Whose Shakespeare? African engagement with Shakespeare in South Africa 1860s to 1880s

Brian Willan (Rhodes University)

In the twentieth century Shakespeare came to impinge in a significant way on the lives and thought of a small but increasing number of educated Africans. From the beginning, as Laurence Wright has observed, Shakespeare was regarded in overwhelming positive terms by the few who came into contact with his plays. Shakespeare represented an aspect – and arguably a rather important aspect – of a literary and political culture to which they felt entitled but which, for long periods, their rulers sought to deny them. In the famous apartheid-era *Drum* newspaper of the 1950s, though, both black and white journalists drew upon Shakespeare to enrich their understanding and descriptions of township cultures, aware of the parallels between Shakespeare's Elizabethan world and what they now saw around them. On Robben Island in the 1980s a collected works of Shakespeare, disguised as the Koran, circulated amongst the political prisoners who chose, and marked, their favourite quotations. Shakespeare, it seems, could speak very directly and positively to the experience of black South Africans.[1]

For those who have looked at the origins of African engagement with Shakespeare in South Africa the starting point is invariably Sol T. Plaatje (1876-1932) – writer, politician, journalist and, amongst many other roles and achievements, translator of

[1] For a fuller treatment of African engagement with Shakespeare in South Africa see Natasha Distiller, *South Africa, Shakespeare and Post-Colonial Culture* (Lewiston, New York: Edward Mellen Press, 2005), especially Chapter 3; and for a view of Shakespeare as cultural imperialism in the context of South Africa see David Johnson, *Shakespeare in South Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

Shakespeare into Setswana, his native tongue. Plaatje attributed the genesis of his love for Shakespeare to seeing a performance of *Hamlet* in Kimberley in 1896 or 1897 after reading about this in the local newspaper – prior to this he had, he said, 'but a vague idea of Shakespeare'. The performance was by the De Jong Haviland Company, one of a small number of travelling companies who brought Shakespeare (and other things besides) to the colonies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and who included Kimberley - for a while at least – on their itineraries.[2]

Plaatje became fascinated by Shakespeare and later embarked upon a project to translate Shakespeare into his native tongue, mostly when he was able to find the time and space during his extensive travels to the UK and North America between 1914 and 1923. Only *Diphosho-phosho (Comedy of Errors)* and *Dintshontsho tsa bo Juliuse Kesara (Julius Caesar)* were published, the latter posthumously and, as has been argued, in a version that did considerable violence to Plaatje's intentions. The remainder, tragically, have been lost.[3]

Despite this sadly reduced corpus these translations have been the subject of increasing, and increasingly sophisticated, critical attention. Far from seeking to emulate Shakespeare with a literal translation Plaatje sought rather to transform Shakespeare to his own ends, using Shakespeare to explore the linguistic riches and resources of his native tongue.[4] Opinions have varied on just how Plaatje went about

[2] S.T. Plaatje, 'A South African's homage' in I Gollancz (ed.) *A Book of Homage to Shakespeare* (London: Oxford University Press, 1916), reproduced in B.P. Willan (ed.), *Sol Plaatje: selected writings* (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Press, 1996), , pp. 210-212.

[3] David Schalkwyk and Lerothodi Lapula, 'Sol Plaatje, William Shakespeare and the Translation of Culture', *Pretexts: Literary and Cultural Studies* 9, no 1 (2000), pp. 10-26.; Willan, *Sol Plaatje: a biography,* pp. 327-333.

[4] See particularly Natasha Distiller, *South Africa, Shakespeare and Post-Colonial Culture* (Lewiston, New York: Edward Mellen Press), Chapter 3, and several pieces by Deborah Seddon, especially 'The

this, and the degree of success he achieved in his endeavours, but all have agreed that Plaatje represents the starting point so far as African engagement with Shakespeare is concerned.

A closer reading of Plaatje's own writings, however, suggests that this assumption may require some qualification. In 1930, two years before Plaatje's death, there appeared a publication called *The African Yearly Register: being an illustrated National Biography (Who's Who) of Black Folk in Africa*, edited by T.D. Mweli Skota, at that time General Secretary of the African National Congress of South Africa. Plaatje knew Mweli Skota and his family well, assisted Skota with the publication of the book, and wrote a couple of notable historical biographies for inclusion in it. One was of Chief Montsioa, the other of Chief Moroka – both of them nineteenth-century Rolong chiefs. Plaatje, himself a Morolong, was both knowledgeable about and fascinated by their histories.[5]

In the biography of Chief Moroka there appears the following statement (unremarked in a growing literature on Shakespeare in southern Africa so far as I am aware):

> As long ago as the 'eighties of the last century, about sixty years after his ancestors fled at the sight of a moving ox wagon, a native priest in charge of the Anglican mission at Bloemfontein, translated into Se-Rolong, Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and whose scholars performed it in the vernacular.

In Plaatje's account Shakespeare clearly has symbolic significance, epitomising the progress made by the Barolong people during the reign of Chief Moroka (1827-1880)

Colonial Encounter and *The Comedy of Errors*: Solomon Plaatje's *Diphosho-phosho'* in Graham Bradshaw and Tom Bishop (eds), *The Shakespearean International Yearbook 9: Special section, South African Shakespeare in the Twentieth Century,* pp. 66-86 and 'Shakespeare's Orality: Solomon Plaatje's Setswana Translations', *English Studies in Africa* 47, no. 2 (2004), pp. 77-95.

[5] T.D. Mweli Skota (ed.), *The African Yearly Register: Being an Illustrated National Biographical Dictionary (Who's Who) of Black Folk in Africa*(Johannesburg: Essen Printing Company, 1930), , pp. 53-7 (Montshiwa) and 60-64 (Moroka). Both pieces are reproduced in *Sol Plaatje: Selected Writings*, pp. 413-419 and 406-413.

in the region that was to became part of the Orange Free State. At the beginning of the period, Africans run frightened at their first sight of an alien and unknown form of transport – at the end, performances of *Twelfth Night* which demonstrated not just familiarity with such a highly regarded example of English culture, but its translation (and hence its transformation) into Serolong, the local dialect of Setswana. And in the period in between these two highly symbolic events, as Plaatje recounts in the same piece, the acquisition by the Barolong of other elements of 'civilisation' – their own ox-drawn wagons, the ability to read and write, Christianity as their religion, the emergence of authors, doctors, priests, lawyers.

Plaatje's comments raise some intriguing questions which this article seeks to explore. Who was the unnamed 'native priest' and what more can be found out about him? Was his performance of *Twelfth Night* a one-off, or is there any evidence of performances of other Shakespeare plays? And how was it that an African priest teaching in the seemingly unpromising setting of a mission school in Bloemfontein could have engaged with Shakespeare to the point of translating *Twelfth Night* (or at least parts of it) into Serolong – decades before there is evidence of anything else like this elsewhere ?

Plaatje's 'native priest', it has not been too difficult to establish, was a man called Gabriel Lepile David. So far as I am aware his name does not appear in any of the general histories of South Africa, or in any accounts of its literature. In the history of the Anglican church in South Africa, however, he occupies an honoured place – not because of any literary achievement but because he was the first African priest to be ordained by the Diocese of Bloemfontein, and proved to be a loyal and dedicated servant of the Church for over 30 years.[6]

An outline at least of Gabriel David's life can be pieced together from church journals and records. Of Tlhaping origin (but always described as a Morolong in the church records), Gabriel David was born in 1849 and was the third generation of his family to have been converted to Christianity. His grandfather was believed to have been one of the early converts of the London Missionary Society, and his father – David Marumane - was a catechist, initially for the Paris Evangelical Mission in Lesotho (Mohalieshoek), and then with the Anglicans. No definite information has survived about David's primary education but when he was about 18 or 19 his father – by this time working as a catechist near the Vaal river – sent him, so it was recorded, 'to find a school' – just as he had been sent by his own father.

He was fortunate: arriving at Bloemfontein the Bishop, or Archdeacon, evidently considered him promising material, and managed to find a place for him at the so-called 'Kaffir Institution', an Anglican training institution in Grahamstown. From the point of view of the Diocese of Bloemfontein it promised, if all went well, to ameliorate their dire shortage of trained teachers for the mission schools they sought to establish.

David then spent over three years in Grahamstown, returning to Bloemfontein in 1870 with Bishop Webb and the promise of a job as a catechist, and assistant teacher, at the

[6] The two main church histories which make (fairly brief) mention of Gabriel David and his father are Cecil Lewis and G.E. Edwards, *Historical Records of the Church of the Province of South Africa* (London: SPCK, 1934); and William Crisp, *Some Account of the Diocese of Bloemfontein in the Province of South Africa from 1863 to 1894* (Oxford: James Parker and Co., 1895).

recently founded St Patrick's mission in Bloemfontein. Thereafter he led an exemplary life in the service of the Anglican church, building up the St Patrick's mission into something of a showpiece for the work of the Diocese. In 1884 - 'after long and faithful service, during which he has shown himself in every way worthy of the higher office' - Gabriel David became a deacon.[7] Six years later, in 1890, he was ordained a full priest. Apart from short periods in Kimberley (1879) and Basutoland (1881) he spent most of his career based in Bloemfontein.

David began his mission work, so he himself recounted later, on 9 October 1871, after first acting as an assistant to Rev. C. Clulee before the latter's departure for the Cape Colony. His daily tasks included preparing candidates for the catechism, taking services at the St Patrick's mission chapel and supporting the work of several outstations. Often he acted as translator and interpreter, at church services and elsewhere, particularly for those of the European clergy insufficiently acquainted with Setswana. On four evenings a week he taught at a night school for men (who were 'getting on well with reading in their own language') as well as having responsibility for the day school for the younger children. This was proving to be more of a challenge, and numbers at the beginning were small. 'I am, however', he wrote, 'doing my best to improve the school, by teaching those who come as well as I can, and by doing everything in my power to get more scholars, and I hope, by God's blessing, to succeed.'[8]

---

[7] *QPBM* 65, July 1885, 'Letter from the Vicar-General to the Associates', 14 May 1884. The Vicar-General added: 'This is the first native ordination in the Diocese, and is a healthy sign of mission progress; he continues to minister under me in St Patrick's Chapel, where there is a large and devout congregation. The services are in the Secoana language.'

[8] *QPBM* 17, July 1872, report by G. David. See also I.S.J. Venter, *Die Anglikaanse Kerk en die Onderwys in die Oranje-Vrystaat 1854-1900* (Pretoria: J.L. Van Schaik, 1959), pp. 164-166, for a further account of the work of the St Patrick's mission school in this period.

Things did soon improve. ‘You will be glad to hear’, he wrote in 1884, ‘that Christianity is continually working in both Spiritual and Bodily things, because our people in 1871 used to live in round huts covered in rags. They now live in square houses thatched with grass, very clean indeed, their location is called Waaihoek’.[9]

Gabriel David’s interest in Shakespeare – never mentioned in any of his own published reports on his work – very likely played only a small part in his life. Converting souls to the Christian faith, judging by the care with which he recorded them, and his devotion to the work of the church, are not surprisingly what comes across most strongly in the reports he wrote

Nevertheless it is clear that he had more than a passing interest in Shakespeare, and evidence survives of two other occasions where he performed scenes from Shakespeare with his students. The first was just before Christmas 1874 when a tea was organised (by wives of the clergy) for the ‘Kaffir School Children’ when school broke up for the holiday. One of the clergy wives described the occasion:

We spread two large tables under the Tree in the Archdeacon’s garden. They had a short service in Sechuana first, and then they did enjoy their tea, after which Gabriel sang a Sechuana grace; and we had games with them. They sang some rounds, and then they acted a scene out of Julius Caesar in a wondrous way, excellent it was. Before they left we gave each a present from the things kindly sent out from England.

If Shakespeare was to be performed then the choice of *Julius Caesar* would not have been a great surprise – it was frequently deemed the most suitable of Shakespeare’s plays for younger readers, actors and audiences and, in decades to come, the play that was to be translated into more African languages than any other. And the ‘present

[9] *QPBM* 69, July 1885, Report from Rev Gabriel David, p. 137.

from the things kindly sent out from England' an affirmation, for the adults at least, of the Englishness of both church and school – and of much of the wider world of which they were a part.

Two years later the end of the school year was again celebrated with a performance from Shakespeare. This time the report came from an unnamed 'associate' of the diocese. She first of all witnessed an examination (and prize-giving) at the recently established 'Kaffir Girls School', and then went on to state:

> I did not hear the examination at Gabriel's School; but they say that the boys acted a scene from King John, in English and Secoana, capitally.

Again the choice of *King John* would have occasioned little surprise. *King John* today may be rarely performed, and ranked low down in the Shakespeare canon, but in the Victorian period it was one of the most popular of Shakespeare's plays – its combination of patriotism, pageantry and sentimentality a particularly appealing combination. Extracts appeared, indeed, in at least two of the Readers commonly used in schools in South Africa, and one of these may well have provided the text required – reducing the play to a rather more manageable length.[10]

One can only speculate, from the brief report provided, on how the scenes were acted 'in English and Secoana'. Were they spoken in one language, and then repeated in the other? Did some characters speak in English and others in Setswana? Or did characters simply move from one language to another as they acted their parts? One wonders, too, what kind of script – or scripts – the boys may have used in order to put

[10] *The Advanced Reader* (Nelson School Series), (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1866), pp. 122-128; *Royal Reader no. 6* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1880), pp. 340-353.

on a performance in 'English and Secoana'. Both of the reports though – of *Julius Caesar* in 1874, *King John* in 1876 – do seem to make it clear that the boys were 'acting' rather than just 'reciting' their parts.

The task of translation, it seems reasonable to suppose, came fairly naturally to Gabriel David. A talented linguist, he was reported to 'know Dutch and English, besides three native languages', and translating and interpreting English into Setswana and vice versa were central to his daily work in Bloemfontein and often noted very favourably by other clergymen and missionaries.[11] At a confirmation service at the St Patrick's church in 1878, for example, Gabriel David conducted the first part of the service in Setswana and then translated 'sentence by sentence' the 'beautiful address of the Bishop'. In 1894, at a service that celebrated the opening of the new St Patrick's church in the Waaihoek location, a procession through the church sang 'Mr David's translation of "The Church's one Foundation".'[12] On another occasions he was reported to have been teaching Setswana to Miss Coplestone, the teacher at the Native Girl's School.[13] No wonder that one white clergyman once commented that 'in Bloemfontein, in the centre of the diocese, we have to depend entirely for intercourse with the native mind upon Gabriel David, our catechist' - fortunately he was an 'able and excellent man'.[14]

No further contemporary reports of performances of Shakespeare survive. If Plaatje is correct in his recollection of a *Twelfth Night* from the 'eighties' then these end-of-

---

[11] *QPBM* 57 July 1882, Letter from Rev. J. Darragh 27 October 1881. The three African languages would have been Setswana, Xhosa and Sesotho.
[12] *QPBM* 106, October 1894 'Letter from the Dean, 9 September 1894', p. 197.
[13] *QPBM* 41, July 1878, 'Confirmation in the Kafir chapel at Bloemfontein', p. 24; *QPBM* 108, April 1895, 'Report from Rev. G. David, 26 December 1894', p. 60, when he interpreted for the Dean when at St Patrick's on Christmas eve 1894.
[14] The remark was made by Rev. W.J. Gaul in 1877 (see *Mission Field*, 1 October 1877, p. 453).

term performances must have continued a while longer. But over time the tradition seems to have just died away. As time went on, and once Gabriel David was ordained deacon and then a full priest, he was most likely just not in a position to spend time on this, and other teachers and catechists took over his teaching responsibilities. It is easy to imagine Shakespeare falling down his order of priorities.

If these are reasonable suppositionsto make about the demise of the tradition of Shakespeare performances at the St Patrick's mission school in Bloemfontein, whence the inspiration for them in the first place? Fortunately we have some clues: I believe they are to be found in the time Gabriel David spent as a student at the Kaffir Institution in Grahamstown between 1867 and 1870. For here he encountered the two leading figures in the life of the institution: Archdeacon (later Bishop) Nathaniel Merriman and Canon Robert Mullins, its Principal. Both men, apart from their other attributes and achievements, were notable Shakespeare devotees and saw no reason not to share their enthusiasms with the African students at their Institution. If exposure to Shakespeare was to be part and parcel of a secondary education then the Kaffir Institution in Grahamstown was the place to go.

The Kaffir Institution was started in 1860, part of the Anglican church's mission – somewhat belated in comparison with the efforts of other missionary societies - to evangelize the heathen in the eastern part of the Cape Colony.[15] It sprang from a recognition on the part of the church of the need to provide for the training of African

[15] The history of the Kaffir Institution in Grahamstown remains to be written. The best available account, however, is Chapter 4, 'The Mullins Institution' in Marguerite Poland, *The Boy in You: a biography of St Andrew's College, Grahamstown, 1855-2005* (Simon's Town: Fernwood Press, 2008).

teachers for the church's mission schools and, in due course - for this was not to be rushed - for a 'native ministry' which the church felt was the only practicable way of bringing the gospel to the mass of the African population. Initially the new school was run as part of the recently established St Andrew's College, a boys' boarding school run by the church for white students. Indeed it was sometimes referred to as 'the native branch' of St Andrew's, and the classroom – to which a dormitory was added a few years later – was built in the grounds of the College.

Progress at the Institution in its early years was hampered by both shortage of funds and uncertainties over staffing. The first problem was to a very large extent alleviated by the initiative of Sir George Grey, Governor of the Cape Colony, in making government funds available to mission schools as part of his policy of integrating the Xhosa into the structures of the Cape Colony, his solution to the seemingly endless, and expensive, succession of wars on the Cape's eastern frontier. He offered the church and the other missionary societies which ran schools for Africans financial support in exchange for a secular curriculum on the English model, along with a requirement to introduce 'industrial training' into the curriculum of the handful of schools which offered secondary education – in line with his views of the proper place for the vast majority of the African population of the Cape Colony.[16]

At both the Kaffir Institution and elsewhere there was a potential tension between the educational aims of the church and those of the government, but in practice this did not seem to pose insurmountable problems: the church was only too happy to embrace

[16] For Sir George Grey and his educational policy see particularly G. Peires, *The Dead Will Arise* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989) and Janet J.H. Hodgson, 'A History of Zonnebloem College 1858 to 1870: a study of church and society' (MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1975).

the new regime – formalized in the Education Act of 1865 - in return for substantially increased funding.

The staffing problem was resolved with the arrival of Canon Robert Mullins as Principal in 1864, a position he was to occupy for over 40 years. The son of a clergyman in Box, Wiltshire, Robert Mullins attended the New College Choir School in Oxford, moved on to a new school of High Church tendencies in Shoreham in Sussex (shortly to become Lancing College), and then decided to become a missionary, accompanying John Armstrong, just appointed the first Bishop of Grahamstown, on the voyage to South Africa in 1855. He was just 16 years old. After working at several different mission stations he returned to England to prepare himself for ordination and a life as a missionary by attending St Augustine's College in Canterbury, returning to South Africa in 1862 with his wife, Jennie. In 1864 he was appointed Principal of the Kaffir Institution.[17]

By the time Gabriel David arrived at the Kaffir Institution in 1867 there were 15 African students, all of them boarders. Mullins was the principal teacher, but was assisted by his wife Jennie and, at various times, other assistant teachers, black and white. Gabriel David left no account of his time at the Kaffir Institution in Grahamstown. Sadly none of the records of the Institution itself have survived either. But it is at least possible to track the bare outline of his time there thanks to the reports that Mullins was obliged to send each year to the Cape Education Department. From one of these it is evident that David was admitted to the Institution in July 1867,

---

[17] Information from Mullins' life is drawn from B.M. Nicholls and N.C.J. Charton, *The Diary of Robert John Mullins (1833-1913)* (Grahamstown: Rhodes University, Department of History), 1998 and W.M. Levick, *The Lives of Robert and Jennie Mullins* (second edition 2004, edited by Mary-Roe Knowling) (Grahamstown, 2004).

that his 'approximate age' was 18 and that he took carpentry as his 'industrial training' option – taught in fact by an African who had been trained at Zonnebloem (the Anglican church's other institute for higher education for Africans) in Cape Town and who also doubled up as assistant music master. Not that there was a great choice – 'tailoring' and 'general' (which meant gardening or horticulture) were the only other options.[18]

Of the 15 students then at the school six were described as 'Kaffirs' [Xhosa], two Batlaping, one Barolong, six Fingoes' – Gabriel David being the one 'Barolong'. Their ages ranged from 13 to 23, with the average age being nearly 19 years old. For the last three years the 'boys' (for thus they were always described) had slept in a dormitory that had been built over the school room 'so that I could have them constantly under my eye.' Since February 1865 he had had an assistant to help in the actual school work, 'though the boys out of school hours have always been under my supervision'.

The Kaffir Institution generally received favourable reports from the government education inspectors: in 1872 for example it was reported that 'the boys show a great amount of intelligence; their work is well and thoroughly done; they are well and carefully disciplined'.[19] But it never achieved the reputation – or the number of students – of the better known institutions of secondary education in the eastern Cape run by other missionary societies, in particular Lovedale (Free Church of Scotland) and Healdtown (Methodist).

[18] Cape Colony, Parliamentary Papers, *Report of Superintendent-General of Education for 1868 (G4-69)*, pp. 114-5; see also Cape Archives, SGE 1/22, school returns (Kaffir Institution), 1869.
[19] Cape Colony, Parliamentary Papers, *Report of Superintendent General of Education for 1872* (G3-73), p.xxii.

In the classroom Mullins attached a high priority to practising translation, and in particular to developing his students' facility in translating from English into Xhosa and vice versa. In fact this language question was quite a contentious one in church circles. The policy adopted at the Anglicans' other college for higher education for Africans – Zonnebloem in Cape Town - had been to concentrate exclusively on the medium of English in line with the philosophy espoused by Sir George Grey and taking account of the fact that its students (many of them sons of chiefs) were drawn from all over southern Africa, and speaking a number of different languages and dialects.[20]

Many in the church in the eastern Cape, Robert Mullins amongst them, thought this was a mistaken policy and that it made it very difficult for students from Zonnebloem to be accepted by the communities to whom they would eventually return. At the Kaffir Institution in Grahamstown, by contrast, whilst there was no question that the medium of instruction should be English, Mullins was at pains to develop at the same time his students' literacy in their native tongue. This was supported by a broader policy which sought to encourage students to maintain close links with their communities throughout the time at the Institution and to minimize the risk of being cut off from them.[21]

One instance of this translation work was noted by the education inspector when he visited in 1872. The first class, he reported, had 'translated on paper some lines of

[20] See Janet Hodgson's comprehensive account of Zonnebloem College – 'A History of Zonnebloem College 1858 to 1870: a study of church and society', by Janet J.H. Hodgson (MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1975), esp. pp. 428-9.
[21] Hodgson, 'History of Zonnebloem College', p. 547, quoting the views of Joseph Cotterill, Bishop of Grahamstown (in *Mission Field*, 1 March 1870, p. 67) to this effect.

Pilgrim's Progress from Kaffir in to English, giving the sense very accurately'.[22] The Xhosa translation of *Pilgrim's Progress* they were using as their text must have been that of Tiyo Soga, published in 1868. Ordained a Free Church of Scotland minister in 1857, and a missionary in the eastern Cape until his death in 1871, Soga had been a painful reminder of how far the Anglicans – with not a single ordained African minister - had still to go. The first black Anglican priest, Petrus Masiza, was not ordained until 1877, twenty years after Tiyo Soga.[23]

Shakespeare impinged on the lives of the students at the Kaffir Institution in several different ways. One was via the books they used in the classroom. At least one of the readers used in the top class – the Nelson *Advanced Reader* – contained a very reasonable selection from Shakespeare, ranging from 'There is a tide in the affairs of men' from *Julius Caesar* (difficult to miss as it was the second reading in the book), through several soliloquies and other famous passages from *Henry IV Part 1, Hamlet, Henry V, Othello, Macbeth*, to rather more substantial selections from *Henry VIII, King John* and *Julius Caesar* (with which the Reader concludes).[24] All the students in the top class, the education inspector noted in 1872, could read the book 'well'.[25]

---

[22] Cape Colony, Parliamentary Papers, *Report of Superintendent of Education for 1872* (G3-73), p.xxii.

[23] For details of Masiza's career see Many Goedhals, 'Ungumpriste: a study in the life Peter Masiza, first black priest in the Church of the Province of Southern Africa', *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 68, September 1989, pp. 17-39.

[24] *The Advanced Reader* (Nelson's School Series) (London: T. Nelson and Sons), 1866. In terms of numbers of extracts by author Shakespeare had the most (12), followed by J.D. Burns (9) and Byron (7). Rev. J.D. Burns (1823-1864), not to be confused with Robbie Burns, was a Scottish writer of religious poetry and hymns, now largely forgotten but evidently considered very suitable by the Edinburgh-based publisher, Thomas Nelson.

[25] *Report of Superintendent General of Education for 1872* (G3-73), p.xxii.

But what really brought Shakespeare alive for the students of the Kaffir Institution was the enthusiasm that Canon Mullins and Archdeacon Merriman displayed for Shakespeare in recitation and performance. Merriman was very much the senior figure and a strong influence on his young colleague. Educated at Winchester and Brasenose College, Oxford. Merriman had arrived in Grahamstown in 1849 as its first archdeacon. A man of moderate High Church views and great physical stamina he left people aghast at his extensive travelling – much of it on foot - throughout and beyond the new diocese of Grahamstown. In the spirit of Christ's apostles he thought nothing of sharing the humblest abode with his Mfengu travelling companion, Wilhelm Goliat, with whom he developed a close relationship. He was also given to drawing comparisons, as befitted an Oxford-educated classicist, between the conditions he saw about him in the eastern Cape and what he had read about the remoter regions of the historic Roman empire. Some thought Merriman a bit eccentric but no one doubted his energetic commitment to his faith or his determination to bring the gospel to the heathen.[26]

Merriman and Mullins saw a lot of one another socially and professionally, and they enjoyed a very close relationship. Merriman was godfather to Mullins' children, and saw in the younger man – so one study has very plausibly suggested – the clergyman son of his own he was disappointed not to have had.[27] Mullins for his part wrote later of Merriman that 'to me personally he was as a father'.[28]

---

[26] For Merriman, W.J. de Kock (ed.), *Dictionary of South African Biography Vol 1*, (Pretoria, National Council for Social research, 1968), pp. 535-537; Pauline Whibley, *Merriman of Grahamstown* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1982); D.H. Varley and H.M. Matthew (eds), *The Cape Journals of Archdeacon N.J. Merriman 1848-1855* (Cape Town, Van Riebeeck Society, 1957); Mandy Goedhals, 'Nathaniel James Merriman, Archdeacon and Bishop 1849-82' (Rhodes University PhD thesis, 1982), p. 187; Wright, 'Cultivating Grahamstown'.
[27] Goedhals, 'Nathaniel James Merriman, Archdeacon and Bishop 1849-82', p. 187.
[28] Whibley, *Merriman of Grahamstown*, p. 101 and *Mission Field*, 2 October 1882. 'Since I came to Grahamstown in 1864', Mullins wrote on Merriman's death in 1882, 'I have been most closely

Shakespeare was a great shared interest and they often participated in readings, usually at the Archdeacon's house. But Merriman also had an urge to bring his enthusiasms to a wider audience. In 1857 he delivered two public lectures on Shakespeare at the General Institute in Grahamstown – both of them extremely well attended. According to Laurence Wright they marked 'the start of Merriman's career as a local intellectual, and the first two occasions on which Shakespeare entered the public sphere in the Eastern Cape'. On another occasion – in July 1869 – he lectured on Shakespeare in the town of Cradock, his subject being 'The times of Henry VIII illustrated from Shakespeare.'[29] In the same year he donated a prize to St Andrews College for Shakespearean recitation.[30]

Merriman and Mullins' liking for Shakespeare was not unusual given their backgrounds and the situation in which they found themselves. As representatives of the Anglican church in the remoter reaches of the empire they clung to a literary culture which they sought to uphold and, in Merriman's case at least, to propagate more widely. Shakespeare was evidently perfectly compatible with their faith, whatever the debates that may have raged about this in the past. Even Bishop Cotterill, a man of distinctly evangelical inclination – often not at all conducive to approval of Shakespeare – was evidently quite happy to take the part of Duncan in a

connected with him, first as his curate, and subsequently as his chaplain and diocesan secretary, and also as next-door neighbour. It is just to me as if I had lost a father.'

[29] Wright, 'Cultivating Grahamstown', pp.00-00; the two lectures given by Merriman , edited and annotated by Wright, are reproduced in *Shakespeare in Southern Africa*: 'Nathaniel Merriman's lecture: "On the study of Shakspeare"', *Shakespeare in Southern Africa*, 20, 2008, pp. 39-61 and Nathaniel Merriman's lecture: "Shakspeare, as Bearing on English History", *Shakespeare in Southern Africa,* 21, pp. 1-21.

[30] Shakespeare would have also had a place in the college's teaching curriculum as part of the study of English history and literature as this was a requirement of the syllabi of First- and Second-Class Public Service Examinations taken by at least some of the boys at St. Andrew's. (see various *Reports of Board of Public Examiners* in 1860s and 1870s.)

reading of Macbeth at the Archdeacon's house in 1867. In one respect though Merriman did have some reservations – the 'course and abominable speech' to be found in Shakespeare, 'a naked blemish which all will now revolt at, as the relic of a coarser age. . . such as to render Shakespeare no fit book to read aloud' – although he evidently did not think this applied to his circle. Fortunately, however, he could recommend 'Bowdler's Family Shakespeare, where this blemish is corrected'.[31]

What is more remarkable, though, is the way that Merriman and Mullins took their dedication to Shakespeare into the lives of the African students at the Kaffir Institution – and beyond. Several contemporary reports attest to this, and in particular to the tradition which grew up to end the school year with performances of scenes from Shakespeare's plays. 'In these early days', Mullins's daughter wrote of Christmas 1869,

> Robert ran his school his own way and taught the boys many subjects which, I am sure, would have been dropped in later years, even if the school had not been taken over by the Government and made to conform to its curriculum. Every year they had a Breaking-up evening, at which the Bishop presented prizes, and the boys performed scenes from Shakespeare – this year from King John, so realistically that the Bishop 'praised them most kindly', and little Janie was distressed at the putting out of Prince Arthur's eyes.[32]

Fortunately little Janie (one of Mullins' other daughters) was spared a gruesome Gloucester-like scene. Prince Arthur persuades his uncle not to put out his eyes as wicked King John had ordered, only to meet his end – conveniently off stage – by falling from the ramparts of a castle.

[31] 'On the study of Shakspeare', p. 00.
[32] W.M. Levick, *The Lives of Robert and Jennie Mullins*, p. 115.

Two years later a similar prize-giving event (attended by ‘both our judges, most of the bar, and all the clergy’) was reported in the columns of the *Eastern Star*. Although the local newspaper had not ‘hitherto interested itself much about the Mission’, Merriman noted, it was nevertheless much impressed by the evening’s proceedings:

The mastery of English as well as Kafir, the writing, figures, geography, map-drawing, as well as composition in both languages, Kafir and English, would have done credit in its English portions to many English schools of some pretension. Their recitation of Tennyson and Scott’s poetry showed not only an accurate mastery of difficult English, but a full appreciation of the pathos of classic poetry.

‘The most astonishing feature of the evening’, however, in the view of the *Star*’s correspondent, was ‘the dramatic display which brought it to a close’. Unfortunately the description that followed has not survived: some scenes from one of Shakespeare’s plays would certainly be the likeliest candidate given the choice on other occasions. ‘We always knew the Kafir to be rhetoricians’, the *Star* concluded, ‘we now know that they possess considerable dramatic taste as well’.[33]

Earlier that same year, however, it had been the turn of *Julius Caesar*:

The natives, as usual, had their end of term party to which each was allowed to invite a Christian friend from the [illegible]. One boy, John, said that Jennie’s children were his only Christian friends, and invited all five! The Magistrate, Mr Huntley, gave the prizes and watched scenes from Julius Caesar.[34]

Shakespeare was evidently performed at the end of each term, not just at the end of the school year. In June 1872, for example, Robert Mullins, in a letter to his mother-in-law, told her that for the end of term his African students ‘acted the “March out of

[33] ‘Kafir College, Grahamstown’, *Mission Field*, 1 April 1872. The report also had some some further reflections on the significance of the evening’s proceedings, however, which provide a most interesting contextualization:
‘Every South African statesman, whose judgment is worth anything, has come to the conclusion that it is as important an object to the State to undermine the more savage instinct by implanting the better instincts of civilization, education and religion, as it is to shatter its physical power, by breaking up the tribal organization. The relation which the Kafir Institution bears to the great heathen mass, and other less pretentious native schools, is somewhat such as our universities at home bear to the great mass of the people and the popular schools.’
[34] W.M. Levick, *The Lives of Robert and Jennie Mullins*, p. 116.

Venice", Shylock and the Duke being specially praised!' He also added that 'this time the evening began with a public viva voce exam, at which they all did very well.'[35]

Four years later Shakespeare was still going strong at the Kaffir Institution. In February 1876 a visitor from England, an unnamed 'associate' of the church, wrote an account of her experiences. After arriving in Grahamstown she was taken in hand by Mrs Merriman and expressed the hope that 'we shall see the Kaffir College this afternoon'. 'The Kaffirs are such *born* orators', she added, 'and Mrs M[erriman] has been telling me that the way they recite Shakespeare is something marvellous'.

But it was not just at the prestigious Kaffir Institution that Shakespeare was in evidence in Grahamstown. The same visitor reported on what she witnessed at the nearby St Phillip's mission:

> The boys were very neatly dressed, like Europeans. . . Then we went to the school-room, and the children were called to *recite* – pieces of Shakespeare, etc. They sang during the intervals, very prettily. Two boys read a scene in 'Hamlet'. One of them, Charlie, had a lovely voice.[36]

This mission catered for the needs of local African (predominantly Mfengu) inhabitants, and its school offered no more than an elementary education up to Standard IV. Merriman – appointed Bishop of Grahamstown in 1871 - is known to have taken a particular interest in the affairs of the St Philip's mission, and there was also a close connection with the Kaffir Institution: the boarders from the Kaffir Institution worshipped each Sunday at the mission church (not having a chapel of

[35] *Ibid*. It is difficult to know what to make of the representation of *Merchant of Venice* as 'March-out of Venice' – is this Mullins just conveying what he saw as an idiosyncratic pronunciation of 'Merchant' or recognition of a completely new slant (appropriation?) that his students had placed upon it?

[36] 'Letters from associates', *Quarterly Paper of the Bloemfontein Mission*, 32, April 1876, p.14. Prior to this she had attended a 'Kafir Service, in the pretty Church; the first Lesson, read by a Kafir in his own language, and the second, most beautifully, in English, by another Kafir, who is third Master at the College' (*Ibid*., p. 13.)

their own), and those intending to become teachers often practised their skills at the mission school as assistants to Rev. William Turpin, the principal.[37] One of their number – Henry Kildasi, a contemporary of Gabriel David's – was employed there full-time when he left the Kaffir Institution. It is quite possible indeed that these Robert Mullins-trained teachers and assistants were the main Shakespeare missionaries, as it were, at the St Philip's mission school, and involved in coaching these younger pupils with their recitations.

****

Unfortunately no direct evidence survives from any of the students themselves – either from St Phillip's or the Kaffir Institution - to indicate what they made of all this. But the reports quoted above (and the later reports on Gabriel David's school in Bloemfontein) do convey very strongly a sense both of the enthusiasm with which the students participated in these Shakespeare readings and performances and the proficiency they displayed. The 'associate' who wrote (clearly reflecting Mrs Merriman's opinion on the matter) that 'the Kaffirs are such born orators' had surely hit upon a point. One need not accept such a determinist view of human nature to recognise an element of truth in this observation: for amongst the Xhosa, and other African peoples in southern Africa, oratorical ability was a highly regarded attribute. Praise poetry and its performance articulated the cultural values of these societies, and the praise poet – or *imbongi* – was held in high esteem. It is not difficult to imagine the students at the Kaffir Institution drawing parallels in their own minds or seeing in

[37] Goedhals ('Nathaniel James Merriman', p. 186) points to Merriman's active involvement in the St Phillip's mission, based on reports in *Grahamstown Journal* between 1866 and 1868. See also Janet Hodgson, *Princess Emma* (Johannesburg: Ad Donker, 1987) for further information about the St Philip's mission. *Mission Field* (1 July 1863) notes the involvement of 'the young men from the Training Institution in Fort England' several years earlier.

Shakespeare the opportunity to develop, or to practice, the skills which were so regarded so highly in their own societies – quite apart from giving pleasure to themselves, their teachers and audiences. Or even being struck by the similarities between the Fool in some of Shakespeare's plays and the role of the *imbongi* in their own societies.

Nor, for that matter - so far as content was concerned - could it have been very difficult for them to have made connections between the plotting, jealousies, murders and countless other acts of violence in *Julius Caesar, King John* and the other plays with what they would have known of the history and traditions of the chiefly societies from which they came.

For Robert Mullins, on the other hand, one of the main attractions of Shakespeare was that it provided a way of occupying the students for whose welfare – outside school hours - he was wholly responsible. He had to find something for them to do. 'The greatest difficulty I have to contend with is laziness, but out of school', he wrote. 'We try to employ them as much as possible in all sorts of outdoor work to keep them from idleness and mischief'.[38] Cricket served the same function, but they could not always be outside. Lurking in the shadows of the missionary mind, if mind and body could not be kept fully occupied, was the fear of a return to 'heathenism' and all that that entailed.[39] In the particular circumstances Mullins faced, Shakespeare, it seems reasonable to argue – notwithstanding various dubious practices to be found in some

---

[38] 'The Kafir Institution, Grahamstown' in *Mission Field*, 1 February 1870, p. 46.

[39] Of the 30 students who had attended and then left the Kaffir Institution by 1869 Mullins admitted that two had left the Institution before the completion of the studies and had returned to 'heathenism', whereas a further six completed their studies, found employment as teachers but had then to be dismissed – 'the great temptation, circumcision, was too strong for them and they have fallen away'.

of plays – was a relatively painless way of keeping his students from ‘idleness and mischief’, drawing upon a familiar cultural resource conveniently to hand.

In many ways the story of African engagement with Shakespeare in both Grahamstown and Bloemfontein was one of individual agency and influence. Merriman and Mullins were clearly great devotees of Shakespeare and they communicated this to those around them. The readings and performances at the Kaffir Institution and the St Phillip’s mission school flowed from this, and the students themselves by all accounts responded with just as much enthusiasm, performing and interpreting Shakespeare – it seems reasonable to suppose - in their own manner and with their own understandings. And then in Bloemfontein Gabriel David, once he was in a position to do so, took his own school students at the St Patrick’s mission in hand in a similar way, and on the same kind of occasions.

But Gabriel David also took his engagement with Shakespeare an important step further, performing Shakespeare in both English and Setswana, laying claim to Shakespeare in a significantly different manner to what had been the practice in Grahamstown where English – so far as one can tell from the descriptions we have - remained the sole medium in performance and recitation. Not only was his school’s performance in Bloemfontein in late 1876 of scenes from *King John* the first recorded occasion that Shakespeare was translated into Serolong (or Setswana): it is the first record we have of Shakespeare being translated into any African language by a native-speaker.[40] Possibly the students at the Kaffir Institution practised translating Shakespeare into Xhosa in their written exercises; if they did there is simply no record of it.

There is a broader context which is essential to an understanding of these initiatives. Perhaps the first thing to say is that it not at all surprising to find this engagement with Shakespeare taking place under the auspices of the Anglican church. I have come across no indication that anything comparable went on at any of the nonconformist schools or missions. Partly this was a matter of the churchmen involved. The majority of the Anglican clergymen – like Merriman and Mullins - were well educated and they came from comfortable English middle-class backgrounds where familiarity with Shakespeare was the norm. They arrived in South Africa with a belief not only in the Anglican creed but in the superiority of English culture and civilization and a conviction that this could be brought to the mission field to assist with the spread of the gospel.

The nonconformist missionaries, by contrast, were generally less well educated, less likely to be familiar with Shakespeare and more likely to be hostile to what at least some of them would have regarded as the overly secular if not distinctly anti-religious and anti-Christian character of Shakespeare's writings. Even those who did have a liking for Shakespeare would not have thought him suitable for use with their students or converts. And while Merriman may have excused Shakespeare's 'coarse language'

[40] Only preceded, so far as published translations are concerned, by a Swahili translation of parts of *Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare* by Edward Steere, an Anglican missionary working in Zanzibar (later to become Bishop of Nyasaland), published in 1867. (Albert Gerard, *African Language Literatures: an introduction to the literary history of sub-Saharan Africa* [Harlow: Longman Group, 1981], p. 133) I have found no other references in the secondary literature to Shakespeare being performed in any other African languages during this period.

as an unfortunate by-product of the age in which he lived, the evangelicals would have been far less tolerant on this point. For the Anglican clergymen by contrast, members after all of the established church in England before they came to South Africa, any lingering concerns over inappropriate language and insufficiently Christian doctrine were easily trumped by Shakespeare's growing stature as a national icon and supreme exemplar of English civilization and culture.[41]

For the nonconformist missionaries the icon rather was Bunyan, and in particular *Pilgrim's Progress*, a rather more edifying tale of spiritual self-discovery. Some of them were to be involved in translating parts of it into a variety of different African languages: by 1872 translations of *Pilgrim's Progress* (or parts of it) had been published in the four major African languages used in southern Africa. And their converts by all accounts responded enthusiastically to the uplifting message, many of them finding that it struck a particular chord with their own experiences and situation. Not that Bunyan was complete anathema to the Anglicans. Robert Mullins found Tiyo Soga's famous Xhosa translation a convenient text to use for translating back into English, and Rev. William Greenstock – another Anglican missionary working not far from Grahamstown – reported on one occasion translating passages of *Pilgrim's Progress* into Xhosa and trying these out to good effect with his students.[42]

---

[41] See particularly Richard Foulkes, *Church and Stage in Victorian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), especially chapter 6, pp. 92-107. The tercentenary of Shakespeare's birth in 1864, and the involvement in the celebrations of a number of senior Anglican clergymen in the UK, marked an important stage in the Established Church's appropriation of Shakespeare.

[42] 'In the evenings', Greenstock reported, 'I occasionally read the Pilgrim's Progress to the boys, by particular desire. I have an English copy, and translate it as I read into Kafir. Some are deeply affected by it; the account of the setting forth of Christiana brought tears to the eyes of one: indeed, the opposition shown to her pilgrimage by her acquaintance, is exactly what is experienced by converts here.' (*Mission Field*, 1 January 1861, p. 6)

But in the more noticeably High Church atmosphere of Grahamstown and the Kaffir Institution you would not expect to see *Pilgrims's Progress* very much in evidence. The situation at Lovedale was quite different. 'Lovedale Missionary Institution was one of the subcontinent's Bunyan epicenters', Isabel Hofmeyr writes in her study of the transnational history of *Pilgrim's Progress*. 'Students entering Lovedale were . . . to encounter an environment that was Bunyan-saturated and they were to meet him in both Xhosa and English in an array of forms. These included primary school readers, secondary school English literature classes, examination papers and essays, sermons, the events and activities of the Students Christian Association, school plays, debating contests, and newspapers.'[43] Shakespeare was nowhere to be seen.

If the Anglican church provided a welcoming cultural environment for Shakespeare then so too did the two cathedral cities of Grahamstown and Bloemfontein. Both were important religious, commercial, administrative and educational centres. Bloemfontein at this time had a small but significant English-speaking population, while Grahamstown was the centre of the largest English speaking population outside Cape Town and generally regarded as the most English of South African towns. An early report from the Superintendent-General of Education pointed, indeed, to the 'civilizing' advantages of locating the Kaffir Institution in Grahamstown – 'more likely to be effectual amidst the civilizing influences of a city like Graham's Town, where the eye is constantly receiving impressions of a permanent and elevating character, and the mind becomes enlarged by contemplating and participating in

[43] Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan: a transnational history of the Pilgrim's Progress* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 120.

occupations and recreations of a more varied and intellectual kind than could be witnessed at any isolated mission station or at a village'.[44]

And if Shakespeare was to be performed here at formal end-of term or end-of-year occasions it was always going to be encouraging to have a sizeable audience of English-speaking dignitaries, secular and ecclesiastic, for whom this struck a particular chord. Such occasions served, indeed, as both validation and celebration of the progress of the 'civilizing mission' as the *Eastern Star* report quoted shows most clearly. In the 1860s and 1870s at least recitations or performances of Shakespeare by African students remained a symbolic part of this.

In Bloemfontein too it was not just Gabriel David who was partial to Shakespeare. '"Shakespeare rounds"' (as well as 'Hymns Ancient and Modern') were sung by African girls in the Anglican church's 'Boarding Industrial School' (started in 1876), while a 'representation of some of the Fairy Scenes from Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" was the 'dramatic piece de resistance' of the annual prize-giving ceremony of the St Michael's Home School (for white girls) in January 1878.[45]

But there was also a broader political and educational context that helped Shakespeare to retain a foothold. In the Eastern Cape in the 1860s a new educational regime gave expression to a policy aimed at incorporating Africans into the structures of the

---

44 Cape Colony, Parliamentary Papers, *Report of Supt General of Education for 1863* (G16-64), p. 10. The only problem was that 'expenses of maintenance are necessarily higher'.

45 K. Schoeman (ed.), *The Free State Mission: the Anglican Church in the OFS 1863-1883*, p. 83; *Quarterly Paper of the Bloemfontein Mission*, 40 (April 1878), pp. 14-18. Four years later another associate of the St Michael's Home School wrote that she 'began Shakespeare readings with some of [the girls] once a week, in recreation time, and Monday evenings were looked forward to with pleasure by us all'. (*QPBM* 58, October 1882, 'From an associate', p. 199.

Colony.[46] It was a secular regime, based very much on the English model and so far as the handful of schools offering some secondary education was concerned it did stipulate a basic secular curriculum and the time in the school day that was to be devoted to it.

A new breed of school inspectors then proved to be quite zealous in reminding schools of these new realities. Amongst other things they also recommended the far more systematic use of textbooks than had been the case previously – and it was no longer permitted to use religious texts for reading practice during the four 'Government school-hours' of each day that had now to be observed.[47] The Nelson *Advanced Reader* used by the top class of the Kaffir Institution in Grahamstown was just one example – far greater quantities of books and readers for the lower grades were used by the majority of schools offering a primary education. As yet there were no South African editions of these books. The books used by South African students, whether they were black or white, were those used by their counterparts in the UK (and indeed other parts of the empire) – although they would have been read, understood and otherwise made use of in a variety of different ways.[48]

[46] Succinctly summarised by the Supt General of Education in his report for 1870: 'The spread of civilization by school-instruction and the encouragement of industrial habits among the Natives of the Border districts, are of importance to the political security and social progress of the Colony.' (Cape Colony, Parliamentary Papers, *Report of Supt General of Education for 1870* [G1-71]).

[47] '… [A]s every institution enjoying a grant assumes at once a public character', Langham Dale, the Supt General of Education, wrote in 1869, 'and has a monopoly of a defined district for the education of all, it is only fair to require that the four Government school-hours shall not be encroached upon at all for religious teaching, and an honest observance of the restrictive religious clause that "no scholar shall be compelled to attend for religious instruction without the consent of their parents or guardians" demands that the Bible and Kinder-bijbel, catechisms, hymn-books, etc, should not be adopted as text-books for the secular reading and memory lessons of the school.' (Cape Colony, Parliamentary Papers, *Report of Supt General of Education for 1868* G4-69, pp7-8)

[48] For a fascinating example of the way in which recitations of speeches from *Julius Caesar* taken from the *Nelson Royal Reader* provided the inspiration for the 'Shakespeare Mas' (masque) on the Caribbean island of Carriacou, see Craig Dionne, 'Commonplace literacy and the colonial scene: the case of Carriacou's Shakespeare Mas' in Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia (eds), *Native Shakespeares: indigenous appropriations on a global stage* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 37-55.

Even as the ‘civilizing mission’ gained some modest momentum in church and government circles there were expressions of concern about the implications of such policies and the exposure of African students to higher forms of education. Amongst the white settler population there had long been opposition to the supposed overproduction of ‘educated Africans’, often very stridently expressed. Soon government and education authorities were adding their voices to this consensus. Sir Langham Dale, the Supt-General of Education in the Cape Colony, was an influential case in point. By 1869 he was writing that he was ‘inclined to discourage the special preparation of a few native lads. . . at great expense, and to assist only in the training of a sufficient number of native teachers to occupy the various school stations at the kraals’. ‘To the educated Kaffir’, he went on, ‘there is no opening; he may be qualified to fill the post of a clerk. . but either there is no demand for such persons, or prejudice operates against persons of colour being so employed.’ Eight years on Dale was celebrating the demise of what he called ‘the age of sentimentalism’ and of ‘the English notions of training natives’, and welcomed the discipline of ‘the saw, plane, hammer and spade’ which he was confident was now taking its place.[49]

Dale, had he been asked, would have scarcely favoured the notion of African students pursuing an interest in Shakespeare – any more than he thought they should be studying Latin or Greek which the churches still clung to for purposes of theological education. The problem with higher education for Africans, in Dale’s view, was that it served only to create a class ‘whose very advantages have made a wide breach between themselves and their heathen kindred and have been at the same time

[49] From Dale’s speech at Zonnebloem College in May 1877, quoted by Hodgson, ‘History of Zonnebloem College’, p. 623.

inoperative or inadequate to open them a way into higher social intercourse'.[50] As time went on he expressed himself ever more in favour of 'industrial education' so far as the secondary education of Africans in the Colony was concerned, and he preferred to redirect his resources into primary rather than secondary education. Such an outlook looked increasingly difficult to square with what went on at the Kaffir Institution in Grahamstown.

Without further detailed research – and even this is unlikely to come up with all the answers - it is difficult to know how much beyond the 1860s and 1870s Shakespeare continued to play any part in the school life of Africans in Grahamstown or Bloemfontein. The likelihood is that in an increasingly hostile educational and political climate, and in the face of competing demands and priorities, Shakespeare just slipped from view. Even Merriman (before he departed the scene in 1882) and Mullins came to share at least some of the concerns about preparing Africans for higher education in a society which discriminated so strongly against them. The African newspapers of the 1880s and 1890s, reflecting as they did the aspirations of the new elite, provide next to no evidence of any kind of public Shakespearean discourse – in contrast to the many columns of reports on that other most enthusiastically adopted product of colonial Anglicization, cricket. Shakespeare had to be rediscovered, it seems, by later generations of Africans.

But in Sol Plaatje's memory of Gabriel David's performances of *Twelfth Night* in Bloemfontein in the 1880s one can perhaps point to a legacy, a contribution to this

[50] Quoted by Hodgson, *History of Zonnebloem College*, p. 623.

process of rediscovery. Exactly how and when Plaatje became aware of these performances it is impossible to be know, but given that David died in 1898 it is very likely that he heard about them well before he himself embarked upon his Shakespeare translations in the second decade of the twentieth century. The awareness of such a forerunner must have been at least a source of inspiration – perhaps a challenge, too, to build upon these earlier foundations. And if one wants to push these connections both backwards and forwards in time, a case can be made too for a rather longer line of descent: from the Shakespeare recitations and performances at the Kaffir Institution in Grahamstown in the 1860s and 1870s, through Gabriel David's bi-lingual performances at St Patrick's in Bloemfontein to the avowedly postmodern production of Yael Farber's *SeZaR* in 2001 which drew upon – amongst other things – Plaatje's Tswana translation of *Julius Caesar* from 1937. Merriman and Mullins would doubtless have been intrigued.

But there may be a further link between Plaatje's ambitious project and the pioneering Shakespearean performances at the Kaffir Institution. In his contribution to Israel Gollancz's *Book of Homage to Shakespeare* in 1916 Plaatje had this to say:

> Besides being natural story-tellers, the Bechuana are good listeners, and legendary stories seldom fail to impress them. Thus, one morning, I visited the Chief's court at Mafeking and was asked for the name of 'the white man who spoke so well.' An educated Chieftain promptly replied for me; he said: 'William Tsikinya-Chaka (William Shake-the-Sword). The translation, perhaps more free than literal, is happy in its way considering how many of Shakespeare's characters met their death. Tsikinya-Chaka became noted among some of my readers as a reliable white oracle.

Who, one wonders, might have been the 'educated Chieftan' who was so quick to offer not just an answer to the question but his own rendering - which Plaatje promptly adopted - of 'William Shakespeare' into Setswana? A very strong candidate

– there are not many others - would be Cornelius Lekoko, nephew and adopted son of the late Barolong Chief Montshiwa. He just happens to have been a student at the Kaffir Institution in Grahamstown in the 1870s.[51] Shakespeare, once encountered, was not easily forgotten.

[51] *QPBM* 22, October 1873, letter from William Crisp to the Bishop of Bloemfontein, 28 April 1873, pp. 6-7; *Mission Field*, 2 December 1878, p. 570, extract from letter from William Crisp, 28 September 1878. Mullins and Lekoko met again in June 1900, shortly after the lifting of the siege of Mafeking, when Mullins travelled to Mafeking to see his son Charles who had been badly wounded. Whilst there Mullins attended a gathering in the stadt when General Sir Charles Parsons, on behalf of the British imperial government, came to thank the Barolong for their loyalty during the siege. In his speech in reply Lekoko, so Mullins wrote at the time, 'said he was most pleased to see the Queen's servants and especially his old teacher!' (*The Lives of Robert and Jennie Mullins*, p. 195)