The Poetry of Belonging
Episodic Memory and Italian and South African Shades

Chris Mann
(Rhodes University, South Africa)

Abstract   The essay develops a postcolonial perspective on Italy and South Africa based on the writer's experience of rural developmental work among predominantly Zulu-speaking people and on five main points of connection between that specific locale and the Italian cultural horizon, from Roman times to World War II: Language, Accounting, Spirituality, War and Literature. Central to this cross-cultural encounter is the writer's direct and intimate involvement in both cultural spheres and the way this is representative of the working of 'episodic memory', i.e. the psychic mechanism by which moments and people of the past are made to live again in one's inner world in the guise of 'shades' and crucially contribute to shape one's sense of belonging. This is a phenomenon that literature has always known, and which this essay exemplifies also by means of original poems that complement the theoretical insights exposed on pre- and post-colonial Italy and its connection with contemporary South Africa.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 Language and the Construction of a Piped-Water Supply. – 3 Accounting, Money and the Construction of a Road. – 4 *Communio sanctorum* and the Ancestral Shades of Southern Africa. – 5 War in Italy, Dante and a Tree by the Adige River. – 6 Literature and Italian and South African Shades. – 6.1 Episodic Memory and the Shades. – 6.2 A Definition of Episodic Memory. – 6.3 A Definition of the Shades Based on Neural Science. – 6.4 A Post-Colonial View of the Shades in Dante. – 7 Conclusion.

Keywords   Zulu. South Africa. Dante. World War II. Memory. Shades.

1 Introduction

In this essay I would like to take a post-colonial perspective, based primarily on my experience of rural developmental work in Southern Africa, and on five aspects of Italy, namely language, accounting, spirituality, war and literature. My approach will be that of a writer whose vocation is poetry. I will thus ground my insights on significant experiences and include a poem in each section. The experiences are drawn from work on poverty alleviation and development projects among predominantly Zulu-speaking people in rural and peri-urban Southern Africa, which took place over fifteen years. They are also based on encounters with the family who hid

my father in Italy during the war and on my current work as founder and convenor of Wordfest, a national multilingual festival of South African literature with a developmental emphasis.

2 Language and the Construction of a Piped-Water Supply

In all its diversity, the Italian language is inextricably bound up with the Greek and Latin of the Roman Empire. In this first recall of a significant experience, I would like to narrate an incident that reveals the role of Graeco-Latin in development.

Imagine, if you will, a meeting in a small hall on a Friday evening on the edge of the Valley of a Thousand Hills on the peri-urban fringe of the city of Durban in 1986. The valley is home to about 120,000 primarily Zulu speaking people and immigrants from other areas who are constrained to live there because of the apartheid legislation currently in force. Since the valley is deemed to be a part of KwaZulu, it falls under a so-called homeland government. The local authority is based on customary law and a hereditary *inkosi* (clan leader or chief). Despite the growing population, there is a lack of basic services such as water and sanitation, health, water and education in sharp contrast to the nearby suburbs and industrial areas where many of the people are employed as factory workers and domestic servants. Such is the disparity of income and service levels and the valley makes one think of Lazarus lying at Dives' gate. The meeting is taking place next to the clinic in the grounds of The Valley Trust, a socio-medical community and research-based organisation founded in 1948 by a vision-ary doctor. The trust's original focus on primary health care, nutrition education and small-scale vegetable production projects has expanded in terms of its holistic philosophy to include the training of community health workers, school-building and preschool projects, the development of democratic local government structures, labour-intensive infrastructure projects, sanitation and spring protection, and the training of community health-workers. Those who attend the meeting are Valley Trust employees and members of the Qadi-Nyuswa Development and Services Board. They include a shopkeeper, a catechist, a school principal, a clan *induna* (head-man), and similar prominent local people elected at a community meeting the year before. They are all males, volunteers and church-goers.

A severe drought had afflicted the valley in 1984. Local people used to rely on springs in the hillsides where women and girls would collect water in buckets and carry it home on their heads, often walking long distances. The portage of water and firewood within that culture is one of the major physical restrictions on women's development. Queues for water at such springs began well before dawn. Such water was contaminated with high levels of *ecoli*. The *per capita* water consumption was significantly below

the World Health Organisation's minimum requirement for health. Time and again local people had asked the Trust to make piped water available in the valley (Mann 1985). The drought enabled Valley Trust officials to persuade the local regional water board to break with apartheid and supply bulk water to the valley on humanitarian grounds. The board would not fund the cost of the infrastructure. The Valley Trust raised the funds for the infrastructure from World Vision, an international Christian organisation. There were no evangelical conditions to the grant. The project involved digging the pipeline by hand to provide temporary employment to several hundred people, and the employment of some twenty standpipe attendants.

The report-back meeting was conducted in Zulu, followed a standard agenda and began with the usual extended and fervent prayer. In South Africa 'isiZulu' or 'isiXhosa' would be used to denote the language but 'Zulu' and 'Xhosa' will be used in context here. After 'Matters arising' had been dealt with, the manager of the pipeline began his report. Distribution was based on metered stand-pipes located along the sprawl of roads into the valley where the stand-pipe attendants issued water in exchange for tokens purchased at local stores. The manager's report comprised a series of anecdotes in which he described what had happened at each of the stand-pipes during the week. Members of the board asked him to speed up his report, to no avail. Stand-pipe by stand-pipe, incident by incident, in down-to-earth Zulu and in painstaking detail he told the Board about cash-boxes, floats, tokens, meter-readings and the illness or no-show of different attendants. Members of the board slumped on their chairs as the night wore on. Then, what struck me that evening, more forcibly and clearly than previously, was the fact that the manager lacked – owing to a number of factors, including the discriminatory and reductive educational policies of the apartheid regime and the mode of Zulu he used – a language in which the particular could be quickly made more general, and in which a specific event could be linked to similar specific events in a way that revealed a pattern of behaviour among individuals, i.e. a pattern that would induce meaning and corrective action in terms of the aims of the project.

The one closest at hand was English, the language of the colonial power that had conquered the Zulu kingdom in the previous century and whose economic dominance continued. As secretary of the meeting, I listened to the discussion in Zulu and took the minutes. Since I was not sufficiently competent in Zulu to do otherwise, I wrote in English, inevitably missing much of the details and nuances of the board members. Thus, I transposed the language of the indigene into that of the coloniser. Later, I wrote a portion of an imagined set of minutes to act as an illustrative metonymy of what regularly occurred. The committee agreed that the manager and the attendants required experience in administering the project. Secondly, the terms and conditions of their employment and the regulations governing the distribution of water required a revision. The edited document would

be prepared by the development agency, approved and amended where necessary by the development and services board and communicated to the stand-pipe attendants in detail at an in-service training course. The treasurer and financial manager then confirmed that they would prepare an income and expenditure account, a balance sheet as well as a summary of the capital expenditure and would submit this to the office of the South African Receiver of Revenue. Where is Italy in all this, you may well ask. Speakers of Italian may not be familiar with the history of the English language. This history is inextricably influenced by the Roman conquest and colonial occupation of Britain (45 BCE to 410 CE) and, linguistically more significant, the Norman invasion and occupation (1066-1154). In both cases, the language of conquest and administration included a vast array of abstract nouns and verbs. In the first instance, these were Latin, in the second the Latin was absorbed into early French. Both of these languages also carried forward the originating Greek terms that Latin had absorbed. As a matter of fact, the minutes I took in English during that meeting were dominated by words absorbed from Latin, as is the Italian of today:

La commissione ha concluso che il dirigente e gli assistenti non avevano l'esperienza necessaria per amministrare il progetto.

In secondo luogo, le condizioni e i termini del loro impiego e le norme che governavano la distribuzione dell'acqua dovevano essere riviste.

Il documento revisionato sarebbe stato preparato dall'agenzia per lo sviluppo, approvato e modificato ove necessario dalla commissione per lo sviluppo e i servizi, e comunicato dettagliatamente agli assistenti del serbatoio durante un corso di aggiornamento sul lavoro.

Il tesoriere e il direttore finanziario hanno poi confermato che avrebbero preparato un resoconto delle entrate e delle uscite, un foglio di bilancio così come un riassunto delle spese del capitale e avrebbero consegnato tutto ciò all'Ufficio delle Entrate sudafricano.

Here now is the English version, with the words of a Graeco-Latin origin underlined:

The committee agreed that the manager and the attendants required experience in administering the project.

Secondly, the terms and conditions of their employment and the regulations governing the distribution of water required revision.

The edited document would be prepared by the development agency, approved and amended where necessary by the development and services board and communicated to the stand-pipe attendants in detail at an in-service training course.

The treasurer and financial manager then confirmed that they would prepare an income and expenditure account, a balance sheet as well as

a summary of capital expenditure and would submit this to the office of the South African Receiver of Revenue.

It is significant that almost the only substantive word that is not written in the imported language of administration is 'water'. Most of the members of the Board were, as a matter of fact, competent in the use of English and the minutes I wrote in English were welcomed by them and crucial to the management of the improved though imperfect water supply to the people in the valley. In contexts outside the meeting, the language of the people on the board oscillated, in fact, from the *lingua franca* of administration to the language of the indigenes, which is a widespread practice observable in post-liberation South Africa, and expressed in the frequent use of mid-sentence code switching from one language to another.

How is this to be interpreted? One useful model of understanding that is still of value is provided by Monica Wilson, a prominent social anthropologist whose fieldwork was based in Southern and Central Africa. She argued that a necessary, though not complete, understanding of post-colonial societies requires an analysis of their change of scale. The change, in her terms, is from small-scale, village societies to larger scale societies. The latter societies are characterised by extensive systems of literacy and numeracy, a wider range of impersonal relationships than those found in clans and chieftainships as well as less local and more universal institutions of law, governance, money, trade and religion. This model of change complements and does not replace existing models of understanding, namely the discourses of politics and economics, gender and race (Wilson 1945; 1971). In some but not all ways, Wilson's model makes good what I call the *lingua franca lacunae* of post-colonial discourse. By this I mean the omissions in understanding what occurs when post-colonial scholars attempt to make sense of cultures other than their own using the language of the coloniser with scant or no reference to the culture-embedded language of the transitional society being researched. A shallow and romantic view of small-scale village societies can be the result. From a post-colonial perspective, then, based on the self-limited purview of the above experience, contemporary Italian is seen as a language of a large-scale society. Many of its Graeco-Latinate abstractions were absorbed into English following the Roman and Norman conquests of small-scale British clans. The British Empire in turn used those characteristics in the administration and development of the institutions of smaller scale societies it conquered and colonised. Such a *lingua franca* may provide access to power and social mobility to individuals in small scale societies. It enables them to enter the multiple dimensions of what I would call a larger scale linguisphere. It may also serve to alienate such individuals from their cultural heritage and to set up a lifelong inner tension between small-scale and large-scale values. For users of Italian in general, the perspective clarifies the extent

to which a large-scale society language is part of everyday Italian. For writers, as distinct from administrators, it emphasises how important it is to continue to keep texts grounded in the nouns and verbs and idiomatic metaphors of interpersonal colloquial usage.

Taps

What a piece of handiwork's a tap!

You ask for one inside a hardware shop,
it's plonked on the counter.

Plonk.

'Will that be cash, friend, or on account?'

That's it – no mention of its origins,
not a single thought about the webbed complexities
of miners, crusher plants, furnaces and hazardous dumps,
of labs and factories,
of credit schemes, companies, trucks and roads
that bring it spigot and all to that counter in the hills.

You want a tap?

Plonk – that's it, friend.

Consider too what pushes up and out of taps,
which shoots and glitters forth
and overflows a cup, a pot,
a pair of cupped and dusty hands.

No need to heave across hot hills for that,
no queuing till midnight with buckets round a toxic ooze,
no sloshing into shackland rivers with a rusty tin.

So bless the manufacturers of taps I say,
the water-board officials and the engineers,
the clouds that rain into the reservoirs,
and the men and women sweating in a trench with picks
so pipe after light-blue polyvinyl chloride pipe
laid end to end, for miles and miles
will bring a tap to every house across a thousand hills.

Taps!

Would that a cool and glittering strand of water
gushing from a sturdy brass domestic figurine
could overflow each pair
of cupped and dusty hands on earth.
(Mann 2010, 110-1)

3 Accounting, Money and the Construction of a Road

The second significant experience links the financing of a road building project in the Valley of a Thousand Hills down the convoluted corridors of history to cognitive increases in scale in medieval Venice and Florence. The holistic model of development implemented by The Valley Trust during my tenure as Operations Director was based on a version of Maslow's well-known pyramid of human needs. Rather than impose projects, the Trust would, where practicable, respond to needs expressed by people in the valley for health care, education, water, sanitation, food and employment. This stretched our organisation immensely.

In 1986, a group of people from an inaccessible part of the valley approached The Valley Trust asking for a road to be built. The need was expressed in a memorable sentence along the lines of *Kunzima ukuhambisa ugogo ngebhala e-clinic uma egula* (when Grandma's ill, it's hard to push her to the clinic in a wheelbarrow). This prompted discussions with Robert McCutcheon, a civil engineer who had gained extensive experience in labour-based road construction funded by the International Labour Organisation in Kenya and Botswana. With the assistance of another civil engineer, Robert Little, I cost out two models of construction, one that relied on machines and the other on manual labour. I was then able to complete two sets of accounts that set out the anticipated income and expenditure of the project using standard accounting categories. The labour-based model was 10 to 15% more expensive than the one that used machines. I can remember sitting in my office late one afternoon looking at the numbers in dismay. Material poverty was rife in the valley, and hundreds, if not thousands, of people were desperate for paid employment. There was no way in which the quantum of the value of the work to the prospective individual employees could be brought to account.

I then prepared a cost-benefit analysis. Although this was more inclusive of non-material and second level values such as access to the clinic, social cohesion and the payment of school fees for children of employees, it relied upon subjective assessment. I was cognitively at a dead end. It was obvious that the labour-based model had more worth and would generate more value from the investment, at least within the human parameters of

people in the valley, but I was unable to bring that to account within the conventional format of number-based accounting.

Given our limited managerial resources, we eventually settled on an income-enhancement project that would offer part-time piece-work to about 250 people over a period of three to four months. Costs were met by a grant from an unemployment relief fund administered by the Department of Manpower. Lingering idealistic doubts about the value of the project to the employees were removed by post-construction evaluations that were uniformly positive (Mann, Myeni 1990).

'The Thokoza (*Be Joyful*) Road project' was one of the several pilot projects that led, together with the change of government in 1994, to an expanded public works programme. These were funded by international aid organisations such as the ODA (Britain) and local development foundations such as the Donaldson Trust. This approach to employment provision, well documented by World Bank studies in other parts of the developing world, was heralded by political leaders in South Africa as a major contribution to the reduction of the unemployment crisis in the country as a whole. Government then set up a programme to provide jobs to a million people. It cost over R40 billion (about 3 billion euros). There were decidedly mixed results, which led to widespread and realistic scepticism about the capacity of the new government to manage a scheme of this magnitude. The worth of such an approach was lost in the maladministration, corruption and political rhetoric that followed (McCutcheon et al. 2012).

Accounting assigns numbers to economic goods and activities in terms of values generated within specific socio-historical contexts. It orders and presents the numbers in complex arithmetical systems governed by rules issued by regulatory authorities.

This format is standardised by an organisation based in London known as the International Financial Standards Board. In many ways its work is an astonishingly successful intellectual triumph since it provides a generally accepted financial *lingua franca* for widely different economies and cultures around the world. The format is not completely fixed, but subject to continual adjustment and reform by the representatives of participating countries. The founding definitions of the regulations that govern the International Reporting Financial Standards distinguish between assets and liabilities. Prominent among the latter are employees. People, in other words, are from the start defined as a cost to business. The current format, furthermore, omits any reference to the impact of the economic activity on the environment. This has serious ecological consequences. The time frames for financial reporting (typically quarterly and annual sets of accounts), within an investment culture hungry for short-term profit, also by definition exclude the worth of ecologically sustainable commercial and industrial enterprises that earn a lower return for investors. As a matter of fact, with the revolution in digital technology and the Internet,

accounting can now provide a continuous flow of data. A multinational retailer, for example, is now able to view a daily balance. This is a narrow and misleadingly precise construction of value, given the long time-spans of evolution, the escalating growth in the population of our species, and its increasingly destructive impact on the biosphere.

Where is Italy in all this, you may well ask. Accounting evolves out of pre-literate, small scale barter economies with the cognitive development of a number of systems of symbolical thinking, ranging from writing and numbering to the coins of money. More than seven thousand years ago, for example, comprehensive accounts were kept by the Sumerians. The Code of Hammurabi of Babylon (2285-2242 BCE) set out the legal requirements for reporting. The accounts of the Chao Dynasty in China (1122-256 BCE) were a comprehensive and systematic ordering of economic activities that include allocating income and expenditure to a number of different monetary funds, periodic reporting and auditing. A similar exact control of resources is observable in the accounts kept by Zenon (c. 256 BCE), an administrator who managed the agricultural estate of Apollonius, in effect the finance minister of the Greek colony of Egypt. Zenon's accounting officers recorded even the cost of used nails. Roman households were required to keep accounts that were used for the assessment of taxes. Augustus Caesar implemented an annual budget, but the accounting records of the Roman Empire have not survived as they were inscribed on wax-covered wooden tablets. In general, accounting in such societies amounts to the assemblage of inventories of economic transactions. These enable proprietors, be they individuals or institutions, to assert control over people and other material economic goods, and in the case of government, to extract and distribute tax in a systematic way.

Why then is the development of double-entry book-keeping such a formative change in economic activity, and why did it happen in northern Italy? The implications of the change cannot be underestimated. Luca Pacioli (1445-1517) summarised the characteristics and application of double-entry book-keeping in a book published in Venice in 1494 entitled *Summa de Arithemetica, Geometria, Proportioni et Proportionalita*. Chatfield in his authoritative *A History of Accounting Thought* states that "accounting history divides into two distinct parts, one comprising the 5000 years before the appearance of double entry and the other the 500 years since then" (Chatfield 1977, 4; see also Davies 2002, 1-65).

It does scant justice to the sophistication of the medieval mind to summarise the changes here but let me outline the differences using a small-scale society perspective. An economic transaction in a small scale barter economy could be characterised as leading to an oral agreement between two people. Such transactions, rendered to writing, evolve into inventory accounting. This acts as an *aide mémoire* so that a number of different transactions that occur over time can be recalled without dispute by both

parties to the transaction. What might have been a couple of spoken sentences and a handshake in an oral economy is transcribed, in greater and greater complexity as transactions increase in number and size, onto tablets of clay, scrolls of papyrus, a waxed tablet, sheets of paper in books or the molecules of silicon chips.

An innovation is required when individuals initiate a greater number of transactions with a larger number of other people over longer periods of time – when, for example, a trader does not merely exchange a basket of apples for a pouch of salt but a shipload of olives, cloth, wine, jewellery and dried figs for silks, spices, emoluments and wheat in different ports in transactions handled by different agents using different currencies. In this case, inventories by themselves are not sufficient to understand and control the number and complexity of the transactions. The innovation, in the case of double entry book-keeping, is induced by complexity and is a consequential increase in cognitive scale.

The transactions require, first of all, a reduction to a monetary value expressed in numerical symbolism and capable of computation by means of arithmetic. The duality, and not just the singularity, of each transaction needs to be perceived, analysed and recorded in monetary terms. The singular events – recorded in what is known today as the journal in accounting parlance – require interpretation and transposition into a nominal account known as the ledger. Then, these are entered into two different vertical columns headed 'Debits' and 'Credits'. These numbers, when brought to a trial balance on a separate sheet of paper as recommended by Paciola, allow the proprietor to see at a glance where the quantum of transactions is heading. What socio-economic events induced this cognitive breakthrough? The precipitating event was the capture of Jerusalem by the Turks in 1075. Over the next three hundred years, the Crusades that followed brought in their wake an unprecedented expansion in economic activity in the Mediterranean as the trade between Europe and the Middle East increased (Littleton 1981, 17). The Italian cities of Venice and Genoa, which acted as intermediaries, soon achieved dominance in the fields of trading and banking.

No longer could the existing record keeping of a company keep track of the implications of the sum of all transactions, which might have been possible in the past when the proprietor considered these prior to making a business decision. Not only had the range of goods increased, but proprietors also employed agents in foreign ports and entered into complex partnerships with other traders as well as bankers, venture capitalists and ship owners. In addition to double-entry book-keeping, other innovations in the instruments of trade included draft bills of exchange, marine insurance codes, mercantile law and innovative methods of credit formation. Other factors were the growth of literacy and numeracy among the merchants themselves, the invention of adjustable type and the rapid adaption of Ara-

bic numerals. The Greek and Roman symbolical representations of number were clumsy in comparison to the Arabic system. Within one generation of its exposition by Leonardo of Pisa in 1202, Arabic numerals were widely used by merchants in Italy (Chatfield 1977, 33). The earliest records of medieval accounting are patchy. There is evidence of rudimentary double entry book-keeping in the ledger of the Farolfi company in Florence in 1299. The oldest surviving evidence of such book-keeping by a city are the Massari accounts kept by the city of Genoa from 1340. The first recorded evidence of double entry book-keeping in Venice can be found in the accounts of Donaldo Soranzo and Brothers in 1410 (Chatfield 1977, 35).

In the absence of similar evidence from elsewhere in Europe or the Mediterranean region, it is a defensible surmise that double entry book-keeping developed by fits and starts in a number of companies and cities from the thirteenth century onwards in northern Italy. Pacioli's work summarised and ordered most, but not all, existing practices, was translated within a few years into five European languages and had a widespread influence. It is remarkable how little the principles of book-keeping laid down by him have changed in the five hundred years since the publication of the book (Chatfield 1977, 49).

From a post-colonial perspective, it is apparent that this form of accounting is a cognitively powerful instrument. As more and more economic activities, goods and services are commodified and allocated a monetary value, and as ownership is depersonalised through the issues of shares, so do firms grow beyond the limited human capabilities of the individual proprietor. Barter economies had little defence against the behemoth of manufactured and agricultural goods, the capital, technology and accounting brought into productive and extractive array by the companies of the nineteenth century. These contributed significantly to the mercantile expansion and the dominance of Europe in other continents. Given its origins in the commercial boom in the Mediterranean regions in the Middle Ages, could this be otherwise? Initiatives have intensified over the last few decades to make accounting more comprehensive and less simplistic, by, for example, providing triple-bottom line annual accounts. These offer investors a summary of the financial, ecological and human value of a company's activities over the accounting period. Such modifications offer a more human and ecologically sustainable 'number-fication' and 'money-fication' of values than the present format provides. At present, however, such innovations are only weakly and intermittently successful, given the global dominance of financial and material values.

From a post-colonial perspective, then, Italy's innovations in financial accounting standards and banking in medieval times significantly contributed to the development of the global accounting standards now in use around the world. The impact of the rigorous materialism of such accounting systems on the people of small-scale post-colonial societies continues

to be devastating. Reform is urgently needed. Without it the employment of machines and not people in places of poverty and unemployment will, according to the format of contemporary accounting, remain an irrational choice, whether in Africa or Italy.

Thokoza Road

Rain on a road up a rural hillside,
I'm walking there slowly with friends,
walking its memory as I dream,
tasting once again the sweat,
the dust, the pride of its making,
its light brown, sinuous corners
rising through gullies of thorn,
green thickets of bush, a sprinkle
of salt-white goats, to mist
along a ridge of dolomite rock,
that hunger, that urge of our youth
to be up and always doing,
quiescent, becoming instead
a mild, unspoken exhilaration.

And here's that culvert's arch,
its masonry now tufted with grass,
that stream still chewing its base,
whose levels we struggled to find,
and here is one of the pegs,
that rusty remnant in a donga,
hammered in to set the camber,
and there, scored in a cutting
the myriad marks of the picks,
the whole wall of the cutting
a frieze, a testimony in stone
to those who'd laboured here,
day after day, in dust and heat,
so many summer-times ago.

And rain has scalloped its ruts
and corrugations in the gravel,
that tricky cross-fall is still
too steep, but trucks and taxis
are grinding slowly up the curves
crowded with people and heaped
with sacks of mealie-meal,

bags of oranges, door-frames,
paraffin tins and mattresses.

While we, like shades come back
to visit their places of toil,
are walking Thokoza Road,
our voices, that hunger stilled,
content enough to remark,
'This road was needed, was built
by hand, in summer's heat.
You who travel its surface
be glad to find its artistry here.'
(Mann 2010, 112-3)

4   *Communio sanctorum* and the Ancestral Shades
       of Southern Africa

The significant experience on which I am going to base the observations of
this section was prompted by a ritual ceremony. Over the years, I had got
to know a local primary school headmaster known in the valley as 'Thisha
Ngcobo'. He and his family lived in a modest house in the Qadi Tribal
Authority area on a jutting spur of land that had a spectacular view of the
valley down to the UmNgeni River far below. His grandfather had been a
catechist who had established the Catholic church near his home. He was
married to a Xhosa-speaking nurse who worked at the Valley Trust clinic.
    Thisha Ngcobo invited me and my wife, the artist Julia Skeen, to a widely
practised ritual ceremony known as *ukwambula itshe* (unveiling the stone,
i.e. the tombstone of a relative, in this case his father). We took the invi-
tation to be an honour, given the continuing repression, the tension and
violence of the 1980s in South Africa as the struggle against apartheid
intensified. It was also significant because we would be attending a public
manifestation of what we had read about and often discussed with people
in the valley, namely the importance ascribed to the continuing influence
of the *amadlozi* (ancestral shades) in the day-to-day lives of ordinary peo-
ple. I can remember very little of the physical details of the event. I can
see the new fence erected around the family graveyard, the house of the
teacher and the nearby church built by his father, the parked cars, the
large number of people attending the ceremony, and the exuberant singing
and *ingoma* dancing after the meal. The rest is infill, realistic suppositions
drawn from vivid experiences elsewhere, from details found in the poem I
wrote shortly after the event and from aspects of the painting by my wife.
I am being deliberately laconic and inconsequential to realistically convey

how little I remember now. The painting shows the grave with the grey headstone still wrapped in a white sheet, the son of the deceased standing nearby in a suit and tie, choir-boys in red cassocks and white surplices, one holding a crucifix, and a priest in a white cassock swinging a censer as he blesses the headstone. In the background are people of all ages, pressing against the fence. I cannot remember what the priest said but I do remember something of his voice. Zulu is a tonal language, with few gutturals. The priest was Irish. He spoke a beautifully modulated bi-tonal tongue. What was happening below the surface appearances of this event? The priest had worked for years among Zulu-speaking congregations, and it would be safe to assume that he knew the significance of the ancestral shades to them. In this case both the deceased had been significant members of the Catholic Church, and therefore it was doctrinally possible for him to perceive them as members of the *communio sanctorum* that the Catholic Encyclopedia defines as follows:

> The communion of saints is the spiritual solidarity which binds together the faithful on earth, the souls in purgatory, and the saints in heaven in the organic unity of the same mystical body under Christ its head, and in a constant interchange of supernatural offices. The participants in that solidarity are called saints by reason of their destination and of their partaking of the fruits of the Redemption (1 Corinthians 1:2 Greek Text). The damned are thus excluded from the communion of saints. The living, even if they do not belong to the body of the true Church, share in it according to the measure of their union with Christ and with the soul of the Church. (*Enclopedia catholica*, 3205)

My memory of the details of the ritual ceremony may have faded, but what I carry forward now is an understanding of how significant the event was. Two ancient and great traditions of spirituality, one European and the other African, were brought into concord during the ceremony as those attending watched, sang and prayed. I remained troubled, however, by the phrase "the communion of the saints". This was not remedied by the generous definition in the Encyclopaedia. The contemporary understanding of the term 'saint' overwhelmingly attributes exceptional spiritual gifts to saints and seemed inflated when applied to the *amadlozi* (shades) of ordinary Christian people. This disquiet prompted me to look at the originating Latin more carefully. The phrase is attributed to St Nicetas (ca. 335-414), the Bishop of Remesiana, present-day Bela Palanka in the Pirot District of modern Serbia, but which was then in the Roman province of Dacia Mediterranea. Lengthy excerpts survive of his principal doctrinal work, *Instructions for Candidates for Baptism.* They contain the expression 'communion of saints', in other words, '*communo sanctorum*', in reference to the belief in a mystical bond uniting both the living and the dead in a

confirmed hope and love. No evidence survives of a previous use of this expression, which has since played a central role in formulations of the Apostle's creed (*Encyclopedia catholica*, 463 and 8445).

There are various theories to explain why the phrase was added to what is known as the Apostle's Creed. Some hold the addition to be a protest against Vigilantius, who condemned the veneration of the saints; and he connects that protest with Faustus in Southern Gaul and probably also with Nicetas in Pannonia, who was influenced by the 'Catecheses' of St. Cyril of Jerusalem. Others see in it at first a reaction against the separatism of the Donatists, then an African and Augustinian conception bearing only on church membership, the higher meaning of fellowship with the departed saints having been introduced later by Faustus (*Encyclopedia catholica*, 3205). The reference to St Augustine of Hippo reminds us that the great theologian wrote in Latin and was a post-colonial African. His egalitarian interpretation of *communo sanctorum* could be rendered in English as 'the fellowship of the faithful'. This is in fact how the phrase is translated into Zulu (and Xhosa), namely *ubudlelwane babangcwele*, or, more poetically in the words of the phrase by Thomas Cranmer, "the company of all faithful people". This phrase evokes the continuity of the living and dead, which is central to indigenous concepts of the ancestral spirits in Southern Africa. We need no recourse to gene theory to demonstrate the reality of this. It is as straightforward and empirically verifiable as noting that our conscious minds are populated by the memories of other people.

A post-colonial perspective on the doctrine of the *communo sanctorum* in Italy, then, derived from the vigorous and animating belief in the shades found in South Africa, suggests that it is a humanising doctrine more worthy of renewal and application than appears at first glance. The recent findings of neural science demonstrate its potential value to urban dwellers, as will be seen in the final section of this paper.

Unveiling a KwaNamatha Shade

The scene registers: a hilltop plot of grass,
cleared and fenced, choirboys in cassocks,
a priest with glasses, then Thisha Ngcobo
standing at a tombstone veiled with a sheet.

That much the painting before me evokes.
A stippling of ink's the flint in the grave.
Pale floatings of colour, textures of light
become fawn grass, a blue KwaZulu sky.

It looks so real. Thorn-trees and rondavels,

the tense, sombre look on the teacher's face
cross over a *then* to *now*, a *there* to a *here*,
with traces of clouds and barbs on the wire.

The art is in the omissions. The goats I saw
straying into a neighbour's maize are gone.
So have the friends that crowded the fence,
a bus with balloons, thumping to a wedding.

Under the level flint, the coffined residue
of Ngcobo's father lies. The grieving over,
the money saved up to purchase the tomb,
he's being returned, back home as a shade.

Dogs barking nearby, the ads from radios,
the prayers and hymns have leached away.
He like the painting has now turned into
a clustering of hints, a presence of clues.
(Mann 2002, 26)

5 War in Italy, Dante and a Tree by the Adige River

The significant experience that generates this section of the paper took place beside the Adige River in a farm land a few kilometres downstream of the small town of Cavarzere in the province of Veneto. Angela Ferro (1920-2013), a small compact widow in her sixties with a rounded face and black hair, was standing on the bank pointing at the trunk of a tree. It was a windless sunny afternoon in the summer of 1973. The broad calm river, edged by poplars, flowed its unostentatious grandeur below the grassy bank where we stood. "*Sai Chris*", Mama Angelina said to me, "at the start of the war, men were shot here in front of this tree. Then they were thrown into the river with pieces of cardboard tied around their necks on which was written, *Così muoiono i partigiani*. At the end of the war, the same thing happened. Men were again shot against the trees and thrown into the river. This time the cardboard around their necks said, *Così muoiono i fascisti*. People who knew each other", she said, "relatives". I will never forget that story, or the quietly melancholy way in which Mama Angelina spoke. Up till then, World War II had been an imagined entity to me, experienced at a distance that was both geographical and existential. The distance was also shaped by my attitudes towards Europe. Surely wars in Europe were more civilised than the messy, confusing violence in Africa?
   Mama Angelina's story altered my perceptions of Italy, as did the other stories she told during the different times I stayed with her in the nearby

village of Rosolina. She was, in effect, passing on to me some of her epi-sodic memories of the war. I wanted to hear them because she was the last remaining member of the family who had hidden my father in the farm where they worked and lived.

Norman Bertram Fleetwood Mann (1920-1952) was a South African soldier who had been captured in North Africa by German troops and then imprisoned in the Po Valley with numerous other South African prisoners-of-war. He had escaped and had been hidden and fed for two years in the farm by a family who risked their lives to do so. For nine months they hid him behind a partition in their pigsty. At night time he would collect a bowl of food concealed nearby, in a haystack or hidden in the grass. The food, mainly beans and polenta, was provided by a tenant family who lived in a tumbledown outhouse and, like so many others in that region at that time of the war, were often close to starvation.

My father returned to South Africa after the war and died when I was four. He was an absent presence in the life of me and my family. Every memory of him that Mama Angelina recounted was a discovery to cher-ish. Story by story, I built up an outline of him and the war in that part of Italy. In fact he had provided much of the outline already, in a diary he had written in Italian in soft-cover school exercise books and hidden in a hole he had dug far out in the middle of one of the maize fields beside the river. Story by story, I began to sense how comprehensive and brutal the war had been in that part of Italy; and then, following further reading at home, how often sustained violent conflict had taken place in that part of Europe over the centuries and further, how often it was linked to belief systems of one sort or another, both ancient and modern. Cracks in my idealistic student adherence to the ideals of the Enlightenment began to open.

Dante's poetic truth-telling was closer to that moment beside the Adige River than I realised. On a Saturday afternoon, the 17th of July 2012, I was at home in Grahamstown, South Africa, when I received a phone call from a mobile in a café in Rosolina. Mama Angelina, as we called her, had married and moved there after the war. From time to time, after having learnt the rudiments of Italian at university in South Africa, I had stayed with her and her husband and, in due course, had introduced her to my wife and, then, our children. The phone call greatly disturbed me. Mama Angelina had died earlier in the week and had been buried earlier in the day. I spoke with members of her family and those of mine who lived in Britain, and had flown to Rosolina for the funeral. It was a blazing hot summer day in Grahamstown. I wandered round the house feeling listless and desolate. I had been reading Dante intermittently during the previ-ous month or so. Later on that day, I picked up the copy of the *Commedia* on my desk and began to read here and there without registering what I was reading. I started to read Canto 12 of the *Inferno* for the first time and was startled to come across his reference to the Adige River. Dante

and his guide Virgil are scrambling down a rocky slope towards the river that runs around the seventh circle of hell. The rugged and broken terrain reminds Dante of the banks of the Adige near Verona. Then Virgil directs his gaze downwards towards the imagined river in hell, a river patrolled by symbols of vengeful anger and bestiality in which the shades of violent leaders are punished for all eternity by being made to stand up to their necks in hot blood. My memory of the Adige River was suddenly given a new dimension of significance as I dwelt on the following excerpts.

Era lo loco ov'a scender la riva
venimmo, alpestro e, per quel che v'er'anco,
tal, ch'ogne vista ne sarebbe schiva.

Qual è quella ruina che nel fianco
di qua da Trento l'Adice percosse,
o per tremoto o per sostegno manco,

che da cima del monte, onde si mosse,
al piano è sì la roccia discoscesa,
ch'alcuna via darebbe a chi sù fosse:

cotal di quel burrato era la scesa;
e 'n su la punta de la rotta lacca
l'infamia di Creti era distesa

[...]

Ma ficca li occhi a valle, ché s'approccia
la riviera del sangue in la qual bolle
qual che per violenza in altrui noccia.

Oh cieca cupidigia e ira folle,
che sì ci sproni ne la vita corta,
e ne l'etterna poi sì mal c'immolle!
(Dante, *Inferno*, 12, 1-12, 46-50)

The place that we had reached for our descent
along the bank was alpine; what reclined
upon that bank would, too, repel all eyes.

Just like the toppled mass of rock that struck –
because of earthquake or eroded props –
the Adige on its flank, this side of Trent,

where from the mountain top from which it thrust
down to the plain, the rock is shattered so
that it permits a path for those above:

such was the passage down to that ravine.
And at the edge above the cracked abyss,
there lay outstretched the infamy of Crete.

[...]

But fix your eyes below, upon the valley,
for now we near the stream of blood, where those
who injure others violently, boil.

O blind cupidity and insane anger,
which goad us on so much in our short life,
then steep us in such grief eternally!
(Sinclair 1939, 154-7)

Dante places a variety of violent leaders in the river: an emperor (Alexander), a regional tyrant (Dionysus of Syracuse), the leader of a tribe of belligerent pastoral warriors (Attila the Hun) and, at a more local level, of social organisation, a Guelph and Ghibellene notorious for violent behaviour.

Bringing a post-colonial perception to bear on war in Italy and hence Europe, I had been shocked to discover an increase in scale far beyond my previous perceptions of how violent our species was. The emotion deepened when I later discovered that war bonds, the financial instrument that makes large-scale warfare possible, were an innovation that took place in Florence in Dante's time (Ferguson 2009, 66-119). Bringing Dante's poetic vision to bear on sustained conflict in twentieth-century northern Italy deepened that perception. Not only in this canto, but in other parts of the *Commedia* too, Dante relentlessly attacks the abuse of power by the leaders of social organisations, both clerical and secular. His vision forcibly reminded me that violence is nothing new in human history, and that a significant cause of its manifestation is to be found in the colonial and sustained conquest of the virtues of our psyche, our own inner *terrae incognitae,* by emotions as tyrannical as cupidity and anger. Where I had sought idealistic solutions primarily in exterior socio-political institutions of governance, I was prompted by Dante to look also inward at the causes of social violence that lay in the individual human psyche. His poetry also prompted me to acknowledge and praise the mercy and heroism of the family that hid my father.

A field in Italy

I'm standing in a field in Italy.
A hot summer's day.
Crows. Tractors.
Poplars lining a river.
Clods and stubble at my feet.

The trees are as in his diary.
The gravel farm road.
The narrow canals.
The soft quick plop of frogs
arrowing into a ditch.

I'm standing near Venice
with people in a field.
The sky is cloudless,
as blue as Giotto's
frescoed inside a dome.

A painter's skies.
Spacious. Visionary.
A Field in Italy
Opening above the plains,
the mountains of a Europe
for once at peace.
I'm standing in a field in Italy
trying to grasp what's happening.
The heat off the soil
beats into my face as at home.
A taxi is parked in the trees.

I'm trying to understand
the people talking around me.
I've come from South Africa
with wife and children
as pilgrims to this field.

We're here to give thanks.
Thanks to a family
who sheltered my father
for two years of war,
risking a bullet in the head.
(Excerpts from Mann 2010, 66-7)

6 Literature and Italian and South African Shades

Imagine for a moment a rural retreat centre north of the city of Durban in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. The coastal bush is thronged with people dressed in long white robes. There is the sound of unaccompanied choral singing somewhere, the scent of wood smoke. There are *amadlangala* everywhere, small rounded shelters made of saplings bent over and secured in the sandy soil. Elderly men, bearded, barefoot, some wearing necklaces and amulets, are shepherding new arrivals as they arrive in minibuses and cars. I am a visitor, accompanying a scholar of African oral literature equipped with a microphone and a tape recorder. In Zulu she asks the man beside our car to recite the *izibongo,* the praise-poem of Isaiah Shembe, the founder of the settlement. Azariah Mthiyane, the *imbongi* (praise-poet), gets on his knees and quietly and fluently recites an extended poem that sounds like this:

> Uyasabeka!
>
> UMhawu 'phalala usinde abasengozini
> UMagqalabanzi kadinwa ukuthwala izono zethu
> UMthombo' osela abalungileyo
> UZandla zinemisebe njengelanga
> INgqungqulu eshay' amaphiko
> phezu komuzi wakithi Eluphakemeni
>
> You are awesome!
> Overflowing with compassion you rescue those in danger.
> Your broad shoulders never tire of carrying our sins,
> you're a spring that the virtuous drink.
> Your hands have rays of light like the sun,
> You're the eagle that beats its wings
> high above our home on the Exalted Mountain.
> (From Gunner and Gwala 1991, 67-9, with amendments to their translation by the Author)

Azariah Mthiyane's poem, built up of a number of epithets, was addressed to the shade of Isaiah Shembe (1870-1935), the founder of the *AmaNazaretha* church in KwaZulu-Natal. At present, the church has an estimated four million members (2012). One of its best known rituals takes place each year when thousands of his followers, singing the hymns he composed, make their way up the holy mountain *Ekuphakameni* (The Exalted Place), north of Durban.

Shembe (1867-1935), the son of a farm labourer, worked initially as a dock worker in Durban. He never went to school and his belief system – like

that of Ntsikana, the nineteenth-century Xhosa religious leader and hymn-writer – developed irrespective of missionary influence. He responded to the alienating cultural fragmentation of urban life by creating a socio-cultural movement based largely on the Bible, which functioned in the minds of his adherents like a "theatre of memory" (Gunner, Gwala 1994; Gunner 2004).

Belief in the shades is an integral part of the indigenous religious system in South Africa. Any attempt to summarise its characteristics must emphasise that it is a belief system in flux, that it varies from individual to individual and group to group and has no formalised creed or doctrine. The outline here is based for ease of reference on a comprehensive account of such an indigenous belief system, namely *Zulu Thought Patterns and Symbolism*, by Axel-Ivar Berglund (Berglund 1976). This has a ring of authenticity since it is a sprawling array of quotations, a compilation of how individual practitioners view their beliefs rather than a summarised and analytic study by an anthropologist.

Lingering post-colonial parlance obscures the complex varieties of shade beliefs in Southern Africa as well as their interaction with Christian and other patterns of religious thought. One might hear, for example, a sentence along the lines of 'local blacks worship ancestral spirits with the help of witch-doctors'. Berglund avoids the word 'ancestor' since this suggests predecessors who are dead and separate from the living. He states that the Zulu concept assumes "a very close and intimate relationship within the lineage between the departed and their survivors" (Berglund 1976, 29). He quotes one informant as saying that "it is impossible to *khonza* a shade", in other words to worship a shade, and goes on to say that the correct usage is *"ukuthetha idlozi".* This means to communicate with a shade, in particular during a rite which propitiates what an *isangoma* or diviner perceives as the discomfort or anger of a shade in the family lineage due to errant behaviour among the living (Berglund 1976, 43; Doke et al. 1972, 792).

The shades are venerated, however, in that they are perceived as channels of communication with *Unkulunkulu* (God). Classical *izibongo,* at least the residuum of texts still extant from the Zulu and Xhosa traditions of the last three centuries, in general address clan and household heads that are male. They are exhortatory, and while ironic criticism is present in some of the epithets, they typically extol the clan head's aggression and courage. There is an epic quality to the recitations that is reminiscent of Homer. Such *izibongo*, recited with memorable passion and physicality by the *imbongi* during one ritual ceremony*,* stir listeners out of the possible apathy and disunity of ordinary discourse into a greater sense of belonging to the lineage or the clan of the person praised.

In recent times, the genre has, however, shown signs of increasing diversity. Contemporary *izibongo* include poems addressed to political and

trade union leaders as well as to women and religious leaders such as Shembe (Oosthuizen 1967; Gunner, Gwala 1991).

The shades are also present in the written tradition of poetry. A wide variety of South African poets and writers make reference to the shades in significant ways: Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi (1875-1945), Thomas Mokopu Mofolo (1876-1948), Nonstizi Mgqwetho (c. late nineteenth and early twentieth century), Henry Isaac Ernest Dhlomo (1903-1956), Archibald Campbell Mzolisa Jordan (1906-1968), David Livingstone Phakamile Yali-Manisi (1926- 1999), Guy Butler (1918-2001) and Mazisi Kunene (1930-2006).

Benedict Wallet Vilakazi (1906-1947), for example, a significant poet, novelist and scholar in the history of literature in South Africa, makes numerous references to the *amadlozi* (shades) in his poetry. Born and brought up in a rural area near KwaDukuza (Stanger) in the first decades of the twentieth century, in 1936, when he was thirty, Vilakazi moved to the mining town of Johannesburg to take up a lecturing post at the University of the Witwatersrand. He wrote novels and poems, and with CM Doke prepared a monumental dictionary of Zulu that is still widely used. Such as Seferis, Vilakazi depicts himself as an exile from the landscape and culture that nurtured him, referring with affection to the lagoons, animals, trees and birds of his upbringing as well as to the shades of significant figures from Zulu history.

KwaDedangendlale, known colloquially in South African English as the Valley of the Thousand Hills, is one of the enduring loci of his yearning for unspoilt nature, tranquillity and a restoration of his originating Zulu culture. A significant number of his poems can be interpreted as acts of retrieval of childhood experiences, those crucial components of episodic and autobiographical memory that, in his case, renew a sense of belonging. Such retrievals are expressed through the use of semantic memory, which encodes the retrieved sensory experience in the grammar, syntax and vocabulary of language:

Ngikhumbule kud' ekhaya
Laph' ilanga liphumela
Phezu kwezintab' ezinde
Lishone libomv' enzansi
Kuze kusondel' ukuhlwa
Nokuthul' okucwebile,
Laph' uphuma phandl' unuke,
Uhogele ngamakhala,
Uzigqum' umzimba wonke
Ngomoya wolwandl' omanzi.

I remember far away at home.
There where the sun comes up
Above the tall hills
And goes down shining red below
Until dusk comes
With its pure silence.
There where you go outside and breathe in,
breathe in deeply with full nostrils
And feel your whole body affected by
the moist air of the sea.
(Vilakazi, translated by Adrian Koopman. See Koopman 2005, 66)

Koopman also quotes and translates other excerpts from *Amal'ezulu* (*Zulu Horizons*), Vilakazi's second volume, which illustrate his perception of the agency of the shades. The first excerpt is addressed to 'Mamina', a female muse and interlocutor, and results in successful however temporary closure:

Yebo Mamina, sengiyavuma.
Amathong' angethwes' umthwalo,
Ngiwuzwa ngiphapheme nakwabuthongo.
Ngithi ngizumekile ngixoxiswe ngawe,
Ngivuke ngokhel' ubhaqa ngiqoshame,
Ngiphenduke ngelul' isandla,
Ngikulolong' emagxalabeni.
Ngizw' ikhambi lingen' ekhanda,
Lingiphethul' ingqondo ngibamb' usiba,
Kanti sekuyilapho ngihay' inkondlo.

Yes, Mamina, indeed I do agree.
The spirits have laid this burden on me,
I feel it even when asleep at night.
I mean even when fast asleep
I am made to talk by you,
I wake, light the lamp and squat down,
Turn and stretch out my hand,
And mould you between the shoulder blades.
I feel the inspiration enter my head,
It arouses my mind and I reach for a pen,
And it is then that I sing my song.
(Vilakazi, translated by Adrian Koopman. See Koopman, 2005, 71)

Vilakazi ascribes the spiritual restlessness he experiences before writing a poem to the activity of *amathongo,* the shades. This is akin to what

might be called the creative anxiety disorder experienced by an *isangoma* (diviner). This can be understood as the brooding (*ukufukamela*) of the shades (Berglund 1976, 127-50). Vilakazi, addressing *mathongo' ohlanga*, (literally 'the shades of the reed' or, metaphorically, 'the shades of the origin of human life') has no illusions about their turbulent power and persistence in his inner life:

Nezint' engazibhala ebusuku,
Ngingazange ngizisukele ngibhale,
Ngibeleselwe yinina mathong' ohlanga,
Ningixabanis' ingqondo ebusuku.
Kuleyonkathi ngiyobe sengafa.

And the things I have written at night
I have never simply of my own accord started to write,
I have always been pestered by you, the spirits of the reed,
You set my mind in turmoil at night.
And so it will always be with me until my death.
(Vilakazi, translated by Adrian Koopman. Koopman 2005, 72)

This leads to a striking evocation of his deeply felt yearning for perpetual peace, not, in the end, alienated from his surroundings, but in intimate contact with his forebears, the shades who are taken to reside in the earth:

... kengilal' ubuthongo,
Ubuthongo bokucimez' amehlo,
Ngingacabangi ngelakusasa nokusa.
Ngish' ubuthongo bokulala ngivuke kude,
Kud' ezweni lamathongo nokozela;
Ubuthongo bokulala ngingavuki
Ngisingethwe yizingalo zawokoko.

... let me lie in sleep,
The sleep that closes the eyes,
Not thinking of tomorrow and the next day.
I mean the sleep of going to sleep and waking up far away,
Far away in the country of the ancestors and drowsiness,
The sleep of going to sleep and never waking up.
Enfolded in the arms of the ancestors.
(Vilakazi, translated by Adrian Koopman. Koopman 2005, 74-5)

How do contemporary literary scholars schooled in secular humanism respond to metaphors such as these, which in their cultural context are poetically numinous and part of a spirituality of dissent at odds with the

scientific world-view and the monetarist values of economic globalisation at the start of the twenty-first century? Some ten years ago the revised edition of the influential book *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* ([1995] 2006) expanded the subject matter of post-colonial studies to include the sacred. The editors drew attention to the gap "between the theoretical agenda of the Western academy and the interests of post-colonial societies themselves", and stated that

> on one hand indigenous concepts of the sacred have been able to inter-polate dominant conceptions of cultural identity; and on the other Western forms of the sacred have often been appropriated and transformed as a means of local empowerment. (Ashcroft et al. 2006, 7-8)

Chakrabarty, author of *Provincializing Europe*, is more forthright. He argues that the contemporary Western academy privileges the secular and relegates the sacred to primitive societies (Chakrabarty 2000). Indigenous concepts of the sacred in South Africa, based on the shades, have played a crucial role in resisting the impact of colonial conquest and dispossession over the last two and a half centuries. *Izangoma* (diviners or oracles) and *izinyanga* (healers) nurtured local concepts of personal identity and an indigenous world-view. *Amatola* (war-doctors) strengthened the resolve of armed resistance to colonial troops during the nineteenth century in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. This tradition extends to the use of medicines to strengthen participants in the Bambatha rebellion in the twentieth century, and to striking miners in the twenty-first. Commenting on the massacre of platinum miners that took place in 2012, the then Deputy President of South Africa, Kgalema Motlanthe, a former general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers, said that the miners at Marikana had been in a muti-induced trance in which they would either kill or be killed (Motlanthe 2012). Flint and Parle identify four significant uprisings inspired by spiritual leaders drawing on the authority of the shades in the Eastern Cape, and also describe systematic attempts by colonial rulers to render such leaders powerless (Flint, Parle 2008, 312-21; see also Peires 1981, 1989).

6.1   Episodic Memory and the Shades

A recent development in the scholarly understanding of memory strengthens the need to reappraise indigenous concepts of the sacred, in particular those regarding the shades. Endel Tulving's empirical research, followed by the advent of cognitive neuroscience and improvements in the technologies that image the activities of the brain, enabled neuropsychologists to extend the original insights of William James and to estab-

lish the science of memory. We are by now familiar with the concepts of working, short-term and long-term memory as well as mental processes such as encoding and retrieval generated by different neural networks. Tulving frequently reiterates that the discipline is new, and that the findings are rudimentary and likely to change. His major contribution to date has been to distinguish between episodic and semantic memory, and to show how these are crucial components of human consciousness and identity. Such mental activities may be fleeting and extraordinarily complex. There is, however, nothing insubstantial about them. They are real events in time (Tulving 1983; Baddeley et al. 2002). Episodic memory as distinct from the semantic one is part of a neurocognitive system evolved by *homo sapiens* that

> involves remembering by re-experiencing and mentally travelling back in time. Its essence lies in the subjective feeling that, in the present experience, one is re-experiencing something that has happened before in one's life. It is rooted in autonoetic awareness and in the belief that the self doing the experiencing now is the same self that did it originally. (Wheeler 1997, 349)

Examples of semantic memory are language, numeracy and simple and complex skills. These are memories of 'knowing what' or 'knowing how', whereas episodic memories are inseparable from subjective feeling and travelling back and forth in mind-brain time. Episodic memories unfold an individual's autobiographical memory and are, thus, the source of personal and socio-cultural identity. The expression and analysis of a patient's episodic memories is an approach used extensively in contemporary psychotherapy (Solms, Turnbull 2002). This approach is likely to reveal a variety of presences in a patient's psyche. Not all of them are likely to be beneficent. Some, in fact, may be destructively malevolent.

6.2   A Definition of Episodic Memory

Over the last few decades, with the assistance of sophisticated scanning technologies, neuroscientists have begun to disaggregate the vast number of activities working at lightning speed and in unimaginably complex congeries of networks in the mind-brain. Billions and billions of neurons with multiple interconnections quiver small packages of chemically distinct molecules called neurotransmitters back and forth across the multiple tendrils of axons and dendrites. Out of this complexity, a thought, an image, a memory, a word emerges and fades in a seethe of mental activity that continues even during sleep and which is always beyond the full recall of consciousness (Solms, Turnbull 2002, 8-43; Damasio 2004, *passim*). An

episodic memory is thus an enduring illusion among the detritus of the forgotten. Unlike the spate, the rush of incoming, disaggregated then discarded sense data that passes through the mind-brain during, for example, a day-long trip through the countryside in a car, the components of the memory are engraved, as it were, into the molecules of the networks of neurons where long-term memories are stored. These traces are the material foundation of our sustained sense of belonging, both in the world and with other people. From the perspective of a literary aesthetic, the bonding of present consciousness and past event, the illusion of the poem as a whole and the shade depicted in its framework make up an extended synecdoche.

6.3 A Definition of the Shades Based on Neural Science

The shades, to apply a neurocognitive model of understanding, do not need to be restricted to the biological lineage of an individual, nor are they ghostly phantoms that have a separate, perceivable existence independent of an individual's mind-brain. The shades, by this definition, are episodic memories of other people that, inhabiting the interior life of an individual, contribute significantly to that individual's personal and socio-cultural identity and, hence, sense of belonging as distinct from alienation. Without discounting religious perceptions of understanding, this neurocognitive model sheds light on the continuing influence of the shade of Isaiah Shembe on the life of his numerous followers as well as that of Buddha, Mohammed and Christ. The number of followers of the latter three spiritual leaders, despite the disaffection with religion in some post-industrial countries, continues to increase at a rate faster than the growth of the world's escalating population, and now numbers over four billion people (Schwarz 2004, 297-8). The neurocognitive model also helps to illuminate the roles of the shades in the imagination of such well-known poets as Homer, Virgil and Dante, the *griots* who transmit the Sundiata epic in Mali as well as T.S. Eliot and Seamus Heaney. Their appearance in literature in different guises and for different purposes is complex and variegated. Ted Hughes, for example, in *Birthday Letters*, explores and expands episodic memory after memory of his deceased former wife, the poet Sylvia Plath (Hughes 1998). Thomas Hardy provides comprehensive references in his poetry to every manner of shades, which he variously calls 'presences', 'spectres' and 'phantasms'. These are not the looming presences of epic heroes or mythical demigods. They are the shades of ordinary, mostly rural people. Hardy, in effect, demystifies and broadens the concept as a more egalitarian and democratic culture emerges in Britain.

6.4   A Post-Colonial View of the Shades in Dante

We are now in a position to view the shades in Dante through a post-colonial perspective based in South Africa in which the shades are part of the life of ordinary people. It would be illuminating to examine the evolution of the concept of heroes and souls in Homer to the shades discoverable in Virgil and, in particular, what effect the transition from an oral to a written rendition of the shades has had on the perception of an audience or a reader. Unfortunately a lack of space constrains me to look at Dante's use of the shades in the *Divina Commedia*, a task in itself so large that it constrains me further to examine only a few salient points. The turbulence and violence found in contemporary post-liberation South Africa shares some important aspects with the period of violent socio-political transition in which Dante lived. Prominent among these aspects are the declining power of feudal rural institutions, the *amakhosi* or hereditary leaders in South Africa, the migration from the countryside to the town, an increasing 'moneyfication' of numerous aspects of culture, and the incessant conflict of values and sectarian factions as kinships make way for new social alliances. This takes place as the lingering mores of small-scale village societies are drawn into the large-scale society of a constitutional democracy and nation state. What is different, of course, is the absence of the temporal authority of a papacy in South Africa, and the jagged and deep divisions between the different colour groups. It is, in all probability, the social turbulence of his era, the shifting ambiguity of values and his exile from power, that prompts Dante to set out the moral universe of the *Commedia.* He does this not in the abstract but by making moral judgements, which assign the shades of different people to different circles in *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. It is, I think, a similar longing for a just and ordered society that inspires Azariah Mthiyane to compose and evoke the shade of the messianic religious leader, Isaiah Shembe. It also induces Vilakazi to seek the consolation of his ancestors as he turns on his bed, unable to sleep in the mining-town of Johannesburg. Having said that, other differences are stark and numerous. Prominent among these is the role that Dante ascribes himself as a poet. He is no deferential *imbongi*. What South African praise-poet would dare recite a poem that consigns the *amakhosi* (hereditary leaders) of a clan to hell for their lack of morality? Dante places the shades of a vast array of leaders and ordinary people, as well as three popes, firmly in hell, which is an act of outrageous defiance hard to match even in countries where freedom of expression has long been protected by law.

Dante as well as an *imbongi* assume that the shades they address are not just creatures of the mind but have a corporeal identity and existence independent of others (Berglund 1976, *passim*). Dante, in fact, attempts in a cryptic and not particularly convincing interchange with Statius in

Canto 25 of the *Purgatorio* to remedy a defect in Catholic theology by presenting the metaphysics of how the shades of individuals come into being in their afterlife. The tonal range of an *imbongi*'s attitude towards the lineage of shades is restricted to exhortations, celebration, occasional irony and panegyrical passion. Dante's tones of voice are more extensive, ranging from admiration and astonishment and plain description to sarcasm, fury, despair, adoration and different manifestations of love. The range of shades evoked in the *Commedia,* furthermore, is not limited to a small-scale society's male leaders, but include the male and female shades of people he knew as well as the shades of historical, biblical and mythical people. From the perspective of a post-colonial society, in which the shades are part of the psychic inner world of millions of ordinary people, the wide range of shades in Dante's *Commedia* are those of a large scale society, written large in a gigantic frieze and harshly lit by the floodlight of the poet's stern morality.

7 Conclusion

By viewing aspects of Italy such as language, accounting, spirituality, war and Dante from a post-colonial perspective, I hope to have revealed some of their significance in a new way. Paradoxically, the exercise has also helped me to understand my own transitional society better. In this way, when brought together by post-colonial studies, Europe and Africa can be seen to continue to find each other out. This is notably evident in the development of a cross-cultural understanding of the existence of the shades based, at least in the case of this author, on a neural science model of episodic memory.

In Praise of the Shades

Hitching across a dusty plain one June,
down one of those dead-straight backveld roads,
I met a man with rolled-up khaki sleeves
who told me his faults and then his beliefs.
It's amazing, some people discuss more
with hitch-hikers than even their friends.

His bakkie rattled a lot on the ruts
so I'm not exactly sure what he said.
Anyway, when he'd talked about his church
and when the world had changed from mealie-stalks
to sunflowers, which still looked green and firm,
he lowered his voice, and spoke about his shades.

This meant respect I think, not secrecy.
He said he'd always asked them to guide him,
and that, even in the city, they did.
He seemed to me a gentle, balanced man,
and I was sorry to stick my kit-bag
onto the road again and say goodbye.

When you are alone and brooding deeply,
do all your teachers and loved ones desert you?
Stand on a road when the fence is whistling.
You say, *It's the wind*, and if the dust swirls,
Wind again, although you never see it.
The shades work like the wind, invisibly.

And they have always been our companions,
dressed in the flesh of the children they reared,
gossiping away from the books they wrote,
a throng who even in the strongest light
are whispering, *You are not what you are,
remember us, then try to understand.*

They come like pilgrims from the hazy seas
that shimmer at the borders of a dream,
not such spirits that they can't be scolded,
not such mortals that they can be profaned,
for scolding them, we honour each other,
and honouring them, we perceive ourselves.

When all I seem to hear about these days
is violence, injustice and despair,
or humourless theories, from cynical hearts,
to rescue us all from our human plight,
those moments in a bakkie on a plain
make sunflowers from a waterless world.

bakkie – pick-up truck.
(Mann 2010, 128-9)

Bibliography

Alighieri, Dante (1939). *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri.* Ed. and transl. by John D. Sinclair. London: Bodley Head.

Alighieri, Dante (1948). *The Divine Comedy.* Ed. and transl. by John D. Sinclair. London: John Lane.

Ashcroft, Bill; Griffiths, Gareth; Tiffin, Helen [1995] (2006). *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader.* New York: Routledge.

Baddeley, Alan et al. (2002). *Episodic Memory. New Directions in Research.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Berglund, Axel-Ivar (1976). *Zulu Thought Patterns and Symbolism.* Cape Town: David Philip Publisher.

Bernard, Penny (2010). *Messages from the Deep. Water Divinities, Dreams and Diviners in Southern Africa* [PhD dissertation]. Grahamstown: Rhodes University.

Brook, Andrew; Akin, Kathleen (eds.) (2005). *Cognition and the Brain. The Philosophy and Neuroscience Movement.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, Duncan (2009). *Religion and Spirituality in South Africa. New Perspectives.* Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Carton, Benedict; Laband, John; Sithole, Jabulani (2008). *Zulu Identities. Being Zulu, Past and Present.* Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh (2000). *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Differences.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Chatfield, Michael (1977). *A History of Accounting Thought.* Huntington; New York: Robert E. Krieger.

Damasio, Antonio (2004). *Looking for Spinoza. Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain.* Vintage: London.

Davies, Glyn (2002). *History of Money.* Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Dickow, Helga (2012). *Religion and Attitudes Towards Life in South Africa*. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Doke, Clement Martyn et al. (1972). *Zulu-English Dictionary*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.

Encyclopedia catholica. s.v. "The Communion of Saints" [online]. URL http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=3205 (2013-10-18).

Encyclopedia catholica. s.v. "St. Nicetas" [online]. URL http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=463 (2013-10-18).

Encyclopedia catholica. s.v. "Nicetas" [online]. URL http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=8445 (2013-10-18).

Ferguson, Niall (2009). *The Ascent of Money.* London: Penguin.

Flint, Karen; Parle, Julie (2008). "Healing and Harming. Medicine, Madness, Witchcraft and Tradition". Carton, Benedict et al., *Zulu Identities. Being Zulu Past and Present.* New York: Columbia University Press, 312-21.

Frosh, Stephen (2013). *Hauntings. Psychoanalysis and Ghostly Transmissions.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gunner, Elizabeth; Gwala, Mafika (1994). *Musho. Zulu Popular Praises.* Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.

Gunner, Elizabeth (2004). *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God. Isaiah Shembe and the Nazareth Church.* Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Hardy, Thomas (1983). *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy.* Ed. by James Gibson. London: Macmillan.

Harrison, Stephen J. (1990). *Oxford Readings in Vergil's 'Aeneid'.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hirst, Manton Myatt (1990). *The Healer's Art. Cape Nguni Diviners in the Townships of Grahamstown* [PhD dissertation]. Grahamstown: Rhodes University.

Hughes, Ted (1998). *Birthday Letters.* London: Faber & Faber,

Kalu, Ogbu (2008). *African Pentecostalism.* Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

Koopman, Adrian (2005). "Benedict Wallet Vilakazi. Poet in Exile". *Natalia*, 35, 63-74.

Littleton, Ananias Charles (1981). *Accounting Evolution to 1900.* Alabama: University of Alabama Press.

Mann, Chris (1985). *Water and Sanitation Projects.* Durban: The Valley Trust.

Mann, Chris (2002). *Heartlands.* Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Mann, Chris (2010). *Home from Home.* Cape Town: Echoing Green Press.

Mann, Chris; Myeni, Bheki (1990). *Asset Generation, Unemployment Relief and Development. Case Study from the Valley Trust.* Unpublished report.

Mtuze, Peter (2004). *Introduction to Xhosa Culture.* Alice: Lovedale Press.

McCutcheon, Robert at al. (2012). "The Expanded Public Works Programme. Policy, Rhetoric, Reality and Opportunities Foregone During the Expenditure of Over R40 Billion on Infrastructure". *South African Civil Engineering*, 20, 34-46.

Nürnberger, Klaus (2007). *The Living Dead and the Living God. Christ and the Ancestors in a Changing Africa.* Pietermaritzburg: Cluster.

Oosthuizen, Gerhardus Cornelis (1967). *The Theology of a South African Messiah.* Leiden: E.J. Brill.

Opland, Jeff (1983). *Xhosa Oral Poetry.* Johannesburg: Ravan.

Opland, Jeff (1998). *Xhosa Poets and Poetry.* Cape Town: David Philip.

Opland, Jeff (2005). *The Dassie and the Hunter. A South African Meeting.* Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Opland, Jeff (2007). *The Nation's Bounty. The Xhosa Poetry of Nontsizi Mgqwethu.* Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.

Peires, Jeffrey B. (1981). *The House of Phalo. A History of the Xhosa People in the Days of Their Independence.* Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

Peires, Jeffrey B. (1989). *The Dead Will Arise. Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7.* Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

Schwarz, John (2004). *A Handbook of the Christian Faith.* Bloomington: Bethany House.

Solms, Mark; Turnbull, Oliver (2002). *The Brain and the Inner World.* London: Karnac.

Tulving, Endel (1983). *Elements of Episodic Memory.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Vilakazi, Absolom et al. (1986). *Shembe. The Revitalization of African Society.* Johannesburg: Skotaville.

West, Martin (1975). *Bishops and Prophets in a Black City. African Independent Churches in Soweto Johannesburg.* Cape Town: David Philip.

Wheeler, Mark A. et al. (1997). "Towards a Theory of Episodic Memory. The Frontal Lobes and Autonoetic Consciouness". *Psychological Bulletin*, 121, 331-54.

Wilson, Godfrey; Wilson, Monica (1945). *The Analysis of Social Change. Based on Observations in Central Africa.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wilson, Monica (1971). *Religion and the Transformation of Society.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.