

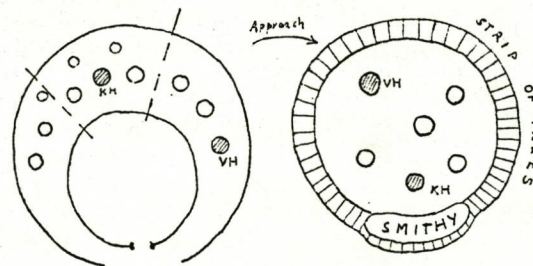
## A PRESENT DAY ZULU PHILOSOPHER

W. BODENSTEIN AND O. F. RAUM

## I

IN February 1957 we visited the homestead of Laduma Madela, member of a small Zulu clan. He belongs to the PondolweNdhlovu regiment, i.e. he was born about 1906. He had been described to us as a somewhat mysterious but particularly knowledgeable person. One of us had established preliminary contacts and gained his confidence. When we visited him for the first time, neither of us anticipated that we should meet in him a unique Zulu personality, a man who, although 'uneducated' in the Western sense, possesses a remarkable breadth of vision and grasp of detail concerning his own culture.

Laduma's homestead had a number of unusual features. The normal Zulu kraal (see Diagram A1) is a crescent of huts surrounding a circular cattle-pen. The huts



A1. Usual Zulu kraal      A2. Laduma's kraal in 1957  
KH Kraal head's hut  
VH Visitors' hut

of the kraalhead and of his two most important wives lie at 'the crown', and the visitors' hut, if any, lies at one of 'the wings'. Laduma's kraal was then without a cattle-pen. A dense ring of wattle-trees completely screened the huts from view, whereas in the average kraal there is not even a fence to hide them. The path leading to Laduma's kraal approached it from above, unlike all other kraals which must be approached from below. The distribution of huts, as indicated in sketch A2, was the very reverse of the normal pattern. Laduma's residence was at the bottom of the kraal, the visitors' hut at the top, while the women's huts (that of Laduma's mother, wife, and 'daughters') lay between them on varying levels of the steep site. Opposite and below the owner's residence lay the smithy. Undoubtedly the set-up of the homestead would strike the ordinary Zulu caller with astonishment and awe. (Since 1957 Laduma has introduced a few changes which lessen the uncanny impression: he has started a cattle-pen, but outside the main homestead; the tree enclosure has been cut down on one side, and the path enters the kraal below the visitors' hut).

The huts of the womenfolk were thatched to the ground, the two 'residences' had conical thatch roofs raised on sod walls. When we were shown into the visitors' hut, we saw a most unusual feature. The white-washed walls were covered with scenes in black and white representing the various stages of a Zulu marriage. Such wall pictures are exceptional in Nguni culture, and had been painted by Laduma Madela himself.<sup>1</sup>

The record of Laduma's family pattern shows nothing out of the ordinary. He has three wives, of whom the two older ones live in a second homestead 25 miles away, where Laduma's cattle are also kept. He himself prefers not to live there, since it lies in a white farming area, and we did not visit it. Laduma's youngest wife stays with him at his Ceza homestead.

We had come to Laduma to obtain an insight into a Zulu smith's work and taboos. He willingly gave us a detailed account of how his smithy is 'dedicated' in various ways, and how he was taught the smith's craft by his paternal and maternal grandfathers. He further described to us the taboo regimen which he observes when he manufactures 'killing' spears and the special relationship which smiths enjoyed with the king and their national status.

In the course of his account we came to realize that Laduma is an expert lightning doctor as well as a smith. We visited him in February 1958 to obtain information about this side of his work. He outlined to us the lengthy and careful training he had received from his father and gave a dramatic description of a novice's passing-out ceremony, which is attended by the guild of lightning doctors and whose culmination is a ritual contest between master and novice during a thunderstorm. The control of lightning by a lightning doctor is achieved mainly through the capture of *iMpundulo*, the legendary lightning bird. Laduma recounted to us in great detail how the guild of doctors succeeds in trapping this bird, which descends with a bolt of lightning, and how the visible remains of the bird are worked up into lightning charms.

## II

Our visits in January 1958 greatly stirred the imagination of Laduma Madela. He had in fact found the disciples he had always hoped for, who would not only understand and value his theories but at the same time constitute a bridge to other peoples of his country and the great world at large. This gave him a feeling of fulfilment and roused in him a creative urge, an almost compelling obsession to impart to his new friends all his secret wisdom, which he had long felt was becoming a burden on his soul, unless he handed it on as a sacred message. As he had the foreboding that he might die at any time, he was impatient to communicate everything as soon as possible. But months passed and we never came. He said that the impatient waiting made him physically ill. He had to find an outlet. So he took a momentous step. He decided to write everything down for us. He had never attended school but some years back he had made his 'niece' teach him the barest rudiments of reading and writing Zulu.<sup>2</sup> So he sat down with the most remarkable concentration and ardour,

<sup>1</sup> The excellent photographs taken by Dr. Katesa Schlosser of Kiel University in 1959 reveal that they are now in bad repair. She plans to give a full description of them in a separate publication.

See plate A.

<sup>2</sup> Laduma seems to have told Professor B. Sundkler that he attended school for a couple of years, but, if this is so, his writing does not reveal it. He runs



painting his hieroglyphics with a happy disregard for the beginnings and endings of words and sentences. Often he would write day and night for weeks: old customs and traditions, local and national history and, most precious of all, legends and mythology. All this was written with a strong tendency to dogmatize and his texts are richly interspersed with critical comment. When we paid him another series of visits in June 1958 he had already filled 22 notebooks and we were promised further instalments. On our arrival we immediately saw that careful preparations had been made for our visit. A path had been hewn out of the high grass and white-washed bricks placed on both sides. The path had a loop near the kraal so that our car could turn without reversing. A sign-post placed where the path turns off the road showed 'Laduma Madela' in red on a zinc strip, the letters 'L M' cut out of skin on a board, and an inscription below reading: 'The wise man who knows the wisdom of the past' together with a Biblical reference: 'Romans i. 1-17' (a passage in which Paul speaks of the basis of his authority). Laduma Madela greeted us with a mixture of enthusiasm and dignity difficult to describe. We felt that this was to be much more than a casual visit. There was an atmosphere about his homestead of grave solemnity which was almost uncanny and he paid much more attention to ceremonial than on previous occasions. We were ushered into the visitors' hut where Laduma solemnly addressed us. He had been impatiently expecting us. The matters he wished to place before us were serious indeed. They concerned the past and future of the whole of mankind, which was threatened with catastrophe. Mankind, he said, had two beginnings, viz. Adamu, who was the forefather of the Whites, as well as his neighbour and contemporary, who was the ancestor of the black people. There were two pillars on which the order and fate of mankind rested: one of them was now rotten, and it was the duty of ministers, teachers, and doctors to remedy this condition. For that reason it was so important that we had met each other. One of the corner-stones of his philosophy is that the kings of old are largely to blame for the decay of the one pillar. By virtue of their arbitrariness and despotism they destroyed the pattern of humanity as ordained by the Creator, thereby bringing mankind to the verge of destruction. The other factor is that men, as distinct from women, are not capable of saving the situation, since they, by virtue of their temperament, approach the problems mainly by angry force.<sup>1</sup> He asked if we understood his reference to two elephants in a letter he had written to us. When we answered that we thought the two races were meant, he denied this and began to unfold before us a written account of the Creation of Mankind, and the origin and distribution of powers at the beginning. It contained drawings of the Arch of Heaven supported by three pillars (in the centre, the east, and the west of the world) and of Nomkubulwana, the Princess of Heaven, who in the beginning ripped the soil open with her sickle to make it fertile. (Plates B and C.)

Laduma spoke with evident emotion, making his points graphically and emphatically.

his words together in the manner of medieval writers and his spelling is unconventional. It is hoped that at least a selection of his writings will be published in the original under the editorship of Professor C. L. C. S. Nyembezi.

<sup>1</sup> In this connexion the presence of Miss Maria-Paula Schiele, whom as a good linguist we had

invited without our host's knowledge, was regarded by Laduma as a particularly favourable omen. He presented her with an ornate battle-axe (*isiZenze*), carrying a carved female head, and claimed that he had made it specially for her, for he had dreamt of her coming with us.

cally. He was occasionally challenged (or irritated) into greater heights of oratory by a young headman of the Zulu clan (but not counted as royalty), who at one time had been a permanent resident in Laduma's kraal. As Laduma told us later, this headman was neither his apprentice nor his confidant. Another characteristic of Laduma's delivery was a concern that circumstances might prevent his completing his account, that the police might not understand the spiritual nature of his message, and that we should be prepared to vouch for his sincerity. To this we readily consented. Also notable was the great effort on his part to impress us with the importance of his message. He insisted that times were critical, that we had arrived in the nick of time, and that we must not shrink from the whole revelation for which everything had been prepared. He proceeded to tell us that the most useful day to meet again was the coming Wednesday, for the ancestors would be present then.<sup>1</sup> All omens, Laduma said, pointed in the same direction. When, at the conclusion of writing out his visions, he had slaughtered a beast, he found that the two kidneys were shrunk and surrounded by a bag filled with water. This showed that the two forces he had spoken of, the two elephants facing each other, were obviously weak. But a stump-like organ between the kidneys signified some union or healing growth which might yet be possible. A great leader would have to emerge to bring this about. Speaking with almost prophetic fervour, he handed over to us his manuscript of the story of Creation, with its fascinating illustrations of certain deities.

Between Monday, 23 July, and Wednesday, 25 July, we studied Laduma Madela's manuscript on the Creation of Man and the World. It is a vivid account of the Creator uMvelingqangi ('who created everything except the world which created him') and his wife maJukujukwana, called after the locality where the creation took place, viz. emaJukujukwini. 'uMvelingqangi and maJukujukwana emerged in the manner of mushrooms' and 'begat' Sitha, Nowa, and Nomkubulwana, the Princess who does not marry. uMvelingqangi prepared for a visit to the reedbeds over the dark ocean, but only Nowa accompanied him, Sitha remained at home. At the ocean's brink the Creator struck the surface of the water with his kirrie, the water receded and was gathered up to form the Headring of the World (*isiCoco somHlaba*). With this redistribution of the ocean waters, large areas of rock formerly constituting the ocean floor became exposed. They were oozing blood. The surface dried and caked, but the oozing proceeded for some time. From this blood of the stones emerged the original inhabitants of Natal, all of them regarded as 'primitive' by the Zulu. These include *imiKovu* (dwarf-sized familiars of wizards), *amaZimu* (cannibals), *aBatwa* (Bushmen), and all *amaLala* clans (the Bantu Mkize, Cele, Tusi, Madide, Ntuli) and those of Basuto origin. (The Madide to the present day recognize among their ancestors *uMatsheni kaSikotha*, i.e. literally 'From-the-Stones'—Son-of-Sikotha, consequently they avoid the root of *iTshe*, stone, in many words.)

For the second creation uMvelingqangi, having gathered the waters into the Headring of the Earth, raised up reeds one by one from the Reedbed rising above the Ocean. From each of them emerged first an elephant, then animals of all sorts and birds, and lastly man. There are five reedbeds (or reedstocks). The emerging humans

<sup>1</sup> Later he explained this point: 'My father was the third son, my mother the third daughter in their families, and his grandparents likewise.' In

consequence the third day is his lucky day and he wears a ring of luck on his third finger.



from the Reed of the East were divided by their King Phumalanga ('Sunrise') into clans to make intermarriage possible between them. The same was done by the King of the West, Ntshonalanga ('Sunset'), and also by the King of the North and of the South and by the King of the Middle. In fact, the creation was expanding rapidly. (There is, as was said before, a third creation, that of the White Man—through Adam and Eve—distinct from these two previous creations.)

uMvelingqangi's son Sitha, feeling that he had been overlooked in this dispensation and that all the created beings would be Nowa's, sent Lizard, his son, to uMvelingqangi with the request that the Creation be reduced. Nowa, aware of this message, sent Chameleon, his son, to countermand the request. Chameleon overtook Lizard eating berries, but Lizard took another advantage and reported his message first. The Creator accepted it (and his word being inviolable had to stick to it, apparently). Thus Sickness, Death, and Lamentations came into the world, and, since this was brought about by a lie, also Sin, which befell mankind like mange. Laduma's account has a dramatic interrogation of Lizard by the Creator, and the culprit is condemned to seek his nourishment among the stones, while Chameleon is transferred into the trees (for being remiss?).

Having studied this vivid account (which incorporates traditional stories, adds entirely new features, and combines all into a magnificent whole which cannot be judged by this summary) we approached Laduma's kraal with high expectations on the appointed Wednesday. On this occasion we were accompanied by a Zulu minister, the Rev. W. Cele. We were received by Laduma's famulus, Mziweyixwala Thabethe, who ordered us to follow him into the visitors' hut. Everybody in the kraal was extremely quiet. The children spoke in whispers and were given food, presumably to keep them quiet. Laduma then appeared to announce that his famulus would take us to a tree in the forest, described as an *umDubu* (Combretum spec.), which he could not approach because he was impure on account of a rash (taboo). He forbade us to take notes of what he had to tell us then, although we might write and draw in the forest. We should speak gently near the tree and abstain from spitting on the ground even if we noticed bad smells. A fire-stick tree was mentioned (*uZwathi*, *uHlwehlwe*) and our question about it answered by the production of a soot-covered fire-drill. When the famulus tried to demonstrate the twirling of the male stick, the master forbade him to do so, since the action might engender 'a war' (between the Fire-stick Tree and the Tree of Creation?). We were reassured, however, that if Thabethe noticed any signs of opposition from the *iNkata* (Authority) of the Tree, Madela would send his *iNkata* (authority-carrying medicine) to mollify the angry Tree of Creation.

The famulus now dressed up in a khaki uniform over a checked shirt, and crossed the medicine-man's braces, the sign of his profession, over his chest. In the skin strips were represented leopard, civet-cat, goat, and monkey. He carried a carved stick. At this stage the senior of us was presented as a sign of initiation with a battle-axe, which had a well carved head-ringed Zulu as knob and miniature braces to ornament the handle. The iron of the blade, we were told, is ancient Zulu iron. The recipient was instructed how to carry it, either horizontally or like a walking-stick with a crook. Before we left we were informed that we should tell any person we met that we were going to be shown where King Dinizulu hid before the English. This

deception was used to Laduma's mother's brother who arrived in the homestead at this moment.

We walked in single file up the mountain to the forest. As we entered it, the famulus stopped, looked right and left for propitious or portentous signs, and so stopped a second and a third time. He then beckoned us to wait, while he left the path

### TREE OF CREATION

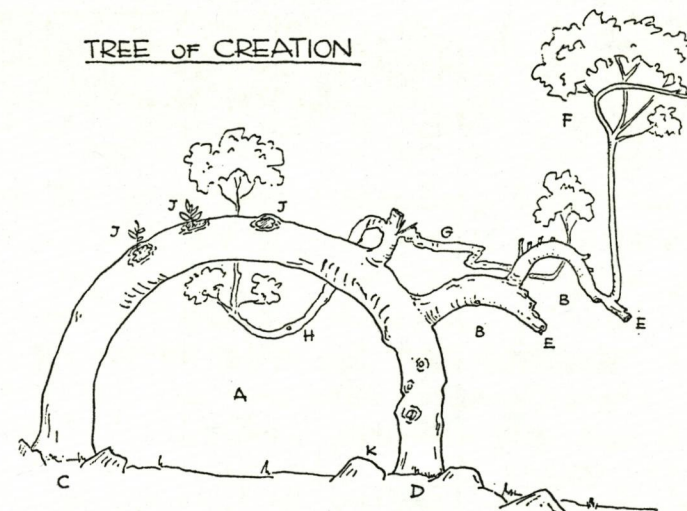


DIAGRAM E. The Tree of Creation (onlooker facing north)

- A. The Vault of our Heavens.
- B. Vaults of Heavens of other Worlds.
- C. Western Pillar/Reed, western end of our world.
- D. Eastern Pillar/Reed, eastern end of our world. N.B. Northern and southern pillars/reeds are not visible; they have rotted away, but are again sprouting.
- E. Ends, boundaries, of other worlds.
- F. *emaJukujukwini*: the highest world, where uMvelingqangi is—far in the farthest East; at the end which is infinitely far.
- G. Broken branch. It should be growing upwards to connect us with the heavens, thus to receive the heavenly blessings. But mankind broke it and thus we are cutting ourselves off.
- H. This branch points to the North and its great kingdom—of no ill omen.
- J. The Three Wounds, signifying the three great sins. Out of two of these young wild fig seedlings (*uMthombo*) grow. They signify new life after a period of decay and symbolize the rejuvenating contribution of the white man.
- K. Madela gets his revelations when sitting here meditating, or in dreams, when sleeping at this spot. This is where the luck-bringing leopards lay and the famulus noticed the impression.

turning into the forest to the left. When his examination of the environs of the Tree of Creation had proved satisfactory, he requested us to approach and to deposit stick and weapon before doing so. As we eventually stopped facing the ominous tree, the guide pointed out a shallow impression at its foot, saying: 'They have been here!', which he interpreted as a good omen. When asked: 'Who?' he replied: 'The



No.

TR

Name Burger, J.M Mrs.Month August 1996

HJP DBN.

Date	Morning		Afternoon		Interruptions and Overtime		Normal	Overtime	Remarks
	In	Out	In	Out	Start	End			
	FR 7 02								
1									
2				FR 16 36					
3									
4									
5	MO 6 58			MO 17 08					
6	TU 7 04			TU 16 35					
7	WED 6 55		WE 16 43						
8	TH 6 55			TH 16 18					
9									
10									
11									
12	MO 7 03			MO 16 31					
13	TU 6 55			TU 16 41					
14	WE 6 53			WE 16 31					
15	TH 6 55			TH 16 30					

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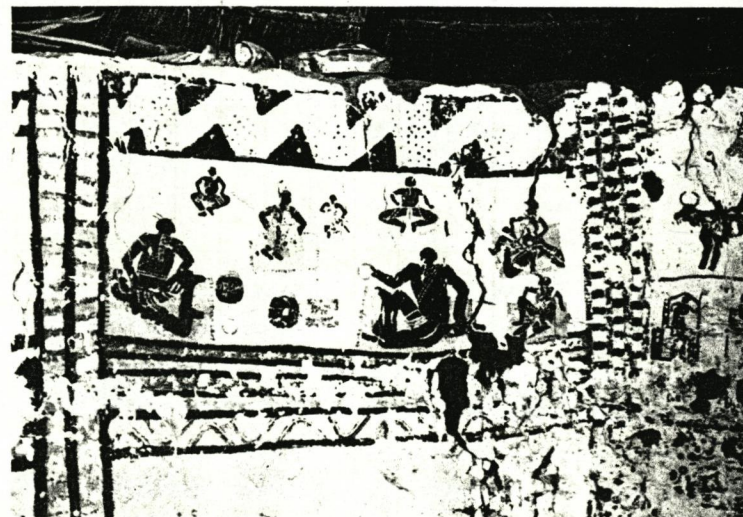
two leopards which Laduma Madela dreamt of in connexion with his first dream about the Tree and which he saw, a male and a female, lying one behind the other.' Thabethe then requested us to place the palms of both our hands on the tree-trunk for some time.

The Tree of Creation (also referred to by our informants by the following terms: Tree of Heaven, Tree of uMvelinqangi, Tree of the iNkata, Symbol of Creation of Heavens) is a curiously grown tree with two perfect stems forming an arch about 20 feet high and 30 feet wide. Years ago the once proud stem had bowed before a storm and one of its bigger branches had struck root (see sketch). The famulus proceeded to explain the arch as representing The Heavens. This form is so striking, he said, that it cannot have grown: it must have fallen from heaven, and this is corroborated by the fact that it seems to rise out of the stones without roots. (In the stones is the abode of Lizard and in the branches of the Tree that of Chameleon.) (See Diagram E.)

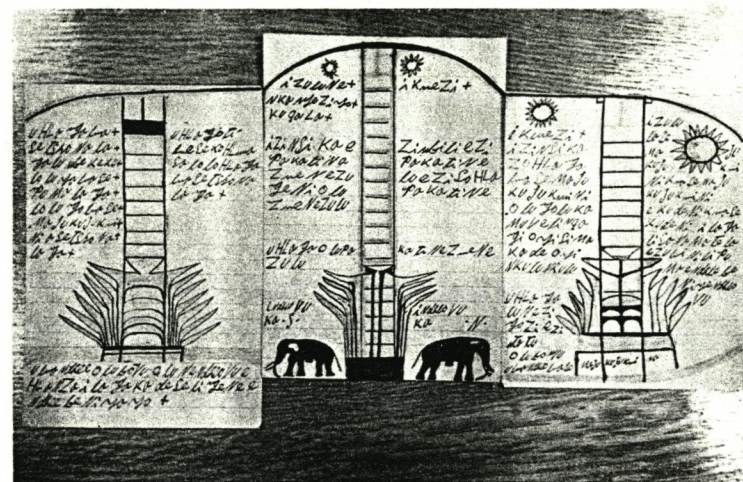
The famulus called the ground under the arch *umHlaba*, the Earth. On it the Creator (or First Emerger) set up the four pillars. Of these four only two are admittedly visible, the 'Sunrise Reed' and the 'Sunset Reed'. The North Pillar or Reed is indicated, he said, in a bent and gnarled branch, pointing in that direction but not touching the ground. The South Pillar or Reed 'has rotted away' (it is absent altogether). Other signs, however, represented it, and he referred us to the beast slaughtered by Laduma which showed two shrivelled kidneys indicating North and South Pillar.

The Creator created not only our earth, but—as branches growing towards the east in semicircular arches show—other heavens and other earths beyond and underneath as well. As Thabethe put it: 'Just as if you reach the horizon you always find another one beyond, so it is with the vault of heaven!' The arched branches showed in elbow-like fashion the boundaries of such additional heavens and earths. A thick branch broken in its upright growth was described as the (potential) path linking Heaven and Earth with blessings which would have descended on Earth had Sin not entered and spoiled everything. Since it was the law of the Creator that man had broken, Heaven is closed to man, for 'what is broken below is also broken above!' At the end of the third arch a straight upright shoot indicates the Domicile of the Creator (*emaJukujukwini*). It is the easternmost part of the Tree of Creation. The three great sins (see below) are represented by the three 'wounds' of the Tree, visible as hollows in the arched trunk, possibly originating in branches long decayed. (No gifts or offerings, the famulus said, are normally presented at the Tree unless such are ordered in a dream.)

To our surprise the famulus now revealed that the Tree of Creation forms part of a grove of *umDubu* trees, all of which have significance for the story of Creation. The tree nearest to the Tree representing Heaven bends strongly towards and over it. It is the Tree of Nowa, the dutiful son of the Creator. It also spreads over the Firestick Tree (referred to later). The Tree of Sitha, the disobedient and jealous son of the Creator, is further up the hillside. It first grew towards the Tree of Heaven but higher up turns decidedly away from it and towards the tree just above the Tree of Sin. This shows Sitha's 'fall from grace' and subsequent inclination towards Sin. The trunk of the Tree of Sin was at one time completely broken off, but many strong



A. Wall pictures in the visitors' hut in Laduma Madela's kraal, showing the beer-drink on occasion of the handing over of the bride-price  
(Photo by Dr. K. Schlosser)



B. The Arch of Heaven. A diagrammatic view of the world with its three pillars (Sunrise, Centre, and Sunset)



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Date	Morning		Afternoon		Interruptions and Overtime		Normal	Overtime	Remarks
	In	Out	In	Out	Start	End			
	7:02								
1									
2				16:38					
3									
4									
5	6:55			17:00					
6	7:01			16:38					
7	Meeting		16:40						
8	6:55			16:10					
9									
10									
11									
12	7:03			16:31					
13	6:55			16:41					
14	6:53			16:31					
15	6:55			16:30					

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D. The Zulu Philosopher Laduma Madela  
(Photo by Annaliese Scherz)



C. Nomkubulwana, the Princess of Heaven. Manuscript page from Laduma Madela's illustrative booklet

shoots thereupon grew out of the stump. Of these a large one was broken again, but none the less is now shooting afresh, a symbol of the irrepressible growth of sin. The Tree of Sin is overshadowed by the tallest and proudest *umDubu*. It is the Tree of the Setting Sun (Ntshonalanga). This tree represents the arbitrary power of despots, including white domination, and significantly stands near the Tree of Sin. (Its branches and those of the Tree of Sitha significantly approach each other.) A tree below and at the right hand of the Tree of Heaven (i.e. at its side of honour) is pointed out by the famulus as the Tree of the Son of Man (*iNdodana yesiNtu*, but Madela and Thabethe in reply to our direct question did not hesitate to interpret this as referring to Blackman: *iNdodana yomuNtu onSundu*). It is of a different species from the others, viz., a *uNomdomela* or *uNobibi*. Under it, according to our informant, elephants love to rest and receive on their mighty bodies the droppings of the innumerable birds that perch on its branches.<sup>1</sup> The Son of Blackman is destined to burn Sin with the branches of the Fire-drill Tree (*uZwathi*) near at hand, and is empowered to do so, because like Jesus he is at the right hand of the Creator. This Black Messiah, Thabethe emphasizes, will work for the salvation of the *whole* world! (See Diagram F.)

### III

When one of us interviewed Madela again in May 1959, it appeared that his communications were entering a new phase. He was now deeply occupied with mythology and was busy building and expanding on his original exposition of the mythological hierarchy. He had almost completed an illustrated booklet describing a whole galaxy of 'divine beings', reflecting the typical Zulu lineage in all its complexity. These new accounts seem to impart more philosophical depth and coherence to the account of the Creation, e.g. by the introduction of *Siŋi*, the personified Evil. In long talks which Madela had with Dr. Katesa Schlosser in June this impression was confirmed. When in November Miss Schlosser and the two authors were again Madela's guests, he surprised us by a detailed and complex version of the architecture of the Universe to accommodate the expanded hierarchy of deities inhabiting it, and also by a new departure in his art: he had abandoned the portrayal of individual deities for mythological scenes with an almost surrealistic effect.

A complete analysis of the Story of Creation and the Grove of Revelation cannot be attempted in this short account. It is, however, possible at this stage to make a few points which will assist us in such an analysis.

Laduma's personal relations to the Tree of Creation, he informed us, began when he dreamt of such a tree in his youth, i.e. before his (first) marriage. Ever since this dream he was afraid (*ukwEsaba*) to enter a forest, since he felt that a tree of such significance to him, to the Zulu, and to Mankind in general could not be approached lightly. He expected good luck from the Tree, but also felt such awe that he experienced a shudder (*uValo*) when he saw it for the first time.<sup>2</sup> Continuing his story,

<sup>1</sup> A Zulu counts it a good omen if the droppings of a bird hit him—all good things come from above!

<sup>2</sup> As he told us about this trembling, he appeared to be under the influence of great emotional stress, as if the revelation of an experience so intimately linked with his own inner development was painful to him. He writhed on his bed, on which he had sat

calmly before; finally he rushed out of the hut but returned after a few minutes. Not long afterwards his wife, whom he had met outside, as one of us noticed through the doorway, entered with his leopard-skin collar. When he had put this on, he was visibly calmed.



Laduma said that he was baptized a Christian about 1930 and attended communion service three times. But he felt so disappointed with Christianity that he decided forthwith to go in search of the Tree. He lived on Ceza Mountain for about sixteen years but discovered the tree only in 1951, about twenty years after his baptism. It was the

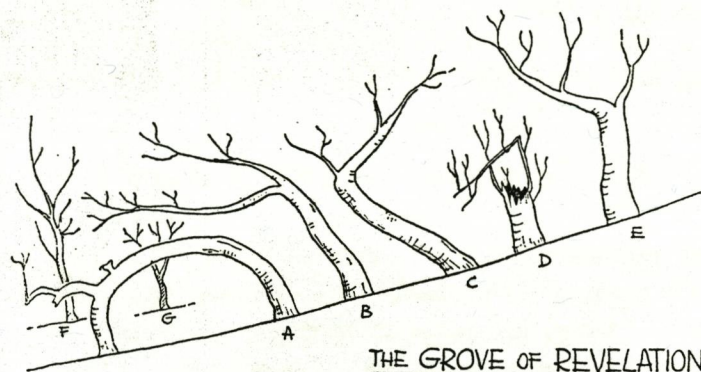


Diagram F. The Grove of Revelation (onlooker facing south)

Trees A-E are all *umDubu weHlathi*, a species of *Combretum*; F is a *uNomdomela* or *uNobibi*; G is a *uHlwehlwe* or *uZwathi*, the Firestick-tree. Their symbolical significance is as follows:

- A. Tree of Creation, or Tree of *uMvelingqangi* (see Diagram E).
- B. Tree of Nowa (*uHlanga lukaNowa*), leaning towards and over A.
- C. Tree of Sitha (*uHlanga lukaSitha*). In its lower part this is also inclining towards A, then suddenly it turns sharply away in the opposite direction, signifying his sin and falling from grace.
- D. The Tree of Sin: broken off and sprouting, then broken off and sprouting again.
- E. The Tree of the West (*uHlanga lwase NtshonaLanga*) signifying the evil powers of the arbitrary kings and despots (including the white man) which bring disaster by violating the laws of Creation. Its branches and those of Sitha's Tree are sympathetically inclined towards each other.
- F. Tree of the Son of Man (Blackman). He will come from the East and destroy everything sinful with fire and build a new kingdom according to the Laws of Creation. Significantly it stands on the right hand of A (this bearing is taken looking east). The right hand is the side of honour and of the heir to kingship.
- G. The Tree of Fire: this will supply the fire to burn sin and stands conveniently close to F.

year in which his father died, but actually some time before the death. Laduma had never heard of such trees which reveal things; he tried to trace others but without avail.<sup>1</sup>

The Tree is in a field (*iNdima*) where everything has significance for him. He has

<sup>1</sup> One of us came across an association between an *iNyanga* and a tree previously, viz., Maklaya Sikhakhana, the grandson of Nondo Sikhakhana, a tribal war doctor, when Zulu power was at its height. Nondo planted a medicinal tree at some distance from his kraal. People passing it 'take off their hats' and greet it 'Mboma!' Maklaya's wives respectfully avoid (*hlonipha*) the tree, as a symbol

of their 'father-in-law'. The informant himself occasionally visits the tree, kneels before it and softly calls its praise name: 'Mboma ka-Mqhele'. He does so to get 'strength' for a difficult situation, not to gather leaves or bark for medicines. In his youth he called on the tree and became so attractive that all the girls fell in love with him!

now gone to it for six years, this (1959) is the eighth. He goes there when he has had a dream, and sometimes he has an urge to go there to lie down under the (upper) trunk and wait for a vision. He does not prepare himself ritually but refrains from spitting near the Tree. His first dream told him to look for it 'to the right' which he interpreted as meaning 'from the path'. When he could not find it in that direction the dream was repeated, and he realized that the direction was to be taken not from the path but from the rising sun. The dreams concerning the Tree foretell good luck. Thus both Laduma Madela and Mziweyixwala Thabethe dreamt about each other and thus came to work together. Once both dreamt about 'Princesses' and when they left the Tree they encountered a group of 'Princesses' in the path: they did not speak, but one of them smiled at them—an inspiring good omen. During one visit, when they turned towards the tree they saw sitting under it a head-ringed man and a woman with a top-knot—also signs of good luck. When Laduma sleeps under the tree he receives visions and messages about the Creation and the Course of the World, which he writes down there and then, lest he forget the messages away from the Tree.<sup>1</sup>

The Grove of Revelation is quite definitely a tabooed site. When Laduma Madela approached the Tree for the first time a dark cloud passed over his eyes. When it lifted he saw the Tree in the undergrowth which was then much thicker than it is now. The famulus admitted that many smaller branches had been hacked down by wood-seekers. People who know nothing about the Tree go there with impunity, but those initiated into the secret of the Grove—as we were now—could not go there without authority from Laduma Madela. There are 'things to act as bar' (*kuKhona okuVimbayo*), a sudden gust of wind which would blow the intruder off his feet and down the slope, or the leopards of the Tree and the elephants would appear and kill him.

The tabooed character of the grove is emphasized by certain scatological features. It was mentioned that when briefing us as to our correct behaviour when approaching the Tree of Heaven, Madela gave us the warning: Do not let yourselves be put off if a stench fills the air! And certainly, as we approached the tree, there was a marked stench of human excreta. Questioned in May 1959 as to the origin and significance of the excreta, Laduma gave the following explanation: the spot being a sacred shrine of *uMvelingqangi*, he will see to it that its seclusion and secrecy are upheld. To this end he will cause uninitiated passers-by, just as they pass the grove, to feel an urge to relieve themselves. This purpose of *uMvelingqangi* is quite obvious, since the 'stench-screen' seals off both the upper and the lower approaches of the sacred tree. In this way everybody except the initiated will avoid the place. There is nothing to prevent Laduma from relieving himself in the vicinity while he is there meditating, but he will definitely not seek the place for that purpose. The protection of the site is also made possible by an automatic sanction attached to it. Laduma told us the story of a kraalhead, one Butelezi, who hacked the bush down near the Tree and ploughed the land below the edge of the forest. Laduma informed him that his medicines were there and that if Butelezi persisted, he, Laduma, would not be able 'to see' them any longer. This warning (*isiVimbelo*) was uttered without a threat, but was ridiculed by Butelezi. After the trespasser's first harvest from the encroaching field, he held a big feast to celebrate. At its conclusion he collected a group of young

<sup>1</sup> The emergence of 'forgetting' as a psychic problem is linked to the invention and learning of writing!





exhibition. The first was in 1992, when she was studying ceramic design at the Witwatersrand Technikon.

"At one stage I was going to drop ceramics and go into painting," she says. "But one of my lecturers really believed in what I was doing. He convinced me that I could make a plate my canvas."

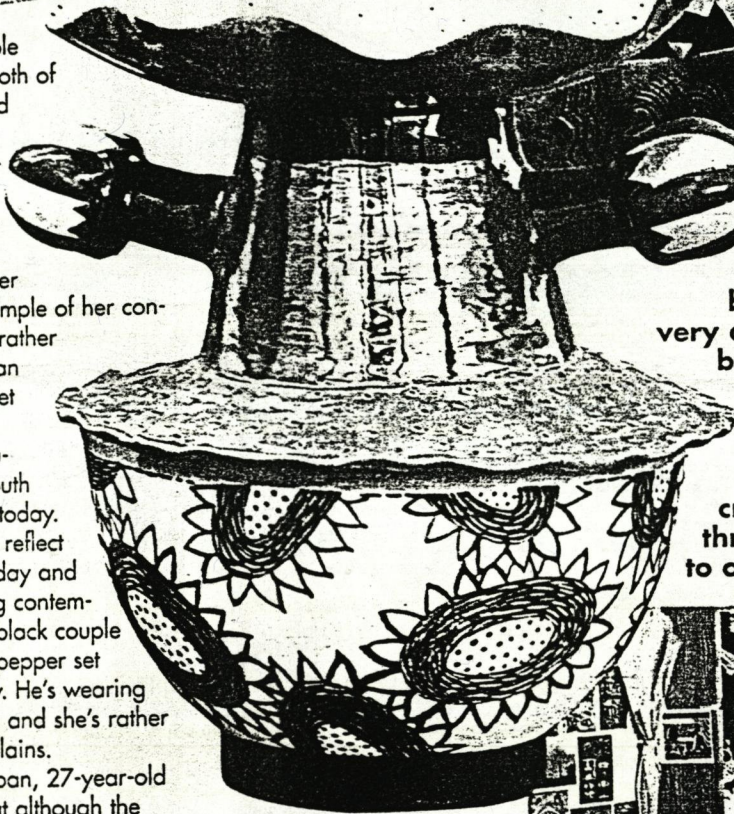
And that is exactly what she has done. □

elephant and a fashionable black woman, both of which are limited editions of 60. A delightful salt-and-pepper set, featuring a modern black couple, is another outstanding example of her contemporary and rather humorous African approach. Forget grass skirts and other tribal influences; this is South African society today.

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Born in Durban, 27-year-old Tiffany says that although the things she makes are functional, this is of secondary importance. For her it is the sculptural form which matters.

"I start with a typical utilitarian form, like a teapot, and take it beyond its function . . . although, funnily enough, the teapots pour quite nicely!



A charming Frilly Flower Pot design with buds "growing" out of the sides. Mother-of-pearl lustre combined with graphic designs give it a very different look. This piece was made by combining several ready-made moulds. The base is a bowl, topped with an inverted saucer and cup. Then she added buds and topped the piece with another saucer, pulled to create a frilled effect. Finally, she cut through the base of the cup and saucers to open the vessel.

Salt-and-pepper sets feature a yuppie black South African couple. He wears a fez and a rather snazzy tie; she sports roses and modern jewellery.

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men to go to a Mashazi kraal. To this kraal his daughter had run off and subsequently no bride-wealth had been offered. Butelezi apparently thought that this show of force would induce the Mashazi to surrender the girl. But when he arrived there with his followers, they were seized with panic and ran away. Butelezi, left alone to press his claim, was attacked by the Mashazi and killed outright. Butelezi lost his life, Madela concluded, because he had not respectfully avoided (*hlonipha*) the Tree of Creation and had burnt Madela's medicines in clearing the ground, i.e. 'medicines, both of herb and animal origin, which come not from heaven but from the earth'. Moreover, at the trial of the Mashazi for the killing, the judge did not find them guilty, a further confirmation of the sanction against Butelezi. On being questioned, Laduma remarked that the Tree did not need a making fast (*ukuBetela*) process as a homestead does against lightning, since it is 'created' there and is unassailable by its very nature. A fire going over the graves of kings is a catastrophe for the whole country. If a fire went through the Grove of Revelation it would be an immense disaster indeed! For the Tree of Creation represents *iNkata yokuDalwa* (the Authority of Creation). In this connexion, it should be noted that grey 'ancient' rocks and old trees (*amaTshe aSimakade, imiThi eSimakade*, i.e. stones and trees that have been standing of old, for ever) are thought by the Zulu to symbolize uMvelingqangi, often referred to as uSimakade, the Eternal One.

The Creation story yields a classificatory index for historical groupings and claims. The Five Reeds obviously represent the five groupings of tribes in Natal and Zululand, as they might still be defined and accepted today. Since the assigning of particular clans and sub-tribes to one of the Reeds involves a definition of their political status in Native constitutional thought, or a commitment as to their place in the indigenous power structure, Madela was loath to classify the Zulu clan names for us. Pressed on this point, he suddenly shouted: 'It is taboo (*zila*) to reveal the order!' and lay down on his bed as a sign of rejection and desperation. However, a few positions were elicited from him, viz. The Reed of the East: Mthethwa (Dingiswayo), Ndwandwe (Zwide kaLanga = Phumalanga); the Reed of the North: Cunu; the Reed of the Centre: Butelezi. When we came to the people of the Reed of the West, Laduma agitatedly remarked: 'It is broken as if lightning had struck it!', and then with a fierce shout: 'Stop, Madela! Leave it!' The Rev. W. Cele, our interpreter-companion, suggested that this group comprises the nations of the Whites and their sinful condition.

From this perfunctory classification we derived with Laduma's assistance certain principles: it is an ideal with him to have a political set-up on the genealogical principle and thus to have five main chiefs to rule Zululand. The same principle could be applied on a lower level, e.g. the Cele had branched out into Mali, Mvuyane, Mbasele, Khumbuze, and Ntosi. Although each of these sections had grown big, they would still welcome being grouped under one big chief with each branch having its sub-chief. The royal Zulu clan's claim to seniority over all other Zulu clans cannot, in Laduma's opinion, be substantiated. Their original praise name (*isiThakazelo*) was Mbololenja (Penis Canis), and they obtained the coveted praise name of Ndabezitha by means of force.<sup>1</sup> Thus, their claim is not based on genealogical fact but on acquisi-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. T. Bryant, *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal*, p. 221.

tion by force of the authority-bearing name of seniority. Thirdly, Laduma expressed no surprise when his attention was drawn to the fact that Mthethwa and Ndwandwe, although once closely related, now intermarry. The fact that they are both *abaZalani* (groups which prefer each other in marriage) and at the same time violently fight each other, is not strange, 'since their source is one'. In other words, the junior section's fight against the supremacy of the senior section within the same kinship group prepares for the possibility of intermarriage. Breaking out of the agnatic hierarchy is a precondition for the two segments dealing with each other as exogamous 'strangers'.

The Creation Story also contains an incipient culture history. The three creations represent three distinct culture stages. The aborigines were agriculturists, they combined a telluric origin (rocks) with an emphasis on matrilineal symbols (blood). They were a collection of interdependent clans, or peoples, without a supreme national head and without unifying political ideology, such as are associated with Zulu tribal culture today. The celestial origin of the noble clans of the Zulu (cf. the reedbeds over the ocean) refers to the cattle-herding culture superimposed upon the peasants by conquering invaders who imposed their military organization and their political ambitions on the loose conglomerate of aboriginal clans. The fascinating aspect of Laduma's stories is that they represent the ideology of the suppressed autochthones as it were. His claim that his medicines have their origin in the earth rather than the sky may be less significant in this connexion than his reiterated claim that all clans are fundamentally independent and sovereign. This view is more common than is generally believed. Hezekiel Ntuli, the artist in clay statues, believes that originally many small clans existed in Zululand, each of which specialized in some art or craft. Their culture then resembled that of West Africa and the Congo Bantu. The amaLala had the reputation of being artists, craftsmen, medicine-men. When the herders conquered the land, they suppressed arts and crafts among the subject clans as an expression of independence, intelligence, and individualism. Laduma's account finally brings out what a tremendously disturbing effect European civilization had on the original intentions of the Creator.

The Creation Story is, in fact, a closely fitting key to current political events and claims. Sitha, the Bringer of Death, Laduma told us, is responsible for the present faction fights between Ndebele and Zulu in the Ceza district, which originally belonged to the Khumalo. It is not necessary to go into the details. The principle stands out clearly: disorder is produced when a country is taken over by a powerful and arbitrary master. Sitha could have repented, he was given a chance, but he decided 'to stab them!' (*scil.* his brother Nowa and his adherents). When the Boers came first, Laduma continues, they acted in the same spirit and the British followed suit. (The Boer influence in Natal and Zululand, dating from 1838, was short-lived. The English have been established there since before 1850.) Ever since Shaka the various European governments set up the Zulu Royal House to rule over the (original) clans and tribes. Since these had their own rulers they were unlawfully and arbitrarily deprived of their sovereignty. The present government is committing an error by again raising the Zulu Paramount Chief to pre-eminence. (There is a Queen with the sign of the Rod left as if in a prison. She is on the wrong track, since it is with her connivance that the Zulu Royal House is being revived.) By contrast the Story of



709 92 VAN VLIET  
QUERARDIEN

Beeld

Woensdag 10 Julie 1996

## Werk toon skoonheid van bewerkte aarde

Fiona Ewan Rowett en  
Querardien van Vliet  
First Gallery, Parkhurst  
Wilhelm van Rensburg

EKSPERIMENTERING met collage en met vergrote vingerafdrukke trek die aandag af van Fiona Ewan Rowett se ware sterkpunt: die skep van atmosferiese landskappe. Haar kreatiewe energie is geleë in die tonalistiese suggestie van die rykdom en skakering van lig in die landskap. Haar gebruik van wit en swart suggereer 'n simboliese innerlike reis deur die landskap - 'n landskap wat tegelyk onbekend en verwelkomend aangebied word.

Rowett voer die atmosferiese werking van lig op die landskap verder as in haar vorige tentoonstelling in 'n besondere reeks getitel *Mineral Landscapes*. Sy plaas 'n kaligrafiese lynrooster bo-oor haar landskap, wat nie net haar eie "handtekening" suggereer nie, maar ook van die ligwerking self. As sodanig vereenselwig 'n mens haar kreatiwiteit met die landskap en skep Rowett 'n eenheid tussen mens en natuur.

Die mens word 'n wegwyser in die natuur. Dit spreek duidelik in Rowett se verrassende gebruik van vlase in die landskap. Die vlase smelt saam met die tonalistiese landskap. Dit is nie 'n gewone, skelkleurige, geometriese stuk doek wat skerp kontrasteer met die landskap nie.

Dit is 'n innerlike vlag wat Rowett verbeeld. 'n Vlag wat jou diepste gevoelens vir jou land simboliseer. Die

vlase in haar olieverfskilderye deel die landskap op, maar verdeel dit nie.

Vereenselwiging met die natuur en natuurelemente is ook die gees waarin Van Vliet haar keramiek skep. Volgens haar help die natuur die kunstenaar om 'n "nie-eenderse eendersheid" te skep - die skeppings van 'n kunstenaar is dieselfde sonder dat dit eenders is.

Dit is veral vuur se reaksie op klei wat volgens haar verantwoordelik is vir die skep van unieke, spontane patrone op keramiek.

Van Vliet bring subtiele, eenvoudige versierings aan op haar werk, wat 'n soort klassieke skoonheid daaraan verleen.

Haar vorms suggereer die manlike en vroulike psige van die mens. Eersyds is die horing- en swaardsketse en die toringvorm, en andersyds die ronde, ontvanklike vroulike vorm.

Van Vliet skep die verwagting van vervulling in haar werk deurdat die een vorm "afhanklik" is van die ander, die een houer amper "gevol" moet word deur die ander om volmaaktheid te bereik.

Dit is nie toevallig dat Van Vliet so aangetrokke tot en so suksesvol is met die Raku-tegniek nie, want bo en behalwe haar tegniese vaardigheid met dié tegniek, wat 'n spesiale effek aan haar werk verleen, beteken Raku vervulling, genot, plesier.

Dit is die gevoel wat by 'n mens opkom as jy na haar werk kyk. Dit is 'n tydllose ervaring van die skoonheid van bewerkte aarde.

• Tot Saterdag.

10-07-96



Creation directs us: each tribe should be reinstated in its ancient territory, and the old chieftainships renewed which correspond to the original Creation. With a Paramount Chief commoners are subjected to a divided loyalty, to the clan chief and the national chief, whereas the Creation provided only for one allegiance. 'What is done today (by the government) is to place horses, cattle and leopards into one kraal. What can come of this?' If, however, the government should give land to the Zulu so that they might settle according to the Order of Creation, that would be auspicious.

And it is only if such a redistribution of the population according to clan membership has been achieved that the Christian churches could come and do their work with some prospect of achievement. For the three wounds in the Tree of Creation represent three sins: Sitha's jealousy resulting in Death decimating the Creation; the analogous Fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (their fall does not concern the Blacks; Sin was brought to them by Sitha); and, lastly, the Spirit of Conquest which subjects the peoples of the original free order to the arbitrary rule of strangers. The stubbornness of Sin, as symbolized in the irrepressible growth of the Tree of Sin, is alive in the Christian Churches too, as is shown by the fact that they couple their preaching (*scil.* of love) with the demand that the indigenous way of life be abandoned (*scil.* a request originating in hate).

The brilliant conception of the Creation story becomes especially apparent when it is realized that it also offers a prophetic glance into the future. Laduma Madela solemnly informed us that not everything had been revealed to us yet. We were to wait until he had been given permission to report more to us. 'When it is eventually revealed, much of it will be seen to correspond with the Holy Scriptures', he added. (He did not mention at the time from whom permission would be obtained ultimately. But we understand that when an unauthorized person attempted to lay hands on some of the manuscripts Laduma was preparing he replied that uMvelingqangi told him to give them to us only.) However, Laduma said he could adumbrate what would happen.

In the Far East, where the Red Reed was, there emerged a great, strong, and fierce man. He was chained and is still in chains. It was he who originally went to Sitha and instigated him to ask for Death for Blackman. He is the one in the centre, between the two pillars, who has no name. When uMvelingqangi created the world, he had already created other worlds previously in which he had left other sons of his (at emaJukujukwini), and in particular this oldest one, who is in fact uJukujukwini. Note the J, said Laduma Madela, it is of great significance; it really stands for Jesus! (*sic*).

One day he will become free of his chains and rise to be a great leader and assume rule over the Creation. He will be Healer as well as Revenger. (As he said this, Laduma burst out fiercely: 'This is as true as this wall stands firm!' He rushed at the hut wall, grabbed it and shook it in a tremendous effort. The action signified: rather than speak an untruth, this wall shall fall.) According to ancient Zulu tradition this Healer-Revenger will come from the East (*eMphumalanga*). He will bring war and chaos and all people, good and bad, will be seized by fear and panic. (At this Laduma banged the table in front of him in a paroxysm of excitement.) He will come with might and eventually put all things right. But first even those residing in peace will be swept away. As the Sun has been rising hitherto out of the Elephant's

Ear, being gentle, he will then rise from its Mouth fiercely. It is then that the Time of Destruction has arrived. It will be terrible, an unforgettable event! For when the Healer-Revenger comes, everyone will recognize him without fail, for he will destroy this corrupt and rotten world as one cracks an old pot!

He will send his messengers to prepare his way! At this stage he pointed out that we had been the first ones to notice two small trees growing on the Arch of the Tree of Heaven near the Wounds. They were two wild fig tree saplings (*uNtombo*), a tree that grows on rocks and sends its roots down between them. We had discovered these trees. 'This is significant', Madela said jubilantly, since both he and Thabethe had not noticed them. The trees show, Laduma explained, that it is the duty of two white men to help in reviving the Order of Creation! The fig trees resemble white man as he, like them, thrives on foreign soil. When lianas on the Tree were reported by us at this juncture, Madela described this as significant also; for the Zulu names for them, viz. *uMgoba-Ndhlovu* and *uMbamba-Ndhlovu* (the Tamer-of-Elephants) refer to elephants, the first creatures to emerge (in the second creation) and the companions of the Great Revenger of Sin.

To obtain the conditions of the white man's assistance in the removal of disorder, one of us asked whether all there assembled could possibly be counted as forerunners of the Great Healer-Revenger. At this obtuse question Laduma with violent anger shouted: 'What else have we been talking about all along?' With this he furiously collected various odds and ends, rushed out of the hut as if mortally offended, and later had himself reported as sick. His young wife had entered half-way through the session and had listened unconcernedly to this outburst. After a few minutes of embarrassed silence we were relieved by signs of Laduma's continuing friendship. He sent us a sample of magnetic oxide of iron as used in the traditional manufacture of weapons. He also sent us a lourie feather, a royal symbol, which honours the recipient like a king.

One last point: the uncanny intertwining of symbols, times, and spaces in his Creation Myth. The Force maintaining the order of mankind, as created by uMvelingqangi, is represented in the Reeds, the Pillars of the story and his drawings, but also in the stems and branches of the Tree of Creation, and in the kidneys and rudimentary organs of the slaughtered offering. His myth of creation combines in a grandiose manner the tradition of his own grandfathers, the tribal accounts, his own experiences, his visions, and the concrete manifestations of his environment. Is the neighbourhood of so fertile a mind with so suggestive a phenomenon as the Grove of Revelation entirely fortuitous? A third, psychologically striking, feature is the interweaving of incongruous elements of time, space, and fate in one story. The origin of mankind resembles, in Laduma's myth, the humble splitting of a clan, the segmentation of a lineage. Zwide, a historical person, who died in 1822, is boldly identified with Phumalanga, one of the great kings of the dawn of history. What a telescoping of the ranges of time! And a similar process is applied to space: the creation of a cosmos of 'worlds', of 'worlds without end', is exemplified and depicted in a small grove on Ceza Mountain. What is here symbol, what reality? Even to us white men, as we were listening to Madela, uMvelingqangi seemed to have created his world there. And then the magnificent knot which intertwines individual fate with universal events: the particular fate of two 'displaced' persons,





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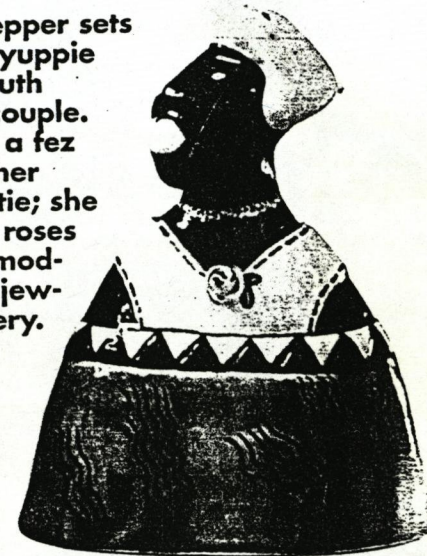
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of the famulus who had been deprived of his inheritance and of Laduma whose ancestor lost his chieftainship—he was killed by Shaka—reflects the universal struggle between the forces of Good and Evil, between Love and Force.

### Résumé

#### UN PHILOSOPHE ZOULOU ACTUEL

LADUMA MADELA, membre d'une petite tribu zoulou, est né vers 1906. Il est forgeron et expert 'sorcier parafoudre' (lightning doctor). Laduma a beaucoup de personnalité et une connaissance profonde de sa propre culture. Cet article raconte une série de visites qui lui ont été faites par les auteurs à partir de février 1957, au cours desquelles il leur a exposé une théorie de l'histoire de la Création et a fait certaines prophéties remarquables.

Laduma avait prévu l'arrivée de ses visiteurs et il les considérait comme des disciples auxquels il devrait transmettre sa sagesse. Il avait déjà rédigé 22 cahiers sur ce sujet, où il traitait du passé et de l'avenir de l'humanité, laquelle est menacée de catastrophe. L'espèce humaine, disait-il, a eu deux origines : Adamu, qui fut l'aïeul des blancs, et son voisin et contemporain, qui fut l'ancêtre du peuple noir. Ils furent les deux piliers sur lesquels reposent l'ordre et le destin de l'humanité ; l'un de ces piliers est maintenant pourri et il est du devoir des ministres, des instituteurs, et des médecins de porter remède à cette situation. Les rois de jadis en sont responsables en grande partie, car ils ont détruit, par leur arbitraire et leur despotisme, le modèle (pattern) de l'humanité, tel qu'il avait été ordonné par le Créateur uMvelingqari, qui a tout créé, sauf le monde, lequel l'avait créé.

Lorsque les visiteurs eurent lu le récit, ils furent emmenés dans la forêt pour voir 'l'Arbre Sacré de la Création', arbre dont la croissance est bizarre, car il présente deux troncs parfaits formant un arc, d'environ 20 pieds de hauteur et 30 pieds de largeur, considéré comme formant la représentation des cieux. D'autres particularités de l'arbre présentent divers aspects de la Création : il fait partie d'un bosquet, dont tous les végétaux ont une signification dans le récit. Laduma avait rêvé de l'arbre du temps de sa jeunesse, mais il ne l'a découvert qu'en 1951. Il lui rend visite lorsqu'il a eu un rêve et attend une vision au cours de laquelle il reçoit des messages concernant la Création et le Cours du Monde. Le bosquet est indiscutablement un lieu interdit, mais les personnes qui ne savent rien de l'arbre sacré y vont impunément.

L'analyse du récit de la Création fait par Laduma fournit un répertoire pour la classification des groupements historiques, car ce récit fait allusion à cinq roseaux, qui représentent évidemment les cinq groupes de tribus du Natal et du Zouloulouland, tels qu'ils pourraient être encore définis et acceptés aujourd'hui. Une structure politique basée sur le principe généalogique et la présence de cinq chefs principaux pour gouverner le Zouloulouland constitue, en effet, l'idéal. Le récit parle également de trois créations, qui représentent peut-être trois stades distincts de culture, et souligne très fortement l'effet profondément perturbateur de la civilisation européenne sur les intentions primitives du Créateur. En fait, ce récit constitue une clé bien ajustée des événements et revendications politiques de l'heure actuelle. Il montre le désordre provoqué par la présence d'un maître puissant et arbitraire qui prend possession du pouvoir dans un pays, et l'erreur commise par le gouvernement actuel en élevant de nouveau le Paramount Chief zoulou à la prééminence. Chaque tribu devrait être réintégrée dans son ancien territoire et les vieilles chefferies qui correspondent à la création primitive devraient renaître. C'est à cette seule condition que les églises chrétiennes peuvent venir et remplir leur tâche avec quelque chance de succès. La conception remarquable du récit de la Création devient surtout apparente lorsque l'on se rend

compte qu'elle offre également un coup d'œil prophétique dans l'avenir, et Laduma a informé ses visiteurs que tout ne leur avait pas encore été révélé. Sa révélation future serait conforme aux Saintes Écritures et Jésus viendrait comme guérisseur et vengeur pour régner sur la Création.

Le récit de Laduma réunit d'une manière grandiose la tradition de ses propres aïeux, les narrations tribales, ses propres expériences, ses visions, et les manifestations concrètes de son entourage. Une caractéristique frappante de cette pensée est la constante interférence des notions de temps, d'espace et de destin. Le récit peut être envisagé sur un certain plan comme une image de la lutte universelle entre les forces du Bien et du Mal.



'I was autographing like hell,' he says. Now the lock of hair is sometimes, specially in the early morning, held back with two hair clips.

He says he can no longer afford to make prints because the quality has to be of such a high standard that the costs would be prohibitive. The glossy book, *Tretchikoff*, published by Howard Timmins in 1950 and printed by Cape & Transvaal Printers, faithfully reproduces the bright peacock colours and striking reds. Tretchikoff prints are now quite difficult to find. Recently in London I saw a version of the *Chinese Girl* in Portobello Road for £50. The librarian at the art section of the Central Library in Cape Town says: 'It is extraordinary how many young people come in looking for references for Tretchikoff. There is very little written on him.' In a recent letter to Tretchi, a young man from London wrote: 'I bought my first Tretchikoff print over four years ago and have been under its spell ever since. It was, of course, *Chinese Girl*.'

I rang Marilyn Martin, director of the South African National Gallery, and asked her why there were no Tretchikoffs in the South African National Gallery. Like all bureaucrats, she cited the acquisitions policy of the gallery and, in fact, faxed a copy to me. It is too long a document to reproduce and is full of what has now become standard South African pap, 'nurture a culturally diverse but shared' etc etc. I asked her to underline bits that she thought relevant. One sentence reads: 'To maintain standards of quality and excellence in the acquisition of works.'

Well-known writer Paul Duncan says, 'When I was in Los Angeles a year ago, I visited an art gallery that had two Tretchikoff originals.'

In the '60s Tretchi was a great favourite of the nouveaux riches. An Orange Free State farmer, after a good year, might have made his first venture into the art market by buying a Tretchikoff print. He says: 'Many of the people who bought my pictures were self-made. I like that because I am self-made myself.' If the late Mario Chiavelli had been around at the time of the *Orchid on the Stair*, he would have snapped it up. Tretchikoff lived in the era of the noble savage; if anyone knew about painting proud natives against sunsets, it was he. Now in post-apartheid South Africa, his picture of the Afrikaans farmer - *Mr van Niekerk* - against a gabled Dutch house has the same smooth, sinless strength. I telephoned a handful of people whom I know had once had a Tretchikoff print (or even original). There was a strange conspiracy of coyness. 'No, no, my dear, you must have it wrong,' I was told many times in the dulcet tones of upper Bishopscourt. Of course many of these people - visually illiterate -



**KATE GOTTGENS** is a painter and illustrator who lives in a house in Wynberg, Cape Town, that is '50s turf, epitomising the clean, bright, sunshiny polish that became popular after the war as an antidote to years of misery. The kitchen is a celebration of plastic - the ketchup tomato, the squeeze bottles. It is a rosy suburban heaven with a sensurround of Springbok Radio, baking powder ads, the sound of a Hoover.

'I suppose you could say that Tretchikoff has given me inspiration,' says Gottgens. 'I did this whole series called *The Thrill of It*. I used dime novels (what we used to call penny horrors). It was before the film *Pulp Fiction* but it was about

that. Tretchikoff was always in my mind. It is that *Twin Peaks*-David Lynch stuff, order and neatness of suburbia, beneath which lies death and decay. Beyond the chiselled features lies chaos.

'My mother had a Tretchikoff book in the house. He was the first artist I was in contact with. She had cuttings of an exhibition that she attended in the '50s. I incorporated some of his earlier work in my own paintings. I do hope he won't mind.

'The sad thing about Tretchi is that he has become imprisoned in this kitsch thing. None of his other values are taken into account. Somehow he can never be looked at from another point of view. There has always been a sort of hyper-realism,

those café scenes and things like that where every single speck of dust was sort of super painted. Many of those pictures were quite dead.

Tretchikoff, however, always managed to capture some atmosphere. There is something almost enigmatic about some of his pictures. I know that he is locked in to that canon of female beauty, the Francoise Hardy image, the almost childish iconography of *Journey's End*, the old boots and the teardrops. But somehow he could always get away with it, because I think he really, really believed it.'

• For illustrations, artworks and 'takes' by Gottgens, ☎ (021) 797-1540