

Archdeacon Merriman, 'Caliban', and the Cattle-Killing of 1856-57 Laurence Wright

Did Archdeacon Merriman accept that Mhlakaza was Wilhelm Goliath? The short answer is that we don't know and, indeed, the identification itself is still strongly contested.¹ However, historical problems sometimes yield, or at least buckle slightly, when approached from unusual, tangential perspectives. If Goliath was Mhlakaza – and this article proceeds on the assumption that he was – this would have been, for Merriman, a highly disturbing and significant matter. For his erstwhile travelling companion and, more importantly, his first convert to the Church, to be deeply implicated in bringing about an appalling social catastrophe on the scale of the Cattle-Killing would be troubling from both a religious and a personal perspective. I want to argue that in the terrible aftermath of the Cattle-Killing, Nathaniel Merriman was brooding on his former servant, Wilhelm Goliath, and that evidence of this preoccupation emerges indirectly in a very open and unexpected forum: a public lecture on Shakespeare.

There is nothing approaching a public admission in the lecture and, indeed, one would hardly expect so scandalous a topic to be broached on such a platform. Nevertheless, evidence of a strange sort seems unmistakably there for those who know Merriman's journals and are willing to read their way back into one of his sources for the lecture. A public meditation which inadvertently yields access to deeply private experience is a peculiar phenomenon. Truth in such cases lies somewhere in the extensive liminal zone between the intentional and the unintentional. Why might Merriman have been pondering the troubling complexity of his former servant's character in public like this? Was it simply that Goliath, as the first and most memorable of his Xhosa-speaking acquaintances, remained his touchstone for racist generalisation? But Merriman had subsequently interacted with hundreds of Xhosas. Far more likely is the suggestion that he was preoccupied with Goliath because he knew the rumours that in his absence his first convert had inexplicably become the prophet Mhlakaza, a metamorphosis with earth-shattering

implications for Merriman's faith and his sense of his own missionary vocation, perhaps even involving a lurking sense of culpability. I can only make the case and leave the reader to decide the extent to which the evidence is persuasive.

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To start with, it may seem inherently strange that anything as defiantly local as the Cattle-Killing tragedy should surface, however indirectly, in a public lecture on Shakespeare. After all, in its very intent, colonial or 'settler' Shakespeare is often somewhat insulated, culturally and institutionally, from the raw heart of the colonial encounter. The act of urging Shakespeare on a colonial public in the early phases of settlement speaks to sentiments redolent of 'home,' the imperial centre, rather than more immediate and perhaps harsher local realities. Indeed, to some extent, the purpose of Shakespeare on such occasions is to propose cultural continuity and reassurance in the face of the challenging and unfamiliar. But, occasionally, estranging and inescapable realities modify and disrupt efforts at the smooth reproduction of metropolitan intellectual comforts.

"On the Study of Shakspeare" was the first of two lectures delivered by Merriman to the General Institute of Grahamstown in 1857 and 1858. The precipitating impulse behind the lectures was in the main one of religious rivalry in the task of ministering to the intellectual cultivation of this small, troubled frontier town. At this stage of its development, Grahamstown was the second city of the Cape Colony after Cape Town, a status it lost chiefly as a result of the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley in 1871 and, later, gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886. Established initially in 1812 as a British military base from which to drive the indigenous Xhosa-speaking inhabitants eastwards across the Great Fish River, the town had developed further largely as a result of the mixed fortunes of the 1820 Settler emigration scheme, designed to relieve economic conditions in Britain after the Napoleonic wars and re-populate the frontier. The settlers were to be used, unbeknownst to

them, as a human shield to protect the Cape Colony. Agricultural conditions were hostile, the size of the farms too small, and the skill base of the settlers inappropriate in many cases (Peires 1989, 474-75). There was ongoing low-level conflict with insurgent Xhosa and Khoi raiding parties, usually over stock theft, flaring into open conflict and outright war at sporadic intervals. Many of the settlers relinquished their agricultural ambitions and moved into Grahamstown where they resumed their former trades or adopted new ones. In the Eastern Cape frontier territories as a whole, the Wesleyans had in many respects stolen a march on other denominations, noticeably the Church of England. Their missionary work, begun in 1823, was well-established and their ministry among the widely-dispersed settlements and hamlets thriving. What was for some years the only newspaper in the Eastern Province, the *Graham's Town Journal* (est. 1839), was run by a prominent Wesleyan, Robert Godlonton. While the Baptists, Presbyterians and Independents were also active in Grahamstown, the Methodists were the dominant religious and intellectual influence. The Church of England ministry, in contrast, sputtered along in a lack-lustre way (Hewitt 1961, 1-17).

To remedy the general weakness of the Anglican Church in South Africa, and particularly to help the situation of the British Settlers on the Eastern frontier, in 1847 Dr Robert Gray was consecrated in Westminster Abbey as first bishop of Cape Town. Two years later, from his See in Cape Town, Bishop Gray created a vast Archdeaconry in the Eastern Province comprising Grahamstown, Port Elizabeth, Bathurst, Fort Beaufort, Sidbury, Uitenhage, Graaff Reinet, Colesburg, Cradock, Somerset East, Victoria, Albert, and incorporating both British Kaffraria and the Orange River Sovereignty – an area of some 89,464 square miles (Hewitt 1961, 23). In January of that year the Reverend Nathaniel J. Merriman was appointed Archdeacon of Grahamstown.

Merriman was born on 4th April 1809, a native of Marlborough in Wiltshire, educated at Winchester and Brasenose College, Oxford, and ordained deacon in Chester Cathedral in 1835. Although a man of broad religious tolerance, his personal sympathies and convictions were attuned to the

emerging Tractarianism he had encountered at Oxford (Goedhals 1982, 14-15). He longed to serve the Church abroad, especially as a missionary. In fact, already attracted by the challenge of South Africa, he had been present at Bishop Gray's consecration. His was a rare combination of high seriousness, a sense of humour, and huge physical vitality. One of his biographers writes: "A deep love of study, of books and the beauty of language, vied with his constant desire to be out of doors and the brimming energy which he expended on walking, cricket and swimming" (Whibley 1982, 3). In 1840 he married Julia Potter, rather against her family's wishes, and they had five children, before the family sailed for the Cape in 1848.

Peter Hinchliff describes Merriman as being "tough as a typical piece of South African *biltong*, and nearly as lean – perhaps the best loved, certainly one of the most vigorous bishops the Province has known" (1963, 115). Merriman's physical strength and stamina were to prove crucial to his ministry in the Eastern Province. His first year in office was spent introducing High Church ways to a demoralised Grahamstown congregation, with some success, and in much local reconnoitring and 'networking', as we would call it today. He was a prodigious walker. This was more than an expression of physical vitality. As he once put it when questioned, "My Master and his Apostles *walked* before me - - -" (Merriman 1957, 65). In this latter regard we first come across mention of a name which was to have enormous consequences for the Xhosa-speaking people and, indeed, for the future history of South Africa. We read in his published journals, which cover the period 1848-1855: "On *Thursday 7th June* [1849] I left home on foot accompanied by a Kafir² man (Wilhelm Goliat[h]) to make a visitation of the Winterberg, Mancazana Post, the Moravian Missionary Station of Shiloh [near Whittlesea], and return to the opening of Fort Beaufort Church" (1957, 52). Thereafter, Merriman's journals mention his travels with Wilhelm Goliath at regular intervals.

The first thing one notices about Goliath's role in these giant peregrinations is that he is pretty much always the laggard. Merriman out-walks him: "The following evening (Saturday) we reached Post Retief - - - Wilhelm knocked up and very footsore, I pretty brisk and vigorous" (Merriman 1957, 52); "I reached

Cradock somewhat late having again lost the road, which I should not have done had not Wilhelm knocked up and lagged behind” (76); “Wilhelm and I trudged on to Graaff Reinet, where I arrived some hours before my limping attendant” (108); “I got to Fort Beaufort the second evening, without Wilhelm, who had hurt his foot, and lagged as usual” (117); “The following evening I reached King William’s Town: Wilhelm, lagging as usual, did not arrive till the next day” (123). Not only was Wilhelm mostly tardy, but on a number of occasions, he gets lost *en route*. Seeing as his immediate function was to carry Merriman’s clothing and personal effects, from Merriman’s point of view this must have been irritating.

Beyond these minor annoyances, which as we shall see may have had a specific bearing on Merriman’s first Shakespeare lecture some years in the future, their relationship, close though not perhaps intimate, was deeply significant in terms of Merriman’s vocation. For example, on the 21st August of the same year we read: “I set off this morning on my walk to Graaff Reinet, a distance of a little more than 90 miles, the 1st day walking as far as Mr Perkins’ farm - - - . He - - - wished me to accept the loan of an horse, but now I had commenced walking I was determined to trudge sturdily on, and accordingly after resting a little on the road - - - Wilhelm and I as was our usual custom sometimes under the shade of a mimosa bush, sometimes in the dry channel of a river, sat and read together both in the Kaffir and English testaments, he trying to learn my language and I his” (Merriman 1957, 65). Wilhelm had already been confirmed in the Wesleyan church, but through his association with Merriman his loyalties gradually shifted, amid much earnest discussion, to the Church of England, where he was confirmed in 1850, the first Xhosa to receive the Anglican Communion.

The association between Merriman and Goliath was deep and lasting. Not only was Goliath Merriman’s first convert (albeit snatched from the Methodist flock, a circumstance of which Merriman was acutely aware), and therefore the first fruit of his cherished missionary calling, in time he also became a kind of junior colleague spreading the gospel alongside Merriman, and lived with the Merriman family at ‘The Grove’, Merriman’s first house in Grahamstown.

The historian Jeff Peires writes: “It seems as if this was an intensely happy period in Wilhelm’s life. Merriman was clearly very fond of Wilhelm and genuinely respected his ability to manage the country and its people. Together they shared the adventures of the road, and more than once they confronted together the suspicions and prejudices of white farmers who resented the intimate and near-equal relationship of the white man and the black” (2003, 61). Sadly, the idyll came to an end. The circumstances are not entirely clear, but it seems Wilhelm became increasingly preoccupied with his own religious visions, neglectful of his duties around the Merriman home, and the rest of the family, chiefly Julia Merriman, grew weary of this idle hanger-on whom they were in fact supporting. In October 1850, Merriman writes:

Moreover, I found, naturally enough, that the rest of my household did not think Wilhelm so well worth his keep as I did; and finding him regarded somewhat like the Knights of King Lear, and believing I was now knowing enough in colonial ways and bush contrivances to travel without my old companion (who, I must say, with all his invaluable Kaffir qualities, was wofully given to limping and lagging behind), I dismissed him, not a little thoughtfully and anxiously, to his new work.

(127)

This “new work” was a position as a teacher in the Xhosa school at Southwell, a village due south of Grahamstown, which Merriman had arranged for him with the Rev H.T. Waters, the minister in charge of the Southwell congregation, and where Goliath worked until the school was closed because of its isolation and vulnerability during the War of Mlanjeni (1850-53). Wilhelm then returned to Grahamstown and to the Merriman’s employ. He apparently ignored such duties as the household demanded of him, even though it is clear that Merriman himself felt he could still trust the welfare of his family to Wilhelm in time of war. He wanted to be a “Gospel Man”, according to Julia, and she regrets having laughed at these aspirations (Letters, Cory Library, Mrs Julia Merriman to Canon J.Baker, 20, 30 October 1896). The last entry in the journals concerning Wilhelm (9 January, 1853) must be seen as portentous:

We have at present feeding at our board a Kaffir orphan child whose father and mother both fell in the Waterkloof, which has during this war been the principal scene of our contests with the enemy. The child is an appendage to poor Wilhelm who is at present established in the capacity of guard to my children and Miss Short [the family governess, nurse and by now, trusted family retainer] who are rustivating at a farm 3 miles from hence. Wilhelm having for some time continued too lazy to work has yet in spite of the precarious subsistence to which he has thereby reduced himself, with characteristic Kaffir generosity taken in this young orphan whom he found one morning near his hut a homeless wanderer.

(205-206)

Thanks largely to the researches of Peires (2003), it is now widely accepted that the individual known to Archdeacon Merriman, and to the rest of white Grahamstown, as Wilhelm Goliath, may have been the same man who a few years later stepped into history as the Xhosa prophet Mhlakaza (see esp. pp.360-362). Much less certainly, it seems also quite possible that the “young orphan” he took under his wing, as described in the passage from Merriman’s journals, was none other than the girl prophetess Nongqawuse. Far from a “homeless wanderer”, if this was the same girl, she may in fact have been his niece (Peires 2003, 63).

The outline of the Cattle-Killing tragedy is too well known to need detailed recapitulation here (see Peires 2003 for a thorough account). Suffice it to say that the suffering was awful. Over a period of some fifteen months between 300 000 and 400 000 head of cattle were slaughtered; it is estimated that the population dropped by about 40 000, with perhaps an equal number moving to the Cape Colony where they survived as indentured servants. The countryside was devastated, homesteads abandoned, looting was rife, refugees wandered about listlessly seeking food, eating roots and carcasses. In a very few cases, cannibalism was suspected (Peires 2003, 263). The British and private citizens distributed food to relieve the starvation, but the effort was inadequate. *Post-hoc* explanations from the colonial side at the time focused on a supposed plot by Xhosa chiefdom to goad their people into war (the so-called ‘Chief’s Plot’). From the Xhosa side the tragedy was

interpreted, and still is interpreted, as a devious scheme by Governor Grey, manipulating Nongqawuse in order to weaken Xhosa resistance (known as 'Grey's Plot'). Neither view holds much water, though Grey undoubtedly exploited the depleted condition of Xhosa society in order to force the imposition of his schemes for 'civilizing' them. Today the consensus is that the Cattle-Killing was indeed a genuine millennial movement, precipitated immediately by the cattle sickness (which often induces cattle-killing in some degree as a form of prevention), and formally by the psychic response of a people stressed beyond bearing by continuing colonial land encroachment, military assault, and political harassment. Not to be ignored, however, is the part played by the religious aspirations of the man known to white Grahamstown as the former Anglican communicant and informal preacher, Wilhelm Goliath, argued by Peirez and others to be that very Mhlakaza who played the role of prophet and publicist for his niece, the fifteen-year-old orphan girl Nongqawuse and his eight-year-old sister-in-law, Nombanda, acting as a powerful go-between, and communicating the girls' visions to believers and non-believers alike. With dreadful irony, his old desire to be a "Gospel Man" was being fulfilled, if in a very different way.

While all this took place the Merrimans were away in England. The three-year period 1853-1856 was extremely troubled and taxing for the family. Two more children were born, joining the existing six, Julia's health was uncharacteristically poor, and they were constantly on the move. In 1853, Bishop Gray had offered the newly founded bishopric of Grahamstown to the Rev. John Armstrong, Merriman having declined nomination largely because of his continuing desire to pursue his missionary vocation. While the Merrimans were on a year's leave in England, Bishop Armstrong died; Merriman again declined the See, and in his stead the Archbishop of Canterbury appointed a doctrinaire evangelical, Henry Cotterill, with whom Merriman did not see eye-to-eye. When the family returned to Grahamstown, not only was the countryside and its people undergoing unparalleled devastation, but their formerly stable circumstances, at home and in relation to the local Church scene, were irrecoverable (Whibley 1982, 56-57).

At the height of the Cattle-Killing, when the aftermath of starvation and death in the Eastern Province was at its worst, the gap between coloniser and colonised, town and country, could hardly have been starker. In complete contrast to the surrounding tragedy, which some settlers seem to have regarded with pity, incomprehension and deep puzzlement,³ we find a localised offshoot of the mid-Victorian passion for mental improvement and cultivation taking root in Grahamstown. Towards the end of the previous year a new periodical, *The Eastern Province Magazine*, under the editorship once again of the Wesleyan Robert Godlonton, had thundered forth in its first editorial:

The existing order of civilization is founded on an extensive knowledge of created things, and the laws that govern their mutual action. The practical application of knowledge to whatever may be of importance to the human being is the process by which civilization is chiefly supported. By a certain perception and appreciation of the esthetic element that pertains more or less to all things, it is adorned and intensified; by a constant search for a higher motive to regulate general action than it has yet been able to find, it promises for the future, in the gradual development of a religious spirit, a yet higher condition than it has itself realised. It has been considered that in this prosperous colony there is an intellectual life that demands a voice for itself: also that we are not so entirely devoted to the physically-remunerative, as to forget altogether the pleasures, to ignore the refinement, which spring from a taste for literature and the fine arts; that there is a power awaiting only the opportunity to speak to show capability here of raising a native literature, which shall ultimately rank among those efforts of the elder states which are as guiding signs to all mankind, leading them on to virtue, truth and peace.

(*Eastern Province Magazine*, September 1856, 1.1:1)

Three civic organisations dedicated to the intellectual and cultural edification of the largely working class white populace of Grahamstown were competing for support and audiences: the Literary, Scientific and Medical Society (this was a grouping independent of specific denominational influence, and which included such intellectual heavyweights as Andrew Geddes Bain and Dr W.G. Atherstone – the man who identified the first Kimberley diamond); the Albany Institute (with Wesleyan connections); and a late-comer, the Grahamstown General Institute, associated with the Anglican Church. The General Institute,

founded at the instigation of Bishop Armstrong (see Armstrong, 1855), began operations at the beginning of 1857, with a notice advertising an introductory lecture “To which the Working Classes of this city are respectfully invited” (*Grahamstown Journal*, Tuesday, January 27, 1857). Typical offerings from the two religiously-oriented societies included “Intellectual, Moral, and Social Progress”, “Mental Cultivation, its duty, pleasures, and advantages”, “Man’s Intellectual Nature”, and “Man’s Intellectual Culture, the design of Man’s Creator”, topics offered within months of each other in 1857. This emphasis on general intellectual uplift as a desirable adjunct to the Christian life contrasts with some of the efforts of the Literary, Scientific and Medical Society which, for example, invited the citizenry to a lecture by John Heavyside (himself an Anglican), on the “Merovingian Era of European History” (August 15, 1857) and also mounted an annual series of evening classes on topics such as “Elementary Chemistry”, “English Literature”, “Geology”, “Botany”, and “Physical Geography” (*Graham’s Town Journal*, February 17, 1857).

The three organisations cooperated to eliminate clashes of dates (see *Graham’s Town Journal*, June 13, 1857), but there was certainly a subterranean element of competition to see who could attract the larger audiences. Between the Albany and the General institutes this boiled down to denominational rivalry. In terms of the speakers available to the General Institute, Archdeacon Nathaniel Merriman was a big gun; so was his proposed topic, Shakespeare. The lecture was advertised prominently in both the *Graham’s Town Journal* and the *Anglo-African*, and delivered on the 2nd September, 1857. More than 450 persons attended and numbers were turned away at the door (*Anglo-African*, 5 September, 1857).

The first part of the lecture, nearly seven pages, is taken up with a discussion of *Hamlet*, focusing on the interpretation of character, as one might expect in the mid-nineteenth century. The final six pages introduce Shakespeare and “the characters of the Historical Drama” (1857, 11), a foretaste of what was to become the topic of the second lecture, “Shakspeare as bearing on English History” (1858), and the lecture concludes with a few moralising side-swipes

at Byron, Victor Hugo and Eugène Sue. However, in between there is a short three page excursus on *The Tempest*, focusing on the character and moral import of Caliban.

In a passage which aptly illustrates his intellectual bearings as a reader of Shakespeare, Merriman introduces the topic using a couple of long-ish quotations from Schlegel emphasising Shakespeare's capacity for creating not only a wide range of recognisable human characters, but equally compelling ones "which lie beyond the realms of reality" (8). He quotes De Quincy to the effect that "Caliban has not yet been thoroughly fathomed", and includes reference to the praises of "Charles 1, and some of his ministers" in regard to the "new language" with which the character is endowed "for the purpose of expressing his fiendish, and yet carnal thoughts of hatred to his master" (9). Merriman's overt purpose in speaking of Caliban is to illustrate a message, a moral commonplace in nineteenth century readings of the play, which typically present Caliban as a kind of philosophical touchstone – if you'll forgive the pun – against which to measure the moral inadequacy not only of Stephano and Trinculo, but ultimately of the serious 'revolutionaries', Antonio and Sebastian. In this range of readings, Caliban is more a creation of philosophical fancy than a prescient figuration of the colonised, representing in his 'baseness' the lowest station in a providential cosmos organised in a vertical hierarchy. It is clear that, for Merriman, Caliban is not only a wonderfully fanciful dramatic creation, but also a conceptual yardstick for humanity "only half-reclaimed it might seem, from the brute creation" (9). Where the *metier* of the remainder of the lecture, and indeed of the one still to come, is that of supposedly context-free moral assessment and appreciation, a discourse familiar from numberless Victorian middle-brow periodicals, the figure of Caliban momentarily prompts Merriman to depart from his role as a mediator of metropolitan academic insight for an earnest, culturally deprived colonial audience, and speak briefly as someone who is part of the South African colonial scene:

The Bard continues, skilfully to show us the hideous aspect which the low-lived and selfish vices of European civilisation assume when placed as they are by his master

hand side by side with this poor savage. Here we have in Caliban, the embodiment of more hatred and more treachery than any will impute to the worst tribe of wild Kaffirs – more ingratitude and folly than they will charge upon the deluded Hottentot (though Caliban, like them, excuses himself on the plea of having been cheated out of his land) here is more grovelling and unreclaimable barbarism than we usually ascribe to the Bushman, yet when he is purposely brought into comparison or contrast with the dissolute seaman and the drunken butler Trinculo and Stephano, with what a wonderful moral and poetic force does the loathsomeness of civilised vice exhibit itself to our eyes.

(9)

Moral degradation on the part of those whose nature (or 'class'?) equips them for better things is far worse than mere ignorant savagery and its contingent consequences. This kind of approach to Caliban, familiar from Coleridge and Hazlitt, and standard in the western academy for the earlier part of the twentieth century, was bottled for posterity in Frank Kermode's Arden edition of 1954. Clearly, we are at some moral and political distance from those postcolonial Calibans, explored in the later twentieth century, whose efforts at colonial revolt are lauded as thoroughly justified. (I am thinking here of the pioneering work of Mannoni (1956) and Césaire (1969), of Fanon (1967) and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986), of Lamming (1984), Brathwaite (1969), and Retamar (1989), to mention only the most obvious examples.) In line with his colonialist presumptions, Merriman squashes any such reading almost before it can be properly articulated. To his credit, he leaves open the possibility that Africans were indeed "cheated" out of their land (a point of view not publicly recognised by white frontiersmen and women at the time, and hardly acknowledged today), but what he cannot condone is "hatred" and "treachery" (Xhosa), "ingratitude" and "folly" (Khoikhoi) and "grovelling and unreclaimable barbarism" (San or, preferably, 'Bushmen'). There is no hint that this array of what he interprets as moral deficiencies could more adequately be understood as surface manifestations of deep-lying cultural and political resistance. Whether his allocation of particular moral defects to specific ethnic groups is intentional or random must remain moot, but Merriman's moralising point is that Shakespeare's Caliban is by nature worse than all of these, the *ne plus ultra* of moral deformity. And yet "when he is purposely brought into

comparison or contrast with the dissolute seaman and the drunken butler Stephano and Trinculo, with what a wonderful moral and poetic force does the loathsomeness of civilized vice exhibit itself to our eyes” (9). He takes the moralising thrust right to his audience’s door:

I will not challenge your memory, or your candor, to say whether this creation of the Poet’s fancy has ever in spirit found a good deal of counterpart in this land, whether drunkenness and covetousness have ever had their hideousness heightened by being enacted before some wandering Caliban, who has perhaps reflected afterwards much in the vein that Shakspeare makes his monster do –

“What a thrice double-ass
Was I, to take this drunkard for a god,
And worship, this dull fool.”

(9)

So the rough, rumbustious, profane, hard-drinking, lower working class settlers of Grahamstown and the Eastern Cape, at least a few of whom may have been in Merriman’s audience, are in some instances morally worse than Caliban, and much, much worse than the indigenous inhabitants of the Eastern Cape. This is predictable fare, exactly what one might expect from a preacher with Merriman’s brief. It is the kind of interpretation that nineteenth century readers reared on the Romantic legacy of Shakespearean interpretation would endorse as ‘natural’. The dialogic richness which has been introduced into *Tempest* studies over the past fifty years or so is simply missing, not available (see, for example, the surveys by Vaughn and Vaughn, 1991; Cartelli, 1999; Zabus, 2002). But now, in order to illustrate and enlarge upon Caliban’s superior moral grip in comparison to the supposedly dissolute ‘low life’ characters, the ‘settlers’, Merriman’s lecture takes an unexpected geographical swerve to Australia, effecting a major detour in the rhetorical thrust and relevance of his argument. He turns to Sir George Grey’s account of his explorations in Western Australia, “where the natives (some of whom were of their party) are generally thought to approach as near to Caliban as any part of the human species” (Merriman, 1857, 9). Governor Grey had arrived in South Africa in 1854, “fresh from his pacification of the Maoris in New Zealand” (Varley and Matthew in Merriman 1957, 213, n.1). What more

natural than that an educated man like Nathaniel Merriman should get hold of his famous work, *Journals of Two Expeditions of Discovery in North-West and Western Australia*, to see what the incoming Governor was made of? Grey's account inadvertently did much to encourage the view that native Australians could credibly be regarded as among the most primitive people on the planet, this according to the (dubious) canon of emerging western anthropological lore.⁴ Indeed, it was Grey's account which first attracted attention outside America to the new-ish ethnographical category of 'totemism', a fact later cited prominently in Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912, 88). However, it was not the supposedly more radical primitivism of native Australians that captured Merriman's imagination – though this would seem initially to be the intention behind this abrupt shift of continents – but a story Grey tells of the perverse behaviour of one of his bearers on the expedition, a man called Henry Woods:

Our movements were soon again delayed by Woods, who began as usual to lie down, and declare his inability to proceed any further. I desired him to leave behind the heavy load he was carrying; but as on former occasions, he again declared his determination to die rather than part with his mysterious bundle which appeared to possess an extraordinary value in his estimation. It was easy to see from his appearance that he was now really ill, and unable to carry such a weight as he was striving to do; – at length he again laid himself down declaring he was dying, and so I was determined no longer to see his life endangered by his so obstinately insisting on carrying on [sic?] his bundle. – I took it up, informing him of my intention to pay him to the full value of any property of his that I might destroy. - - - I proceeded to open it with the intention of throwing all useless articles away. Upon this announcement of mine, he burst into tears, deploring alternately, his dying state and the loss of his bundle, and then poured forth a torrent of invectives against me, in the midst of which I quietly went on unfolding the treasured parcel, and exposing to view – 3 yards of heavy thick canvas, some duck that he had purloined, ditto a large roll of sewing thread, a thick pea jacket which I had abandoned at the boats, and various other old pieces of canvas and duck, also a great part of the cordage of one of the boats, which he had taken without permission. When these various articles were produced, it was difficult to tell which was the prevailing sentiment in the minds of some of the party, mirth at thus seeing the contents of the mysterious bundle exposed, or indignation, that a man should have been so foolish as to endanger his own life, and that of others, for the sake of such a collection of trash.

It is a very general illustration, apposite enough in context. Merriman treats the story as real-life confirmation of a supposedly universal propensity of the irresponsible lower orders to abandon proper priorities. Just as Stephano and Trinculo are so easily side-tracked from their murderous intentions by the delights of exploring the “frillery”, the “trash”, in Prospero’s wardrobe, so Henry Woods seems inexplicably prepared to sacrifice his very life for the mundane goods he has scrounged and pilfered. (That this behaviour may reflect a level of need beyond their ken seems not to have occurred either to Grey’s party or Merriman.) Merriman drives home the overt point of the illustration succinctly: “Sir George Grey does not go on to say what were the remarks of the native Kaiber who accompanied them; but one can hardly think they would have been much other than those which were our bard puts into the mouth of Caliban” (10).

Though Merriman mentions him just the once, Kaiber is one of the important ‘characters’ of Grey’s *Journals*. Introduced as “one of the most intelligent natives of these parts” (Vol 1, 313), he is the expedition’s star tracker. I would argue further that Grey portrays a relationship of close cooperation between them not unlike the early relationship between Merriman and Wilhelm Goliath. One thinks, for example, of the “watch-recovery” episode (Vol 1, 315-15); or where the two confront signs of foul play at a newly-made grave (Vol 1, 322). There are indeed many ‘Caliban’-like moments: “Kaiber here brought in some nuts of the Zamia tree; they were dry, and, therefore, in a fit state to eat. I accordingly shared them amongst the party” (Vol 1, 61); or, “Kaiber by my side lulled me with native songs, composed for the occasion” (Vol 1, 25). The relationship comes to its crisis in the second volume where Kaiber tries to trick Grey into abandoning their comrades, who are resting some way off, by claiming he has lost their trail, and that the two of them must go on alone to the security of water and shelter. Grey threatens to shoot him, whereupon he “led me straight back to the party in about an hour” (Vol 2, 77). One can see perhaps why Merriman would point to Kaiber as his Australian Caliban.

Oddly, though, there is also something very familiar in Grey's sketch of Henry Woods. One can't help suspecting a deeper, more private association here with Merriman's first convert, Wilhelm Goliath. He too had 'lagged behind' on so many of Merriman's prodigious walks, carrying a bundle. Then it had been a bundle of Merriman's clothing (Merriman 1957, 53), including presumably his formal ecclesiastical attire. Here we have another laggard, the Australian Henry Woods who, like Stephano and Trinculo in Shakespeare's play, insists on treasuring and defending a bundle of trash. An association between the two men and this particular episode in *The Tempest* may have been strengthened by a memory of Goliath's naïve preference for the impressive ecclesiastical garments characteristic of the Anglican Communion, as opposed to the more modest regalia of the Wesleyans. Rather as Stephano and Trinculo had been seduced by the "frippers" (4.1. 224) deployed by Prospero to distract them, Goliath wanted to know "why the Wesleyans did not wear the same 'mooie' garments that we wore" (Merriman 1957, 106). Merriman had always been extremely concerned that his protégé might be converting for the wrong reasons, conscientiously urging him to remain with the Wesleyans. According to Merriman, "Wilhelm said more than once with a thoughtful sigh, "I wish you" (i.e. the Church) "had come first" (106).

It might be argued, then, that there is a perceptible 'doubleness' in Merriman's private response to the passage he puts forward as an Australian incarnation of this episode from *The Tempest*. In a strange way, Kaiber and Henry Woods seem to have brought to mind contradictory aspects of his old travelling companion, Wilhelm Goliath. Kaiber's behaviour, as portrayed in Grey's *Journals*, with all its paradoxes, reflects the attractive, accomplished, companionable aspects of Wilhelm Goliath. The sketch of Henry Woods foregrounds his more trying, irritating characteristics. It may be no accident that at this moment the figure of Kaiber is all but submerged in the text of Merriman's lecture, private to those who know Grey's *Journals*, whereas the annoying aspect of their relationship breaks surface and is memorialised in the tale of Henry Woods.

If we accept that there was some such association working away in Merriman when he wrote this part of the lecture, the crucial question arises as to why – why was his old companion Wilhelm Goliath present to his thought at all when writing the lecture? Could it merely be that Goliath remained for Merriman a perennial touchstone for his by now more extensive personal experience of the indigenous people of South Africa, one from which he continued to generalise – nothing more? Perhaps, but we should not ignore the more likely possibility that the question posed by ‘Shakespeare’s’ Caliban would naturally have focused Merriman’s thinking on his local context, not just in general, but very particularly on the devastating and incomprehensible social tragedy playing itself out in the surrounding countryside at the time of the lecture. What on earth was going on? If one popular and even predominant component to the puzzle was, as we have seen, captured in the name ‘Mhlakaza’, and Merriman knew that Mhlakaza indeed *was* Wilhelm Goliath, then we have a very specific reason why Merriman might be pondering, in public, in a highly oblique manner, the complex, contradictory memories he held of his old servant, companion, and, most importantly, first ‘convert’. Ultimately, Mhlakaza had contributed to a collective calamity for which he, more than any other single individual, was responsible, and Merriman himself was thereby distantly implicated. As someone who had accepted Christian redemption, and then sloughed it off by regressing to what Merriman could only regard as barbarism, this Mhlakaza, if we take the identification seriously, must in Merriman’s eyes have now seemed, like the degenerate settlers he attacks in the lecture, ‘worse’ than Shakespeare’s Caliban.

The apparently adventitious Australian detour I have described, hardly essential to the argument of Merriman’s lecture, seems to spring, as I have argued, from personal reflections derived from his reading. An apt surface illustration in the lecture betrays a double layer of private significance, which unexpectedly takes us to the heart of the traumatic Cattle-Killing, and what must have been Merriman’s deep bewilderment at the transformation undergone in his absence by his old companion. The evocation of Goliath is palpable. Goliath is there because the example of Caliban raises in Merriman’s thought the issue of how to assess or characterise the indigenous

peoples of South Africa, and this point Merriman tackles quite specifically. But to reflect on the local Xhosa-speaking people in Grahamstown in 1857 meant in some way pondering the meaning of the Cattle-Killing. To avoid it would be impossible, a bit like ignoring the elephant in the drawing-room. My suggestion is that the memories of Goliath surface in the lecture because he was associated in Merriman's mind with the Cattle-Killing, as indeed he would be if Merriman knew that Goliath was Mhlakaza, by now one of the most notorious figures in the Colony. We may never know, in terms satisfying to our craving for literal evidence, whether or not Merriman accepted that Goliath was Mhlakaza. Yet there is something sufficiently compelling about the sub-text of this lecture, as I hope I have shown, to make the argument worth articulating.

* * * *

In later life, Merriman continued to reflect on the Cattle-Killing. Years after the events of 1856-57, now as Bishop of Grahamstown, he invoked the settler response to the Cattle-Killing in a Pastoral Letter aimed at countering his charges' reluctance to contribute to the Church's missionary effort. Owning that "in many of your complaints I can sympathise, more deeply perhaps than you would be inclined to give me credit for" (Merriman 1876, 3), he appealed to past behaviour:

No one who remembers the starving period of 1857, and the generous sympathy with which all classes came forward to relieve the poor skeletons that daily crawled into our towns could doubt that there was still a good spice of brotherly love remaining, and the farmer's wives, who were the most violent denouncers, were also among the foremost in relieving the wretchedness which they saw at their door.

(3)

Seeking to assuage the legacy of settler bitterness "founded on the grounds of the Kafirs having injured us so deeply in past years, by stealing our cattle, murdering our countrymen, and plundering and burning our farms" (6), Merriman reverted once again to what one might call the 'Caliban argument':

And if there are lazy Kafirs who profess Christianity, so there are in the same proportion, I fear, drunken, dissolute, and fraudulent Europeans who do the same.

(4)

Standing firm on his platform of Christian universality, he illustrates his point this time with reference to dissolute behaviour among newly Christianised 7th and 8th century Anglo-Saxons (4-5), to the “idle” and “listless” peasantry in Southern Italy (5; Appendix A), to cattle raiding along the Border Country between England and Scotland, and cattle stealing by the so-called “Free Selectors” of Australia, the latter example courtesy of Anthony Trollope’s *Australia* (Vol 1, 160) ([12], Appendix B). The behaviour of the Christianising Xhosa was in no way exceptional, in Merriman’s eyes. Following the last frontier war, the war of Ngcaycibi (1877-1878), the Bishop’s belief in the beneficence of white rule in South Africa waned steadily, issue by issue, until by 1880, we see him applying the ‘Caliban argument’ in revulsion against Governor Bartle Frere’s betrayal of the Zulu monarch Cetshwayo, who was banished to Cape Town in furtherance of Frere’s federationist ambitions:

It makes one blush for the name of Englishman to think of one’s fellow country men being deliberately guilty of such things as the very heathen account to be unmanly and abominable.

(Letter, Merriman to FW Chesan, 24 May 1880, quoted in Goedhals, 358)

Mandy Goedhals notes that “At the age of seventy-one, Merriman was able, under the dictates of his Christian conscience, to review the position he had held for thirty-two years, and to criticise openly and publicly, the treatment meted out to people of colour, by men of his own race” (358). Considering that he started his career from a position of uncomplicated assurance regarding the “civilizing mission” of Christianity (Goedhals, 125), this was a remarkable shift.

I suggest then that in preparing the Shakespeare lecture of 1857 it seems unlikely that Merriman could have read Grey’s portrait of Kaiber without making an association with Wilhelm Goliath. It is also difficult not to set the sketch of Henry Woods against what must have been Merriman’s now disillusioned memories of the man who had so often delayed him on his travels, carrying Merriman’s bundle, and who had subsequently been instrumental in leading his people to the very brink of annihilation: a colonized ‘Caliban’ who had rebelled indeed. Even if, with scepticism operating at full stretch, we allow ourselves to pass over these particular possibilities, it is

hardly conceivable for an attentive Grahamstown audience in 1857, with the horrendous events of the great Cattle-Killing playing themselves out on their doorstep, not somehow to measure the almost incomprehensible horror of the previous few months against the philosophical question posed by Shakespeare's "monster" (see 3.2.1-16); that is, if they paid heed to Merriman's Shakespearean argument at all.

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NOTES

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1. The surprising identification of Wilhelm Goliath as Mhlakaza was made in the first edition of Peires's remarkable history of the Cattle-Killing, *The Dead Will Arise* (1989). It was immediately challenged on the grounds that the evidence presented was slim. In the second edition (2003), Peires fleshed out the material and added new documentary evidence that had subsequently come to light. The case is now much more substantial (see "Afterword", pp.360-362). A recent article by Davies (2007) contests the identification with evidence drawn from Rev. H.T. Waters' 1859 visits to the Wesleyan mission station of Clarkebury, well after Goliath's purported disappearance from the written record in January 1853 (see Peires, p.360), and later even than Mhlakaza's supposed death in November 1857 (Davies, p.23). In 1859 Waters reports hearing "of William Goliath, or Flage, who lived sometime with Archdeacon Merriman. He has been living at Joey's kraal - - -" (Davies, p. 24). Davies writes, "And while [Goliath] was known by another name, it was Flage – not Mhlakaza", adding in a note, "The name 'Flage' is a mystery that I have been unable to get to the bottom of. As it stands, it is not an obviously Xhosa name, but Waters could, of course, have 'mis-spelled' it. What is certain is that it is not a mangling (deliberate or otherwise) of Mhlakaza" (Note 33, p.24). Davies's certainty here is probably misplaced. Given the aberrant orthographies rife at the time, 'Flage' is a credible rendering of a muttered, misheard and contracted "Mhlakaz". Perhaps Goliath/Mhlakaza was indeed still around. Waters lays no claim to having met Goliath (he would have recognized him from their time at Southwell); merely to have heard of

his presence “at Joey’s [Joyi’s] kraal” (p.24). What Davies’ arguments suggest to me is that official reports of Mhlakaza’s death may well have been “greatly exaggerated”: it was, after all, in Mhlakaza’s interests to keep his head down, or even to disappear.

2. The offensive term ‘Kafir’ or ‘Kaffir’ is retained here only where it appears in quotations from original documents. Although in the Eastern Province at the time it referred simply to Xhosa-speaking people, there was often still a pejorative overtone.
3. The *Diary* of RJ Mullins covers the years 1854-1867, and records an educated response to the Cattle-Killing and its aftermath (See Cory Library MS 7111-7117). On 6 Feb. 1858, Mullins notes that he “talked over the *Leviathan*”. In their edition of the *Diary*, Nicholls and Charton suggest that “Mullins may have discerned in the frontier conditions after the cattle-killing features comparable to the ‘state of nature’ described by the seventeenth century philosopher” (204).
4. This certainly was not Grey’s own view, but it was a common assumption of nascent western anthropology at the time. Grey himself writes:

The Australians have been most unfairly represented as a very inferior race, in fact as one occupying a scale in the creation which nearly places them on a level with the brutes, and some years must elapse, ere a prejudice so firmly rooted as this can be altogether eradicated, but certainly a more unfounded one never had possession of the public mind.

(1841, 367)

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