

VILAKAZI Benjamin Walliet

1. Vilakazi was born at Groutville Mission in 1906. After school he herded his father's cattle, and while doing so learned many Zulu songs and was captivated by praise poems. In 1918 he went to St. Francis College, Marianhill, became a Catholic, and qualified as a teacher at the age of sixteen.

Cartoon: Vilakazi herding his father's cattle, with a book perhaps, or better still, with pencil and paper, composing.

2. He first taught in Ixopo and took his Matriculation privately. He then went to teach at Ohlange, and there took his B.A. through UNISA, the first black South African to do so. At twenty-nine he became lecturer in Bantu languages at the University of the Witwatersrand. While there he achieved his D.Litt., and became widely known as a scholar. He wrote a great deal, five books, three of prose and two of poetry. He is the recognised father of Zulu poetry as distinct from traditional praise poems. He was also the first Nguni winner of an overseas literary prize, from the International Institute of African languages and Cultures.

Cartoon: Vilakazi lecturing at Wits. I guess his students would be white, or certainly mainly white.

3. Vilakazi's crowning achievement was the monumental Zulu-English Dictionary, his co-author being the Rev.C.M. Doke. His untimely death in 1947 from meningitis, at the age of forty-one was a great blow to South African literature and scholarship.

Cartoon: Vilakazi and Doke looking with unconcealed pride at the first copy of their dictionary.