THEORIA

A JOURNAL OF STUDIES
in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Vol. LXVII

October 1986

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Published twice yearly by the
UNIVERSITY OF NATAL PRESS
PIETERMARITZBURG

ISSN 0040-5817

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HUMBUGGING THE GENERAL?

King Cetshwayo's Peace Overtures During the Anglo-Zulu War

by J.P.C. LABAND

'You are humbug, the talk of peace is nonesense, you know the king don't want peace'.[1] So declared John Dunn, once King Cetshwayo's white chief, now working for the British invaders of Zululand, when brushing aside the protestations of Sintwangu, the King's messenger. This attitude, so common in 1879 in the British camp, has been perpetuated by Gerald French, the biographer of Lord Chelmsford, the British commander in Zululand. He praised the general's 'forbearance' in the face of the king's 'irresolute and humbugging attitude' towards peace negotiations, which he cynically attributed to Cetshwayo's attempts 'to wriggle out of an awkward situation'; while the majority of the king's 'purported' messengers he dismissed as no more than 'spies'.[2]

In contrast, Bishop Colenso, the king's indefatigable apologist, steadfastly insisted on Cetshwayo's sincere attempts to negotiate a settlement with the invading British. In his *Digest of Zulu Affairs*, which painstakingly notes every one of the king's peace-feelers, Colenso calculated that six times before the invasion began, and eighteen times during its course, royal emissaries made their way to the British authorities. In addition, on three occasions Cetshwayo sent to the Bishop himself in order to enlist his aid in his attempt to negotiate. All these messengers, Colenso indignantly recorded,

> when not detained or put in irons, were either delayed by being sent from one post to another, or were sent back with mocking and impossible demands, or deluded in some way or other, by their civilized and Christian adversaries.[3]

The issue, then, is not whether Cetshwayo attempted to negotiate, nor even, after Colenso's painstaking research, how often, when and with whom. Rather, it is to assess the sincerity of the king's efforts, and the degree to which they were related to the fortunes of war and the political situation within the Zulu kingdom. At the same time, it is necessary to comprehend the minimum British requirements for a negotiated peace, and the extent to which the relevant civil and military authorities were seriously prepared to entertain Zulu approaches. For if either one of the two sides were not genuine, then it would be a matter of discovering who was humbugging whom. Or were they humbugging each other?

It seems logical in such an enquiry first to establish the aggressor's demands. There is no longer any doubt that Britain initiated the war in the interests of the confederation of the white states of southern

Africa under the crown. For Sir Bartle Frere, to whom, as High Commissioner, this task had been entrusted, the 'native question' was the crux of the region's inter-related problems, and it was around the Zulu kingdom that it was centred. Militarily the most potent black state in south-eastern Africa, it was perceived as posing a threat to the Colony of Natal, and the Cape was known to be reluctant to join a confederation that might embroil it in fresh wars. Moreover, the Transvaal, annexed in 1877, would remain unreconciled (so it was thought) until its festering border dispute with Zululand was decided in its favour. And to top these issues, Frere had come to the conclusion that the Zulu king was the 'head and moving spirit' of a 'native combination'[4] forming to throw off white domination in southern Africa. It seemed obvious, therefore, that the Zulu 'menace' must be eliminated. Yet it did not seem possible that this could be done without resorting to violence. For Frere was deeply convinced that the nature of the Zulu state as he understood it, and its 'military system' in particular, meant that it was incapable of remaining within its own borders and living at peace with its neighbours. It would persist as a danger and a stumbling block to confederation until the 'military system' was dismantled and the king's power broken.[5] Yet Frere did not envisage absorbing a defeated Zululand. Rather, he favoured a system of indirect rule by compliant chiefs under a British agent on the Indian model.[6]

The ultimatum which was presented on 11 December 1878 to the Zulu envoys naturally reflected these concerns and objectives. While four demands concerned compensation for minor border incidents, the remaining six were aimed at taming Zulu military power and independence. The most significant of these insisted on the dismantling of the military system, thus subverting the social, economic and political structure of the Zulu kingdom; while another required the stationing of a British Resident in Zululand, which would have meant the effective end of Zulu independence.[7] Of course, if the Zulu king were tamely to accept these conditions, then Frere's objectives would have been achieved. But the king was not expected to give up his sovereignty without a fight, and Chelmsford was under orders, once the period of grace stipulated in the ultimatum had expired, to 'take the matter in hand' and ensure Cetshwayo's compliance through force of arms.[8]

Frere was of opinion that when, as seemed inevitable, it came to war, there would remain little room for 'pacific negotiations', at least not until Cetshwayo had 'proved the strength of his young Regiments.'[9] In other words, Zulu military defeat was to be the precondition to any useful negotiations whose basis would remain the conditions set out in the ultimatum. Until then, any Zulu peace-feelers were to be regarded with suspicion, and any emissaries to be

treated with the greatest caution as potential spies. Consequently, it was taken as axiomatic that they were not to be admitted into the camps or fortifications of the military.[10] Thus the British marched into Zululand fundamentally determined not to treat with the Zulu king until he capitulated unconditionally.

If British objectives were clear enough to their leadership at least, then the Zulu were at a considerable loss to explain just what it was that the invaders of their country required. In September 1878, conscious of the military preparations along his borders, Cetshwayo sent to Sir Henry Bulwer, Lieutenant-Governor of Natal, challenging him to 'tell him plainly what wrong he has done to the English'.[11] During November the king's protestations, carried by his messengers into Natal, grew in proportion to the extent of the military build-up:

> '. . . the King wishes to sit down, rest and be peaceful';[12] 'What have I done to the Great White Chief? I hear from all parts that soldiers are around me';[13] 'Cetywayo hereby swears, in presence of . . . all his Chiefs, that he has no intention or wish to quarrel with the English.'[14]

The delivery of the ultimatum on 11 December was consequently something of a relief, for at last the king was given an inkling of what it was that the British wanted of him. The sense of that document of some 4 000 words was conveyed to him verbally by his emissaries, not an unusual feat among a people whose memories were suitably trained to do so.[15] Nevertheless, the British demands were sufficiently obscure, or astonishing, for the king to have to send six separate embassies to the British between the delivery of the ultimatum and the eventual invasion on 11 January 1879,[16] both to require clarification of the terms and to beg time to collect the cattle demanded in reparation for the border incidents. Furthermore, he needed space to put the matter before his council and gain their consent to his decisions.[17]

The British refused to take these messages seriously. Reports from Christian refugees convinced them that the Zulu army would 'stand by their king, and fight for the old institutions of their country';[18] while even Bishop Colenso's agent heard that Cetshwayo had no intention of complying with the British demands, and that he was saying 'there is now nothing for it but war'.[19] Thus the king's message of 11 January 1879 entreating more time for his councillors to consider the terms[20] Frere dismissed as a ruse,[21] for as his biographer explained, it was felt Cetshwayo was only temporizing in an attempt to defer hostilities for a few months until the harvest was safely in.[22] There was most likely some foundation to this supicion, which also contributed to the dubious treatment of the king's emissaries on that occasion. Bishop Colenso charged that

they were sent as prisoners to Stanger (doubtless because of the military suspicion that they were spies),[23] though the official version was that they had been 'located' there as they had refused to return to Zululand on account of the imminent hostilities.[24] In any event, their mission which had been to the forces stationed along the Lower Thukela provoked a strict order from Chelmsford on 17 January laying down that any future emissaries must communicate only with him, and no other commander. Even more significantly for future Zulu overtures, he stressed that none would even be considered which was not 'preceded by ... the unconditional acceptance of all demands (in the ultimatum) as before notified.'[25] Chelmsford was doing no more than affirm his and Frere's earlier opinions in this matter, but by issuing this general order he was making it a matter of policy, and slamming the door on any compromise settlement which the Zulu king might attempt to negotiate.

At the same time, the British were aware of existing rivalries and tensions among the elite of the Zulu kingdom, and knew that some of the king's leading councillors and chiefs were opposed to the war and hoped for accommodation with the British. They put such knowledge to good use, and from the very outset attempted to detach likely chiefs and their adherents from their loyalty to the king by appealing to their ambition or fear of British occupation.[26] Thus, by using every blandishment to win over the chiefs along their line of advance, and so creating a pool of collaborators from whom to select suitably compliant chieflings through whom Zululand was to be ruled, the British clearly hoped to isolate the king and his supporters, whose unconditional surrender and destruction were alone acceptable.

King Cetshwayo was long in grasping this hard truth. Despite all the rebuffs he had already suffered, he persisted in attempting to open negotiations with the invaders—indeed, right until the very end, when he was a fugitive in the Ngome forest.

The first phase in this essentially futile endeavour occurred before the fateful battle of Isandlwana on 22 January. Cetshwayo would seem to have instructed the commander of the main Zulu army, Chief Ntshingwayo kaMahole, not to move straight into the attack against the invading British Centre Column, but first to send a delegation of chiefs with an offering of 400 cattle to have 'a palaver'. The king subsequently claimed that the officers of the army were still engaged in deciding which among them should go on this mission, when a chance encounter with the British unintentionally triggered the battle.[27]

Though it cannot be certain that the king did indeed instruct Ntshingwayo as he said, there is no doubt that Isandlwana changed the whole nature of the war. Unlikely as it had been, a negotiated

settlement was now quite impossible. Frere's plans for a quick successful war might lie in ruins, and his reputation with them, but it was now absolutely essential for the very presence of the British in southern Africa that the might of British arms be speedily vindicated. And to achieve this, nothing less than complete victory in the field was acceptable, and with it the overthrow of the existing Zulu state. No amount of talking on the Zulu part would ever shake the British resolve.

Yet this was not at all immediately clear to the Zulu. They had brought the British invasion to a halt, and it was the king's declared policy to use such an opportunity to menace the frontiers of Natal and so bring the British to the conference table. He knew, moreover, that he would have to move before the British were able to bring up reinforcement. Yet his plan was frustrated because his army, disheartened by heavy casualties, and obedient to post-combat purification rituals, had refused to stay in the field.[28] Unable, therefore, to exploit the temporary initiative he had gained, he nevertheless decided to use the opportunity to re-open negotiations.

There were other considerations, too, besides these. By early March the king was apparently in a state of alarm concerning the continuing loyalty of some of his more important chiefs. His brother Hamu kaNzibe, who long had entertained designs on the crown, and who had been in communication with the British since November 1878, finally had defected and, after various vicissitudes, was to reach the British lines on 10 March, there to await the defeat of his brother and his reward at British hands. This betrayal was seen by many Zulu as prefiguring the break-up of the kingdom, especially as there had already been other minor defections.[29]

It was to this background, therefore, that on 1 March two messengers crossed the Thukela at Middle Drift and made their way to Bishop Hans Schreuder's mission nearby at kwaNtunjambili. Despite having withdrawn from Zululand in 1877, Schreuder had maintained his longstanding friendship with Cetshwayo,[30] and it seems that this is why he had been singled out as the recipient of the king's message.[31] In substance, the king begged the British through his messengers to withdraw their forces from Zululand (Colonel Pearson was blockaded at Eshowe and Colonel Wood was mounting raids from his camp at Khambula) and to resume talks on a peaceful settlement. Once more, he used the opportunity to declare that he did not 'clearly understand' the demands of the British government, but professed himself willing to give his attention to any proposals.[32]

The British response to the feeler was both harsh and cynical. Frere, his resolve hardened by the promptings of J.E. Fannin, the Border Agent along the middle Thukela, showed himself as

unprepared as ever to accept anything less than the king's unconditional surrender and the general disarmament of the Zulu people. Nor was he ready even to consider any message from the king that did not come 'in a form to bind him'.[33] It is Fannin, though, in his diary, who reveals what also lay behind Frere's curt and uncompromising response. The British, it is quite clear, welcomed the Zulu initiative, but not because it brought with it a hope of peace. Rather, they planned to take advantage of renewed negotiations to keep Zulu 'attention occupied', and by spinning out the process so give time for sufficient reinforcements to build up preparatory to a renewed offensive.[34]

Chelmsford's reaction was most straightforward. He stood convinced that no message from the king was anything but humbug, and that he would be 'doing the most foolish thing to accept this Zulu's protestations'.[35] 'I hope', he wrote to Wood, 'to be able to give him his answer next week by sending a column forward to Eshowe.'[36] As for the messengers, they were sent back with 'long faces' across the Thukela to tell the king of Frere's conditions.[37] Cetshwayo, it seems, was to be duped.

Negotiations continued. On the evening of 21 March two further messengers contacted the Border Police at Middle Drift, and the following day delivered their message to Bishop Schreuder and Fannin. The principal messenger was Klaas, alias Barnabas, a Christian convert, who had left the king's presence some week before. It had been his intention that he arrive at the same time as the first set of messengers, but he had been delayed by illness — or so he claimed. His mission was of a historic nature. He bore with him the book, 'beautifully bound in red morocco and gilt',[38] of the 'Coronation Laws' promulgated by Theophilus Shepstone at the time of the king's coronation in 1873, and later presented to him by Bishop Schreuder.[39] The king rhetorically demanded to know in what ways he had 'transgressed its provisions'. Fannin was not impressed. He handed back the book with the cold reply that the government ultimatum explained everything, and sent the messengers back.[40]

Fannin felt justified in his curt rejoinder by additional information he had gained from the messengers. Ten days previously, he was told, the king had summoned a meeting of his council to discuss the 'best mode of prosecuting the war.'[41] Doubtless Chelmsford's obvious preparations for a renewed attack had forced such a development, and the king had no choice but to be prepared for it. Yet if the British were stringing the Zulu along over negotiations, it seemed equally clear to the British that the Zulu were doing the same to them. This conviction only strengthened their existing suspicion that all Zulu messengers were no more than spies. Thus when on 23 March two messengers from the king

attempted to approach the beleaguered entrenchment at Eshowe under the cover of a white flag, they were treated as such. The messengers' offer of a free passage to the Thukela if the garrison went peacefully was treated as a transparent ruse, and despite the traditional sanctity the Zulu messengers expected to enjoy, they were unceremoniously clapped into irons.[42]

By this stage the war was in any case regaining momentum after the lull produced by the British need to regroup. At the same time as Chelmsford's column was advancing up the coast to the relief of Eshowe, the king and his council determined to throw their main army against Wood at Khambula. Yet the king chose this very moment to despatch fresh messengers to the middle border. It seems the consistently uncompromising British response to his approaches had failed to daunt him, or perhaps he was simply keeping his options open. Yet the simultaneous despatch of armies and emissaries could only reinforce the British conviction that all messengers must be spies.[43]

On the very day of the battle of Hlobane (28 March), three messengers approached the ferry at Middle Drift. They were fired upon, but under an improvised white flag they were allowed to cross and were sent under guard to Fort Cherry. There they spent the night with their hands tied painfully behind their backs, before being interviewed by Fannin the next day.[44] The messengers handled as spies and subjected to such indignity were Johannes, a Christian convert, and Mfunzi and Nkisimane. The first was from Schreuder's eNtumeni mission, while the latter two were of advanced age, respectable and thoroughly well-known messengers of Cetshwayo, who over the preceding six years had repeatedly been sent on important missions to the Natal government.[45] Their message was dignified. Cetshwayo wished them to declare yet again that he saw 'no reason for the war waged against him', and asked the government 'to appoint a place at which a conference could be held with a view to the conclusion of peace.'[46]

While Fannin was passing on what he clearly considered this spurious message to the military authorities for their consideration, the outcome of the war was decided. On 29 March Wood broke the main Zulu army at Khambula, and on 2 April Chelmsford brushed aside the Zulu forces at Gingindlovu and relieved Eshowe. The war had entered a new and final phase with the initiative now firmly in the hands of the British. Yet there was another lull while they prepared for the final blow, for which Chelmsford and Wood were to advance on oNdini from the north-west, and General Crealock from along the coast.

Meanwhile, what was to be done with the latest messengers, languishing now in Fort Buckingham? Fannin supposed that as likely spies they should be detained at least until the relief of

Eshowe.[47] Chelmsford agreed, and at the same time reiterated his strict condition of 17 January concerning any future negotiations with Zulu emissaries: all communications from the Zulu king would have to be sent directly to him at his headquarters camp, wherever it might be.[48] Sir Henry Bulwer rightly feared that this order would cause unnecessary 'difficulties and delays' and hamper the cessation of hostilities he desired.[49] But Chelmsford's insistence that he alone should communicate with Cetshwayo reflected not only his determination that the king must accede in full to the onerous British terms, but was also part of his campaign to keep anything pertaining to the conduct of the war out of Bulwer's civilian hands.[50]

Accordingly, on 15 April the Hon. W. Drummond of Chelmsford's Headquarters Staff appeared at Fort Buckingham to inform the incarcerated Mfunzi and Nkisimane that if they wished to make any peace proposals they must do so at Wood's camp in Zululand, whither Chelmsford was moving.[51] However, on account of a degree of confusion over who had the authority actually to give them permission to proceed (or perhaps it was part of a ploy deliberately to delay them), the two messengers remained where they were until an enquiry prompted by Bishop Colenso resulted in their leaving for Zululand on 9 May.[52] Yet their vicissitudes were not over. On 12 June they appeared under flag of truce in Pietermaritzburg, sent on by H.F. Fynn, the Resident Magistrate at Rorke's Drift. It would appear from their conversation with General Clifford in the capital that after leaving Fort Buckingham they had gone not to Chelmsford, but to consult with the king and his councillors, who had essentially confirmed their previous message, and had sent them back with an injunction to hurry. But the messengers were old and the rains heavy, and Chelmsford's precise whereabouts unknown to them. This is why they had fetched up at Rorke's Drift. Yet Clifford had not much better an idea than Fynn of the General's precise whereabouts, and sent the exhausted messengers off in the direction of Babanango.[53] Before they could locate him, they and the message they bore were quite outstripped by events.

In any case, in the course of their interrogation by Clifford, the messengers had let slip an observation which pinpointed the fundamental limitation of all Zulu peace initiatives thus far: they admitted they had no authority to talk about the actual terms of peace, only the king's desire to negotiate. This was in accordance with Zulu custom. Messengers were only sent out to make arrangements for a meeting of chiefs who alone had the power to discuss terms.[54] Yet as early as March Frere had made it clear that he was not prepared to consider any message that did not bind the king to the British terms.[55] With the king attempting to set the scene for negotiations, and the British insisting on total surrender in

accordance with the demands of their ultimatum, the situation had plainly reached an impasse.

Moreover, the British were wedded to the concept of victory in the field. On 4 April Frere directed that 'no overtures of any kind must be allowed to delay military operations', at least until 'complete military command' of Zululand was secured. Then they could dictate any terms they wished. In this same minute Frere also gave attention to a complementary policy, pursued by the British since the beginning of the war, when he authorized that 'overtures for peace' would be acceptable from any other chief but the king.[56] For as the war turned decisively against the king, so the opportunity increased to detach his chiefs from his cause. This strategy gelled in the post-Khambula period. Ever-increasing numbers of chiefs submitted to the advancing British on easy terms and accepted their suzerainty, abandoning the king whose power the British were determined to crush utterly.

Indeed, it was clear from early May that allegiance to the king was beginning to waver seriously, and it was reported that the king had sent again for his principal chiefs. They had strongly urged him to make every effort to negotiate peace, and to this he had consented.[57]

The consequence of the king's new peace initiative was that General Crealock, advancing laboriously up the coast, was soon complaining that he was 'in a state of chronic messengers from the King and his indunas'.[58] Not that he did any more than direct them to Chelsmford via Wood,[59] as insisted upon by Frere.[60]

Chief Ndwandwe, the first of this series of messengers, came into Fort Chelmsford on 15 May with Cetshwayo's plaintive message; 'What have I done? I want peace — I ask for peace.'[61] Chelmsford responded to word of this message by evolving additional terms for surrender over and above those contained in the ultimatum. All captured weapons and prisoners were to be surrendered, 10 000 stands of firearms should be handed over, as well as at least 10 000 cattle or 20 000 sheep.[62] Crushing and impossible terms surely designed to elicit resistance until the desired ultimate Zulu military disaster. Frere capped this with his harsh directive to Chelmsford that the king's messengers were to be told that unless acts were substituted for 'idle words' and the Zulu made genuine efforts to comply with the terms, their land would be devastated.[63]

On 27 May Crealock learned that the king was sending him further messengers,[64] and that he had ordered that whites were not to be fired upon during the period of negotiations.[65] There could no longer be any doubt that the king was under pressure to treat, and that he was in earnest. But could he possibly accept the inflexible British terms?

The messenger who arrived on 28 May[66] was Sintwangu, an

inceku (or high official in the King's household), a well-known emissary who had attended the ultimatum ceremony as the king's eyes and ears.[67] In conversation with John Dunn on 31 May he reiterated Ndwandwe's message, and begged Dunn to use his influence to achieve peace. It was also clear from what Sintwangu said that he feared the king's influence was 'passing away'.[68] Patently, the time was at hand for the British to press submissions from the local chiefs. As for Sintwangu, he was sent off like the other messengers to negotiate directly with Chelsmford, if he could find him.[69] This was the fate of Ndwandwe, who appeared again on 7 June with another relay of messengers,[70] purveying what Crealock called his 'peaceful lies from the king.'[71] Simultaneously, the British were pursuing the local option with determination, and all the major coastal chiefs were in the process of suing for terms. This reality made a mockery of the efforts of the king's messengers, and even before the battle of Ulundi was fought the entire coastal region would have abandoned the royal cause and come to terms with the invaders.[72]

It was against this background of widespread betrayal in the eastern reaches of his kingdom, and Chelsmford's reiterated conviction that there could be no permanent peace until the king were deposed,[73] that Cetshwayo attempted to negotiate with the Second Division which was advancing on oNdini with considerably more expedition than the sluggish coastal column.

Three messengers, Mgcwelo, Mtshibela and Mphokothwayo, reached Wood's camp at the Nondwini river on 4 June. They had left the king at his kwaMayizekanye homestead on 30 May and had first, mistakenly, made for Khambula. It would seem that they had set out at the same time as Sintwangu had been despatched to Crealock, and Mfunzi and Nkisimane to Rorke's Drift. The three messengers carried a message which Cetshwayo had personally given them before his chief councillors.[74] Genuine emissaries though they might be, they made a bad impression on the British, who found them 'villainous-looking scoundrels'.[75] In turn, they were so strongly impressed at the spectacle of British armed might that they assured Drummond in their preparatory interview that they would 'strongly recommend' on their return that the king come to terms. They also let it be known that Cetshwayo was finally of intention to send his chief minister, Mnyamana, and other 'officers of state' to treat,[76] as Frere had always insisted they should.

However, in their formal interview on 5 June with Chelmsford, the General laid down conditions which were a refinement of those additional ones evolved in May, and which Bishop Colenso could only categorize as 'preposterous'.[77] Firstly, Chelmsford made it plain that on grounds of developments along the coast he no longer believed that the kind was being obeyed, and that unless he could

provide proof of his authority and desire for peace, the General would rather continue negotiating with his chiefs. Therefore, Chelmsford warned that he would continue his advance unless, in earnest of his power and genuine intentions, the king sent in the oxen at his royal homestead, and the two seven-pounder guns captured at Isandlwana, as well as promising that all the other firearms in Zululand would be collected and given up. In addition, an age-grade regiment, to be named by Chelmsford, must come into the British lines and lay down its arms. Then, and only then, would Chelmsford even entertain peace discussions, to be conducted, naturally, in terms of the demands of the ultimatum.[78]

Their mission thereby rendered absolutely futile, the disconsolate messengers left the British camp on 6 June,[79] bearing with them Chelmsford's written statement of his impossible terms. This punctilious sop to correct diplomatic form (for who in the Zulu camp would be able to read his words?) does not disguise Chelmsford's transparent cynicism. The king had already made it plain that although willing to negotiate, he could not accede to the demands of the ultimatum. How then could he to these outrageous preliminary conditions? How could Chelmsford expect him to? Clearly he did not. His conditions, in writing too! were for the record. His intentions were to fight and win his battle and destroy the king whose warriors had ruined his reputation at Isandlwana. It was he who was humbugging Cetshwayo. It made not a jot of difference that there were reports of the king calling on his people to send him cattle to help buy off the British and make peace;[80] nor that he did not intend the British should be attacked unless they resumed their advance on oNdini.[81] By way of contrast, Chelmsford's instructions of 16 June laid down that chiefs, on submitting to designated authorities, be only required to give up their arms and the royal cattle in their keeping. In return, their people were to be spared and protected.[82] Only the king could expect no mercy, unless he totally surrendered his sovereignty.

Though being pushed into a situation where he must fight to the last, Cetshwayo nevertheless attempted even more urgently than before to negotiate, spurred on doubtless in these desperate endeavours by the realization that the invader could never be stopped by force of arms. Two new messengers, Ntanjana and Sibungu arrived at Fort Pearson on the lower Thukela on 25 June, begging that the British stay their advance until negotiations could take place. For if they continued to march on oNdini the king, they explained, 'cannot help fighting, as there will be nothing left but to try and push aside a tree that is falling upon him.'[83] Unregarded, the messengers left on 29 June.[84]

Sintwangu appeared on a new mission the following day, when he came into Crealock's camp at Fort Napoleon on the Mlalazi river

bearing an enormous elephant tusk — the symbol of peace and friendship — in earnest of the authenticity of his mission.[85] He made the unfortunate impression messengers seemed now automatically to create in the minds of the prejudiced British, one of whom described him as manifesting 'a curious mixture of dogged determination, savage cunning and treachery.'[86] His interview with Crealock did not last twenty minutes, and when directed to address himself rather to Chelmsford, he took the rebuff as if he had expected it,[87] as well he might have.

Chelmsford's written conditions, meanwhile, which the two messengers had taken off on 6 July, still required an answer. It had been the General's condition that this be returned within eight days. Yet as Gibson reminds us, even in this emergency Zulu dignity did not 'permit of hurry'.[88] And, as the king could not read the message when it arrived, it was necessary to bring Cornelius Vijn, a trader whom the war had detained in Zululand, to the king to do so for him. Vijn was living at a distance, so it was not until about 17 June that he had arrived at the Mbonambi homestead, translated the note, and penned Cetshwayo's response.[89] Doubtless affronted by Chelmsford's impossible demands Cetshwayo, despite his perilous situation, dictated a proud and dignified reply, deprecating negotiations while the British army was advancing and plundering as it went.[90] Yet this letter never reached Chelmsford. The four messengers to whom it was entrusted were denied entry when they arrived before Fort Marshall on 22 June and fearing they should be shot, returned with the note undelivered.[91]

Vijn consequently wrote again. The three messengers, Mgcwelo, Mtshibela and Mphokothwayo (who had carried Chelmsford's written terms to Cetshwayo) were sent with Vijn's letter in a cleft stick,[92] carrying two great tusks of ivory and driving a herd of 150 of the cattle captured at Isandlwana. They were intercepted by a British patrol and on 27 June were brought into Chelmsford's camp on the Mthonjaneni heights overlooking oNdini and the Mahlabathini plain.[93] The tone of this second letter was much more placatory than that of the undelivered one, and probably reflected Cetshwayo's cooler second thoughts. It did not come to grips with Chelmsford's conditions. Consequently, the General declared that he would continue his advance, and so would not accept the symbolic tusks. However, in order to give the king a last chance to comply, he undertook not to cross the White Mfolozi to oNdini immediately and condescended to keep the cattle as a sign that he was still willing to have peace, if only entirely on his terms.[94]

With this the messengers had to be content, and left the next day telling the interpreter as they went that they 'would have to fight now' as it was impossible for the king to comply with Chelmsford's terms.[95] And indeed, Chelmsford remained prepared to 'stop

hostilities' only on condition that his conditions were complied with in full.[96] For although he credited Cetshwayo and his councillors with a genuine desire to end the war—their desperate situation demanded nothing less—he was sure that it was still only on their terms, and not on his.[97]

Then, at midday on 30 June, the by now extraordinarily well-travelled and foot-sore Mfunzi and Nkisimane finally ran their quarry to ground. They carried yet a third letter penned by Vijn, as well as the sword of the ill-fated Prince Imperial in earnest of their mission, and promised the speedy arrival of the two captured seven-pounders and more cattle.[98] Yet unbeknown to them Vijn had done the king an evil turn, for the letter carried a postscript in which the trader informed Chelmsford that it was his opinion that the king and people, if not the princes and chiefs, really intended to fight.[99] Not unlikely either, considering that the British were showing themselves eager to treat leniently with the chiefs, while the king saw he had no hope left but through battle.

Chelmsford responded to this latest embassy by modifying his earlier terms somewhat. He was now prepared to accept a thousand rifles captured at Isandlwana in lieu of the surrender of an age-grade regiment. Furthermore, he announced that Cetshwayo had until noon on 3 July to comply with his conditions, and that his troops would remain on his side of the White Mfolozi up to that moment.[100] Lest we should be tempted to applaud what French would have as Chelmsford's magnanimity and readiness to avoid further bloodshed,[101] we should note two things. Chelmsford's small concession in his demands of the Zulu king was only a gesture calculated to appeal to the British sense of fair play, for it made no difference to Cetshwayo. More significantly, we should take note of Major C.W. Robinson's comment: 'Cetywayo was given time because we could not well make our preparations complete till the 4th (July)'.[102] It was Chelmsford who intended well and truly to humbug Cetshwayo, and to prepare for the battle necessary to salve his reputation.

Yet as it turned out, Chelmsford's disingenuous new offer never reached Cetshwayo. On Mfunzi's testimony it seems that the chiefs were 'hopeless and desperate' and had no desire to prolong negotiations which were patently pointless. They would not allow him access to the king, and falsely informed him that Vijn had gone and that Chelmsford's letter could therefore not be translated. Nor were they prepared to take any heed of Mfunzi's oral version of its contents.[103] It seems that for the Zulu too, battle was the only remaining possibility. The king did make one last effort to treat, and was again thwarted by his people. Chelmsford's force had moved down from Mthonjaneni, and by 1 July was encamped on the White Mfolozi. The next day a herd of at least 100 of the king's own special

white oxen were seen being driven as a peace offering towards the British camp. But the young men of the uMcijo age-regiment turned them back, insisting they would fight rather than give up the cattle.[104] Events were now completely out of the king's hands. Having received no answer to his ultimatum, Chelmsford advanced across the river on 4 July and routed the Zulu army. Cetshwayo did not wait to witness the debacle, but struck off for the north to seek refuge.[105]

With the dispersal of his army and his own flight, the king found himself in an entirely new situation. Only a few shreds of authority still clung to him, while his chiefs were necessarily concerned with how best to come to terms with the British in such a way as to preserve at least their own local power and influence. The lenient policy which the British had adopted so far towards the chiefs showed them the way, and turned any lingering loyalty to the king's cause into an embarrassment. While the king was still at large it remained difficult for the chiefs to tender their final submission to the British and become part of their new dispensation for Zululand. Thus for Sir Garnet Wolseley, who had superseded Chelmsford, it was essential that the king be captured,[106] and that the chiefs should know where they stood. The second was the easier to achieve, and on 26 July he made known that the chiefs must surrender their arms and royal cattle, that the monarchy and military system were abolished, and that the names of the new independent chiefs would soon be announced.[107] Such favourable terms rapidly convinced more and more chiefs to comply,[108] and stripped the king of any remaining influence, so that his messages exhorting them to stand firm were largely ignored.[109]

What was left for the king to do? The British had achieved their objectives: Zulu military capability was destroyed and the royal power irrevocably shattered. If Cetshwayo were to continue his negotiations with the conquerors it could only be to ensure his personal safety and future liberty. For even these were no longer to be taken for granted. Had not Wolseley written to his wife that he 'should be quite happy if some kind friend would but run an Assegai through him (Cetshwayo)'?[110]

Wolseley noted on 20 July that reports were coming in indicating that the king saw his position as hopeless and was prepared to accept any terms which might be offered.[111] A suppliant royal messenger duly approached Colonel Clarke at Kwamagwaza on 26 July. Clarke replied that the king's life would be spared if he surrendered, and directed the envoy to Wolseley.[112] A spate of similar messages and replies were rapidly exchanged,[113] until on 7 August Wolseley interviewed an important delegation sent on by Colonel Clarke. It was led by the important chief Mavumengwana kaNdlela Ntuli.[114] He had with him yet another letter from the king taken down by

Vijn, in which Cetshwayo pathetically declared that he was still collecting cattle which he would send in with his chief minister Mnyamana (in whose homestead he had taken refuge), and that he would follow in their wake. Meanwhile, 'the English should take pity on him and leave him the country of his fathers.'[115] But they had determined on his exile, and Wolseley demanded his immediate surrender.

Mavumengwana and his returning delegation fell in with Mnyamana and the cattle and decided to go back with them to Wolseley instead of reporting to the king. Cetshwayo, meanwhile, hearing that British patrols were out seeking him, took fright and fled from Mnyamana's ekuShumayeleni homestead to the fastnesses of the Ngome forest.[116] He was now being abandoned by all. Vijn, who had come into camp on 10 August with a last message from the king begging to be allowed to stay in Zululand, agreed, on the promise of a reward, to persuade Cetshwayo to surrender. But he could not overcome the king's dread of being sent into exile, and returned empty-handed to Wolseley on 13 August, while the king pushed on further into the forest.[117]

On 14 August, driving 617 cattle before them, which had been collected on the king's orders, Mnyamana, Chief Ntshingwayo kaMahole, two of Cetshwayo's brothers, and 150 other chiefs of varying degrees of importance presented themselves at Wolseley's camp.[118] The offering of royal cattle indicated that Mnyamana's intention was not to submit personally, but to sue for terms on the king's behalf.[119] At last, as the British had so long insisted, a major chief was to negotiate directly for the king. Negotiate, or simply beg? Ntshingwayo later told Magema Fuze:

> 'We had been sent by the King; we had not run away to the Whites. We had gone simply to ask for his head, that he might live and not perish.'[120]

Yet, when obviously assured that the British would not execute Cetshwayo, their duty was done; and their thoughts turned to their own futures. They rapidly declared they had themselves come to surrender.[121] Wolseley detained them in his camp and sent out further patrols to apprehend Cetshwayo, aided by information from the chiefs who wanted to see an end to the king's hopeless plight.[122] He was captured on 28 August, and the chiefs were freed to accept the terms of Wolseley's settlement on 1 September.

When King Cetshwayo was brought a prisoner into Wolseley's camp near the burned oNdini royal homestead, he begged John Shepstone, who interrogated him, to be allowed to remain in Zululand, even if no longer as king. Shepstone told him that there was no possibility, and that he was to leave the country. On hearing

these words the defeated king abandoned all hope, and 'the tears ran down his cheeks.'[123] Never once had his words swayed the adamantine British from their purpose. This, perhaps, was the truth behind the course of the king's overtures to the British throughout the war. Essentially, British terms were not negotiable. They always made that very clear, and in that sense they were not guilty of humbugging Cetshwayo. Yet Chelmsford was not above using negotiations on occasion to string the Zulu king along in the interests of his military preparations. In that sense there was an element of duplicity in the General's relations with Cetshwayo. It seems too that there was a disingenuousness in his framing preconditions for full negotiations that were patently beyond the king's powers to fulfil.

If the British record is not absolutely clear of a degree of deliberate humbug, what about Cetshwayo's? For one thing, he did not apparently exhibit the consistency of the British, though this can be attributed to his role of victim, parrying the 'falling tree' of the British invasion. Thus his overtures ran the gamut from half-hearted fencing, to an attempt to impose a settlement from a position of some strength, to increasingly desperate efforts to stem the British advance as his chiefs abandoned him, to the final, broken pleas for clemency. There is a form of logic in this progression that underpins his sincerity. The real problem was that he wished for peace on terms acceptable to him and his councillors, and was never willing seriously to consider those of the British. In a sense, therefore, his overtures consistently bypassed the issue and thus antagonized the British. An additional problem was that in terms of Zulu custom the king's messengers were merely despatched in order to set up a meeting of the leaders, and did not have plenipotentiary powers of their own. This too frustrated the British. All contributed to a general sense of their being deliberately humbugged by the king.

While not denying that there was most likely an element of humbug in the king's diplomacy (as there was in the British), it seems that the real difficulty was not so much that the two sides were humbugging each other, as that they were passing one another by. Lack of mutual comprehension was, as it so often is, the root of the problem.

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NOTES

I thank the Human Sciences Research Council and the University of Natal for their financial assistance in 1984. Without their grants I would have been unable to undertake the research in England necessary for this article. All opinions expressed and conclusions reached are mine.

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59. Ibid., 17 May 1879; WC II/2/2: Chelmsford to Wood, 16 May 1879.
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62. CP 13, No. 18: Colonel Crealock to Colonial Secretary, 21 May 1879.
63. *BPP* (C. 2374), enc. 10 in No. 32: telegram, Frere to Chelmsford, recd. 30 May 1879.
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72. Laband, 'Cohesion of the Zulu Polity', pp. 13–15.
73. WO 32/7745: Chelmsford to Secretary of State for War, 2 June 1879.
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80. CP 15, No. 44: General Crealock to Chelmsford, 11 June 1879.
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85. Intelligence Branch of the War Office, *Narrative of the Field Operations Connected with the Zulu War of 1879* (London, 1881), p. 105. The tusk was 7 feet in length and half a yard in circumference (*Illustrated London News*, 20 September 1879). It was subsequently forwarded to Queen Victoria (*BPP* (C. 2482), No. 79: Hicks Beach to Wolseley, 29 September 1879).
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87. Ibid., p. 319.
88. Gibson, *Story of the Zulus*, p. 209.
89. Vijn, *Cetshwayo's Dutchman*, pp. 42–9. Colenso, *Digest of Zulu Affairs*, series No. 1, Part 2, pp. 584–5.
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92. *Illustrated London News*, 23 August 1879.
93. War Office, *Narrative of Field Operations*, p. 110.
94. CP 13, No. 54: Message from Cetywayo to Chelmsford, 26 June 1879; and message to Ketchwayo from Chelmsford, 27 June 1879. *BPP* (C. 2482), No. 47: Chelmsford to Secretary of State for War, 28 June 1879. In a curious incident, the king's messengers of 30 June refused Chelmsford's request to take back the cattle. The British believed at the time this was because the cattle had been doctored to ensure their defeat, and that the Zulu feared that if they accepted them the magic would be turned on them instead (*The Graphic*, 30 August 1879).

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96. WO 32/7751: Telegram, Clifford to Secretary of State for War, 3 July 1879.
97. Clarke, *Zululand at War*, p. 229: Lt.-Col. Crealock to Alison, 28 June 1879.
98. *BPP* (C. 2482), enc. in No. 32: Chelmsford to Secretary of State for War, 6 July 1879.
99. Ibid., Aa in enc. in No. 32: Message from the Zulu king to Chelmsford, 30 June 1879.
100. Ibid., A in enc. in No. 32: Message from Chelmsford to Ketshwayo, 30 June 1879.
101. French, *Lord Chelmsford*, p. 250.
102. Clarke, *Zululand at War*, p. 235: Major C.W. Robinson to Maude Lefroy, 6 July 1879.
103. Colenso, *Digest of Zulu Affairs*, series No. 1, Part 2, pp. 595a–593b. Magema interviewed Mfunzi in October 1879 and was shown the still unopened letter.
104. Vijn, *Cetshwayo's Dutchman*, pp. 50–1; p. 144 (Colenso's notes). War Office, *Narrative of Field Operations*, p. 113; Webb and Wright, *Zulu King Speaks*, p. 58; Magema M. Fuze (tr. H.C. Lugg and ed. A.T. Cope), *The Black People and Whence they Came. A Zulu View* (Pietermaritzburg and Durban, 1979), p. 114.
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106. *BPP* (C. 2454), No. 62: Wolseley to Hicks Beach, 10 July 1879.
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110. Wolseley Papers, Hove Central Library, Letters to his Family 1852–1887 (typescript copies): Wolseley to his wife, 10 July 1879.
111. WO 147/7: Wolseley's South African Journal 1879/80 (henceforth Wolseley's Journal): 20 July.
112. Ibid.: 26 and 27 July 1879; WO 32/7769: telegram, Wolseley to Secretary of State for War, 28 July 1879; Clark, *Zululand at War*, p. 259: Lt. Col. C. East to Alison, 26 July 1879.
113. See Wolseley's Journal: 6 and 7 August 1879; and Clark, *Zululand at War*, p. 261: W.H. James to Alison, 31 July 1879.
114. Wolseley's Journal: 7 August 1879; *Natal Witness*, 11 August 1879; *Natal Mercury*, 18 August 1879; Webb and Wright, *Zulu King Speaks*, p. 59.
115. Vijn, *Cetshwayo's Dutchman*, p. 54.
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117. Wolseley's Journal: 10, 11 and 13 August 1879; Vijn, *Cethswayo's Dutchman*, pp. 58–62; Webb and Wright, *Zulu King Speaks*, p. 35.
118. Wolseley's Journal: 14 August; C.L. Norris-Newman, *In Zululand with the British throughout the War of 1879* (London, 1880), pp. 237–8.
119. Colenso Papers, file 27/230: Colenso to Chesson, 13 September 1879.
120. Vijn, *Cetshwayo's Dutchman*, p. 160 (Colenso's notes).
121. *The Graphic*, 4 October.
122. Laband, 'Cohesion of the Zulu Polity', pp. 20–1.
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UNITY OF VISION IN BEN JONSON'S TRAGEDIES AND MASQUES

by EDWIN HEES

At first glance a comparison of Jonson's tragedies and masques seems to offer a particularly glaring instance of the discrepancy between the 'real' world and a political ideal. I wish to show that for Jonson both forms originate from a common world-view and from a common conception of the nature and function of poetry and history. If Jonson's tragedies and masques are read as isolated works they may well seem to express mutually exclusive visions of the potential moral condition of his culture. But if the individual works are read in the context of Jonson's entire oeuvre, it quickly becomes clear that they embody equivalent political visions in accordance with classic Renaissance precepts on the social utility of art. Although the political emphasis in the tragedies and masques differs according to Jonson's conception of the audience watching or participating, they both embody the same attitude to power and authority. In the tragedies a potentially redeeming sovereign power is abused or simply absent; in the masques this same power is made exemplary and apotheosized.

Jonson's first requirement for tragedy, as stated in his prefatory note to *Sejanus,* is 'truth of argument'. It will be seen that Jonson's emphasis on what he took to be historical authenticity indicates that his preoccupation with his historic material in the tragedies was primarily moral. But there appear to be two aspects to Jonson's view of history, the one expressing a humanist confidence in man's moral perception, the other deeply pessimistic.

The former view finds clear expression in the poem, 'The mind of the Frontispiece to a Book', written as an explication of the frontispiece to Sir Walter Raleigh's *History of the World* (1614). The poem opens as follows:

> From Death, and dark oblivion, near the same,
> The Mistress of Man's life, grave History,
> Raising the World to good or evil fame,
> Doth vindicate it to eternity.
> Wise Providence would so; that nor the good
> Might be defrauded, nor the great secured,
> But both might know their ways were understood,
> When Vice alike in time with Virtue dured.[1]

At least two functions of history are alluded to here: it is the task of the historian to retrieve both virtue and vice from oblivion but the ultimate aim of historical reconstruction, the aim which has the

sanction of Providence itself, is to ensure moral discrimination. For Jonson the two functions are inseparable: historical authenticity guarantees moral validity.

The scholarly reconstruction of Roman history in *Sejanus* (with its detailed notes for the 1605 Quarto edition) and *Catiline* (1611) demonstrates that, as J.A. Bryant puts it, 'Jonson's plan of attack was to dramatize history as it had been reported by the best authorities extant, not, as was the custom with Shakespeare and others, to use the extant narrative as a quarry of materials from which to fashion a semi-historical dramatic fable'.[2] The assumption is that fiction will be less compelling than what has actually happened in the past and can be verified from contemporary sources. Modern historiographers would not have the same sort of confidence in primary sources, but to a poet who presupposes that human nature is essentially unchanging and thus that the reverberations of a historical fact are potentially endless, the meticulous recreation of the past was an immensely serious endeavour to comment meaningfully on contemporary political processes. The poet was not concerned, in theory at any rate, with facile 'parallels', covert allegory or the unsophisticated vice of 'application', but with what Jonas Barish calls 'moral historiography'.[3] Jonson's two tragedies are meditations on questions of authority and empire, written according to the dicates of Italian Renaissance critics who had judged history to be the only basis for tragedy, and who in turn were elaborating on a comment by Aristotle that only the possible convinces us. For Jonson, the playwright's integrity in reconstructing the past was as much a matter of artistic principle as civic responsibility.

Quite clearly, such history makes no claims to disinterestedness or objectivity. The world is raised 'to good and evil fame' to 'vindicate it to eternity'. In order to ensure clarity of effect historical facts must be 'interpreted', to borrow a word from Jonson's panegyric to Thomas May, 'the Learned Translator of Lucan'. Jonson thus adapts Tacitus's narrative on Tiberius's reign to his own needs. For instance, he suppresses the fact that the prostitute Livia, mistress of Sejanus, with whom she plots to kill her husband Drusus, was in fact the sister of Germanicus, as this detail would complicate Jonson's emphasis on the Germanicans' dignity and moral authority. Jonson also says nothing about Tiberius's youth, characterized according to Tacitus by military prowess, executive talent and humanity. Jonson allows us to see Tiberius only at the moment of the play's action, 'so sunk in duplicity as to be incapable of a candid word, and wholly devoted to the pursuit of his private obscenities . . . a Tiberius monolithically dedicated to evil'.[4] Where Jonson does incorporate distasteful details about the virtuous—such as Sejanus's disparagement of Agrippina as a 'dangerous . . .

male-spirited dame'[5], a subversive malcontent—he neutralizes them; clearly one is meant to discount Sejanus's assessment. By magnifying certain traits in accordance with his moral emphasis, Jonson creates characters who are exemplary (both as models for imitation and as warnings) rather than complex. 'By doing away with inconsistencies in his characters', Barish says, 'Jonson does away with pettiness; he achieves the "dignity of persons" he proposed to himself as one of the prime requisites of tragic art'.[6]

The creation of exemplary characters is entirely in keeping with the view of history implied in 'The mind of the Frontispiece to a Book'. But in the case of both *Sejanus* and *Catiline* the incidents outlined form only an epicycle in a larger historical pattern; in neither tragedy is order restored unequivocally. This is most obvious in *Sejanus*, where the figure of the successful tyrant Tiberius looms behind the rise and fall of his henchmen. In *Catiline,* not only are Cicero's methods of quelling the conspiracy tainted by compromise and the employment of the devious tactics of the conspirators themselves, but at the end of the play three figures remain as future rulers of Rome: Caligula, Nero and 'ambitious Caesar', as Jonson describes him in the poem to Thomas May. In each case an apparent political victory initiates a period of savage repression and systematic persecution. (The Elizabethans did not share our popular admiration of Julius Caesar, as H.M. Ayres pointed out in an article on Shakespeare's play.[7])

Clearly a different view of history from that presented in the poem on Raleigh's frontispiece is implied in Jonson's meditation on the problems of power in his tragedies. The principal source for *Catiline* was Sallust's account of the conspiracy, but Jonson seems to have taken over from Sallust not merely a documentary outline for the play, but an implicit philosophy of history. Certainly Bryant's account of Sallust's view of historical cycles makes it sound very Jonsonian: 'Unlike the Greek historian Polybius, from whom he probably derived his cyclic view of history, Sallust regarded the inevitability of decline in man's political structures as the consequence not of some natural order but of man's own wilful depravity and his inability to live by reason'.[8] One recalls Jonson's comment in *Discoveries*: 'I cannot think Nature is so spent and decayed, that she can bring forth nothing worth her former years . . . Men are decayed, and studies: She is not'.[9]

What is remarkable about Jonson's interpretation of history in his tragedies is the sense of the vulnerability and fragility of the moral order; but he focuses on 'the causes, and the men'[10] rather than on a single, suffering tragic hero. It has, in fact, become something of a truism to speak of Jonson's tragedies as 'tragedies of state' rather than of individuals. The focus of his two tragedies is not on a 'hero' (and this includes Cicero) but rather on the functioning of state

power. Raleigh's frontispiece notwithstanding, the exclusiveness of Jonson's emphasis in the tragedies on the mechanics of statecraft amounts to a virtual denial of a providential view of history. Neither Sejanus nor Catiline is overcome by forces remotely metaphysical: Sejanus is simply outwitted by a shrewder and crueller politician and not only is Cicero's preservation of the state tainted by moral compromise, he is also conceited and ambitious. This view of him is fully and convincingly argued by M.J. Warren who claims that 'the efficacy of his policies is constantly questioned by the events of the plot, and ... his final triumph is hollow and ironic'.[11] In both tragedies the state is left precariously exposed to ruthless manipulation by men who seek power for its own sake.

J.W. Lever's comment that 'no aura of divinity, no moral sanction pertained to the actuality of state, by implication subject to change',[12] is worth recalling here. To the Jacobean tragic dramatists 'the special shape in which evil revealed itself in their age was the phenomenon of state power and the debasement of human values'.[13] Lever's comments on *Sejanus* in this respect are particularly interesting:

> In appearance, Jonson's dramatic structure accords with medieval conceptions of tragedy as depicting the fall of the great at the turning of Fortune's wheel. But in essence it amounts to a denial of the moral principles underlying such concepts ... History is made by men; it is as ruthless and amoral as they; and for Jonson it offers no hope of amelioration.[14]

It may begin to appear that Jonson's concern with authenticity and his implicit sympathy with a Polybian cyclic view of history have led him to a wholly disillusioned pessimism which depicts men acting in a moral void. But this conclusion is so utterly out of keeping with everything we know about Jonson that it is necessary to account for the tragedies in terms which will not invalidate the foregoing interpretation of their import but rather align it with a reading of the rest of Jonson's work, specifically here, the masques. *Sejanus* itself provides a useful starting point. To the 'Argument' of the first Quarto edition of the play (published on 6 August 1605) Jonson added this astonishing paragraph:

> This do we advance as a mark of Terror to all Traitors, and Treasons; to show how just the Heavens are in pouring and thundering down a weighty vengeance on their unnatural intents, even to the worst of Princes: Much more to those, for guard of whose Piety and Virtue, the Angels are in continual watch, and God himself miraculously working.[15]

This must have been written just before the Gunpowder Plot of 5 November 1605 and may simply be a reassurance to the Privy

Council who had already summoned Jonson to appear before them on charges of treason after *Sejanus* had first appeared on the stage (1603). As an interpretation of the play the paragraph is blatantly irrelevant and may be discounted completely (Jonson in fact omitted it from the 1616 Folio *Works*). But the implied assumption about the extra-dramatic purpose of the work is revealing, and behind this assumption lies an important aesthetic debate about the very nature of poetry.

The classic English Renaissance statement on the nature of the poet's art, particularly in relation to the historian's, is Sidney's *Defence of Poetry*. Given that the end of all knowledge is to move men to virtuous action, Sidney considers the claims of moral philosophy, history and poetry in serving most effectively 'the end of well doing and not of well knowing only'.[16] It will be remembered that history is disqualified as it is tied to presenting all past deeds, regardless of their moral significance; whereas the precepts of philosophy are too abstract to promote virtuous action, the examples of the historian may be too ambiguous and arbitrary. The historian is 'captured to the truth of a foolish world' and is 'many times a terror from well doing, and an encouragement to unbridled wickedness'.[17] It is only 'the peerless poet' who 'coupleth the general notion with the particular example'.[18] Only the poet is able to abstract the perfect pattern from the formless flux of history and invest it, 'for your own use and learning',[19] with its full ethical significance. The emphasis in poetry is on the exemplary nature of the action, from which the audience may take its own moral bearings:

> If the Poet do his part aright, he will show you in Tantalus, Atreus, and such like, nothing that is not to be shunned, in Cyrus, Aeneas, Ulysses, each thing to be followed; where the Historian, bound to tell things as they were, cannot be liberal (without he will be poetical) of a perfect pattern, but, as in Alexander or Scipio himself, show doings, some to be liked, some to be misliked. And then how will you discern what to follow but by your own discretion, which you had without reading Quintus Curtius?[20]

Quite clearly, then, poetry 'leads to maximization of virtue in human life far beyond that possible with only the experience of history'.[21]

The paragraph Jonson appended to the Quarto of *Sejanus* was obviously designed to move men to virtuous action, but it was dispensable: other factors guaranteed the play's moral integrity. The very detailed annotation, for instance, that Jonson undertook for this edition suggests rather more confidence in historical authenticity as a motive force to moral action than Sidney was prepared to grant. But the tragedies conform in other ways to

Sidney's theory: in each instance Jonson has presented a 'perfect pattern' by excluding or adjusting historical material in order to present an 'ideal' action which, by exemplifying reprehensible behaviour with a minimum of ambiguity and contradiction, was intended to promote moral discrimination and, possibly even more important, ethical responsibility. Ultimately, Jonson's recourse to history is an affirmation of a moral order, not a perception of a moral void. Sidney may have derided the traditional claims of the historian, while Jonson more wholeheartedly endorsed them, but the point is that, in his tragedies, Jonson is functioning primarily as 'the peerless poet' and not as historian or moral philosopher. He insists that *Catiline* is 'a legitimate poem'[22] and justifies *Sejanus* in exclusively literary terms; his scholarly marginalia were merely intended 'to show my integrity in the story'.[23] Even Sidney had admitted that 'the best of the Historian is subject to the Poet':

> for whatsoever action, or faction, whatsoever counsel, policy, or war stratagem the Historian is bound to recite, that may the Poet (if he list) with his mutation make his own; beautifying it both for further teaching and more delighting, an it pleaseth him: having all, from Dante his heaven to his hell, under the authority of his pen.[24]

The emphasis is on the poet's independence, indeed his power, to create 'perfect patterns'; in each of the tragedies we witness a functioning model of the degenerate, or at least seriously compromised, body politic. But with the Horatian 'teaching' and 'delighting' in the above quotation one moves into another area of poetic endeavour; that of creating ideal models, not for repudiation, so to speak, but for imitiation. Jonson's most unambiguous creations of such commendable models are to be found in the genre to which he devoted a significant part of his working career, the court masque. In the tragedies, Jonson demonstrated that the pattern of history may not conform to the ethical assumptions underlying 'poetic justice', while the masques, through the revelation of moral truth and the manipulation of spectacular effects, 'were the vehicles of the most profound ethical statements, creating heroic roles for the leaders of society, and teaching virtue in the most direct way, by example'.[25] The masque is thus entirely beyond the vicissitudes of history and the inherent imperfections of man. But whatever their differences, the masques and the tragedies are the work of a man who believed that it is the poet, not the historian or political propagandist, who promotes virtue by means of ideal images of action.

A comment by Sidney on 'that first accursed fall of Adam' is particularly suggestive in this context:

> Neither let it be deemed too saucy a comparison to balance the highest point of man's wit with the efficacy of Nature: but rather give right honour to the heavenly Maker of that maker, who, having made men to his own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature, which in nothing he sheweth so much on as in Poetry, when with the force of a divine breath he bringeth forth things far surpassing her doings, with no small argument to the incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam: sith our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it.[26]

While this is too limited a definition of the poet's function[27] to account for Jonson's tragedies (which turn precisely 'our infected will' into poetry), the focus on 'our erected wit' is helpful in accounting for Jonson's tremendous emphasis on the primacy of the poet's invention in that collaborative enterprise, the court masque. The masque, more directly than any other genre, 'maketh us know what perfection is'. One reason for this is suggested by a comment in A.C. Hamilton's study of Sidney: 'Since the will is radically infected the reader must be ravished with delight'.[28] The transcendent vision expressed in the masques presupposes the prior existence of the degenerate condition expressed in the tragedies. Each form presents a possible manifestation of sovereign power: each, in a crucial sense, is a *poetic* definition of the Prince.

Jonson, it seems, was prepared to stake his career as chief writer of court masques on the issue of the poet's primacy in the act of creation. Jonson's point of departure in writing a masque and his conviction of the masque's significance are stated very clearly in his introduction to *Hymenaei* (1606), one of his first masques:

> It is a noble and just advantage, that the things subjected to understanding have of those which are objected to sense, that the one sort are but momentary, and merely taking; the other impressing and lasting. Else the glories of these solemnities had perished like a blaze and gone out, in the beholder's eyes. So short-lived are the bodies of all things, in comparison of the souls. And, though, bodies oft-times have the ill-luck to be sensually preferred, they find afterwards, the good fortune (when souls live) to be utterly forgotten. This it is hath made the most royal princes, the greatest persons (who are commonly the personators of these actions) not only studious of riches, and magnificence in the outward celebration, or show; (which rightly becomes them) but curious after the most high, and hearty inventions, to furnish the inward parts: (and those grounded upon antiquity and solid learnings) which, though their voice be taught to sound to present occasions, their sense, or doth, or should always lay hold on more removed mysteries.[29]

Jonson's scorn for what he understood to be Inigo Jones's exclusive concern with spectacle—'O Shows! Shows! Mighty Shows!'[30]—as opposed to 'soul' implies, not so much an emphasis on the verbal as opposed to the visual qualities of the masque, (most of the masque, after all, was not literary) but rather that 'primacy of invention' was the poet's and that it was the architect's task to give 'expression' to the poetic invention according to true order and decorum. In the most thorough exploration of this conflict between Jonson and Jones, D.J. Gordon points out that the philosophical basis of the masque for Jones—the mental act of 'invention' followed by appropriate poetic 'expression'—was primarily the same as Jonson's and that 'What Inigo is doing is, in fact, to assert that Architecture is a liberal and not a mechanical Art'.[31] Stephen Orgel sums up the issues as follows:

> Jonson's argument in this debate is essentially that of the emblem writer; not that the spectacle has no meaning, but that it is properly the *expression* of the meaning, the body of the work as the poetry is the soul. Jones, with a respectable array of philosophical and psychological opinion behind him, was maintaining in effect that it is visual experience that speaks most directly to the soul, that it is *images* that *mean,* and words that explain their meaning.[32]

But for Jonson the poet was peerless, the architect merely pretentious:

> O Show! Shows! Mighty Shows!
> The Eloquence of Masques! What need of prose
> Or Verse, or Sense t'express Immortal you?
> You are the Spectacles of State! Tis true
> Court Hieroglyphics! and all Arts afford
> In the mere perspective of an Inch Board!
> You ask no more than certain politic Eyes,
> Eyes that can pierce into the mysteries
> Of many Colours! read them! and reveal
> Mythology there painted on slit deal!
> Oh, to make Boards to speak! There is a task
> Painting and Carpentry are the Soul of Masque.
> Pack with your peddling Poetry to the stage,
> This is the money-get, Mechanic Age![33]

There is in Jonson's outburst at least an acknowledgement, however ironic (or is it pure sarcasm?), that Jones's conception of the purpose of the masque was ultimately the same as his: both poet and designer conceived of the masque as a Spectacle of State, and both felt that its primary significance, as Jonson implies in the introduction to *Hymenaei,* lay in the *performance* as an expression of the liberality and magnificence of princes.

Where the tragedies had been concerned with the degeneration of the body politic, the masques present the apotheosis of the ruler; the closer Britain moved towards civil war the more dominant in the Caroline masques became an implicit suggestion that the ideals presented in the masques were a remedy for a degenerate society. Jennifer Chibnall has pointed out that the seventeenth-century masque is both 'a scenic genre and ... a form representing the dominant ideology of the aristocracy, the problems of the latter determining the shape of the former'.[34] Certainly for Jonson the same kind of civic awareness that 'shaped' the tragedies was crucial to the production of masques, which were diplomatic occasions as much as moral fables and exhortative idealizations of the sovereign. He writes in *Love's Triumph* (1630), his second last masque, written for Charles I:

> ... all Representations, especially those of this nature in court, public spectacles, either have been, or ought to be the mirrors of man's life, whose ends, for the excellence of their exhibitors (as being the donatives, of great Princes, to their people) ought always to carry a mixture of profit with them no less than delight.[35]

In fact it is true to say that the point towards which the whole masque moves is the establishment of 'wonder' as the ideal expression of the ethical and aesthetic content of the masque. Sidney himself had said that 'moving is of a higher degree than teaching',[36] and that the poet is eminently suited to the performance of this task. Poetry, whether as masque or tragedy, was for Jonson emphatically a means of making a contribution through wonder to the health of the state. The masque *The Golden Age Restored* (1615) makes this quite clear. Once Pallas has banished Iron Age and his noisy, disruptive cronies, 'the evils', she summons The Golden Age and Astraea to earth to rule during the new Jacobean age. They want to know 'how without a train/Shall we our state sustain?' whereupon Pallas summons 'the poets':

> You far-famed spirits of this happy Isle,
> That for your sacred songs have gained the style
> Of Phoebus's sons: whose notes the air aspire
> Of th' old Egyptian, or the Thracian lyre,
> That Chaucer, Gower, Lydgate, Spenser hight,
> Put on your better flames, and larger light,
> To wait upon the age that shall your name new nourish,
> Since virtue pressed shall grow, and buried arts shall flourish.[37]

This strong sense of civil obligation aligns Jonson with a whole group of writers—self-proclaimed 'laureates'[38]—who professed poetry as an elected vocation, and whose vatic conception of the

poet set them above amateur poetasters who had debased the nature and function of poetry.

For Jonson there was no contradiction between laureate as tragic playwright and writer of court entertainments. The exposure of the wicked and the foolish in the tragedies and the celebration of heroes in the masques are both aspects of Jonson's traditional civic humanism: the relation between the tragedies and the masques is dialectic rather than mutually exclusive. Jonson sometimes annotated his masques (*Hymenaei, The Masque of Queens, Oberon, The Masque of Augurs*) because he wanted to give them the same kind of authenticity as the tragedies. He undertook to annotate *The Masque of Queens* because Prince Henry had asked him to do so and because 'The same zeal, that studied to make this Invention worthy of your Majesty's Name, hath since been careful to give it life and authority: that, what could then be objected to sight but of a few, might not be defrauded of the applause due to it from all'.[39] The modern reader may have to adjust his perspective to read this accurately as a tribute rather than a boast; the tribute is, moreover, entirely in keeping with this masque's (in a sense with all the masques') preoccupation with the classical problem of Fame.

One may infer an important distinction between the tragedies and the masques as stated in terms of the Fame of the aristocratic lady masquers in the final song of *The Masque of Queens* (1609):

> Who, Virtue, can thy power forget,
> That sees these live, and triumph yet?
> The Assyrian pomp, the Persian pride,
> Greeks' glory and the Romans' died:
> And who yet imitate
> Their noises, tarry the same fate.
> Force Greatness, all the glorious ways
> You can, it soon decays:
> But so good Fame shall, never:
> Her triumphs, as their causes are for ever.[40]

True fame (or what Jonson calls 'good fame' in 'The mind of the Frontispiece to a Book') is important not because it glorifies personality but because it is indissolubly linked to virtue and is beyond mutability. It is more 'real' than the unstable empires mentioned in this Song or described in *Sejanus* and *Catiline*: the tragedy of the latter two instances is precisely the loss of the truly civilized ideals celebrated in the masques. In the tragedies the phenomenon of state power exemplifies the debasement of human values; the masques are an assertion of state power as an instrument for order and harmony. In the tragedies 'no aura of divinity, no moral sanction pertained to the actuality of the state, by implication subject to change', or to the sovereign ruler; the masques are an

affirmation of the continuous redemptive power of sovereign authority.

The poet gives the most universal expression to the ideal, but it is the ruler who validates the poetry as Jonson's early 'comical satires' make clear. *Cynthia's Revels* (1600) appeared before Jonson had written any masques and thus reveals his preconception of the form. Crites, the ideal poet, is initially reluctant to write a masque for the absurd courtiers but is finally submissive to the will of Cynthia. Unlike the foolish courtiers who are frequenters of the Well of Self-Love, he is able to celebrate an ideal beauty beyond the self through the masque which then becomes the instrument of the courtiers' 'cure'. Only if the poet is subject to some higher authority will he avoid the vices of self-love and arrogance as well as personal and civic decadence. Even the supreme poet in *Poetaster* (1601), Virgil, makes this point unequivocally:

> It will be thought a thing ridiculous
> To present eyes, and to all future times
> A gross untruth, that any poet (void
> Of birth, or wealth, or temporal dignity)
> Should, with decorum, transcend Caesar's chair.[41]

Ultimately the functions of the poet and historian seem to merge into that of moral commemoration, or to make the point more accurately, the conception of history which Jonson the writer of tragic dramas espouses most sympathetically is the one that endows history with the same virtues as poetry, the 'soul' of the masque. Heroic Virtue points out in *The Masque of Queens* that the House of Fame, seat of the Queens being celebrated in the masque, was 'Built all of sounding brass, whose Columns be/Men-making Poets.'[42] The claim for the poet is a large and bold one, but it is, in essence, the same as that made in 'The mind of the Frontispiece to a Book' for the Mistress of Man's Life, History, who 'Raising the World to good or evil fame,/Doth vindicate it to eternity.'[43]

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NOTES

This article is a revised excerpt from a doctoral thesis presented to the University of South Africa in 1983.

1. All quotations from Jonson are taken from the collected works, *Ben Jonson*, ed. C.H. Herford and P. and E. Simpson, 11 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925–1952), hereafter cited as H & S, followed by volume and page numbers. Spelling has been modernised. This reference is to H & S, VIII, pp. 175–176. An illustration of the frontispiece may be found in the same volume, facing p. 177.
2. J.A. Bryant, 'The Significance of Ben Jonson's First Requirement for Tragedy,

"Truth of Argument",' *Studies in Philology*, 49 (1952), 197.
3. J. Barish, ed., *Ben Jonson: Sejanus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 4.
4. Barish, pp. 10–11.
5. H & S, IV, pp. 381–382 (*Sejanus,* II. 191, 211).
6. Barish, p. 9.
7. H.M. Ayres, 'Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* in the light of some other versions', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America,* n.s. 18 (1910), 184 and passim; see also J.A. Bryant, '*Catiline* and the Nature of Jonson's Tragic Fable', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America,* 69 (1954), 270.
8. Bryant, '*Catiline*', 267.
9. H & S, VIII, p. 567 (*Discoveries,* ll. 124–128).
10. H & S, VIII, p. 62 ('To Sir Henry Savile', ll. 31–36).
11. M.J. Warren, 'Ben Jonson's *Catiline:* The Problem of Cicero', *The Yearbook of English Studies,* 3 (1973), p. 65.
12. J.W. Lever, *The Tragedy of State* (London: Methuen, 1971), p. 6.
13. Lever, p. 18.
14. Lever, p. 68. See also R. Ornstein, *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy* (1960; rpt. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1975), pp. 95, 103.
15. H & S, IV, p. 353.
16. G. Gregory Smith, ed., *Elizabethan Critical Essays,* I (1904; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 161. Spelling modernised.
17. Smith, p. 170.
18. Smith, p. 164.
19. Smith, p. 168.
20. Smith, p. 168.
21. R.M. Strozier, 'Poetic conception in Sir Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry*', *The Yearbook of English Studies,* 2 (1972), p. 58.
22. H & S, V, p. 431 (*Catiline,* Dedication, l. 6).
23. H & S, IV, p. 350–351 (*Sejanus,* To the Readers).
24. Smith, p. 169.
25. S. Orgel 'The Poetics of Spectacle', *New Literary History,* 2 (1971), 367.
26. Smith, p. 157.
27. Sidney does qualify it, e.g. Smith, pp. 160, 166, 168, where the poet's task is seen as representing 'ideal' forms of vice as well.
28. A.C. Hamilton, *Sir Philip Sidney* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 117.
29. H & S, VII, p. 209, (*Hymenaei,* ll. 1–19).
30. H & S, VIII, p. 403 ('An Expostulation with Inigo Jones', l. 39).
31. D.J. Gordon, 'Poet and Architect: The Intellectual Setting of the Quarrel between Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes,* 12 (1949), 166.
32. S. Orgel, 'The Poetics of Spectacle', 372.
33. H & S, VIII, pp. 403–404 ('An Expostulation with Inigo Jones', ll. 39–52).
34. J. Chibnall, 'The Significance of the Caroline Court Masque in the History of the Court Revels', Diss. Girton College, Cambridge n.d., pp. 12–13.
35. H & S, VII, p. 735 (*Love's Triumph through Callipolis,* To Make the Spectators Understanders, ll. 1–7).
36. Smith, p. 171.
37. H & S, VII, p. 425 (*The Golden Age Restored,* ll. 113–120).
38. R. Helgerson, 'The Elizabethan Laureate: Self-Presentation and the Literary System', *English Literary History,* 46 (1979), 193–220.
39. H & S, VII, p. 279 (*The Masque of Queens,* Dedication, ll. 1–5).
40. H & S, VII, p. 316 (*The Masque of Queens,* ll. 764—773).
41. H & S, IV, p. 295 (*Poetaster,* V. ii. 28–32).
42. H & S, VII, p. 302 (*The Masque of Queens,* ll. 385–386).
43. H & S, VIII, p. 175 ('The mind of the Frontispiece to a Book', ll. 3–4).

COMIC LESSONS

by RODNEY EDGECOMBE

Much comic plotting turns on misapprehension, on the failure of an intrigue or the skewing of some elaborate action owing to an agent's misconstruction of his task or his discharge of that task in the wrong situation. Examples of this are legion, whether we consider Puck's innocent mistaking of the 'Athenian lady ... in love/With a disdainful youth'[1] or Ruth's apprenticing Frederick to a pirate instead of to a pilot in *The Pirates of Penzance*. Something of the same disconnection of action from design can be detected in comic dialogue, where we encounter *non sequiturs* of thought rather than action. Such dislocation is often triggered by the deafness or the self-enclosed oblivion of the one participant, whose responses seldom match his feeder lines. Again many instances of this source of comedy could be adduced—Franz's misunderstanding of Crespel in the Offenbach/Barbier/Carré *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, or Peg Sliderskew's impenetrability in *Nicholas Nickleby*:

> 'They an't becoming enough, Peg,' returned her master.
> 'Not what, enough?' said Peg.
> 'Becoming.'
> 'Becoming what?' said Peg sharply. 'Not becoming too old to wear?'
> Arthur Gride muttered an imprecation on his housekeeper's deafness, as he roared in her ear:
> 'Not smart enough! I want to look as well as I can.'[2]

This passage provides a convenient point of transition into the topic I wish to examine here, for whereas the comic disjunction of the dialogue is largely due to Peg's deafness, part of its amusement also centres on her perception of the word 'becoming', since she drains off its secondary adjectival meaning and absorbs it into a present continuous verb. Flexible idiom thus founders on prosaic literality.

Such oscillations between academic convention and reductive common sense occur in many of the comic lessons scattered throughout literature, at some of which I now want to glance. Nowhere is this oscillation more obviously the matrix of the humour than in Master Page's lesson scene from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. M.L. Radoff has pointed out the precedent for this episode in Huon le Roi's *Li Abecés par Ekivoche*,[3] but its comic energy remains peculiarly Shakespearian, drawing strength as it does from the bawdy misapprehensions of Mistress Quickly, the blank rote-learning of the child and the dubious authority of the schoolmaster, a mix that testifies to the anarchic impulse behind so much parodied instruction, that subversion of dignity and high

seriousness that threatens all inflated balloons with deflationary pins. The lesson itself is rendered comic by its lack of structure when it shoots off *in medias res* with bits and pieces of Lilly's and Colet's *A Short Introduction of Grammar*. This gives it the sheerness and suddenness of a joke's climax after the short maternal coaxing of Mistress Page:

> *Mrs Page.* Come on, sirrah, hold up your head. Answer your master, be not afraid.
> *Evans.* William, how many numbers is in nouns?[4]

But the point is not developed, and with the fluent inconsequentiality which characterises the comic narratives of Miss Bates and Mrs Nickleby, Evans proceeds to ask his pupil the Latin for 'fair' and the English for 'lapis'. The unintelligent inflexibility of the schoolmaster betrays itself in the ambiguous question 'And what is "a stone", William?', and his berating the child for his justifiable answer (an English synonym) instead of supplying the expected reconversion into Latin. This in itself tends to generate comedy, for it mechanises the schoolmaster's mentality, and, by presenting him as a pedantic automaton, realises the Bergsonian notion that 'attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body [and, by implication, mind] reminds us of a mere machine'.[5] The pedant's unworthiness of the office he so pompously assumes is thus made clear, and proves as ripe for satiric undercutting as Malvolio's reverie beside the box hedge. Here, however, it is not Sir Toby and his henchmen who administer the deflationary asides, but Mistress Quickly. Her interjections have a broad farcicality in their own right, a farcicality which turns on the misapprehensions we have already isolated as a feature of comic dialogue. One of these mistakes derives from a swivelling ambiguity *within* the language, so that the homophonic 'nouns' (grammatical) and 'nouns' (= 'wounds') issue in the delicious deflection of the lesson from syntax to expletives; the other even more uproariously from translingual misunderstandings, most of which have a vivid sexual import. So the innocence of childhood and its virginal Latin receive a roystering obbligato of irrelevant adult experience, a contrast always conducive to comedy.

When linguistic barriers are vaulted in this way, we enjoy the superadded funniness of the speaker's misplaced (and xenophobic) confidence that his language is a *lingua franca* and the only possible vector of meaning. In *Henry V*, for example, Pistol blasphemously converts 'Seigneur Dieu' to 'Signieur Dew',[6] displacing an image of enduring Godhead with a proverbial one of transience, and, in an even more amusing interchange, construes the Frenchman's

rhetorically anguished question 'Est-il impossible d'échapper le force de ton bras?' as an inappropriately paltry bribe — 'Brass, cur!/Thou damned and luxurious mountain goat,/Offer'st me brass?'[7] This actually sets a true value on his imperfect courage and brazen self-assurance, causing the error comically to double back upon the original French line. The inescapability of Pistol's 'brass' therefore becomes the issue, not the overrated strength of his arm. This is a comic strategy identical to that by which Mistress Quickly construes 'caret' as 'carrot', introducing a whiff of the vegetable garden or kitchen into the aridity of the classroom (her associations have only slightly less justification and relevance as a train of developed thought than the zigzag progress of Evans's own lesson), her reckless conversion of 'horum' to 'whores', of syntactic case to genital, and 'hic' and 'hac' to wild oaten activities.[8] An especially engaging feature of this scene is her irrepressibility, the relentless way in which she bounces back at the pedant (her elasticity is the quintessence of the comic spirit) and earns his unidiomatic and self-indicting rebuke — ' 'Oman, art thou lunatics?' — suggesting a very faulty command of the nominal 'numbers' with which his lesson began.

Although Mistress Quickly's remarks are prompted by phonetic logic, their resounding irrelevance to, and disconnection from, the issue at hand dimly anticipates a feature of Absurd Comedy. In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, for instance, the dialogue often approximates a rapid stichomythia, implying intimate collaboration in the creation of meaning, whereas in fact, since each character is simply pursuing his own dissociated line of thought, any sense of integration must be illusory:

Ros: I want to go home.
Guil: Don't let them confuse you.
Ros: I'm out of my step here —
Guil: We'll soon be home and high — dry and home — I'll —
Ros: It's all over my *depth* —[9]

The same comic surprise, occasioned by parallel grooving of independent sequences of logic, is of course a central feature of the lesson scene in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and the contingent points of phonetic contact between these sequences become all the more laughable for the very tenuousness of that contingency. And of course the unconscious containment of secondary (and bawdy) meanings in lines uttered by 'innocents' like Malvolio ('her very C's, her U's and her T's, and thus makes she her great P's'),[10] and Katherine in *Henry V* is the very stuff of comedy, anarchically derailing convention, playing delightedly with the subversive slipperiness of language, assailing stiff decorum with a more

flexible, improvisatory spirit. In the French lesson from *Henry V*, Shakespeare plays on the absurdity of Katherine's unconscious malapropism, the comedy intensified by the dignity that unconsciousness ensures. Her rendering of elbow into sword trips off the Latin signification of 'arms' contained by her stab at the English word for the limb in question — 'd'arma, de bilbow' — [11] and language also veers unpredictably to make the neck a mnemonic numbering device ('de nick') and the chin an offence against God ('sin'). This comic flow is reversed in her consciousness of French phonetic bawdry — equally absurd — in otherwise innocent English words, one mispronounced and misapplied by her instructress, Alice:

> *Kath.* Ainsi dis-je; d'elbow, de nick, et de sin. Comment appellez-vous le pied et la robe?
> *Alice.* Le foot, madame; et le count.
> *Kath.* Le foot, et le count? O Seigneur Dieu! ils sont les mots de son mauvais, corruptible, gros, et impudique, et non pour les dames d'honneur d'user.[12]

Another form of comically parallel disjunction can be detected in the frequent inappropriateness of these lessons to their situation in the narrative or the play. In Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, for instance, Troilus, prostrated by his grief, endures an elaborate lecture by Pandarus on the conduct of love, with the result that the inarticulate immobility of the victim and the bustling garrulity of the pedant engender a comedy of contrast — 'Yet Troilus for al this no word seyde,/But longe he laye as stille as he ded were'.[13] As C.S. Lewis observes, 'Complacent instruction, when the instructor is willing and the pupil is not, is always funny'.[14] One might cross-refer *Henry V* here, where Fluellen's stickling attentiveness to classical precedent in warfare is met by the surly dismissiveness of the Irishman:

> *Flu.* Captain Macmorris, I beseech you now, will you voutsafe me, look you, a few disputations with you as partly touching or concerning the disciplines of the war, the Roman wars, in the way of argument, look you, and friendly communication . . .
> . . . . . .
> *Mac.* It is no time to discourse, so Chrish save me: the day is hot, and the weather, and the wars, and the king, and the dukes: . . .[15]

The lawyer in *Die Fledermaus* (Strauss/Haffner/Genée) similarly reels off a spool of legal jargon (which one might regard as a

telescopic law lecture) in self-justification after his client has been arrested, and the discontinuity between his self-important inventory and the distraught condition of Eisenstein and Rosalinde vaguely recalls the situation of Troilus and Pandarus. The off-staged music lesson in *The Taming of the Shrew* also springs to mind:

> *Bap.* Why then, thou canst not break her to the lute?
> *Hor.* Why no, for she hath broke the lute to me.
> I did but tell her she mistook her frets,
> And bow'd her hand to teach her fingering,
> When, with a most impatient devilish spirit,
> 'Frets, call you these?' quoth she, 'I'll fume with thee.'[16]

The reluctance of Kate to receive her instruction is compounded here by the choleric disharmony of her temperament (which resonates ironically with the subject matter of her lesson), and she makes her reluctance clear with the skidding, anarchical kind of puns we have seen at its destructive work in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Henry V*.

The converse of these lessons forced upon an uncollaborative listener are those which turn on a spirited intrigue between the parties, where the instruction becomes a formal, empty husk for the kernel of lovers' intimacies, a drop scene for public display before a private action. *The Taming of the Shrew* again provides an example. Here Lucentio woos Bianca by enunciating lines from Ovid segment by segment, and 'construing' them by introducing himself and his suit to her. The comic impulse is twofold, inhering in the disconnection of meaning from the parts of the quotation, and the subversion of a stiff, academic procedure by the resourceful, improvisatory lover. The urgent modernity of his protestation clashes as funnily with the antiquity of the myth the lines actually describe as the latter-day Pisa when it counterpoints a hoary '*Sigeia tellus*'. The formula is repeated in Bianca's repetition of the lines, and then again in Hortensio's 'Illustration' of the gamut in the music lesson which follows hard on the heels of the Latin one, where the rehearsal of the G reduces the components to mere lyric expletives in a plea for love. The music lesson in Beaumarchais's *The Barber of Seville* does not reveal quite so systematic a displacement of public statement by private innuendo as that in *The Taming of the Shrew*, but it turns none the less on a similar irony of situation. Rosine's choice of an aria from *The Futile Precaution* has significance for herself and Almaviva (posing as her music master), a significance only murkily apprehended by Dr Bartholo, and the heroine's commentary on its stock pastoral content has obvious pertinence to her own situation:

> It seems as if with the passing of winter the heart acquires a greater sensibility — as a captive long imprisoned and given the offer of freedom savours to the full the joys of liberation.[17]

While Almaviva is canalising the content of the lesson towards his and Rosine's situation, Bartholo also makes grotesque efforts to master the strategy in the same scene, when he lumberingly alters the name in a song in order to pay court to Rosine:

> Wilt thou have me
> Rosinette?
> A prince of husbands
> You would get . . .
> [*Laughingly to the Count*] It's Fanchonette in the song, but I sing Rosinette for fun and to make it fit in with us. Ha, ha! Good, eh![18]

Bartholo's blatant effort serves by contrast to point the dexterity and obliquity of the lover's comparable device.

In some respects the music lesson in the Donizetti/de Saint George/Bayard *La Fille du Regiment* differs from that in the Beaumarchais play, for here Marie is expected to master a frigid and studied aria by one Fettuggini, but, egged on by her old friend, keeps lapsing into the demotic melodies of her former life as vivandiere. This puncturing of arid formality by racy melodic asides bears some resemblance to the rhythm of the Latin lesson in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

Another variant on the comedy of parodic instruction centres less on the reluctance of the pupil than on the unlikeliness of the teacher. There is something especially anarchic about the way in which Moth, so diminutive and spry, tutors the fatuous Armado in *Love's Labour's Lost*. It is the reversal of roles that generates the humour here, as for example in:

> *Moth.* . . . But have you forgot your love?
> *Arm.* Almost I had.
> *Moth.* Negligent student! learn her by heart.
> *Arm.* By heart, and in heart, boy.
> *Moth.* And out of heart, master: all three will I prove.
> *Arm.* What wilt thou prove?[19]

The same pert, subversive precocity figures in Rosalind's lessons in love to Orlando in *As You Like It*, though of course the precocity is only semblant, and the astute, manipulative presence of the heroine gives the scene a larger comic purpose that, as in *The Barber of Seville*, lurks behind apparently innocent instruction.

In Crabbe's 'The Preceptor Husband' (Book IX of *Tales of the Hall*) the comic lesson takes yet another form, where the teacher

(himself rather silly) has his eagerness countervailed not so much by the reluctance as the stupidity of the student. This formula has a precedent in John Redford's *The Play of Wyt and Science*, for, as Émile Legouis has pointed out, the 'comic element [there] is supplied by an episode in which Ignorance is heard blundering through a lesson in the alphabet given him by his mother, Idleness. The mistress, who represents the old somnolent methods of teaching is no less ridiculous than her idiot pupil'.[20] And Finch, the preceptor husband, is no less absurd in his solemn, over-insistent pedantry ('The boys contemn'd and hated him as vain,/'Stiff and pedantic ... '),[21] and his wife no less wilful than Ignorance. Furthermore, her irrepressible talkativeness and frequent deflections of attention also share something of the energy and zany irrelevance of Mistress Quickly's interjections:

> ' "Augusta, love," said Finch, "while you engage
> 'In that embroidery, let me read a page;
> 'Suppose it Hume's; indeed he takes a side,
> 'But still an author need not be our guide;
> 'And as he writes with elegance and ease,
> 'Do now attend — he will be sure to please.
> 'Here at the Revolution we commence, —
> 'We date, you know, our liberties from thence." '[22]

Crabbe here shows the instructor guilty of aestheticism, a condonation of the acknowledged bias of Hume's content for considerations of form, and a reduction of the informativeness of history to pleasure in style alone, against which implicit credo *The Village* and other works by Crabbe stand in sturdy refutation. Augusta's chattery response to this helps deflate her husband's lofty patronage; and she misconstrues the subject matter of the lesson (nemesis for his preoccupation with style) with a vigour as spirited as Mistress Quickly's in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*:

> ' "Yes, sure," Augusta answer'd with a smile,
> ' "Our teacher always talk'd about his style;
> 'When we about the Revolution read,
> 'And how the Martyrs to the flames were led;
> .....
>
> 'There were five Bishops taken from the stall,
> 'And twenty widows, I remember all;
> 'And by this token, that our teacher tried
> 'To cry for pity, till she howl'd and cried." '[23]

The joke naturally lies in the way history has been converted into material for a novel of sensibility as lachrymose as anything by Henry Mackenzie — or so the exaggerated intensity of 'howl'd and

cried' would seem to imply. Later on she excitedly relates the affair of Essex and Elizabeth in tones which recall the sentimental novels of Charlotte Smith, short-circuiting once again the abstractions of constitutional history with gossipy concerns. Further salt in Finch's wounded vanity is to be found in her vague conception that 'Revolutions' is the final book of the Bible (the erroneous vulgar form 'Revelations' is often encountered):

> 'But the queen shook her in her dying bed,
> 'And 'God forgive you!' was the word she said;
> 'Not I for certain:'—Come, I will attend,
> 'So read the Revolutions to an end." '[24]

An aphorism of Pascal has some relevance to 'The Preceptor Husband': 'Two faces are alike, neither is funny by itself, but side by side their likeness makes us laugh.[25] Augusta's confused responses alert us to the equally confused instruction in a subsequent botany lesson, where the continuity between fatuous master and fatuous pupil redoubles the comic charge of the scene. Finch sees flowers either as the arbitrary sum of structural parts—'He show'd the flowers, the stamina, the style,/Calix and corol, pericarp and fruit'[26]—on which account his focus proves too narrow for the apprehension of their beauty; or in generic terms as all-encompassing as they are unintelligible. Here Crabbe laughingly discharges term after term in deadpan conformity to the metre:—'Lunate and lyrate, runcinate, retuse'.[27] The science of these categories becomes so constrictive that Augusta pants to escape—paradoxically, for the scene is set out of doors. Crabbe manages to register the rhythm of her frustration by seeming to offer relief, and stemming the rush of jargon to comment on Charles's manner. But the respite of authorial intrusion, during which the instructor's emphatic delivery is recorded, serves only by way of illusory pause before another onsurge of thunderous polysyllables:

> 'Lunate and lyrate, runcinate, retuse;
> 'Long were the learned words, and urged with force,
> 'Panduriform, pinatifid, premorse,
> 'Latent and patent, papulous, and plane,—[28]

In an effort to drive home his instruction, Finch asks Augusta to point out a stigma to him. This she confuses with a stamen in a scatty retort parodying the random and undirected lesson she has just received:

> ' "Stigma!" I know, the things with yellow heads,
> 'That shed the dust, that grow upon the threads;
> 'You call them wives and husbands, but you know

> 'That is a joke — here, look, and I will show
> 'All I remember." — Doleful was the look
> Of the preceptor, when he shut his book, . . . '[29]

Yet Augusta does not entirely damn herself when she trivialises her husband's sexual metaphors, for, as Robert Chamberlain observes, Crabbe had misgivings about the 'coyness with which Erasmus Darwin handles the sexual system',[30] as well as the 'sentimentality upon which the success of the neo-Ovidian *Loves of the Plants* must depend'[30] — and this despite his having anticipated Darwin in a section of *The Library* (1781 text).[31]

The comic lessons in *Nicholas Nickleby* have a sinister undertow of violence, anticipating the characteristically black humour of Absurdist theatre. The disqualification of the teacher for his task is the most obvious comic generator here:

> 'This is the first class in English spelling and philosphy, Nickleby,' said Squeers, beckoning Nicholas to stand beside him. 'We'll get up a Latin one, and hand that over to you. Now, then, where's the first boy?'
>
> 'Please, sir, he's cleaning the back parlour window,' said the temporary head of the philosophical class.
>
> 'So he is, to be sure,' rejoined Squeers. 'We go upon the practical mode of teaching, Nickleby; the regular education system. C-l-e-a-n, clean, verb active, to make bright, to scour. W-i-n, win, d-e-r, winder, a casement. When the boy knows this out of the book, he goes and does it. It's just the same principle as the use of the globes. Where's the second boy?'
>
> 'Please, sir, he's weeding the garden,' replied a small voice.
>
> 'To be sure,' said Squeers, by no means disconcerted. 'So he is. B-o-t, bot, t-i-n, tin, bottin, n-e-y, bottinney, noun substantive, a knowledge of plants. When he has learned that bottinney means a knowledge of plants, he goes and knows 'em. That's our system, Nickleby; what do you think of it?[32]

The broad irony of this passage turns upon Squeers's illiteracy, which, given his phonetic spellings and ludicrously tendentious glosses, makes mockery of one supposed purpose of the lesson (instruction in spelling), just as the assignment of boys to menial tasks about the school travesties the disinterested, contemplative abstractions of the philosophy Squeers professes to be teaching here. (It is possible indeed that Dickens is making a sly dig at the traditionally empirical cast of British philosophy.) Be that as it may, Squeers's definition of various words is absurdly slanted by the task at hand, as in the 'localised' explanation of 'clean', with the very vitreous ring it has in 'make bright' — and in any case, 'clean' requires no definition at this level of instruction; it is merely inserted as a task-master's injunction. The nightmarish illogicality

with which 'horse' and 'beast' are later rammed into equation with 'quadruped' in this scene no doubt lingered in the back of Dickens's mind when he came to draft the lesson in *Hard Times*, where a brisk *logicality* deployed on the subject is seen to maim the imaginative response quite as brutally as Squeers's grotesque misinformation and faulty procedures of reasoning.

In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Muriel Spark presents us with a school teacher who, if not misinformed, presents her pupils with a quirkishly individual world view instead of the prescribed syllabus, and one comic lesson in the novel resembles that in *The Barber of Seville* in the way it conspiratorially diverges from its 'public' function:

> 'Hold up your books,' said Miss Brodie quite often that autumn, 'prop them up in your hands, in case of intruders. If there are any intruders, we are doing our history lesson . . . our poetry . . . English grammar.
>
> The small girls held up their books with their eyes not on them, but on Miss Brodie.
>
> 'Meantime I will tell you about my last summer holiday in Egypt . . . I will tell you about the care of the skin and of the hands . . . about the Frenchman I met in the train to Biarritz . . . and I must tell you about the Italian paintings I saw. Who is the greatest Italian painter?'
>
> 'Leonardo da Vinci, Miss Brodie.'
>
> 'That is incorrect. The answer is Giotto, he is my favourite.'[33]

The flexibility and colourfulness of the teaching here, with its dreamy ellipses, its entertaining miscellaneousness, its sheer novelettish indulgence (shades of Augusta's Elizabethan history) place it at the furthest possible remove from the malformative grind of utilitarian or simply ignorant instruction in the Dickens novels. But qualifying this freedom is a dangerous opinionatedness which, while it has the comedy of displaced expectation, also points to the pernicious subjectivity — Muriel Spark stresses the smallness of the pupils in her description — which will finally render her influence unhealthy. Assessing greatness of painters by taste alone has some similarity to defining 'clean' by reference to tasks about Dotheboys Hall — both set the disinterestedness of knowledge at nought.

And it is this arbitrariness, evident both in the unpredictability of pupil and master, that characterises the zany course of Ionesco's *The Lesson*. Termed by the author 'A Comic Drama', it embodies most of the features we have seen recurring in other comic lessons, and yet its comedy is pervaded by an unease and futility that blacken it, and also take to their logical conclusion the proto-Absurdist elements in the Dickensian episodes glanced at above. Our misgivings, Angst and reluctant laughter as we watch the piece, stem very largely from the way in which the authority of the teacher (like Squeers's), though totally unfounded in ability or expertise,

yet confers on him a power that extends even over the life of his student. The mild disqualification of Evans and Finch for their tasks has now become comically and yet frighteningly blatant:

Professor: Like . . . er . . . Bordeaux, you know, not exactly. But if you will allow me, could you perhaps tell me . . . Paris, now, is the chief town of . . . er . . . ?

The Pupil *searches for a moment, then, pleased to know the answer*

Pupil: Paris is the chief town of . . . France?

Professor: But yes, of course, yes! Bravo! That's fine! That's excellent! I congratulate you. You have the geography of your country at your finger-tips. Your chief towns.[34]

The grotesque rudimentariness of the geography lesson (not unlike Master Page's interrogation about plurality), with its absurd acclamations and hesitant advancement of the obvious, soon gives way to yet more surrealistic instruction in arithmetic. Here the pupil, having shown her ability to add, appears congenitally unable to subtract, and the comedy, like that in 'The Preceptor Husband', derives its vigour from the unweddable divergence of master and student. Rather different is the comic formula of the ensuing language lesson — maniacal nonsense about Neo-Spanish and the synonymity of all languages, against which we hear the plaintive continuo of the student's obsession with her toothache. Her disengagement from the task in hand is responsible for our amusement (as in the Crabbe tale), but the comic texture is thickened by Ionesco's mechanisation of the dialogue, and its entrapment in the disparate but parallel grooves typical of much Absurdist theatre:

Pupil: Are the roots of all words square roots?

Professor: Square or cubic. It depends.

Pupil: I've got toothache.

Professor: To continue. And so, to give you an example, which is barely more than an illustration, take the word 'front'.

Pupil: How am I to take it?

Professor: How you like, so long as you take it, but whatever you do don't interrupt.

Pupil: I've got toothache.[35]

These then are some of the ways in which high comedy has been pressed from situations which are ripe for exploitation — authoritatively pompous pedants; reluctant, constrained pupils; and (occasionally) pert commentators to point the disconnections on which so much of this humour depends.

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34. Eugène Ionesco, *Rhinoceros*, tr. Derek Prowse, *The Chairs, The Lesson* tr. Donald Watson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p. 184.
35. *The Lesson*, p. 203.

THE CONSERVATION OF SOUTH AFRICA'S BUILT HERITAGE: A MULTI-ETHNIC CHALLENGE

by ROBERT F. HASWELL

'I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed; I want the cultures of all the lands to blow about my house as freely as possible; but I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.' *Mahatma Gandhi*

The conservation of South Africa's built heritage has been largely an Afrikaner-dominated activity. No doubt this is partly a reflection of the fact that the Afrikaner is a product of Africa, and has shown a greater concern for the material evidence of his presence in South Africa than his English-speaking counterparts. The latter, generally speaking, have been inclined to regard their heritage as residing elsewhere. An effective concern with conservation must also be related to political access. The country's other ethnic groups have simply been excluded from official conservation activities.

Notwithstanding a recent general upsurge in the proclamation of buildings as national monuments, a bias is still readily apparent favouring the Cape Province, and Afrikaners. But if the National Monuments Council (N.M.C.) can move from an ethnocentric to a multi-ethnic view of our built environment, the conservation movement could yet play a significant part in meeting one of the main challenges facing South Africa: the fostering of mutual respect for the historic contributions of each of our country's many ethnic groups.

Despite the conservation-minded activities and good intentions of individual property owners, companies, and local authorities, the official proclamation of buildings, sites and objects as national monuments remains the only effective way of ensuring that historic structures and features are protected. It is therefore instructive to review the activities of the N.M.C., and its predecessor, the Historical Monuments Commission, in terms of the number of proclamations, the location of those proclamations, and the types of buildings proclaimed as national monuments.[1]

There has been a marked increase in the number of proclamations by the N.M.C. since 1969, as is indicated graphically in Figure 1. In fact of the 1 299 proclamations since this practice commenced in 1936, 1 019 have been gazetted since 1969. Prior to 1970 the number of proclamations per annum averaged ten; in the decade 1970–80 fifty; while in the eighties the average has risen to eighty-six. Bearing in mind that a single proclamation can encompass more than a single building, and that the proclamation of groups of buildings commenced in 1973, one could infer that a

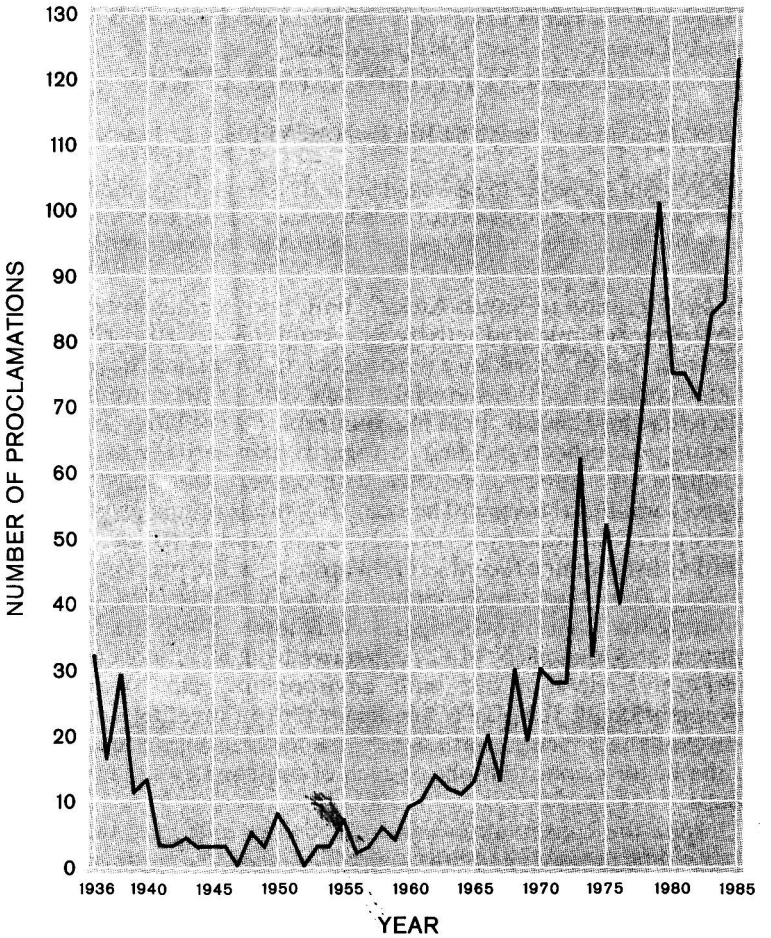

Fig. 1 The proclamation of National Monuments, 1936–1985

tide of conservation is sweeping across the country.

However, Figure 2 reveals that the distribution of 'national' monuments has a decidedly provincial pattern, with the Cape Province bias most evident. The Cape Province has consistently contained more than half of the country's 'national' monuments: 52 % in 1936; 53 % in 1950; 65 % in 1970; 71 % in 1980; and 70 % in 1985.

In view of the white settlement history of the country it is perhaps not surprising that there have been more proclamations in the Cape Province — the first area to be settled by whites — than in the more recently white settled areas of the country. But the degree and

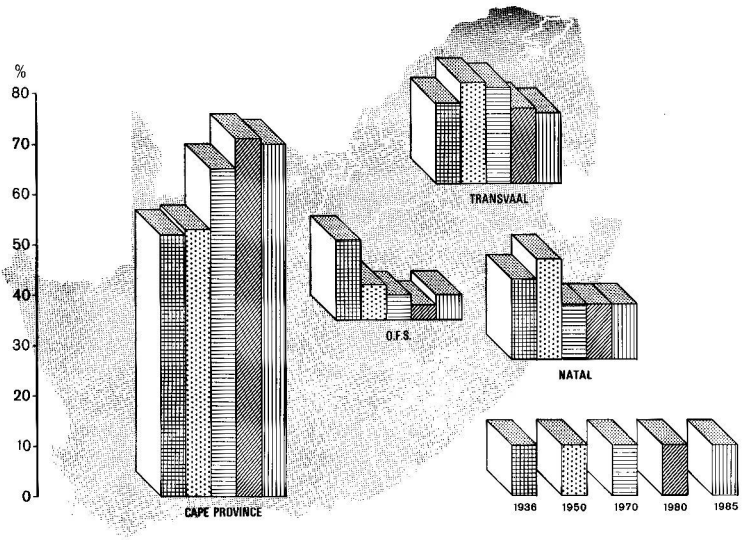

Fig. 2 Percentage National Monuments by province, 1936 – 1985

persistence of Cape dominance is revealing. One could have expected that, once most of the Cape Province's historic buildings had been protected by proclamation, attention would then have shifted to the other provinces, and therefore that the Cape Province's predominance would have begun to decline significantly in recent years. But the gap between the Cape and the 'Cape-Nots' has not closed but increased.

It is instructive to note that Montagu, Cape Province, has twenty-three proclaimed buildings, whereas Pietermaritzburg, Natal, which is just as old and has served as a Voortrekker, Colonial and Provincial capital has only eighteen. Furthermore, the proclamation of groups of buildings has been confined to the Cape Province. The country's Cape-Dutch heritage, in the form of rows of houses, trees and water furrows, invariably focusing on a church, has been well conserved in the Cape towns of Tulbagh, Swellendam, Paarl and Stellenbosch. In 1981–82, ninety-seven properties in the largely Cape Victorian village of Wynberg were proclaimed, and in 1984, the façades of some 170 buildings were proclaimed in the Cape town of Graaff-Reinet.

Therefore whether our concern is with individual buildings, or groups of buildings which collectively define much of the character of a street, or even a town, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that provinces other than the Cape have been largely and consistently overlooked. This is not to deny that Cape-Dutch, Cape Regency

and Cape Victorian buildings and streetscapes are eminently worthy of conservation, but rather to point out that 'things Cape' have been judged as being of national import at the expense of buildings and streets elsewhere, which are perhaps just as important from a truly national, as distinct from a provincial and parochial, point of view.[2]

Richmond, Natal, is a case in point. Established in 1850, it is a British settler town par excellence. Its streets, named after royalty and colonial officials, are adorned by a fine array of historic buildings and sites: three nineteenth century church and adjacent churchyard complexes, including St. Mary's (1853) which was the first consecrated Anglican church in Natal and also features as a later addition a tower designed by Sir Herbert Baker; a double storey corner store (1863); a hardware store once patronised by Herb and Cecil Rhodes; a courthouse complex featuring a variety of materials and styles; an array of cottages and houses ranging from humble shale-walled cottages of the 1850s to red brick Victorian Gothic and Natal veranda-style houses; a freemason's lodge (1884); the village library (ca. 1864); the site of the original court of the country's oldest tennis club; and a row of gabled Indian stores. Yet only the freemason's lodge is a national monument, and that was only proclaimed in 1983.

It could be argued that the distribution of national monuments reflects not so much a Cape Province bias, as a lack of concern for, if not resistance to, conservation in the other provinces.[3] However, if one reviews the order in which buildings are proclaimed, and the types of buildings, sites and symbols proclaimed, then it is clear that the Cape Province bias is fundamentally a reflection of a cultural bias.

Table 1 lists the order of proclamations in Pietermaritzburg, Natal, from 1936 to 1972.

TABLE 1: NATIONAL MONUMENTS IN PIETERMARITZBURG, 1936–72

1. Acacia Tree	1936
2. Voortrekker Museum	1937
3. Old Pulpit, Voortrekker Church	1940
4. Government House	1950
5. Legislative Assembly and Council Buildings	1968
6. Voortrekker Road	1968
7. City Hall	1969
8. St. Mary's Anglican Church	1970
9. Andries Pretorius House	1972

Prior to 1969 Pietermaritzburg appears to have been regarded as little more than a repository of Voortrekker relics, and the questionable authenticity, as well as the manufactured Cape-Dutch

look, of some of these 'relics' reinforces the suspicion that the only items considered worthy of conservation are 'things Cape'.

The first item to be proclaimed in Pietermaritzburg was a tree, in the shade of which the Natalia Volksraad, according to one source, decided to surrender to the British Commissoner in 1842. Even an N.M.C. publication admits that 'there is no documentary proof of this statement and every reason to doubt it' but adds 'notwithstanding these doubts, the tree is of considerable interest'.[4] The tree has subsequently been deproclaimed. There is also considerable archival and artistic evidence to question the claim that the Voortrekker Museum, Pietermaritzburg's second proclaimed monument, is housed in the Church of the Vow.[5] It is admitted that the building in question has a fabricated Cape-Dutch appearance: 'graceful Cape-Dutch gables replaced the original simple ones and eventually a front porch was added'.[6] One suspects that similar architectural licence was involved in the building of a 'replica' of the Andries Pretorius House alongside 'The Church of the Vow'.[7]

In addition to the proclamation of extant and rebuilt Voortrekker relics, plaque site-markers recalling Voortrekker buildings no longer standing were put up in Pietermaritzburg. In 1947, for instance, two plaques were affixed to the entrance walls of the City Hall, recalling that this was the site of the Voortrekker Raadsaal. It was not until 1969, however, that the City Hall itself, which with its forty-seven metre clock tower is undoubtedly the city's main landmark, was belatedly proclaimed a national monument. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the city's most prominent building was well-nigh invisible, for twenty-two years, to those who viewed South African history from a Cape-Dutch perspective.

If further evidence of ethnocentrism is needed, it can be pointed out that fourteen Dutch Reformed Churches in the Orange Free State alone have been proclaimed recently. By contrast only four Hindu temples and one Moslem mosque in Natal have been proclaimed. In the case of the temples this is a particularly unfortunate oversight, as they are not merely of historic interest as such, but are also vivid blends of architecture and sculpture—outstanding works of folk, as distinct from high style, architecture.[8] They 'may well be considered as traditional of Natal as Cape-Dutch architecture is to the Cape'.[9] Indians were not allowed to settle in the Orange Free State. Natal therefore has an added responsibility to conserve its Indian built heritage.[10]

The ethnocentric approach to conservation in South Africa is hardly unique. In many respects our activities mirror those in the U.S.A., where the National Register of Historic Places, which came into being in 1935, now contains some 15 000 individual listings—a single building, or an archaeological site—and 1 500

historic neighbourhoods or districts. But until the late 1960s the National Register overlooked buildings of regional and local importance in favour of those judged to be nationally important by the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) mainstream of American society. Thus in a city such as Boston one could, until recently, have been led along 'the Freedom Trail', from one WASP symbol to another without being made aware of the Irish, Italian and Black communities, who not only helped to shape the city but in fact now constitute the majority of the city's population. In 1976 a Black Heritage Trail, which cuts across the WASP Freedom Trail in more ways than one, was established in Boston. In Canada, a cultural and therefore conservation bias in favour of the ethnic group in power at any one time has been detected.[11] In Montreal, for instance, the francophone contribution to the city's built heritage is currently the object of conservation activity, in contrast to the previous preoccupation with WASP structures.

There is reason to believe therefore that the future management of conservation both in American and Canadian cities will fully acknowledge the heritage contributions of different ethnic groups. The image and acceptance of a city as a multicultural product is also the key to the future of urban conservation in South Africa.

Further aspects of the multi-ethnic challenge facing South Africa's towns and cities can be appreciated by reflecting on past events, and speculating about how the 'white' heritage may be evaluated in the future. A portent of how painful the process of accepting the monuments erected by another ethnic group might be is graphically on display in Harrismith, in the Orange Free State. Two Anglo-Boer War memorials stand tête-à-tête along the town's main street: one commemorates the Grenadier and Scots Guards 'who gave their lives for their country, South Africa 1900–1901–1902'; the other recalls the sacrifice of the Boers in that same war. The Boer memorial was unveiled in 1938, vandalised in 1940, and therefore also bears a plaque which reads 'Hierdie monument is in die nag van 1 Maart 1940 deur die vyand van die boerevolk geskend'.[12]

Competing symbols and opposing monuments share space uneasily. Hence the removal of so many statues in former colonies. This does not necessarily mean that all white symbols will be replaced. In Bulawayo several buildings of the 1890s were threatened with demolition under the Smith regime, but are now seen as shrines because they may have housed the black trials after the Matabele War (1896). It is possible therefore that the Richmond, Natal, courthouse complex, which British settler stock may wish to conserve for its architectural merit and law-and-order symbolism, could well be conserved in the future as the site of the firing-squad execution of twelve blacks during the Bamabata

'Rebellion' (1906). In similar vein the Town Hall in Greytown, Natal (a national monument) which was the scene of Dinizulu's trial in 1908 could come therefore to symbolize the black struggle as much as it does white secular authority.

The challenge facing urban conservationists in South Africa is nothing less than a microcosm of that facing the nation at large in many spheres. We are a plural society in which one particular minority has exercised control over a number of ethnic groups. We need now to fully accept that 'national' norms in the form of monuments or anything else, are no longer dictatable. Instead we have to adopt a multi-ethnic view of our society which, in the first instance, acknowledges the distinctive values, customs and contributions of each group. Secondly, and most importantly, we need to acknowledge the considerable degree of acculturation or intercultural borrowing which has taken place, and therefore emphasize, not merely group differences, but the South African heritage which is more than merely the sum of its parts.[13] Much, if not most, of our architecture is eclectic: it is neither European nor African but both. Our built environment is a unique multi-cultural product as is the country's many bi- and trilingual people. Once we accept this fundamental point we will begin to discern commonalities — those elements which our groups share — rather than merely the more obvious differences.[14] By paying attention to the latent South Africanism reflected in our built heritage, conservationists can become part of the vanguard for a new South Africa. Otherwise we may deservedly be regarded as ethnocentric groups clinging to the past.

The multi-ethnic challenge which urban conservationists face in South Africa is certainly formidable but not without parallel. Consequently, if that challenge can be met South Africa may yet become the model by which such conservation activities elsewhere are gauged.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Although the N.M.C. only came into being in 1969, it merely replaced and continued the work of the Historical Monuments Commission, which had been established by an Act of Parliament in 1934. For the sake of simplicity therefore I have referred to the N.M.C. as if it operated throughout the period under review.
2. Elsewhere I have argued that Oudeklerksdorp, Transvaal, and Weenen, Natal, are Voortrekker counterparts of their Cape predecessors and progenitors, and hence just as worthy of conservation. See R.F. Haswell, 'Oudeklerksdorp and Weenen: Historic Dorpsgesigte Worthy of Conservation', *Lantern* (April 1983), Vol. 32, No. 2; pp. 31–38.
3. Undoubtedly the N.M.C. has over the years encountered resistance from owners who did not want their buildings proclaimed, but apart from the fact

that it would be virtually impossible to be accurate about such resistance, it seems unlikely to be a major factor in explaining the Cape Province dominance.

4. J.J. Oberholster, *The Historical Monuments of South Africa* (Rembrandt van Rijn Foundation, 1972); p. 247.
5. Archival information indicates that a parsonage was under construction in November 1840 (South African Archival Records, Natal, No. 1; pp. 353–355); and furthermore, the location of the 'church' at streetline indicates that it was built as a dwelling and therefore subject to Article 5 of the Dorp Regulations promulgated in February, 1839 (South African Archival Records, Natal, No. 1; p. 295). Moreover, a sketch, reproduced as Figure 2.13 in R. F. Haswell, *An Historic Townscapes Conservation Scheme for Natal* (Natal Town and Regional Planning Commission, Report No. 61, 1984; p. 23), shows a small stone house with straight end wall gables on the site of the 'church'.
6. Oberholster, op. cit., pp. 240–241.
7. If the house in question is a faithful replica then it is a significant example of a blending of British settler and Cape-Dutch traditions. The house would then have to be seen therefore as much as a symbol of intercultural borrowing as the one-time home of a famous person.
8. Folk, unlike high style, architecture changes only slowly and relies heavily on local materials and traditions. Folk architecture therefore not only complements other architecture but vividly displays the passage of time.
9. Paul Mikula, 'Hindu Temples in South Africa', *Condenser*, 1983; p. 15.
10. Apart from religious structures the only other Indian buildings proclaimed as monuments are two shops in Weenen. In the Annual Report of the N.M.C. for the year ended 31st March, 1981, the following description appears: 'these predominantly Edwardian shops date from the beginning of the twentieth century and form an impressive architectural entity'. On the contrary these are Natal Indian rather than Edwardian shops. Both of the shops feature distinctly Indian gables, one of which contains the inscription 'Arabian Merchant'—a reminder of the desire and subterfuge on the part of the early Moslem traders to be distinguished from the Hindus. Both are therefore pukka Natal Indian and should be recognised and protected for what they are. Both shops stand empty as a result of the implementation of the Group Areas Act.
11. H. Kalman, 'Politics, patriotism and preservation,' *Canadian Heritage* (August 1982); pp. 4–8.
12. This monument was vandalised during the night of 1 March, 1940 by the enemy of the Boer people.
13. The assertion that prolonged contact among the many ethnic groups resident in South Africa has resulted in cultural duality—the retention of group identity but also the sharing of a common South African culture—is diametrically opposed to the widely held belief, which is taught in school and reinforced amongst other things by public holidays, that little intercultural borrowing has taken place despite the many, many years of contact. The divisive view was first enunciated by G.H. Calpin, *There are no South Africans* (Nelson, 1941).
14. This point was made as early as 1894 by Mahatma Gandhi in reply to the editor of *The Natal Mercury*: "Sir, I appeal to your good sense, and ask you will you not better serve humanity by collecting and pointing out the points of resemblances between the two peoples (Indian and European) than by holding out to the public gaze points of contrasts " M.K. Gandhi, *The Natal Mercury*, (July 12, 1894); p. 3.

YEATS, FRYE, AND THE MEETING OF SAINT AND POET

by NICHOLAS MEIHUIZEN

Yeats once wrote, 'If it be true that God is a circle whose centre is everywhere, the saint goes to the centre, the poet . . . to the ring where everything comes round again.'[1] The purpose of this article is to look at the rare meeting ground of the two perspectives — Saint and Poet — firstly in Yeats's theory, and secondly in an actual poem, 'Solomon and the Witch'. The terms Poet and Saint are used in a restricted way by me to refer only to the former's intense familiarity with the world as 'a man speaking to men', and the latter's intense familiarity with the eternal realm and its attendant transcendental state.[2] With regard to theory, I have to rely entirely on Northrop Frye's unique elucidation of *A Vision* in his collection of essays, *Spiritus Mundi*. Yeats's theory as it stands lacks sufficient information with regard to the meeting of Saint and Poet and the freedom this implies; and tends to over-emphasize, in Blake's phrase, the 'same dull round'.[3] Frye's reading of *A Vision* changes this emphasis and effects very well the meeting. Yeats's poetry is far less reticent in its portrayal of the meeting — one thinks of 'A Dialogue of Self and Soul' and, in particular, 'Sailing to Byzantium' which actually reconciles the two perspectives but concludes with a difficult paradox. Thus a home-grown analysis will suffice in this regard, although it also benefits from certain of Frye's observations.

With his insights into *A Vision* Frye is not doing anything new in terms of his own field of interest, the patterns of myth; what is refreshing, though, is that his application of this field to Yeats gives a sense of illumination, not of imposition — as sometimes happens with a 'strong' reading.[4] Although, using a term from Barthes, the critic 'covers' his author's words with a feasible explanation in the language of the day,[5] he does not smother them. For example, Frye interprets in a lucid manner the vision of redemption obscured by the complexities of Yeats's mythological universe:

> . . . we have to set aside the body of *A Vision* with its conception of unity and individuality as opposed and impossible ideals which only superhuman beings can reach, and look for another construct in which they are at the same point, and that point accessible to human life.[6]

In Yeats's philosophy, 'unity' and 'individuality' are opposite and transcendental ends of a scale that otherwise includes all life; Frye's desire to make the transcendental, the area familiar to the Saint, 'accessible to human life' suggests his awareness of the need to link this area with the Poet's. Why should this need exist?

He quotes Yeats: ' "I think that much of the confusion of modern philosophy . . . comes from our renouncing the ancient hierarchy of beings from man up to the One." '[7] The 'hierarchy', according to Frye, is drawn from certain archetypal realities as perceived through great poetry. The practising poet is automatically taken up into this hierarchy which consists of 'states of being greater than himself'.[8] At the apex of the hierarchy we find the Thirteenth Cone, Yeats's mysterious image of redemption, little elucidated by the poet. Simply, it represents liberation from the wheel of birth and death,[9] once again, the transcendental perspective of the Saint. We are returned to Frye's awareness of the need to allow 'unity and individuality' to meet at the 'same point'. He expands:

> The process of entering into a life greater than our ordinary one, which every poet knows, is a process of entering into this hierarchy, and of beginning to ascend the stair of life. The Thirteenth Cone, therefore, is a symbol of the way in which man emancipates himself by becoming part of Man, through a series of greater human forms [archetypes]. Here we move towards an existence in which Phases 1 and 15, unity and individuality, are the same point. It is therefore impossible that the 'One' could be anything but Man, or something identical or identifiable with man . . .[10]

Therefore, to answer the question, 'Why the need to conjoin Saint and Poet?' one might simply answer that it is part of Yeatsian evolution, the prime consequence of a natural ascent of the stair of life. But Frye's elegant logic uncovers the humanistic basis of 'the One', man's greatest form, making it a form fit for the Poet: if the Thirteenth Cone offers the perspective where Phases 1 and 15 'are the same point', then the One must be associated with man as it will then incorporate 'individuality', the mark of man.

Frye's final emphasis firmly joins the realms of Saint and Poet when he considers two poems in which 'imaginations and images, the true subjects and the true objects', merge into 'a timeless unity'. If we identify with 'Man', however, the subject comes to the foreground and the object, the image, recedes:

> ['Byzantium'] is mainly about images, which are . . . generated in water and borne across water by dolphins into the simplifying and purgatorial world of fire. ['News for the Delphic Oracle'] applies the same movement to human souls, and makes it clear that nothing of the physical or concrete world is lost, or even sublimated, by the kind of redemption here described.
>
> These two poems, then, deal with the consolidation of imaginations and images, the true subjects and the true objects, into a timeless unity. But of course the image is a product of the imagination: in the imaginative world the relation of subject and object is that of creator and creature. In this perspective the whole cycle of nature, of life and

> death and rebirth which man has dreamed, becomes a single gigantic image, and the process of redemption is to be finally understood as an identification with Man and a detachment from the cyclical image he has created.[11]

A perfect balancing of Saint and Poet results: the 'identification with Man' seems related to the world of the Poet, while the 'detachment from the cyclical image he has created' seems related to the renunciatory world of the Saint.

To put Frye's reading of Yeatsian redemption briefly, then: man ascends the stair of life and encounters at each step a greater form or archetype which he identifies with, until he reaches the top of the stair and identifies with the prime form, the One. At this stage man becomes Man and the object world recedes — Poet and Saint meet. In terms of the working poet this is all very well; he comes into contact with archetypal realities through the very nature of his work. But what of the poet as man in the world? What for him can truly prompt the 'identification with Man'? Judging from Yeats's poetry one answer seems to be 'love'. Certainly the sense of completion which he experienced in his own life after his marriage must have suggested the fact to him.[12] That fine poem written at this time, 'Solomon and the Witch', observes certain consequences of ideal union in a delightfully light-hearted way. One major consequence, as we shall see, is not unrelated to Frye's perception of the 'identification with Man', that is, the result of the conjunction of 'individuality' and 'unity'. But at the same time 'Solomon and the Witch' bypasses the paradox inherent in Frye's perception: for Frye the transcendental area of the Saint loses 'nothing of the concrete or physical world' of the Poet.[13] 'Solomon and the Witch', while evoking a transcendental realm, poses it as something to be striven towards, and finally emphasizes the process involved, not the goal. However, for a brief period in it the perspectives of Saint and Poet meet in the context of ordinary life.

The mythical, archetypal significance of Solomon and Sheba themselves is fairly obvious. As F.A.C. Wilson notes, the two are the 'types of "perfect love"'.[14] In Frye's four-part scheme of archetypes — found elsewhere in the body of his work[15] — they would most probably belong to the second phase, the 'zenith, summer and marriage or triumph phase', which is concerned with 'myths of apotheosis, of the sacred marriage, and of entering into Paradise'.[16] In 'Solomon and the Witch', the lovers' consummation might be seen as a sacred marriage resulting in a type of apotheosis which evokes a vision of Paradise. Further, the poem fits perfectly Frye's archetypal comic pattern as it is characterized by 'love', 'communion', and is set in a sacred 'grove'.[17] These parallels are too numerous to be simply put down to coincidence, and are proof, by

the way, of the fundamental value of Frye's archetypal theory: his archetypal schemes, applicable to most situations in literature and myth, seem, even in their simple stages, comprehensive, a valuable bed-rock on which to build.

But our poem doesn't coldly follow a pre-ordained system to the letter, it is charged with the inherent liveliness and unpredictability of the Poet's world, and so mixes phases. For example, it seems concerned with aspects of phase one, 'resurrection' of a perfect state, and a 'defeat of the powers of darkness' which the world now embodies. Also, phases three and four find a place in it when a type of 'death' and 'dissolution' is sought after in its concern to '"end"' the '"world"'.[18]

With regard to specific precursors, the rich sensual luxuriance and sense of longing of Yeats's poem is certainly paralleled by the Song of Solomon; but the full significance of the lovers to Yeats is only made truly apparent by Symons's play 'The Lover of the Queen of Sheba'.[19] Symons, like Yeats, deals with 'the timeless moment as it presents itself to lovers':

> When thou art I, and I am thou
> Time is no more . . .[20]

In other words, Symons's play probably suggested to Yeats Solomon and Sheba's connection with a transcendental love experience.

Sheba's introduction in 'Solomon and the Witch' describes a night-time scene presided over by a '"wild moon"'. Apart from its relation to *A Vision*, the moon is a symbol of rich potentiality in Yeats. Also, the adjective '"wild"' conveys creative energy, especially if considered alongside the adjective describing the 'sun'—so antithetical to the present moon—in 'Lines Written in Dejection': 'timid'.[21] The pervasive ethos of the poem then is the Poet's—one of rich creative potential. Into it comes Sheba's '"cry"' uttered '"in a strange tongue"'. (One thinks of the automatic writing of *A Vision*, where Yeats, like Solomon, must decipher his companion's 'cries'.)[22] Solomon, by tradition versed in the language of all animals,[23] interprets the cry, and the tone of the poem becomes light-hearted, suggesting Solomon's rather urbane casualness, but also the confident joy which accompanies an especially pleasurable love union:

> Who understood
> Whatever has been said, sighed, sung,
> Howled, miau'd, barked, brayed, belled, yelled,
> cried, crowed,
> Thereon replied: 'A cockerel

> Crew from a blossoming apple bough
> Three hundred years before the Fall
> And never crew again till now,
> And would not now but that he thought
> Chance being at one with Choice at last
> All that the brigand apple brought
> And this foul world were dead at last.
> He that crowed out eternity
> Thought to have crowed it in again.'

Man's coming is almost connate with the departure of '"eternity"' ('"Three hundred years before the Fall"'), but man might, ironically, bring eternity '"in again"'. A pre-condition for the coming of eternity is '"Chance [becoming] . . . one with Choice"', which suggests to me a point of harmonious perfection where one's personal 'choices' are not contrary to the impersonal operations of the universe originated by 'chance'. Personal and impersonal will, embodied respectively in the terms Choice and Chance, seem to become one through a supreme act of love (the Poet's perspective) which necessarily '"ends"' the restrictive external '"world"' (characterized by the boundaries which must arise when Choice is blocked by Chance), and allows '"eternity"' (the Saint's perspective) to flow '"in again"'. Otherwise Chance and Choice are as opposite, to return to Frye's concerns, as 'individuality' and 'unity'. 'Individual' will is limited, subject to Chance; will seen from the angle of 'unity' is surely governed by Choice, a consequence of the focused, unitary status inherent in the term. A conjunction of Choice and Chance therefore implies a conjunction of individuality and unity: the One is attained and Saint and Poet meet, but in a transcendental context.

There is further evidence in the section of the poem just looked at to support the above conclusion. Man acts on 'choice', which is only blocked by the 'chances' of circumstance. Implicit in the union now broached is an absence of such blockage. As an outcome, objects recede in significance and subjects, the lovers, come to the foreground. '"All that the brigand apple brought/And this foul world"' is the realm of objects; '"were dead at last"', indicates its possible recession. Thus the possible outcome of Solomon and Sheba's union approximates Frye's vision of Yeatsian redemption: 'an identification with Man and a detachment from the cyclical image he has created'.

But here the poem provides a down-to-earth check in the form of an identification with man (in low case) all too caught up in the realm of 'images':

> '. . . love has a spider's eye
> To find out some appropriate pain—

> Aye, though all passion's in the glance—
> For every nerve, and tests a lover
> With cruelties of Choice and Chance;
> And when at last that murder's over
> Maybe the bride-bed brings despair,
> For each an imagined image brings
> And finds a real image there.'

Love is seen to search with a cruel and calculating '"spider's eye"' for '"some appropriate pain"' '"For every nerve"', a perverse activity, horribly described as a '"murder"'; non-unified '"Choice"' and '"Chance"' are conditioned by the '"cruelties"' of man's own creating; the 'chosen' '"bride-bed"' might offer, not consummation but rather, by 'chance', '"despair"'; there is a chilling disparity between '"imagined"' and '"real"' images.

Solomon's final words, however, which again adopt a light-hearted tone, are important. Sheba notes '"Yet the world stays"', and Solomon replies

> 'If that be so,
> Your cockerel found us in the wrong,
> Although he thought it worth a crow.'

He indicates the possibility of supreme human elevation in the face of everyday existence. A potentially world-ending love experience which evokes a transcendental state need not be of absolute value. Thus, although for a short space of time, the identification with 'Man' is placed within feasible parameters not preclusive of 'man': Saint and Poet meet in the context of everyday life in the world.

The conclusion of the poem completes our picture of the complementary roles of the imaginative archetypes portrayed by Solomon and Sheba; the conclusion also displays a practical emphasis on process which enables the poem to retain the perspective of the Poet, but the Poet very aware of the presence of the Saint, striving for union with the Saint. Sheba's final speech evokes an intense, contained excitement with its utter silence, '" . . . not a sound . . . Unless a petal hit the ground"'; its thrilling escalation of creative potential, '"the moon is wilder every minute"'; and its self-absorbing focus of 'individual' will, '"O! Solomon! let us try again."' In this vibrant silence the two lovers' power might be gathered to enable them to aim once more for the 'One'. Solomon, portraying one archetypal response, humorously thinks their love-making, although it does not '"end"' the '"world"', '"worth a crow"' from eternity, conceding in his urbane way the value of their experience. Sheba, portraying another archetypal response, desires intensely to strive again for the '"end"'; Solomon's tone does not detract from the regenerative might of her final centering—rather, it dryly complements it.

'The night has fallen; not a sound
In the forbidden sacred grove
Unless a petal hit the ground,
Nor any human sight within it
But the crushed grass where we have lain;
And the moon is wilder every minute.
O! Solomon! let us try again.'

The poem ends under a moon which grows '"wilder every minute"', thus the early suggestion of rich potentiality which the present wildness picks up (symptomatic of the world of the Poet), is buttressed by Sheba's final urge, ironically, for a conjunction with the world of the Saint. This urge might be emblematic of all human striving for something beyond the confines of what has already been attained or established in life. In this more general picture the Saint's fulfilment would represent the ultimate attainment in life. Therefore this state of fulfilment becomes the prime goal of all the Poet's strivings. The Poet's world, man's world, is then, as it were, set into motion by its attraction to the Saint's world. Thus, in terms of our engagement with life, the distance between Saint and Poet seems more important than their meeting. And yet it is the pleasure derived from some form of apprehension of the brief meeting of the two—suggested by Sheba's desire to '"try again"'—which gives impetus to the engagement with life.

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NOTES

1. Northrop Frye, *Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and London, 1976, p. 268.
2. Patanjali, *Aphorisms of Yoga*, translated by Shree Purohit Swami, with an introduction by W.B. Yeats, Faber, London, 1938, 1973, p. 15. Yeats says, 'Through states analogous to self-induced hypnotic sleep the devotee attains a final state of complete wakefulness . . . where the soul, purified of all that is not itself, comes into possession of its own timelessness. Matter, or the soul's relation to time has disappeared . . . '
3. Frye, p. 270.
4. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: a theory of poetry*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1973. For Bloom the 'strong poet' deliberately misinterprets his predecessors in order to accommodate his own ideas. '. . . strong poets . . . misread one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves', p. 5.
5. Roland Barthes, 'Criticism as language', in *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*, Longman, London, 1972, edited by David Lodge. p. 650.
6. Frye, pp. 270–1.
7. Ibid., p. 272.
8. Ibid., p. 271.
9. W.B. Yeats, *A Vision*, Macmillan, London, repr. 1963, p. 301. In the context of *A Vision* the term 'freedom' on this page must refer to freedom from the otherwise never-ending cycle of birth and death elaborated on in this book.
10. Frye, pp. 272–3.
11. Ibid., pp. 273–4.
12. Joseph Hone, *W.B. Yeats: 1865–1939*, Macmillan, London, 1942, p. 307.
13. The same paradox is inherent in Yeats's own 'Sailing to Byzantium', of which

T. Sturge Moore said, 'such a goldsmith's bird is as much nature as man's body.' *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature*, Volume 11, Oxford University Press, New York, 1973, edited by Frank Kermode and John Hollander, p. 1710.

14. F.A.C. Wilson, *Yeats's Iconography*, Victor Gollancz, London, 1960, p. 27.
15. Northrop Frye, 'The Archetypes of Literature', in *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*, p. 422 ff.
16. Ibid., p. 429.
17. Ibid., p. 432.
18. Ibid., p. 429.
19. Wilson, p. 276.
20. Ibid., p. 278.
21. See 'Lines Written in Dejection' in *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, Macmillan, London, 1950, pp. 163–4.
22. Hone, p. 309.
23. Wilson, p. 279.

NOTES ON 'DIE BLENDUNG' BY ELIAS CANETTI

by KATHLEEN THORPE

Ich hatte das Gefühl einer Gesetzmässigkeit, die stärker war als ich selbst, etwas, das an die Disziplin der Naturwissenschaft erinnerte, ... Die ersten Zeichen ihrer Einwirkung waren in der Strenge dieses Buches zu spüren.[1]
(I had the feeling of a conformity that was stronger than I, reminiscent of natural science, ... The first signs of its effect were to be noticed in the harshness of this book.)

In the autumn of 1931, Elias Canetti, recipient of the 1982 Nobel Prize for Literature, put the finishing touches to his only novel *Die Blendung*[2] or *Auto-da-Fé*[3] as it is known in the English translation. The remarks quoted above in introduction refer to the unrelenting logical consequence underlying the novel. Canetti refers, also in the same autobiographical work *Die Fackel im Ohr*, to his literary guide during the year in which he concentrated on writing his monumental work. Whereas Gogol had influenced him in giving free rein to his imagination, now

> im Jahr der Konzentration, als es mir um Klarheit und Dichte zu tun war, um schlackenlose Durchsichtigkeit, wie in Bernstein hielt ich mich an ein Vorbild, das ich nicht weniger bewunderte: Stendhals *Rot und Schwarz*. Täglich, bevor ich mit dem Schreiben begann, las ich einige Seiten daraus und wiederholte so, was er selber getan hatte, mit einem anderen Vorbild, dem berühmten neuen Gesetzuch seiner Tage.[4]
> (in the year of concentration when I was concerned with clarity and density, with perspicuity free of dross, as if in amber I adhered to an example, which I admired no less: Stendhal's *Scarlet and Black*. Daily, before I began writing, I read a few pages of it and thus reproduced what he himself had done following another example, with the famous new law book of his day.)

Bearing in mind Claudio Magris' warning against lending too much credence to Canetti's autobiographical statement that, while seeming to say everything, keeps much back from the reader ('Hinter dem liebenswürdigen und glatten Fuss der Autobiographie, die so anders ist im Vergleich zur Kantigkeit der Blendung und die trügerisch alles zu sagen scheint, steht eine Zurückhaltung.'),[5] one can discern the stamp of Stendhal's aspiration to attain the clarity and concentration of the *code civil* on Canetti's novel. This is particularly evident in the tightly woven chain of events at the beginning of the novel that leads inexorably to the death of the main character.

Although it would be true to say that Canetti has not received the attention accorded to other writers of the Austrian literary scene

such as Thomas Bernhard, even a cursory glance at a bibliography such as *Germanistik*[6] reveals a steadily growing number of entries particularly since the mid-sixties. This late reception of Canetti's work, especially of *Die Blendung* would seem to indicate that, like many other great works of world literature, it was written in advance of its time. Opinions of this novel range from the enthusiastic to the disenchanted. Even the most critical of readers such as Peter Russell who regards the novel with a jaundiced eye, is forced to admit that Canetti does succeed in his intention 'to view society from an eccentric angle'[7] and justified as many of his criticisms are, especially with regard to flaws in the structure of the work, remarks such as the following must surely remain open to debate or be taken as evidence of the same sense of humour he so grudgingly concedes that Canetti does possess:

> The first chapter alone ('Der Spaziergang') might well remind a scholarly reader of problems with which he is familiar himself. The suspicion cannot be avoided that this is not so much a novel to interest the average human being, as the ideal birthday gift for an academic.[8]

Die Blendung is a bizarre and gripping analysis of the inability of an isolated intellectual to come to grips with the world. Peter Kien, a renowned sinologist, imprisons himself in his library, reducing his physical demands to a minimum in order to concentrate on studying old manuscripts. He makes regular brief sorties outside his apartment to refresh himself by gazing at the displays in book shops. On one of these walks Kien engages a young boy in conversation and thus creates a breach in his defences against the world. Deceived by the low cunning of his grotesque housekeeper, Therese, Kien marries her. His carefully organized haven is eroded by Theresa's demands. She makes common cause against him with the brutal caretaker, Benedikt Pfaff, and they evict Kien from his home.

Defenceless against the world Kien falls in with a hunchback, Fischerle, who ruthlessly exploits him by pandering to his illusions and extracting his money from him. Therese and Pfaff begin disposing of Kien's library. Finally, a *deus ex machina*, Kien's psychiatrist brother Georg, arrives to rescue his deranged relative. George evicts Therese and Pfaff from Kien's apartment and reinstalls his brother there, not realizing the advanced state of his insanity. Kien finally achieves his aim of being completely at one with his books, by setting himself and his library alight.

As J.M. Paul remarks in his essay on rationality and insanity in Canetti's novel: 'Der ganze Roman ist auf den Schluss hin gebaut'.[9] This structuring of the entire novel toward the conclusion has its foundation in the first four chapters of the work. As will be shown,

these chapters predetermine the end of the novel and in so doing fulfil the function of an exposition as befits an analytic work of this nature. The novel is divided into three sections: 'Ein Kopf ohne Welt', 'Kopflose Welt' and 'Welt im Kopf' ('A Head without a World', 'Headless World' and 'World in the Head') dominated as the headings imply, by the changing relationship between the head (Kopf) and the world (Welt). Michel-Francois Demet summarizes the function of this division as follows:

> ... the ternary structure of the novel corresponds in its first part to a criticism of European idealism and can henceforth be incapable of assuring our intellectual health. In the second part we see a criticism of anarchy and of the folly of the body and the world. The thesis and antithesis oppose each other classically, but the third part seems to affirm through the folly of the mind and nihilism the impossibility of the synthesis.[10]

Before embarking on a closer reading of the introductory chapters of the novel a brief discussion of certain related aspects may prove helpful in placing this work in the contemporary literary scene. *Die Blendung* (blinded or dazzled) has been titled in translation as *The Tower of Babel* (American version 1947) and as *Auto-da-Fé* (English version 1946). Both of these reflect facets of the novel emanating from the blindness of the characters as is seen in the German title. The symbol of the doomed Tower of Babel indicates not only a chaotic breakdown of communication, but also points to the self-delusion of the architects of this structure, leading them to believe that achievement of the absolute (heaven) through human effort alone was possible. The biblical reference to the Tower (Genesis 11, v. 1–9) starkly describes the irrevocable transition from a world of 'one language, and of one speech' through to the dispersal of the unitary society and subsequent loss of communicative ability: 'Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.' The symbol of the Tower also points to the so-called 'ivory tower' mentality often attributed to academe. The applicability of this connotation is borne out by the detailed descriptions in the novel of the lengths to which Kien goes in his effort to insulate himself against society.

A well-known theme of so-called 'intellectual novels' is the isolated individual's striving for the absolute. Perhaps the greatest contemporary Austrian novelist exploiting this theme with monomanic vigour and uncompromising stylistic virtuosity is Thomas Bernhard (born 1931). The notion of the ivory tower has also been taken up by such diverse writers as Virginia Woolf and Peter Handke, but whereas Handke in his stance of 1967[11] declares

himself to be an inhabitant of such an ivory tower in the pursuit of self-knowledge, Virginia Woolf's discussion, as will be quoted below, focuses on the relationship between the artist and society. Although Peter Kien is no artist, many of Virginia Woolf's thoughts would seem to have a direct relevance to this aspect of Canetti's novel, at the same time drawing attention to the position of an isolated 'intellectual'. Kien is educated and financially independent, much in the mould of Virginia Woolf's description of the pre-1914 writer:

> He sits upon a tower raised above the rest of us; a tower first built on his parents' station, then on his parents' gold. It is a tower of the utmost importance; it decides his angle of vision; it affects his power of communication.[12]

Kien feels the discomfort of the 'leaning tower'[13] to use Virginia Woolf's turn of phrase, but fails to draw any conclusions from this. His world disintegrates when he is driven out of his paradise into the 'real' world of the masses—his distorted vision lays him open to cruel exploitation and ultimately to flight into death. The tragedy of Peter Kien's fate rests in the sterility of his intellectual pursuits. An artist perhaps, like the author of *Die Blendung*, is able to avoid the entrapment of the intellectual life's incompatibility with the sort of animal mob mentality portrayed in the novel, by committing the nightmare to paper in a structured form. In moulding an amorphous mass of thought, it would seem possible to assert the power of the individual over a threatening idea.

The first chapter of part one, the longest of the exposition 'A Head without a World'[14] begins with 'the Morning Walk'. This is no aimless stroll, but a ritualistic walk reminiscent of the philosopher Emmanuel Kant's well-known walks through Königsberg. The connection between Kant and Kien is intended, as Canetti's original title for what subsequently became *Die Blendung* was 'Kant fängt Feuer' (Kant catches alight). The walk turns out to be an exceptional one, as contrary to habit, Kien enters into a conversation that will untimately lead to his world being turned upside down. Initiating the conversation outside a book shop, Kien quizzes the child (a boy of nine) on his interests, revealing what seems to be common ground. Apart from the wish to learn Chinese, the boy's sense of adventure includes a desire to see India (tigers) and China (Great Wall). For Kien himself, we are subsequently informed, the conversation represents a radical departure from his normal custom of seldom speaking and is an adventure into an unfamiliar sphere of communication. As later becomes apparent, the danger (tiger), forewarning of the rapacious Therese and Pfaff, and the isolation implied by the Great Wall of China, are the foundation of the unfolding novel.[15]

Although it is not the primary aim of this essay to discuss the narrative techniques[16] employed in this novel, a few remarks concerning stream-of-consciousness techniques—and more particularly these in conjunction with the role of the narrator—may be permissible at this point as they are skilfully employed to enhance the themes and dramatic tone of the novel. The narrative form of the novel is basically personal, thus drastically reducing the direct role of the narrator. In fact it is the employment of dramatic technique, classed by Robert Humphrey[17] as one of the less common techniques in stream-of-consciousness writing, that determines the very beginning of *Die Blendung*. The absence of the narrator is complete, as not even minimal direction is given. The reader is confronted with a dialogue in the form of questions and answers, quoted within inverted commas. The boy identified Kien as a strange sort of professor who owns a library. Immediately following on the dialogue, an omniscient narrator intrudes, thus establishing the 'reader confidence' referred to by Humphrey as the information concerning Kien gleaned from the dialogue is confirmed. The establishment of reader confidence is of the utmost importance in *Die Blendung*, facilitating as it does the acceptance by the reader of surreal situations as real or rather plausible within the context of the novel where, as Hugo Schmidt remarks, 'grotesque things happen as a matter of course.'[18] In spite of the dominance of the surreal in much of *Die Blendung*, particularly through the liberal use of indirect interior monologue, the contortion of an extra-literary reality in the work results in a consciousness of reality that makes it possible to term this a realistic work in a very special sense. We will return to this point later.

Reproaching himself for having indulged in a conversation 'ohne zwingenden Grund' (8–without a compelling reason), Kien 'wortkarg und mürrisch von Natur' (8–morose and sparing with his words) continues on his walk—a daily ritual between 7 and 8 a.m.—not to encourage philosophical thought, but as we are later informed 'um die Luft fremder Bücher zu atmen' (to breathe in the air of alien books). This breathing in the air of books foreign to his nature, referred to by him as smut and trash, serves as a small challenge to Kien, reviving him a little. The opposition of the other books does not extend to their contents, but for an hour a day 'gönnte er sich einige der Freiheiten, aus denen das Leben der übrigen ganz besteht' (13–he allowed himself a few of those liberties which constitute the entire life of other beings). In this act of self-indulgence, Kien feels himself to be participating in normal life, but simultaneously not losing sight of the difference between himself and the 'others'.

Kien, owner of the most important private library in the city, jealously guards his treasures, taking a few of them with him on his walks for company. An intimate contact both physical and mental

characterizes his passion for his books. Indeed, the daily unchanging proximity of his books determines his 'strengen und arbeitsreichen Leben' (8–life of austere and exacting study). Devoted to them in his ascetic and work-filled routine, his books have almost become part of him as he tightly clutches them to himself in order to assure maximum physical contact with them. Kien's neglected body, emaciated and badly-dressed, has been adapted to accommodate his books which, as he hugs them to himself, make up for his lack of physical substance. In a rare moment of insight, Kien recognizes his exaggerated solicitude 'übertriebene Sorgfalt' (9) for his books, but excuses himself by recollecting the 'Wert' (value) contained in his briefcase. Value is one of the catch-words in Kien's vocabulary, leading to his downfall. His idiosyncratic use of the word, ignoring the monetary connotation, blinds him later to the purely financial value attached to his books by the equally blinded but infinitely more cunning Therese.

Allied to value is Kien's fastidiousness regarding the cleanliness of his books: 'Nichts hasste er mehr als schmutzige Bücher' (9–He hated nothing more than dirty books). He takes care to keep his books free from contamination — treating them in the same way that he avoids contact with the world outside his antiseptic library. This obsession explains why he tolerated Therese initially in his household at all. She, as we will later see, attends to the cleanliness of his library and her employer's obsession provides her with the opportunity of breaching his defences.

The narrator's intrusion to introduce Kien also recapitulates the circumstances occurring before the opening of the novel and leading up to the fateful conversation. In placing much emphasis on the role of eyesight, the significance of the novel's title is revealed. Kien's monomanic obsession with his books has not yet completely blinded him to the outside world. The boy had entered Kien's line of vision by standing between him and the shop window. As has already been mentioned, reading the titles of books belongs to Kien's morning ritual and it is further revealed to be a secret eyesight test, reassuring him of their well-being 'wie gut es ihnen ging' (9). His clarity of vision is directed solely to reading; as soon as people intrude, it becomes defective — as a subsequent episode illustrates. Kien's uniqueness does not permit him normally even to notice others. Walking with eyes cast upward Kien does not realise he is being addressed when asked the way to Mut Strasse. Preoccupied as he is, Kien merely observes the mounting frustration of the man who asked the question with interest, feeling himself to be the third person on the scene and observing the one-sided speech of the man unable to elicit a reply from the stubbornly silent second party. Blind to the fact that he could be addressed in a

normal fashion at all: 'Kien hoffte auf einen Streit. Erwies sich der Zweite als gewöhnlich, so blieb er, Kien, unbestritten das, wofür er sich hielt: der einzige Charakter, der hier spazierenging' (13–Kien hoped for a fight. If the second man appeared after all to be a mere vulgarian, Kien would be confirmed in his own estimation of himself as the sole and only person of character walking in this street). This episode is illuminating as it shows Kien able to observe his own behaviour but in a schizophrenic way, not until much later registering any connection between the stubbornly silent person who could perhaps reveal himself as 'gewöhnlich' (ordinary) by replying and thus part of normal society, and the unique and speechless 'character' who is unapproachable, aloof from everyday concerns. It is interesting to contrast this episode where Kien is addressed, with the opening conversation in which he initiated the interchange, thus maintaining the upper hand[19] and revealing a bid for power—a particular concern of Canetti's, much discussed by scholars.[20] The Mut Strasse episode has a sequel in the entry Kien makes in his 'Dummheiten' (Stupidities) book, reserved for things he wishes to forget. His proclivity for self-delusion overcomes his feebly functioning awareness of society, awakened only when his books become endangered. Kien twists the facts and emerges victorious from this brush with normality—a tendency, we are assured by the ironic narrator, typical of Kien's attitude towards himself:

> Kien reproduzierte sich noch einige Tatsachen aus seinem Leben, die sein zurückgezogenes, redescheues und jeder Eitelkeit bares Wesen ins rechte Licht rücken (17).
> (Kien called to mind one or two more facts from his daily life, which showed his retiring, untalkative and wholly unpresumptuous nature in its true light.)

Kien's feelings of exclusiveness lead us again to the reasons behind the conversation with the boy, breaking the orderly routine of his existence. Order is an important theme in *Die Blendung* to which we will return. The ill-advised conversation points to a residual element of the human desire to be part of society as opposed to Kien's striving to be subsumed by his library. Out of sympathy 'Mitleid' (10) Kien had spoken to the boy, but this human emotion is prompted by a purported pedagogic intention, namely to save the child from the influence of the 'niederträchtige(s) Zeug' (9–depraved fare, that is, the books in the window display) an intention not entirely unselfish, but with an undertone of having perhaps found a likely proselyte as his thoughts on education demonstrate. Kien envisages an education for the young, based on drastic reduction: 'Wie soll man die Empfänglichkeit der ersten

Jahre beschränken?' (9–By what means is the suggestibility of these early years to be reduced?) he asks himself and comes to the conclusion that small boys should grow up in an important private library such as the one he owns. Yet Kien shrinks from the thought of taking on such a task despite the idea's obvious appeal. The residual nature of these educative inclinations is demonstrated in the dismissal of even the thought of moulding even one of the delicate creatures 'zarten Geschöpfe' (10) on account of the disruption of his solitary life such an undertaking would entail.

The desire for solitude ties in with Kien's previously mentioned image of himself as an exalted being, and the wish to maintain the inviolability of his library points again to a power play similar to Canetti's essay on Albert Speer's portrait of Adolf Hitler's lack of trust in others and preoccupation with security which insulates and isolates him from the world, encouraging illusions of exclusivity:

> In dieser Umgebung, in der niemand an ihn herankann, fühlt er sich wohl, hier lebt er unangetastet als der Einzige für den er sich hält.[21]
> (In these surroundings into which no-one can get to him, he feels at ease. Here he lives untouched as the sole and only being he considers himself to be.)

The demands of Kien's work do not allow for 'Abschweifungen' (10–diversions). His service to science and the truth, as it is later called, brings to mind literary predecessors of Peter Kien viz. Kafka's Gregor Samsa in the *Metamorphosis* and Gustav Aschenbach in Thoman Mann's *Death in Venice*, the overburdened heroes set on the path to death.[22] Understood in this tradition, Kien's death at the end of the novel is inevitable. The 'hero' of *Die Blendung* cannot allow himself the diversion of a child, not only because of the attention demanded but also because 'Fur Kinder muss man eine Mutter halten' (10–One has to keep a mother for children). 'Halten' viz. to keep or retain does not envisage any further use for a mother/woman in his life. Noteworthy is Kien's lack of differentiation between a woman performing tasks in the household and a wife, as it leads directly to his fall. As will be discussed, it is Therese's hypocritical caring for his books that leads Kien into marriage, ignoring the warnings against women he addressed to himself.

As a child or wife would represent an unthinkable disturbance, so the idea of disorder is introduced yet again in the image of the Tower of Babel hinted at in an episode remembered by Kien from his early youth. His love of books when he hid overnight in a bookshop, leads young Kien to tell the only lie of his life to which he will admit. Young Kien's expedient, howling (12) when detected calls to mind the tears of genuine despair at the end of the fourth chapter, marking the end of the exposition.

Kien's devotion to the truth, involving a coincidence in meaning with 'Wissenschaft' (12) that is, science, determines his thinking; and seen from the vantage point of what he considers to be 'Wissenschaft' namely, the reconstruction of old Chinese manuscripts, points more to a positivist establishment of facticity than to the truth, which belongs to the sphere of subjective perception. He devotes himself to the past without reference to the present and so, when he does attempt to apply what he reads to his own situation, he finds only affirmation, not having had access to the contents of the alien books he sniffs at daily on his walk — those works it will be recalled provoke 'Widerspruch' (13–opposition) in him. Kien's service to truth ignores the societal framework within which truth is perceived, because he believes that 'Man näherte sich der Wahrheit, indem man sich von dem Menschen abschloss' (12–One approaches the truth by cutting oneself off from human beings). In isolating himself from others in the pursuit of the truth, Kien's work is elevated to the status of an absolute and his perception of himself is that of a high priest, as aloof and exclusive as the idol he serves. He dismisses the others, making up the masses, merely as bad actors in continually changing roles. The sociological necessity of the many roles played by people in society is anathema to Kien in his striving to achieve the absolute, which he himself endeavours to emulate by being immutable, fixed in a single identity,[23] not unlike the statue he physically becomes at the end of the first part of the novel in an attempt to resist Therese's merciless onslaught.

In the reduction of his personality to a single role, Kien attempts to reverse the progress of philosophy and psychology since the eighteenth century, stressing as it does the multiplicity of facets making up a personal identity. The maintaining of this one 'Charakter' has led, as we have previously observed, to a reduction in Kien's physical appearance about which he is remarkably incurious. Only when his very existence is endangered does he show an interest in reassuring himself of his immutability by wishing to satisfy his 'Wissbegier' (142–thirst for knowledge) by looking in a mirror.

In his scholarly work, Kien is painstaking in his efforts to render his opinions unassailable when they are finally expressed. Regarding the spoken word as ephemeral, he sets out to create opinions as monuments, binding on fellow sinologists. Teasing his colleagues unmercifully, Kien promises to appear at conferences, always withdrawing at the last minute, thus ensuring that he remains 'eine meistbesprochene Figur' (15–a much-discussed personality) and in this way terrorizing the scholarly world from afar.[24]

Refusing to vouch for the veracity of the statement by using indirect speech, the narrator ambiguously informs us that Kien

'selbst sei nichts weniger als ein Genie' (16–Kien was nothing less than a genius). This opinion of himself as a genius, despite rhetorical protestations to the contrary, extends to the over-evaluation of himself as a rational thinker. Indeed even the dreams he chooses to remember have clear contours, 'Nie stelle bei ihm die Nacht etwas auf dem Kopf' (17–In his case night had no power to turn things topsy turvy). The idea of a world turned on its head is central to this work. A confrontation with a blind man further disturbs Kien on his homeward walk and combined with the 'Angst' (18–anxiety) he feels at the sight, the irrational intrudes into his consciousness resulting in the nightmare sequence of the second chapter. Kien's fear of blindness calls thoughts of suicide to mind and the narrator assures us that Kien will follow the example of the librarian of Alexandria who committed suicide when he could no longer see.

Home at last in his library, Kien surveys this domain or as it is later called, his 'Heimat' (48) or homeland. Kien's library is not only a place devoted to books and scholarship, it is a way of life. Windowless, it has no perspective on the world. With light coming only from above, Kien blesses the absence of outside influences. Cushioned from disturbances by thick-piled carpets, activity centres around the desk. Personified in his thoughts, his books populate his world — the only evidence of human requirements is the bed, which seems even to shrink in shape, ignored by Kien as far as possible. This same divan, however, looms large after Kien has made the fatal error of marrying Therese.

Therese who dominates the second chapter of *Die Blendung* entitled 'Das Geheimnis' (The Secret) has been briefly introduced at the end of the first chapter. Kien's housekeeper for eight years — grotesque in appearance and characterized by her idiosyncratic speech or acoustic mask and blue starched skirt — is driven by money, a frustrated sexuality and above all, curiosity. This chapter fulfils the function of not only making the reader acquainted with Therese, soon to become Kien's chief adversary, as a representative of the masses or crowd, but also, mainly through her eyes, to corroborate the knowledge concerning Kien collected so far. Therese, through the narrative form of indirect interior monologue, is also responsible for the creation of dramatic tension in a novel that could otherwise become dull. Kien's disregard for his physical needs mentioned above is further remarked upon as he taciturnly takes his meals at his desk, even reducing his physical hygiene requirements to fifteen minutes per day, pushing his loathed 'Waschwagen' — a type of mobile washstand — out of his study as soon as possible. The secret indicated by the chapter heading concerns Therese's need for excitement and is provoked by her curiosity as to how Kien spends his time from 6.15 until 7 a.m. every

morning. Her thoughts race and provide pace for the narration.

Kien's thoughts have been disturbed by the sight of the blind man and in searching through his old notes, he has difficulty in reading the faded ink of one of them. The very idea of blindness is sufficient to drive Kien to tidy his desk, creating a 'Turm von Makulatur', a 'Berg von Papierfetzen' (25–a tower of wastepaper, a mountain of paper scraps) thus reintroducing the idea of chaos indicated by the Tower metaphor. This mountain of wastepaper could perhaps also hint at what Kien's scholarship is actually worth! Observing Kien pack his briefcase for his morning walk, Therese confirms the image of Kien already established in the first chapter: 'Das ist der ernste Mensch, der nie lacht und nie ein Wort redet' (29–So that's your sensible man, with never a smile or a word!). In view of Kien's laughter as he dies, the fact that his lack of laugher is remarked on is significant. From Therese's point of view, however, the fact that Kien has money is of cardinal importance. Foreshadowing future events, Therese thinks: 'Und so was hat Geld! Das viele, viele Geld! Der gehört unter Kuratel.' (29) Once married to Kien, Therese's thoughts will be on just how to put him away and dispossess him.

The third chapter 'Konfuzius, ein Ehestifter' (Confucius the Matchmaker) is in many respects a repeat of the first chapter. The fateful conversation has a sequel when the child takes up his invitation to visit Kien's library the following Sunday. Kien as we know reproached himself for the invitation and seizing on this opportunity to ingratiate herself with him, Therese twice turns away the persistent child. In feigning an interest in learning she strikes a chord with Kien because to him 'Lernen ist alles' (30–learning is everything). Kien's thoughts now turn to educating Therese by giving her novels to read. Kien's lowly opinion of novels will be discussed later. Having found Kien's weakness, Therese widens the breach by showing care for the cleanliness of his books. As we have already seen, cleanliness is an important concept in Kien's vocabulary. Kien takes the bait, because 'Er sah es gern wenn man die Interessen seiner Bücher wahrte' (31–He liked seeing someone looking after the interests of his books). Wishing to thank Therese, he offers her a book, immediately feeling disturbed by his promise and this creates dramatic tension.

These second thoughts usher in a dream, bizarre and frightening, unlike the other dreams Kien cared to remember. The dream is introduced into the text without any indication of its being a dream at all. This is only registered in a brief statement in the pluperfect tense concluding the interlude. 'Aus alledem hatte der Schlaf einen Traum gebraut' (35–Out of this sleep a dream had brewed) with the verb 'brewed' reinforcing the intoxication induced by the suspension of logic in the dream. Initially Kien is the observer in his nightmare of sacrifice, blood, fire, books and human beings in

interchangeable roles. The image of the tigers mentioned at the beginning of the novel have translated themselves into two Jaguars rationalized by Kien into Mexican priests about to perform a human sacrifice. When Kien opens his eyes, not having wanted to see the sacrifice, he is shocked to see books instead of blood leap out of the victim's chest. Falling on the ground they are consumed by 'Klebrigen Flammen' (32–sticky flames).[25] The structure of the dream is determined by a mad tempo in which relentless destruction is rhythmically interspersed with brief breathing spaces. Approaching the alter where an enormous pyre smoulders, Kien curses the animal-priests and ends up cursing himself. The realization that he has destructively turned on himself—a further indication of the inevitability of his own suicide—is of brief duration. Blinded by the flames, screaming people cling onto Kien, further impeding escape. As the books he sought to save become a crowd of human beings, he, like some sort of latter-day St. Peter, denies them: 'ich kenn' euch nicht' (33–I do not know you). This act of denial is followed by increased action on the part of the burning people to detain him and in so doing make him share their human fate. Aware of his impotence, Kien, unable to speak or weep, gives vent to his misanthropy in thought. His hatred of human beings is of course also self-directed as he has been forced to remain in the midst of the pyre:

> Er verabscheut sie, nie haben sie vom Leben genug, er hasst sie. Wie er sie Kränken, quälen, beschimpfen möchte, er kann nicht, er kann nicht. (33)
> (He abhorred them, these greedy creatures; could they not be satisfied with the life they had had? He loathed them. He would like to hurt them, torment them, reproach them; he could do nothing, nothing.)

Not however having lost his sense of mission as regards the books, Kien experiences a vision in which a mighty book is slowly consumed by a red glow. The silent fortitude of the books' martyrdom, stresses that a metamorphosis has again taken place—in Kien's mind books replace people. In contrast to people who scream as they die, books die stoically like martyrs and saints: 'Märtyrer schreien nicht, Heilige schreien nicht' (33–4–Martyrs don't scream, saints don't scream). Accompanying the vision is the voice of all-knowing God; proclaiming the absence of books and the vanity of all things. Acknowledging the voice of the absolute in which truth resides, Kien is saved temporarily and even wants to laugh at the empty fire. This respite allows the dream to take on an identifiable historical contour. Contemplating the burning of Rome, Kien surveys the human destruction surrounding him and as

the sole survivor he is once again able to assert his superiority over other human beings.

However, without warning, the mad orgy of destruction begins again with people changing into books this time, causing Kien to rush to save them where he, impeded by bodies is saved by God's assurance that there are no books. Four times the 'Schauspiel' (34) or dramatic play is repeated. The mad tempo of events reaches a crescendo in a vision of the Last Judgment. The voice of god booms out mockingly, 'Jetzt sind es Bücher' (34–Now they are books). The ultimate horror of books marching in phalanxes toward the burning altar awakes Kien.

Although Kien is able to dissect his dream by rationalizing some of the events, for instance the destruction of the library of Alexandria, he is left with the abiding fear of his library going up in flames and not even the thought of the insurance policy he had once concluded, merely to avoid further contact with the agent, can comfort him. Kien's life is inextricably bound to his library, he 'zweifelte an seiner Kraft, nach Vernichtung von fünfundzwanzigtausend Bänden weiterzuleben ... ' (34–he doubted his strength to continue living after the destruction of twenty-five thousand volumes).

Kien returns to his decision to initiate Therese into scholarship. His dismissal of novels has already been mentioned briefly and underscores the one-sided nature of Kien's scholarship. Kien's dislike of novels is founded in his decision to become a one-dimensional man. Kien, as a 'geschlossene Person' (35) or closed individual, wishes to avoid the challenge to his identity and consciousness ascribed to the novel which of course, makes up at least part of the interest of a specialist study of twentieth-century literature:

> Nur wird von Romanen kein Geist fett. Den Genuss, den sie vielleicht bieten, Überzahlt man sehr; sie zersetzen den besten Charakter. Man lernt sich in allerlei Menschen einfühlen. Am vielen Hin und Her gewinnt man Geschmack. Man löst sich in die Figuren auf, die einem gefallen. Jeder Standpunkt wird begreiflich. Willig überlässt man sich fremden Zielen und verliert für länger die eigenen aus dem Auge. Romane sind Keile, die ein schreibender Schauspieler in die geschlossene Person seiner Leser treibt. Je besser er Keil und Widerstand berechnet, um so gespaltener lässt er die Person zurück. Romane müssten von Staats wegen verboten sein! (35)
> (But no mind ever grew fat on a diet of novels. The pleasure which they occasionally offer is far too heavily paid for: they teach us to think ourselves into other men's places. Thus we acquire a taste for change. The personality becomes dissolved in pleasing figments of the imagination. The reader learns to understand every point of view.

> Willingly he yields himself to the pursuit of other people's goals and loses sight of his own. Novels are so many wedges which the novelist, an actor with his pen, inserts into the closed personality of the reader. The better he calculates the size of the wedge and the strength of the resistance, so much more completely does he crack open the personality of his victim. Novels should be prohibited by the State.)

The disturbing occurrences of that fateful morning walk on which Kien had those unusual brushes with normal humanity persist in disturbing his peace of mind with their ripple effect. Kien has, as we have seen, reviewed his life and not changed his mind about having chosen the path of isolating scholarship, yet the unusual contacts with people have an effect on his concentration, as he now knows moments of fatigue and has the desire to be among people, that is, to be part of society against the dictates of his character, so dedicated to the sterile joys of his scholarship:

> Auch er kannte Augenblicke, in denen er seiner buchstäblichen Leistungen müde wurde und die heimliche Lust verspürte, für länger, als es ihm sein Charakter gestattete, unter Menschen zu gehen. (36) (He too knew moments when he was tired of his services to the written word and felt a secret desire for more of the company of human kind than his strength of character normally permitted.)

Kien's usual way of distracting himself by treating his books as companions, no longer proves satisfactory as thoughts of Therese's devotion to the book he lent her, lead him to believe they have something in common. After all, hadn't Therese made a paper cover for the grubby old novel, clothing it like a child? All doubts about her are swept aside when Kien surprises Therese in the kitchen, wearing gloves and laboriously reading the novel that had been placed on an embroidered velvet cushion to protect the 'value' contained in the book.

Deeply ashamed of himself for having doubted Therese, Kien consults his 'friend' Confucius, whom he addresses in the familiar form: 'Er scheute sich nicht, Konfuzius zu duzen' (39–He was not shy of Confucius; he called him 'you' straight out). His lack of distance as regards the writings of the Chinese sage leads him to take them at face value. In his blinded or dazzled state, Kien is in no position to evaluate Therese beyond outward appearances. Blinded by her solicitude for his books, he comes to the ironic conclusion: 'Acht Jahre war ich blind' (40–I was blind for eight years) and resolves to put an end to these blinded years by following Confucius' advice to rectify wrongs. Kien therefore resolves to compensate Therese by marrying her as she had proved her willingness to look after his books: 'Sie ist das beste Mittel, um meine Bibliothek in Ordnung zu halten' (40–She is the heaven-sent

instrument for preserving my library). In viewing Therese as a means or instrument, he ignores his own previously held opinion on the subject of a wife. Stunned that her ploys had borne fruit so soon, Therese accepts Kien's proposal of marriage.

An interesting point is mentioned during Kien's conversation with Confucius' works. While reviewing the various stages of his life, an important fact comes to light, indicating the precarious nature of Kien's ivory-tower existence on purely financial grounds:

> Mit den Zinsen seines väterlichen Erbes hätte er bis an sein Lebensende ein angenehmes Auskommen gefunden. Er zog es vor, das Kapital auf Bücher zu verwenden. In wenigen, vielleicht noch ganzen drei Jahren war alles verbraucht. (39)
> (He might have lived comfortably on the income from his paternal inheritance. He preferred to spend the capital on books. In a few years, three perhaps, it would all be spent.)

These remarks of course call to mind Virginia Woolf's essay where the perception of the isolated artist is viewed from the vantage point of the vanishing economic independence of the modern writer. Kien is blinded toward such considerations as we know. He simply does not acknowledge the subconscious certainty, as seen in his dream, that he inhabits a leaning tower: 'Von der bedrängten Zukunft träunte er nie, also fürchtete er sie nicht' (39–He never even dreamed of the threatening future, he did not fear it).

The fourth and final chapter of the exposition, titled 'Die Muschel' (The Mussel Shell), concerns the marriage of Kien and Therese. Reinforcing the notion that a new chapter in Kien's life is opening, the boy of the first chapter appears again for the last time thus emphasizing the symmetry of the exposition. Following on the rather shabby wedding ceremony, the couple return to Kien's apartment. Kien feels at home once again in his inverted world view, perceiving the outside world as a prison and his library as freedom, his true homeland if not a universe.

Kien has mistakenly believed that Therese is well on the way to being completely assimilated into his 'Heimat' (48). The divan now comes to his attention and piling books onto it in preparation for the final initiation of Therese into the order of his library — his idea of consummating the marriage — he waits for his bride, all feelings of love directed at his books. Therese now divested of her shell, her starched blue skirt, proves to have more earthy ideas. She is by no means defenceless without her shell and the awful realisation finally dawns on Kien that Therese has little consideration for his books: 'Er schlottert vor Angst, er betet zu den Büchern, der letzten Schranke' (50). Shaking with fear, praying to his books — the last stockade, Kien has to watch Therese sweep his books onto the

floor, recline on the divan and beckon him to her. Shocked and enraged, Kien flees from the library, locks himself in the lavatory — the only room without books in it — and cries like a child.

The image of Kien weeping with uninhibited emotion, alone and friendless, stands in direct contrast to the closing image of the novel: 'Als ihn die Flammen erreichen, lacht er so laut, wie er in seinem ganzen Leben nie gelacht hat' (414-When the flames reached him at last, he laughed out loud, louder than he had ever laughed in all his life). Kien's orgiastic laugh therefore forms the polar opposite of the uncontrollable, impotent weeping at the end of the exposition. As the structure of the novel shows, indicated by the chapter headings of parts one and three, 'Ein Kopf ohne Welt' has indeed become 'Welt ohne Kopf'. The threat of the world has invaded his head and in order both to protect his books from further violation and at the same time to achieve absolute unity with them, he sacrifices himself with insane joy.

The logical fulfilment of the novel's exposition does not present any sort of synthesis. Instead of a harmonious close, the cleft remaining in the mind of the reader between the head (pure scholarship) and the world (masses) stays unresolved and disturbing. Canetti therefore succeeds in the aim forming Kien's dismissal of the novel. The wedge driven into the consciousness of the reader prevents any resolution. *Die Blendung* can in this sense be considered to be a realist work in its intention. The realism of Canetti's novel is therefore not to be found in a mimetic reproduction of objective reality in the nineteenth-century sense, but in the consciousness of a future under threat. In his essay *Realismus und neue Wirklichkeit* of 1965, Canetti, in discussing the many threats facing the future of mankind, draws the following conclusion: ' . . . man kann ohne Untertreibung sagen, dass wir in einer Weltperiode leben, die mit unseren Grossvätern das Wichtigste nicht mehr gemein hat. Sie hat keine unzerspaltene Zukunft'[26] — one can say without exaggeration that we live in an epoch in which we no longer have the most important thing in common with our grandfathers: our epoch does not have an undivided future.

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NOTES

1. Canetti, Elias: *Die Fackel im Ohr. Lebensgeschichte 1921–1931*, Fischer Taschenbuch 5404, Frankfurt a.M., 1980, p. 344. The translation is my own.
2. Canetti, Elias: *Die Blendung* (1935), Fischer Taschenbuch 696, Frankfurt a.M., 1980. Quotations from this text will be cited by page number only.
3. Canetti, Elias: *Auto-da-Fé*, The Seabury Press, New York, 1979. Translated from the German under the personal supervision of the author by C.V. Wedgwood.

4. Op. cit. p. 343. The translation is my own.
5. Magris, Claudio: 'Der Schriftsteller, der sich versteckt' in: *Modern Austrian Literature* 16, 3/4 1983 (pp. 177–95) p. 195.
6. *Germanistik*. Internationales Referatenorgan mit bibliographischen Hinweisen, Hrsg. von H.W. Bähr et al., Tübingen.
7. Russell, Peter: 'The Vision of Man in Elias Canetti's *Die Blendung*' in: *German Life and Letters*, Vol. XXVIII 1974–1975 (pp. 24–35) p. 32.
8. Ibid. p. 28.
9. Paul, J.M.: 'Rationalität und Wahnsinn in Canettis Roman *Die Blendung*' in: *Modern Austrian Literature* op. cit. (pp. 111–31) p. 122.
10. Demet, Michel-Francois: 'The Theme of Blood in Elias Canetti's *Die Blendung*', ibid. (pp. 147–53) p. 151.
11. See Handke, Peter: *Ich bin Bewohner des Elfenbeinturms*, in the poem of the same title, st. 56. Frankfurt a.M. 1972, pp. 19–28.
12. Woolf, Virginia: 'The Leaning Tower' in *Collected Essays* Vol. 2, London 1966, p. 169.
13. Op. cit. p. 171.
14. Where possible, translation into English will be based on *Auto-da-Fé*, cf. note 3.
15. cf. Dissinger, Dieter: 'Der Roman *Die Blendung*', in: *Text + Kritik*, Zeitschrift für Literatur, Hrsg. von Heinza Ludwig Arnold B.28, *Elias Canetti* (pp. 30–8) p. 31.
16. cf. Schmidt, Hugo: 'Narrative Attitudes in Canetti's *Die Blendung*', *Modern Austrian Literature* op. cit. pp. 93–109.
17. Humphrey, Robert: *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles; London 1954, p. 38.
18. Op. cit. p. 101.
19. cf. Dissenger, op. cit. p. 32.
20. cf. eg. Lorenz, Dagmar C.G.: 'Elias Canettis *Masse und Macht* und *Die Blendung*. Bezüge zwischen Roman und Massentheorie', *Modern Austrian Literature* op. cit. pp. 81–91.
21. Canetti, Elias: *Hitler nach Speer* in: *Das Gewissen der Worte*, München, Wien. p. 179. My own translation.
22. cf. Kuna, Franz: *Kafka. Literature as Corrective Punishment*, Bloomington and London, 1974, p. 50.
23. Magris. op. cit. p. 183.
24. Paul, J.M. op. cit. p. 112.
25. cf. Demet op. cit. who points to the 'mysterious relationship' between blood and fire in the novel.
26. Canetti, Elias: *Realismus und neue Wirklichkeit* in *Das Gewissen der Worte*. op. cit. p. 70.