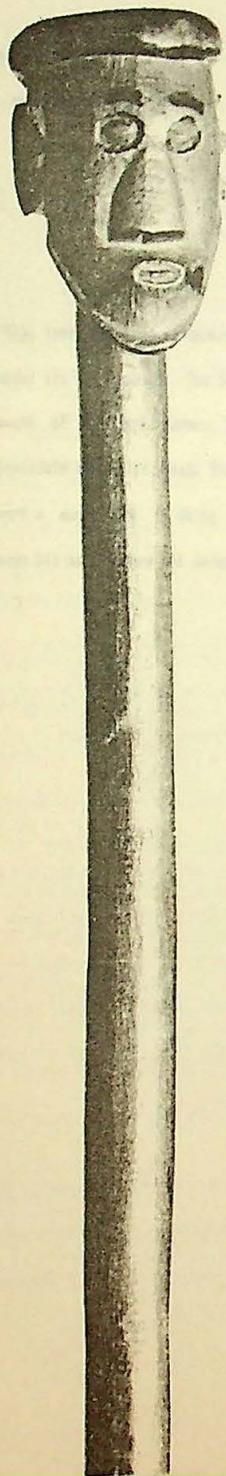


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THE 'MFECANE' AFTERMATH

towards a new paradigm

6-9 September 1991

PORT NATAL: A 'BLIND' DARKNESS
speculation, trade, the creation of a vortex
of violence and the 'mfecane'

Cathy Gorham • University of Cape Town

University of the Witwatersrand

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Afrika-Studiecentrum



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"A BLIND DARKNESS":

KNOWLEDGE, TRADE, AND THE MYTH OF 1824: THE TRADING SETTLEMENT OF PORT NATAL AS GATEWAY TO THE "MFEKANE".

Cathy Gorham, August 1991.

"Sky, land, and sea disappear together out of the world when the Placido - as the saying is - goes to sleep under its black poncho. The few stars left below the seaward frown of the vault shine feebly as into the mouth of a black cavern. In its vastness your ship floats unseen under your feet, her sails flutter invisible above your head. The eye of God Himself - they add with grim profanity - could not find out what work a man's hand is doing in there; and you would be free to call the devil to your aid with impunity if even his malice were not defeated by such a blind darkness."

Joseph Conrad,

Nostramo.

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One of the most incredible aspects of southern African historiography is that Shaka - the brute, despotic, irrational leader of the Zulu in the early nineteenth century - is held responsible for most of nineteenth, and even some twentieth, century politics. Despite concerted attempts to move away from Great Man History, it has not been possible to discard this popular and monolithic view of the Zulu King as progenitor of socio-political upheavals, genocide, and even the depopulation of vast tracts of land on the eve of the Great Trek.

At once, Shaka's cruel, capricious, and basically uncivilized ways are held to have created the opening for traders, missionaries, Colonial officials - hence Civilization - to step in and begin to set southern Africa's house in order. Under European rule, this massive project demanded mechanisms of control through Ordinances, Hut Tax, Education, and history, ultimately ensuring that the penumbra of peace associated with the expansion of Empire descended like a thick blanket to stifle the final quiverings of "uncivilized behaviour".

Coincidentally, the Zulu state under Shaka fuelled European labour needs in the Cape Colony and along its expanding borders. In this way a commercial metropole situated south of the epicentre of violence (hence an external, and objective, witness) could be expanded and consolidated. Refugees, fleeing the Zulu rampaging and devastation, filtered down through the hands of the kindly traders and missionaries, creating the Cape Colony's first significant labour supply beyond its borders.

Commercial expansion from the Cape to the bay of Natal in 1824 is seen as a vital part in this process, and the shadow of Shaka looms large in the early, rising sun of Civilization at the bay blots out the true nature of activities there. The Natal pioneers, Farewell, Fynn, King, Isaacs and co., have conventionally been portrayed in the dappled light surrounding the first encounter between Europe and Shaka. 1824 saw Port Natal become a gateway into the interior, into the turmoil associated with contact between European slave traders further north at Quelimane, Inhambane, and Lourenco Marques (Delagoa Bay), and into the history of southern Africa.

But this is not where the history of the Farewell expedition and the subsequent settlement of Port Natal begins. Nor was it the result of some "Divine Plan", heretically sealed from contemporary events and concerns, aiming to bring to the Zulu the best of British civilization. Until it is traced to its origins, the significance of mercantile expansion

in the nineteenth century from the Cape north to the south east coast of Africa which brought the traders to Natal, not forgetting its interaction in the creation and dissemination of a history which has been so widely accepted for so long, cannot be understood. In this, the interconnections between Captain W.F.W. Owen's expedition to explore the south east coast of Africa, Cape mercantile concerns, the Naval squadron based at Simon's Bay, and attempts to establish a trading link with Delagoa Bay, are elucidatory.

Once, in keeping with more recent historiographical trends, the shadow of Shaka is shifted from the image of the Port Natal traders as the forerunners in Europe's mission of civilizing Africa, their true shadow emerges. There was no single key in the form of Shaka which opened the way for the Fynn and Farewell expedition to the bay of Natal in 1824. Something more complex, more sinister, and less "civilized" lay behind their scheme. To delve into this in an attempt to trace the traders for who they were and what they represented, as opposed to what they have become, is highly problematic and not unlike trying to see into the darkness of Sulaco. As with Conrad's fictitious bay in Nostramo, this darkness is man-made, its power derivative of greed, and its henchman, myth.

To grasp the historical landscape behind this metaphorical darkness entails a project which the new thought on the "afecane" has only just begun to pursue. It means lifting the blanket of "civilization" from its creation, reviewing the myth of "1824", and delving into the very minds that created and disseminated its fictions, fantasies, and half truths. Since the central construct of conventional "afecane" historiography - Shaka and the Zulu state as motor for nineteenth century history - is closely related to myth and its role in society, an avenue for exploration opens up: defining a method and an hypothesis that places the traders more comfortably within their original context. The impetus for the expedition to the bay of Natal in 1824, and its ramifications in South African historiography, is a key to this. As the receptacle for much myth, it may be held up against itself, disassembled, and turned around. The aim here is not so much reconstruction as it is to expand and explore, in terms of historiographical analysis, Roland Barthes' injunction to seek "a reconciliation between reality and man, between description and explanation, between object and knowledge".¹ This is a tentative step toward that.

¹R. Barthes, "Myth Today" in Barthes: Selected Writings (Oxford, 1982), pp.93-149, quote from p.149.

"The most civilized nations are precisely those which have the deepest interest in the spread of civilization. To them accrue all the pleasures and advantages of increased knowledge, quickened industry, and of a field of enterprise continually enlarging, as the more rude and sequestered numbers of the family of mankind are more intimately connected by commercial intercourse."

W.D. Cooley,

"Memoir on the expediency of sending an expedition to explore the country west of Delagoa Bay."
1833.

"Once again, knowledge of subject races... is what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control."

E.W. Said,
Orientalism.

The accepted version of nineteenth century events holds that the Fynn-Farewell expedition which set off from Cape Town in April-May 1824 had the lucrative pickings of a trade in ivory in its sights.² This is directly linked with the return from Delagoa Bay to Cape Town in early 1823 of the Orange Grove which had been sent north along the coast "in search of new avenues of trade".³ Fynn wrote that it was this which prompted F.G. Farewell and J.S. King to consider a "mercantile trip to St. Lucia Bay, near which a large part of the Zulu nation lived under their great chief Shaka".⁴ The Orange Grove, owned by Cape Town merchant Henry Nourse, had brought back a cargo of "ivory, wax (ambergris), etc., part of it obtained at Delagoa Bay".⁵

Believing that all the ivory and gold dust obtained by the Portuguese at Delagoa Bay originated from the Zulu kingdom, Farewell organised a joint stock company with financial backing from another Cape merchant, J.R. Thomson.⁶ The aim was to explore trade opportunities in this quarter, with a clear focus on St. Lucia Bay.⁷ Having failed on their first voyage to that bay to find a safe anchorage, King and Farewell's exploring party aboard the Salisbury and

² B. Becker, Rule of Fear (New York, 1964), pp.40-1; A.F. Hattersley, The Natalians: Further Annals of Natal (Pietermaritzburg, 1940), p.15; E. Mackeurtan, The Cradle Days of Natal (Pietermaritzburg, 1948), p.110.

³ Mackeurtan, Cradle Days, p.94.

⁴ J. Stuart and D. McK. Malcolm (eds), The Diary of Henry Francis Fynn (Pietermaritzburg, 1950) - henceforth Fynn Diary - p.52.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Cape Archives, B.W. 118/839; there is some confusion as to the spelling of "Thomson"; Roberts, in The Zulu Kings uses "Thomson", as does the editor of Narrative of Voyages. However, the same merchant established a shipping concern, Thomson, Watson and Co., thus the spelling here.

⁷ Fynn Diary, p.52; Mackeurtan, Cradle Days, pp.98-9.

the Julia, chanced on the bay of Natal, surveyed it, and shifted their focus south-ward to the better port, although more distant from their prospective trading partners.⁹

At this point Henry Francis Fynn becomes an important player in the scheme to open up the south east coast of Africa to trade. Having spent six months at Delagoa Bay in 1823, as supercargo aboard another Nourse ship, the Jane, there for trading purposes, Fynn's experience made him a reasonable choice for Farewell's planned venture to Natal. In April or May 1824, Fynn left Cape Town in the Julia as manager of the proposed "trading transactions".¹⁰ This, augmented by the sketchiest of details, is what is commonly presented as the background to the settlement of Port Natal in 1824.¹⁰ Much that is vital to understanding the forces which motivated the expedition is therefore lost. Since Fynn's manuscripts present the first record of the history of the hinterland bridging the Cape Colony in the south and Delagoa Bay to the north - not to mention evidence relative to the rise of the Zulu state so important to the historiography of southern Africa - this presents a serious error, not just in terms of the accuracy of historical accounts, but also the assessment of Fynn's writings as a source. Somehow "1824", in this sense the point at which the history of Natal begins, is allowed to float about like another mythical "1652". The line drawn from the Orange Grove's speculative voyage in 1822-23 to the Fynn-Farewell landing in 1824 has been dropped as an anchor connecting the history of Natal to the broader stream of the "afecane". The intention here is to demonstrate that the line is at best tenuous, and can be disentangled from myth, thus allowing the conventional history to float free of its moorings like some phantom ship.

Such a study represents another thread in the attempt to revise the history of nineteenth century South Africa. Any analysis of the impetus for the settlement of Port Natal must be critically situated within this historiographical context, lest it, too, follows the conventional example in mooring itself alongside the floating harbour of myth.

The present controversy amongst historians concerned with the study of nineteenth century upheavals in southern

⁹The paragraph reflects Fynn Diary, pp.36-54; Mackeurtan, Cradle Days, pp.98-110; and B. Roberts, The Zulu Kings (London, 1974), pp.11-13.

¹⁰Fynn Diary, p.56.

^{10A}A prime example, A.E. Cubbin, "Origins of the British Settlement at Port Natal, May 1824-July 1842" (Ph.D thesis, University of the Orange Free State, 1982) provides elementary biographical details on the main protagonists, but delves no further into the context of the landing of Fynn which he takes as the point of departure for his thesis.

Africa hinges on the cause and subsequent effects of what is now termed the "mfecane". Julian Cobbing, in the light of Liesegang, Smith, and Hedges work on southern Mozambique¹¹, and Patrick Harries' revelations of the slave trade out of Delagoa Bay¹², has developed the hypothesis that the "internal revolution" of the Zulu state¹³ and hence the concomitant trans-continental upheavals of this period was, contrary to the conventional (past and present) historiographical view¹⁴, the result of European slave-raiding on four fronts: Delagoa Bay in the north, Trans-Orangia to the west, the Cape's eastern frontier in the south, and, to the east, Natal. In this view the "Mfecane" is neither Zulu-centric, nor an historically accurate construct, but rather the result of an "alibi" for the realities of Europe's mission of at once "civilizing" southern Africa and serving settler needs.¹⁵

The examination of the early nineteenth century is presently characterised by three approaches. The first strand draws on the work of J.D. Omer-Cooper whose Zulu Aftermath paved the way for an "Africanist" history portraying Shaka, Dingane etc. as great statesmen as opposed to bloodthirsty despots. Shaka, the military genius and innovator, thus fell into the popular, liberation-type-hero category.¹⁶ Rather than review the origin of his sources, Omer-Cooper built upon the Fynn, Isaacs, and Bird tradition, spiced with some Bryant.¹⁷ The thesis therefore did little to explain the cause of these nineteenth century disturbances, instead obfuscating their origin with a new set of myths.

In defense of the "population explosion/demographic pressure" theory which developed in the "Aftermath" of

¹¹G. Liesegang, "Beiträge zur Geschichte des Reiches der Gaza Nguni in Südlichen Mosaabik" (Ph.D thesis, Universität zu Köln, 1967); A.K. Smith, "The Struggle for Control of Southern Mozambique, 1720-1835" (Ph.D, UCLA, 1970); and D.W. Hedges, "Trade and Politics in Southern Mozambique and Zululand in the Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries" (Ph.D, University of London, 1978).

¹²P. Harries, "Slavery, Social Incorporation and Surplus Extraction; the Nature of Free and Unfree Labour in South-East Africa", Journal of African History, 22 (1981), pp.309-330.

¹³As advocated by J.D. Omer-Cooper, The Zulu Aftermath. A Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Bantu Africa (London, 1955).

¹⁴R.H. Davenport, South Africa: A Modern History, Ch.1.4 to 1.5 (Cape Town, 1987); P. Maylan, A History of the African People of South Africa, Ch.4, (Third edition, Johannesburg, 1987), and J.D. Omer-Cooper, The Zulu Aftermath, for example.

¹⁵J. Cobbing, "The Mfecane as Alibi: thoughts on Dithakong and Mholomo", Journal of African History, 1988; "Jettisoning the Mfecane (With Perestroika)" (paper presented to African Studies Centre, University of the Witwatersrand, September 1988); "A Tainted Well. The Objectives, Historical Fantasies and Working Methods of James Stuart, with Counter-Argument", Journal of Natal and Zulu History, 1988; "Grasping the Nettle: The Slave Trade and the Early Zulu" (paper presented to the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, October 1990).

¹⁶See Omer-Cooper, The Zulu Aftermath, ch. 2 on the Zulu Kingdom.

¹⁷Fynn Diary; N. Isaacs, Travels and Adventures in East Africa, Hermann, L. (ed) (Cape Town, 1936); J. Bird, Annals of Natal (Pietermaritzburg, 1888); A.T. Bryant, Olden Times in Zululand and Natal (London, 1929).

Oaer-Cooper's thesis of a "Nineteenth century revolution in Bantu Africa", a "scientific" and inter-disciplinary approach has attempted to explain the cause of the "mfecane", centring once more on Natal and the Zulu state. However, this approach has also proved inconclusive. For instance, Martin Hall's demonstration of the cyclical nature of faaine and its devastating ecological effects in the 1700s and 1800s is weak in that his findings are based on evidence provided by one section from one Yellow Wood tree in one region in "Zululand", the Karkloof Forest.¹⁸ Jeff Guy's explanation in terms of rainfall patterns and their effects on pasturage falls short of the mark since it fails to consider all aspects of agricultural production, particularly cultivation and crop storage, equally part of Zulu adaptation and synchronisation with the environment.¹⁹ The most recent attempt to bolster the "ecological disaster" thesis, that of Charles Ballard, presents an imaginative flight of fancy cushioned with a plethora of "ifs" and "may haves", and posits the theory (building on Hall and Guy's conclusions) that faaine and drought "may have been responsible for creating a major subsistence crisis that had potential for destabilising the normal functioning of society".²⁰ That Ballard uses the 1815 eruption of the Indonesian volcano, Taaboro, to demonstrate the impact of atmospheric disturbances on the world climate, and hence the causes of the "mfecane", lends his work little credibility.²¹

A second approach concentrates on the manifestation, in the face of Abolition, of parallel systems of slavery in their regional context, such as the western Cape and the Colony's eastern frontier.²² For Natal, a consideration of the genesis and metamorphosis of the Shakan state, and the political and historiographical ramifications of the creation of Natal's "mfecane", in the context of the trade in slaves out of Delagoa Bay, has been undertaken by

¹⁸M. Hall, "Dendroclimatology, Rainfall and Human Adaption in the Later Iron Age of Natal and Zululand", Annals of the Natal Museum, pp.693-703, November 1976.

¹⁹J. Guy, "Ecological Factors in the Rise of Shaka and the Zulu Kingdom", in Marks, S. and Ataore, A. Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa (London, 1980), chapter 4.

²⁰C. Ballard, "Drought and Economic Distress: South Africa in the 1800s", Journal of Interdisciplinary History, Autumn, 1986, p.371.

²¹Ibid, pp.359-361.

²²Respectively, C. Saunders, "'Liberated Africans' and Labour at the Cape of Good Hope in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century", The International Journal of African Historical Studies, 18, no.2 (1985); R. Shell, "History of the Slave Trade to the Cape, 1656-1822." (unpublished paper, 1989); and S. Newton-King, "The Labour Market of the Cape Colony 1807-28" in Marks, S. and Ataore, A. (eds) Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa (London, 1980) chapter 7; A. Webster, "An Examination of the 'Fingo Emancipation' of 1835" (unpublished paper, April 1990).

Carolyn Hamilton and John Wright respectively.²³

Informed by the second, the third angle of consideration is exemplified by the work of Cobbing, Wright (both of whom tend to blur beyond the borders of this categorization), Russell Martin, and William Worger.²⁴ Here the central concern is to demonstrate the twisting of history to suit political purposes, the manner in which this is achieved, and hence its sociological ramifications. An important point is demonstrated by this approach: the genesis of historical "facts" must be monitored carefully and their productive existence scrutinized if bias is to be countered, if not avoided.²⁵ This is as important to the project of reviewing the "mfecane" as it was to its creation.

This new thought on the "mfecane" represents an approach to the study of the past which falls into a broader dialectic. In recognising the power of knowledge and its configuration in the production and dissemination of ideas, cultures and histories, it attempts to examine the distribution of that power and its maintenance within cultural discourse through producer to consumer. In this, the position of the analyst is also considered important. As a foundation stone for this type of study on which subsequent and similar studies have built, E.W. Said's Orientalism is of extreme importance. Russell Martin's consideration of "British Images of the Zulu" is self-consciously styled in this mode and brings to light important evidence and observations on the manner in which literature dealing with the Zulu kingdom was produced.²⁶ It sets an important precedent for South African historiography, and one which has strangely been neglected until the central tenets of the "mfecane" were called into question. William Worger's study of the "Myth of Shaka" predates this, and cannot be classified with any other historiographical "trend" since it prefigures much that has recently come into prominence. Worger begins to sketch a method that at once breaks down the old myth of Shaka-as-barbaric-tyrant, and demonstrates the need to review original sources. For the first time he notes that the written, documented "evidence" offered up by the Natal traders, Fynn and Isaacs, is composed of much

²³C. Hamilton, "Ideology, Oral Traditions and the Struggle for Power in the Early Zulu Kingdom" (M.A. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1985); J.B. Wright "The Dynamics of Power and Conflict in the Thukela-Mziakulu Region in the Late 18th and Early 19th Centuries: A Critical Reconstruction" (Ph.D thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1990).

²⁴Dobbing, "A Tainted Well", and "Grasping the Nettle"; Wright, as above; S.J. Martin, "British Images of the Zulu" (D. Phil, Cambridge University, 1982); W. Worger, "Clothing Dry Bones: The Myth of Shaka", Journal of African Studies, 6, no.3 (1979) pp.144-158.

²⁵As Marian Cornavin has demonstrated. See Apartheid, Power and Historical Falsification (London, 1980), particularly chs. 1 and 8; see the discussion below, pp.14-16.

²⁶S.J.P. Martin, "British Images of the Zulu".

oral testimony collected in a subjective, biased, and a-critical manner, and must therefore be utilised with the utmost caution.²⁷ Again, it is striking how the main stream of historiography has neglected to integrate Worger's findings. Relative to this, Dan Wylie has examined, albeit from a literary, cultural and stylistic point of view, the writings of Nathaniel Isaacs. He has demonstrated that, beyond his political project (emphasising the necessity for the annexation of Natal by Britain), Isaacs' Travels and Adventures in Eastern Africa belongs more to 'the realm of narrative fiction than an accurate, 'eye-witness' account of Shaka's reign'.²⁸

Rather than obfuscate further the need to review the "mfecane" from its very roots by building on an already shaky framework, and if the debate is to be contributed to constructively, historiographical method as opposed to myth and fantasy must become the means to the end. The new thought on the "mfecane", in attempting to present an alternate view of this history which recognises the poverty and limits of its sources and avoids building from such a shaky framework, has come under fire for just that.²⁹

The irony is that so much of this debate hinges on varying interpretations of the evidence, often related to some ideological framework. For instance, the Smith-Hedges variants of the trade hypothesis as explanation for the socio-political transformation of states in and around Delagoa Bay in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries both use specific economic theories as a framework on which to hang their evidence, stretching it at times, and discarding that which seems anomalous. Thus H.F. Fynn's writings are used insofar as they are applicable, but his evidence of Portuguese-African connections in a trade that included slaves as well as ivory, is neglected in favour of the larger project. State formation is described according to the relation to demand and supply in the trade for

²⁷W. Worger, "Clothing Dry Bones", pp.145-56.

²⁸D. Wylie, "Utilizing Isaacs: One Thread in the Development of the Shaka Myth" (paper presented to the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, October 1990); Wylie is currently researching a thesis in which it is argued that "the narrative norms of fiction have informed the portrayal of Shaka far more than those of empirical historiography", "Utilizing Isaacs", p.1.

²⁹Two recent papers reply to this question by holding up Cobbing's method to scrutiny; both call his use of evidence into question, the first in relation to the chronology of the trade in slaves out of Delagoa Bay, the second to the manner in which Shaka is presented as a European invention as part of an alibi for their activities; unfortunately the first, E. Eldredge, "The 'Mfecane' Reconsidered: the origins of violence in southern Africa, ca. 1800-1830", is subject to citation restrictions, but argues against Cobbing's hypothesis as presented in "The Mfecane as Alibi" only; the second, C. Hamilton, "The Character and Objects of Shaka' and their many representations in the 1820s: the Cobbing thesis reconsidered" (paper presented to the Centre for African Studies, 29 May 1991) inaccurately refers to Cobbing's argument as a thesis, and can be disputed for its own subjective and selective use of evidence - see note 134 below.

ivory, admittedly of importance in the eighteenth century, but declining by the nineteenth. Hedges considered this, and phrased in an explanation based on the rise to prominence of a cattle trade to merchant ships at the bay. However, he himself observed that the number of these ships declined in the 1790s, an obvious corollary of which is to question the validity of his emphasis on the impact of such a transference from one commodity of trade to another.²⁰ A decline in the number of merchant ships calling at the bay would surely mean a decline in the need for victualling, hence it is debateable whether the transference to a demand for cattle could have been in the order required to cause the upheavals and state formation Hedges describes - unless other ships, of an illicit nature, augmented these numbers. Nevertheless, an emphasis on a rise in a trade in cattle does not conclusively explain the roots of the "mfecane". Yet Hedges allows the hypothesis (and economic theory) to control the evidence, rather than a balance maintained between the two. So such history has become the skeleton of myth because of this, and in demonstrating the dynamics which created and nurtured the "myth of 1824", these relations between fact and fantasy must be considered. Such a study serves also to move a step closer to understanding what has prevented scholars of the "mfecane" from taking up leads such as those set down by Martin and his predecessor, Wogger. Perhaps it will serve also to explain something of the future for the debate.

History, as Peter Geyl defined it, is a "debate without end", a platform where varying arguments, diverse views are ranged against one another in the name of dialectical discourse. Out of the flow of this debate steers a debris, a sediment which filters down to settle as shale: an accumulated knowledge. Banked up in papers, journals and books, this becomes the bed-rock on which future research and debate builds. As J.H. Hexter wrote, historians aim to produce "cumulative increments to men's knowledge".²¹ If this is the fluvial plane, history extends back and forth, through accumulations of the written word, from source to estuary, and the ebb and flow of formative cross-currents account for its course. With time the bed-rock becomes impacted; it is then subject to further intrusion, erosion, and alteration in the flow of discourse. Such a telescopic pressure of time creates a sense of stability, a sense that the firm granite of knowledge bears the weight of the present.

²⁰Hedges, "Trade and Politics in Southern Mozambique and Zululand", Abstract, and pp.11-14.

²¹J.H. Hexter, "The Rhetoric of History", International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences, vol.6, p.369.

As the geologist explores the strata and formation of the earth's crust to understand the forces which shaped the planet, so the historian is able to examine the nature of the discipline's inheritance through the configurations of its accumulated knowledge. Where the geologist's task is simplified by the discovery and analysis of physical evidence, the historian's is complicated. Because, as Vico wrote, people make their own history, what people can know is what they have made³², a process existing as much in the abstract as the physical. We therefore have little evidence from which to work beyond that which is a production of our own. It is this which led Collingwood to the conclusion that all history is the history of thought, and the history of thought a re-enactment of the past through the historian's own mind.³³

In terms of dialectics this means that a precarious balance between evidence and abstracted conclusions, re-inserted in the flow of knowledge as "truth", or better still, its representation³⁴, must be maintained. Where the scientist sets out from the physical, the empirical, the historian must already be considering the abstract, the thesis or hypothesis, with a view to harmony between evidence and conclusion, a condition which prompted Peter Gay to compare the craft of history to a Janus face - looking toward subjectivity and science at once.³⁵ This denotes art as a representation of truth, and one which does not make it any less acceptable than science, so long as balance is maintained.³⁶

However, the divide between the separate roles of the pure sciences and history in society is marked by the political utilisation of the latter as a form for social manipulation, hence its ascendancy as an ideological weapon. As George Orwell wrote, "who controls the past controls the future, and who controls the present controls the past". This needs to be stressed if the forces dictating the creation, acceptance and dissemination of historical "truths" are to be understood. The production of an individual mind, each truth has its roots in the fertile soil created by the prescriptions of society and is subject to its further nurturing before it becomes an accepted

³²As quoted in Said, Orientalism, p.5.

³³R.J. Collingwood, The Idea of History, pp.209-215.

³⁴As observed by E.W. Said, Orientalism (London, 1978), p.21.

³⁵P. Gay, Style in History, p.212.

³⁶While admitting to the problems associated with determining historical facts as neutral and objective, in Style and History Gay asserts that "style is the art of the historian's science" (p.217), that Bury's dictum - "history is almost a science and more than a science" - is, despite and even because of its paradoxical nature, precise (p.215), and ultimately that "history is a science of the concrete" (p.214).

"truth".³⁷ The historical "fact" therefore has a life beyond the text in which its generation was secured - pinned down - like a butterfly from the mind of the historian. It has a pre-life, and an after-life; the historian in this sense acts as a synapse where the past may meet the present, and vice-versa.

In the case of the history of Shaka, Worger has demonstrated that, from the first, it was not merely information that was recorded by traders, missionaries, and officials in Natal, but "also many of the critical judgements of the authors" (my emphasis). Questioning and utilization of these sources relates to a knowledge of their formative context. Worger shows that, although it cannot be proved that Shaka was never "capricious in his practice of justice", it cannot be said that he always was so. As support for this argument, he draws attention to the instability of the accepted sources on the matter, Fynn and Isaacs, observing that their recent arrival into Zulu society, an ignorance of the language, and "an impression of being alien in a culture" contributed to the formation of their written observations.³⁸ This is the first level at which "facts" are generated.

At yet another level, through repetition and a lack of discrimination in the use of sources, second generation facts are produced and create the appearance of a multiplicity of sources resting on concrete foundations. The acceptance of Fynn and Isaacs' judgement of Shaka by Theophilus Shepstone and A.T. Bryant demonstrates just this; Bryant became a source and springboard to other studies which adopted these conclusions through an equally indiscriminate use of sources.³⁹ A simple cross-checking and tracking down of these "facts" to their origins reveals the problem of historical genesis observed by Worger, more often than not discrediting the conclusions which they have generated.

On the surface it would appear that to use such sources relative to the "mfecane" without recognition of their fallibility is tantamount to a belief in their neutrality and objectivity. "Facts", as Peter Gay observed, "are never

³⁷Since language is the basis for communication between historians, it is useful to recall Nietzsche's definition of the truth of language here: "a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms - in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are"; quoted in Said, Orientalism, p.203.

³⁸Worger, "Clothing Dry Bones", p.153.

³⁹Worger, "Clothing Dry Bones", p.154; see also Wright's discussion of the creation, appropriation and reinforcement of the "mfecane" "stereotype", "Political Mythology and the Making of Natal's Mfecane"; Wright concludes that "Natal's mfecane exists today by virtue not of its historical argumentation but of uncritical repetition of a racist and elitist myth", p.287.

neutral; they are impregnated with value judgements".⁴⁰ Yet, when there is no threat to the status quo, these value judgements can conveniently be forgotten, and historian's "facts" are allowed to exist as objective images of "truth". This is particularly relevant to South African society where history is, especially with regard to the nineteenth century, artificially separated from politics.⁴¹ E.H. Carr wrote that

the belief in a hard core of facts existing objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian is a preposterous fallacy, but one which is very hard to eradicate.⁴²

History can be as committed to truth and accuracy as science, but it deals with the psychological and often subconscious in both the production and definition of its material. Its method is therefore different from the scientific and objective testing and analysis of data within closed, regulated and controlled systems, and must be analysed and understood as such. Yet there is a propensity to ignore that which lies beyond hard-core objectivity and empiricism. This relates more closely to the dynamics of myth which allows such ambiguities to rest together.

Roland Barthes' essay, "Myth Today" demonstrates clearly how myth incorporates both the semiological and the ideological; its message is both a statement of fact and a value judgement, hence it hides nothing and "its function is to distort, not make disappear".⁴³ By negating the dynamic role of myth in the creation and dissemination of historical "facts", the study of history invests heavily in its political project, and fails to recognise the nature of its return. Historical enquiries are undertaken as a response to some perceived need, and are always directed to some purpose.⁴⁴ In relating to the demands made by society, the historian's work reflects the ideological and political currents in some way or another⁴⁵; not to do so requires a conscious and alienating act of will. To interrupt the process whereby myth turns history into nature, into the known and acceptable, means stepping into such

⁴⁰Gay, Style in History, p.195.

⁴¹The rain-shadow cast over the study of the nineteenth century by the "Liberal/Radical Debate" of the 1970s, and the political preoccupation with "modern" history (post diamonds and gold) ensured that the new line of critical thought examining the history of South Africa neglected a revision of the major part of the nineteenth century. Most myths associated with such history have therefore been allowed to go unchallenged and to continue as the staple diet for primary and secondary education. Such a disjuncture is marked by the reluctance to incorporate modern, "political" history into school teaching syllabi. When it is, the form is aseptic and again relies on the myth of objectivity.

⁴²E.H. Carr, quoted in Gay, Style in History, p.198.

⁴³Barthes, "Myth Today", pp.105-110, quote from p.107.

⁴⁴Gay's conclusion, Style in History, p.195.

⁴⁵Said has written that no one "has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of society", Orientalism, p.10; yet the goal is to achieve some sense of impartiality, of "academic freedom", which is the essence of Barthes' injunction for the study of myth; see note 45 below.

a void.⁴⁶ In myth exists an investment which deals less with reality than a certain knowledge of it.⁴⁷ Ultimately, myth is a value for which truth is no guarantee.⁴⁸ To be so clinically aware of these preconditions, due to their inherent restrictions is not easily achieved, but its opposite demonstrates the saphrophytic level at which political projects regulate the study of history.

South African history has been for many years the playing field of politicians, ideologists, and other mythologisers intent on rewriting their concerns into the web of time, drawing the past closer to a particular perception of the present in the name of the justification of the latter. History, due to its ideological importance and role in society, is particularly vulnerable to the creation and dissemination of myths, especially when a society has its thought-processes cut off at the knees. States of emergency, the play-thing of totalitarianism, extend beyond their physical - chronological - existence into the everyday activities of those upon whom they are imposed. By promoting an insidious and pervasive self-censorship amongst all organs of communication, the official project of thought control is able to reproduce itself like the virus that it is, stifling any intellectual opposition with power to undergird it. It does not need a state of emergency to begin the process, and it does not take a Presidential Address to Parliament to end it.⁴⁹ As George Orwell wrote as long ago as 1946,

Everything in our age conspires to turn the writer, and every other kind of artist as well, into a minor official, writing on themes handed down from above and never telling what seems to him to be the whole of the truth.⁵⁰

Part of the truth is that historians exhibit a semi-awareness of this condition: the existence of myth is taken as a given, and rarely analysed beyond its political - ideological - function. While journalists contest the freedom of the press, and academics profess their allegiance to freedom of thought and expression, historians neglect the effect of this on the essence of their craft, its role as an ideological weapon, and their method as a platform for creating and

⁴⁶Barthes discusses the level of such alienation: "when a myth reaches the entire community, it is from the latter that the mythologist must be estranged if he wants to liberate the myth", for the mythologist there is no "promised land", since the act of demythologising is an act of destruction; "Myth Today" pp.147-8.

⁴⁷Barthes, "Myth Today", p.105.

⁴⁸Barthes, "Myth Today", p.109.

⁴⁹Now the government is to 'lift' the state of emergency, but to entrench the extra-ordinary police powers in new legislation as well as maintaining many press bars. In fact the emergency will be maintained. Nothing will get better, it is in fact to get worse for the press." Pat Sidley quoted in The Journalist, March 1986, p.8.

⁵⁰S. Orwell, "The Prevention of Literature", in Inside the Whale and Other Essays (London, 1956), p.160.

maintaining the backbone of this weapon: myth.²¹

There are two notable exceptions to the above observation, namely Marianne Cornevin and Leonard Thompson. However, both demonstrate a common weakness, and one which has allowed much of South African history dealing with the nineteenth century to go unchallenged for so long. Cornevin's Apartheid, Power and Historical Falsification strongly upholds Africanist perspectives in an attempt to establish the dignity of a past raped by a "regime", reserving criticism for "white" history which fails to recognise the injustices of its account. Since her project is the same as J. Omer-Cooper's, she accepts the bulk of the thesis of a revolution internal to Zulu society, and the subsequent "integration of the subject tribes into the emergent Zulu nation".²²

Thompson's admirable critique of The Political Mythology of Apartheid, as it is entitled, shows a sensitive awareness of the historian's contribution to the myth-making process and its interplay with the generation of critical thought. He writes that

a myth's political impact may be unimpaired, especially in countries where the public is sheltered from the free exercise and dissemination of historical scholarship. There, politicians may continue to exploit myths long after competent historians have revealed their fundamental falseness and discarded them in the dust heap.²³

However, like Cornevin, Thompson's analysis is limited to apartheid's influence on history and its role in the creation of Afrikaner mythology. The basis for his conclusions is the observation that this mythology stems from the numerically inferior position of Afrikaners in society.²⁴ Such a reduction should be extended beyond the political epoch termed "apartheid" since most of South African historiography, particularly that dealing with the nineteenth century, revolves around a minority attempting to maintain political and social superiority through intellectual control.

²¹See for example Jay Naidoo's Tracking Down Historical Myths (Johannesburg, 1989) in which eight "myths" are countered with historical questioning which allocates the root cause of these myths to the eccentricities of "pigmentocratic" history. Naidoo's countermeasures rest in raising alternate, African Nationalist versions in keeping with present popular trends.

²²M. Cornevin, Apartheid, Power and Historical Falsification, p.96; see also J. Omer-Cooper's chapter (2) on the rise of the Zulu kingdom, The Zulu Aftermath, especially pp.29-37.

²³L. Thompson, The Political Mythology of Apartheid, (New York, 1985) p.13.

²⁴Thompson, The Political Mythology of Apartheid, p.25.

By limiting themselves to "apartheid" South Africa and its view of history, Cornevin and Thompson both isolate their findings in one epoch which is supposedly so different from any other. Once apartheid has been removed from the statute books and the vote extended to all people, appearances would have it that these findings are no longer applicable. Their legacy, however, like that of the state of emergency, will live on. Furthermore, the significance of Cornevin and Thompson's conclusions has been lost to historiography due to an emphasis of the political as opposed to methodological mechanisms whereby history is shackled to the myth-making process.

It is the study of this process which distinguishes the critical approach to historiography dealing with the nineteenth century from that which accepts the core of "mfecane" theory that a revolution internal to the Zulu under Shaka set off a "great wave of battles and migrations"⁵⁵. Where the latter attempts to rewrite the explanations for the rise of the Shakan state, as patterned by Omer-Cooper, the former attempts to realign the study of history with the study of its relationship to myth. This, as the title "The Mfecane as Alibi" suggests, is the essence of much of Cobbing's research into the definition, dissemination, and disinformation of the "mfecane".⁵⁶ Where it is the norm to accept that many myths exist and are politically functional as part of nineteenth century history, this approach seeks to apply the study of the dynamics of myth to the origins and transmutations of such history.

Much work aimed at reviewing the "mfecane" leans heavily on its ideological function as myth. John Wright's "Political Mythology and the Making of Natal's Mfecane" exemplifies this, yet takes an important step away from the blinkered approach exhibited by Cornevin and Thompson.⁵⁷ Wright observes that the historiographical significance of Cobbing's hypothesis rests in that it provides "a conceptual framework for the reintegration of separate 'black' and 'white' histories which mfecane theory has functioned to segregate".⁵⁸ Again it is the echo of a political project which Wright sounds, but at a broader, certainly more methodological level than that expressed by Cornevin and Thompson.

⁵⁵J. Peires, The House of Phalo (Cape Town, 1987), p.86.

⁵⁶See J. Cobbing, "The Mfecane as Alibi", and "Jettisoning the Mfecane".

⁵⁷This discussion is limited in that Wright's doctoral thesis has not been considered; the discussion is centred instead on the published material.

⁵⁸J. Wright, "Political Mythology and the Making of Natal's Mfecane", Canadian Journal of African Historical Studies (1988), pp.272-291; quote from p.273.

Since the nature of South African politics has for so long been the cause for criticism and the arena for intense debate, a sense of solidarity with others intent on revealing the iniquities of apartheid can be evoked by concentrating on the political aspect of the "afecane". "Left" writing therefore creates a broader category (which includes the work of Cornevin and Thompson) to which the anti-afecane writer can belong. Yet there are certain tensions between this type of analysis and the rest of the "Left" school; debate on the nature and use of evidence is representative of this. Wright's work falls between the first and second horizons here in that it points to an "elsewhere" in terms of the open-ended "alibi" of the "afecane". As Barthes demonstrated, myth always has at its disposal an "elsewhere", allowing it to perpetuate itself while hiding nothing. The "afecane" is therefore a receptacle, a concept, in which there is invested "less reality than a certain knowledge of reality."⁵⁹ By pointing to that "elsewhere" through showing up the purpose behind the myth, by analysing its political project in considering the production of the "afecane" "stereotype" through all its phases, Wright does not need to re-represent the "afecane". It is, therefore, the Cobbing-hypothesis that must withstand methodological criticism since it leans further out into the abyss beyond myth. There are, then, areas within the new thought on the "afecane" which reflect various degrees of unity with "Left" writing. As the Cornevin-Thompson example demonstrates, such unity sets up its own limits, more often as a result of an ideological undertone.

If an analysis of evidence is not to be controlled by such preconditions, serving some other project, what is needed is a double-focus extending between past and present. "Source" and "estuary" must be viewed simultaneously, as if through binoculars, if the whole is to be conceptualised and analyzed. Therefore, in examining the forces which gave rise to the settlement at Port Natal in 1824, the analytical framework applied by the receiver and transcriber of the "primary" evidence to the source(s) must be borne in mind along with that which is attempting to re-pattern this material toward a more acceptable picture. Put more clearly, this means that all primary⁶⁰ writings on the Fynn-Farewell expedition must be traced back through the prism (or grid) which distorted them, placing both the writer and the point of creation in the original context as far as is possible. This is no new prescription for historians, but what is, in the context of the "afecane", is that the facts gleaned from such texts do not enjoy an aseptic, objective existence which allows them to be used in a "scientific" manner. While a study of this kind, influenced by

⁵⁹P. Barthes, "Myth Today", p.105.

⁶⁰By this is meant those giving rise to "evidence" in the form of "facts".

Said's Orientalism, has begun to point the way toward a more critical awareness of the power of history and its production by focussing on "Shaka" as a construct serving various political needs, one facet of the expansion of Europe into Africa in the early nineteenth century which created this has been seriously neglected. It is to this, the myth of 1824, that the analysis now turns.

The missionary and pioneer settler-historian, John Ayliff, wrote of what is today termed the "afecana":

The accounts brought down of the events connected with the wars of the interior, which ultimately produced the dispersion of the Fingoes, are, as must be supposed, dark and confused, and perhaps some may appear somewhat contradictory...⁶¹

He continued with a pledge to present the "only source of information" remaining, oral statements, "as they have been told me", but in the same breath points to his role as anything but an impartial recorder of facts. He promised to place "reliance on those statements" which in his estimation bore "evidence of credulity".⁶² Indeed, as Alan Webster has shown, his work reflects a heavy reliance on his own estimation and filtration of his sources.⁶³

Equally aware of his role in the creation of history was Henry Francis Fynn - "ivory" trader, protector of the homeless, government agent, and dashing pioneer. His standing in the Natal community as an authority on the African, pre-colonial, past is reflected in his position as a witness at the Harding Commission of 1852 and the manner in which his evidence was taken up in its wake.⁶⁴ Both his personal biases - his ego - and this authority have echoed from those times to the present, compounding the nature of his evidence as a "truth" which veritably shines behind the project to which it has been brought.⁶⁵ Before the Commission he stated that

It is the white man alone who, having lived many years in this portion of South Africa, and possessed of many sources of information, can give a clear, correct, and connected narrative of events which have occurred

⁶¹J. Ayliff, Notebook, Cory Library MS 1110, p.1.

⁶²*Ibid.*

⁶³A. Webster, "Ayliff, Whiteside, and the Fingo 'Emancipation' of 1835: A Reappraisal" (Honours thesis, Rhodes University, 1988) p.6, 18-20; Webster, "An Examination of the 'Fingo' Emancipation of 1835" (unpublished seminar paper, April 1990) particularly pp.5-6.

⁶⁴J. Pridmore, "The Production of H.F. Fynn" (paper presented to the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, October 1990) p.3, states that between April and May 1853 Fynn's evidence was published in the Natal Mercury as "ethnological information on early Natal".

⁶⁵From G.M. Theal's History of South Africa (1891) to Daer-Cooper's The Zulu Aftermath (1966), J.C. Chase's The Natal Papers (1843) to D.W. Hedges' "Trade and Politics in Southern Mozambique and Zululand in the 18th and early 19th Centuries", those writing on this earlier period have few sources other than Fynn on which to draw, therefore each tends to extract what is useful in his/her hypothesis, discarding the rest. This is most notable with regard to Zulu links with the Portuguese trade in slaves out of Delagoa Bay in the early nineteenth century.

Becker⁶⁰, or the "investigative journalism" of Louis du Buisson⁶¹, and fantasizing where facts run dry. Instead, the intention here is to follow the lead set down by the new approach to the "mfecane", to follow Worger, Martin, Wright, Cobbing and Wylie's example, and point out the historiographical inaccuracies rather than re-assimilate them in a process of re-mythologising. Such methods ought to be strictly applied to examining the original context in which the "primary" texts were created.

The myth of 1824 rests heavily on the foundations of Europe's project of "civilizing" Africa, extending commercial relations to its people, altering value systems to one perceived as morally superior, and restructuring socio-political systems through a "remaking (of) Africa in the European image".⁷⁰ It exists as a separate, hermetic entity, alienated, in a reflection of its geographical position, from the history of the rest of the sub-continent. Thus "1824" is bandied about as the first benchmark along south eastern Africa's Road to Civilization.⁷¹ Any excursion into the murkiness preceding the arrival of the traders in that year is made in order to relate those "pioneer settlers" to the general trend of history - which can then be used once again to bolster the credibility of the European mission of civilising "darkest Africa".

Surrounding the hermetic history of the Fynn-Farewell landing at the bay of Natal is evidence of a stronger dynamic directing mercantile concerns at the Cape. At least two established merchants became actively involved in attempts to open up trade with Delagoa Bay in the 1820s, Henry Nourse and J.R. Thowson. What stimulated such an interest is not clear, for the speculative voyage, mentioned by Fynn, which brought the Orange Grove with a lucrative cargo to Cape Town in 1823 was part of a less clearly defined chain of events. Related to this question is an even broader history which appears to have as its pivot the expedition to survey the south east coast of Africa led by Captain W.F.W. Owen. Each of these has produced its own body of literature, hence a point of departure in examining what lies beyond the conventional focus of the hermetic history, that which has become peripheral through the dynamics of its myth.

⁶⁰ Becker, Rule of Fear; Path of Blood; Hill of Destiny.

⁶¹ L. Du Buisson, The White Man Coneth (Johannesburg, 1987).

⁷⁰ Frederick Cooper's observation as a result of his study of Kenyan history, "Mau Mau and the Discourses of Decolonization", Journal of African History, no.2, (1988), p.317.

⁷¹ Davenport's "definitive" text, South Africa: A Modern History, refers to the founding of Natal by a small settlement of Englishmen at the port (p.109). It is such which perpetuates the myth of the "Final Outpost" as the bastion of British "civilisation" in South Africa.

The "diary" and other manuscripts of Henry Francis Fynn, and the journals, reports and letters associated with the surveying mission allow the myth and the deeper body of knowledge in which it functions to be accessed. Both are limited, and subject to omission and error, but in an understanding of their productive context rests a countermeasure to the selective use (or misuse) of "evidence" drawn from their pages. What follows must determine the poverty of the material from which the historian must work if the darkness of history is to be charted beyond its metaphorical blindness, and if a reconciliation between reality and those who produced it, between its description and its explanation, is to be achieved. The historian is then left to deal with the poverty of the past.

The documentary production of the survey of the south east coast of Africa, the Narrative of Voyages, is unique.⁷² The result of editorial culling of diaries and journals kept for official purposes during the voyages of the Leven, Barracouta, and Cockburn, Narrative of Voyages was written by men of a "scientific bent", and reflects the "worldly wisdom of the man of action".⁷³ The text is of value in that it draws together for the first time information on Delagoa Bay and the more immediate hinterland collected over a period of months and relative to the

numbers and characters of the natives, their occupations, modes of subsistence and c. the nature of the soil, and also the productions of the surrounding country.⁷⁴

However, the scramble of information which results from the editing - a number of sources, with entries written at various times and from various vantage points, all thrust together as a narrative - makes the originals more desirable as accurate sources. Furthermore, the interest in the bay resembles an anthropological approach, considering only a relatively small time-scale with little reflexive content.

A "shadow" text, published two years after Narrative of Voyages, exists in the form of T. Boteler's Narrative of a Voyage of Discovery to Africa and Arabia, containing very little that varies from the earlier published accounts of the survey. Some intriguing politicking prevented the second lieutenant of Captain W.F.W. Owen's flagship, the Leven,

⁷²Narrative of Voyages to Explore the Shores of Africa, Arabia and Madagascar Performed... under the Direction of Cpt. W.F.W. Owen R.N., H.W. Robinson (ed) (London, 1833) - henceforth "Narrative of Voyages"; there are also the collected letters and writings of Cpt. Owen in G.M. Theal's Records of South-Eastern Africa (London, 1903), vols II and IX.

⁷³Martin, "British Images of the Zulu", p.26; see also pp.24-26; the text was compiled from the journals of Captain Owen (Leven), Lieutenant Owen (Cockburn), Second Lieutenant Boteler (Barracouta) and the midshipman, Rozier, and the botanist, Forbes.

⁷⁴Orders of the Admiralty to Owen, quoted in Narrative of Voyages vol. I, p.vi.

from publishing his journals in 1827 when his manuscript was ready. Permission from the Admiralty for his proposed book was then withdrawn, and the official version scrambled together to take its place - and it took another five years to bring to print.⁷⁵ A further two years followed before Boteler's version could be revised into narrative form and printed with the Admiralty's sanction.

On top of the usual editing process, Boteler admits to having had to impose certain "self-editing" to avoid "erroneous statements" which involved rejecting everything which did not appear to him to be "sufficiently authenticated". This he did, after the Admiralty's ban⁷⁶, by comparing his manuscript with "different authorities", "more especially in the relation of facts discreditable to individuals among the Portuguese".⁷⁷ Today one is left to guess at the nature of such "facts". Boteler's narrative is more brisk and easier to follow since it does not suffer breaks which serve to change gears between the various sources constituting Narrative of Voyages. However, content-wise, Boteler's self-editing worked remarkably well; there is nothing offered contrary to the earlier publication. It would be interesting, were it possible, to compare the original journals turned down by the Admiralty with the final, approved, product. Such are the mechanisms behind the poverty of sources.

The other important source for this history, the Fynn "diary", must be called into question for its historical validity. Composed of various manuscripts existing in several versions, and edited over a period of about a hundred years, it has long lost the quality demanded of a creditable historical source. Since the editors, James Stuart, followed by D. McK. Malcolm, give little hint of the process which brought the "original sources" to life, it is difficult to date any of the manuscripts, hence assess them in their productive context. The original copy, if one ever existed, had been destroyed; it was buried along with Fynn's brother, Frank. One of James Stuart's informants, William Bazley - quoting Fynn as his source - put the matter succinctly: "His [Fynn's] one problem was that the second diary was written from memory".⁷⁸ When Fynn's second "diary" and his writings collected in J. Bird's Annals of

⁷⁵ Boteler, Narrative of a Voyage of Discovery to Africa and Arabia (London, 1835), editor's introduction, p.vi.

⁷⁶ The tone of Boteler's introductory comments suggest that these emendations were carried out under the instructions of his superiors, and were not in accordance with his personal views.

⁷⁷ Boteler, Narrative of a Voyage of Discovery, author's introduction, p.xvi.

⁷⁸ C. Webb and J. Wright (eds), The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence Relating to the History of the Tulu and Neighbouring Peoples (Mitternritzburg, 1975), vol.1, p.56.

Natal⁷⁹ are compared, it seems that Fynn used various combinations of his 'memoirs', rewriting with the aid of letters and other papers which had survived, finding each time that something different was worth emphasising.⁸⁰

The material relevant here⁸¹ seems to have few embellishments, being centred around a chronological exposition of the chain of events that led from Fynn's arrival at Cape Town in 1818, to his employment in 1823 as supercargo of the Jane by Henry Nourse for the voyage to Delagoa Bay, on to his endeavours at the bay, and ultimately to his experiences and role in the founding of Port Natal. Since the latter is the focus of the "diary", it was not necessary - on the part of either Fynn or the editors - to expand the detail relevant to the earlier stages. Interspersed with Fynn's (or the editors') bland chronology are anecdotes such as that dealing with the relationship between Owen and the Simon's Bay Commodore, Joseph Nourse, and a dinner at the Portuguese fort where antagonisms over British attempts at trade with the Tembe were revealed.⁸² This ensures that the main project is not presented too baldly, and at the same time that its impact is not distorted.

It is debateable to what extent his information may be taken at face value, yet, that Fynn's activities prior to 1824 are treated both editorially and historically as peripheral, suggests that, as with the conditions of myth and its related alibi (as discussed by Barthes), fact has been allowed to rest as fact here, since nothing need be hidden. Essentially, Fynn's account of Delagoa Bay deals with the iniquities of the Portuguese presence, and his perceived position of civilized superiority - "Britannia rules the waves" - allowed him to discuss the Portuguese involvement in the slave trade freely. His "diary" leaves little to the imagination as regards his attitude toward the Portuguese. He wrote: "The fort and settlement of Delagoa were as contemptible as can be imagined".⁸³ In an apparently earlier account of Delagoa Bay, Fynn shifted from this skeletal, political style to one of ethnological pretensions. A comparison of this piece, entitled "Delagoa Bay" and included in Theal's Records of South-Eastern Africa, agrees with the later "diary", although it is more detailed.⁸⁴ Unfortunately Theal did not date Fynn's essay,

⁷⁹J. Bird, Annals of Natal 1495-1845, vol. I (London, 1885).

⁸⁰Brian Roberts observed "at least three versions" of Shaka's savage reaction to the death of his mother - as written up by Fynn; The Zulu Kings, p. 159.

⁸¹See Fynn Diary, chapters 1 to 3.

⁸²Fynn Diary, p. 39; and p. 44-5, respectively.

⁸³Fynn Diary, p. 39.

⁸⁴Compare chapters 1 to 3 of Fynn Diary with Theal, Records of South East Africa, vol. II, pp. 479-488.

therefore it is difficult to decide whether or not to assess the material as a near-contemporary source. Nonetheless, its contents present the same nightmares for post-Vansina historians as do the writings of the survey party.

Fynn wrote that his reasons for being at Delagoa Bay between June and December 1823 precluded an "interest in making myself acquainted with the history of the tribes in those parts".⁸³ Since he was there as supercargo of the Jane, and since his activities were designed to stimulate trade links between the Cape and the people of Delagoa Bay, his observations are limited. Yet it is these limits which have opened a new perspective on trade at Delagoa Bay. The "diary" must therefore be treated with caution, particularly because it appears to rely on Fynn's aged memory, but, in the understanding of the context within which its evidence was gathered rests an important historiographical tool.

From a reading of these sources, with a focus other than conventionally prescribed, emerges a view of events balanced on more than the narrow pivot reflecting back from Fynn and Farewell's landing in Natal to the arrival of the Orange Grove in Cape Town. This can be described as having three consecutive horizons, extending from the over-arching general context of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century trade along the south east African coast, through a more specific focus on trade out of Delagoa Bay in this period, down to its narrowest point, a focus on the nature of Fynn, Farewell and King's interest in establishing a trade link between the Cape Colony and the bay of Natal. Like a Russian doll, each emerges from a consideration of the former, yet the central dynamic running through all, directing the manner in which they are manifest, appears to be missing - until the influence of Abolition on early nineteenth century socio-economic affairs is considered. This has been the function of the myth, to draw attention away from the broadest horizon, yet most specific dynamic.

In refocussing on the traders' activities as part of the historical horizon beyond the function of the myth of 1824, three seemingly simple questions must be addressed: the nature of Fynn, Farewell, and King's relation to the general mercantile concern with trade along the coast; the timing of their expedition to Natal; the reason for a shift in focus from Delagoa Bay, through St. Lucia Bay to the bay of Natal; and the most obvious: what it is they wished to trade for. Much of the history of the port between 1824 and 1827-1829 is made more plausible once these issues are

⁸³Fynn Diary, p.45.

revealed.

It was the search for profit which drew the half-pay lieutenant, F.G. Farewell, and his associate, James Saunders King, another ex-navy man, out of their trading ventures between the Cape, Calcutta, Madras, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Ayres, St Helena, and the Isle of France (Mauritius).⁶⁶ There can be no doubt that the ensuing expedition was a spin-off of interest in potential trade at Delagoa Bay, and since this is the first clue given as to the intentions of the Natal traders, it is a useful starting point for a revision of their activities.

Captain W.F.W. Owen's surveying expedition was instrumental in publicizing the potential of profit in trade along the south east African coast.⁶⁷ In June 1823 the survey was thought to have

produced some sensation at the Cape, as, independently of the relation of facts respecting the coast and people, it was considered as tending, by the greater light thrown on the commerce of Delagoa, to open another branch of trade for the merchants.⁶⁸

It was not merely the advice that Owen could give relative to trade possibilities which stimulated this interest; an active attempt to create an opening in trading relations with the people of Delagoa Bay was not called for by Owen's orders from the Admiralty⁶⁹, but, when his party returned to Cape Town in April 1823 on a replenishment visit, this is what they had achieved in more concrete form than the expansion of information relative to the coast.

At the time of Owen's second visit to Cape Town, merchants were poised to trade with Delagoa Bay in a manner more

⁶⁶Farewell's movements can be gauged quite accurately from the series of Permission to Leave granted him between 1818 and 1823; see Cape Archives, CO 6067 for those years; King's are more difficult to determine - in 1822, as Captain of the Salisbury, he ferried troops between Algoa and Simon's Bay, at which time he became involved in an attempt in trading seal oil and fish from the Chaos islands off Algoa Bay (Cape Archives, GH 1/8 No.605; Owen Narrative of Voyages, vol.I, p.68 refers to the "Deal Settlers" attempt at such a trade, which might include King) but, after Farewell first chartered the Salisbury, turned his attention to the West Indian trade; Fynn holds that it was on a voyage to St. Helena that King and Farewell decided to turn their attention to St. Lucia; Fynn Diary, pp.51-2.

⁶⁷L. Herrman, editor of Isaacs' Travels and Adventures in Eastern Africa, 2 vols. (reprinted Cape Town, 1936), ascribes mercantile concern with a trade in ivory in these quarters solely to this stimulation of their interest: "Biographical sketch of Nathaniel Isaacs", p.viii.

⁶⁸Narrative of Voyages, vol.I, p.245.

⁶⁹With reference to the Tembe treaty, Fynn's "diary" states that Owen was "authorized, in the course of his voyages, to take formal possession of such countries as might be taken over with advantage to the British Crown" (p.38). In the light of the written response it received, and the British refusal to ratify the treaty, such a claim is doubtful - see Earl Bathurst to Lord Charles Somerset, 10 October 1823, in Theal, Records of South-Eastern Africa, vol.IX, pp.35-37. Other than Fynn's, there is no mention of such an investiture of authority in Owen, least of all in the orders he received from the Admiralty.

civilization of the barbarous tribes inhabiting that coast" - another extension of the ambiguous nature of the treaty. When he left Delagoa Bay five months later, suffering from malaria, the legality of Owen's proceedings were still in the balance with Bathurst claiming that its details appeared "objectionable and impractical", and no one was sent to replace him.⁹⁶ All in all the treaty proposed to carve out a piece of Britain in south east Africa, with the protection of free trade (in other words an opposition to the presence and activities of the Portuguese) at its core.

Owen's awareness of the potential of Delagoa Bay was acute. In May 1823 of this he wrote:

To Great Britain this Port offers an important point with relation to her Colony in South Africa, being the only one except Saldanha Bay on its whole Coast, it opens all the interior of Africa to her commerce where Millions of people are ready to receive Clothing... and civilization from her.⁹⁷

Rather than an echo of the Tebe plight in the face of famine and devastation, the treaty represents the scale of Owen's vision, which extended to the possibility of incorporating "the whole Coast of Natal".⁹⁸ The inclusion at the end of the treaty of Mayete's plea, "I find my State and people too weak to defend themselves against the aggressions of either Africans or Europeans", cannot be connected to the purity of the humane instinct ostensibly driving Owen to accept the cession of sovereignty. The lines immediately following point clearly to Owen's larger project:

...and because I find my people ignorant and uncultivated and inhabiting a country capable of everything, by well directed industry, to which they [the Tebe chiefs] are well disposed... I have chosen the King of Great Britain as my protector...⁹⁹

If ever there were a case of ventriloquizing the African voice, this is one.

An important figure in this act of ventriloquizing was the man responsible for interpreting the treaty, coincidentally the same person who made the first overtures to Owen concerning the formulation of such an agreement¹⁰⁰: "Shamaguava", or "English Bill".¹⁰¹ The first meeting between this man and the crew of the Leven occurred as a result of a mistrust of the survey party which prevented the Tebe from boarding the ship; English Bill was employed as "a sort of spy" to evaluate the situation before their leaders were prepared to open communications

⁹⁶Earl Bathurst to Lord Charles Somerset, 10 October 1823, in Theal, Records of South-Eastern Africa, vol. IX, p.36.

⁹⁷Owen, "The Bay of Delagoa", in Theal, Records of South-Eastern Africa, vol. II, p.477.

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Tebe Treaty, reproduced in Theal, Records of South-Eastern Africa, vol. IX, p.27.

¹⁰⁰Owen, "The Bay of Delagoa", p.472.

¹⁰¹Certificate of witnesses to the Tebe treaty, attached to the treaty, Theal, Records of South-Eastern Africa, vol. IX, p.28.

with Owen. The interpreter spoke scatterings of four other languages apart from English and his own, reflecting his experience as a middleman conducting trading transactions between the Tembe and vessels calling at Delagoa Bay. After malaria had cut the crews of the Leven, Barracouta, and Cockburn together by a third¹⁰², the remaining numbers were supplemented by English Bill and thirteen others aboard the Leven, and another merchant middleman, "George of the Sand", and two others were taken aboard the Barracouta, "hired" to facilitate the return to the Cape.¹⁰³ The treaty, according to Owen, therefore gave some guarantee as to the safety of "Kappell's" (Mayete's) people. They had gained some experience aboard the Cockburn during the January-February 1823 survey of the Mapoota river, if not before.¹⁰⁴

There is little either written into the treaty, or in the literature describing the circumstances of its procural, that reflects a humanitarian consideration and wish to protect the Tembe as the basis upon which Owen accepted it. The document was a trade agreement, designed to protect British merchant interests at the bay, as subsequent events showed. Furthermore, while English Bill was at the Cape conversing with merchants and providing "the necessary information for carrying on a trade with his countrymen"¹⁰⁵, the Simon's Bay Commodore, Joseph Nourse, was furthering merchant interests on the grounds of Owen's treaty.

Nourse's involvement at Delagoa Bay presents problems for the thesis that it was Owen's expedition alone which catalysed merchant interest there, for two reasons. Firstly, Nourse was equally concerned to procure the treaty with the Tembe. Owen claimed that, under pressure from the Portuguese, he had hastily accepted the treaty where he would have preferred to refer the matter to Nourse "in whose province it more particularly lay", suggesting that the Commodore had been involved from an early stage.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, the treaty became the basis for a manifesto drawn up by Nourse authorizing British merchant trade, and promising that any "interruption" of trade would be "at the cost and peril of such persons, of any nation whatsoever". To ensure this "peaceable trade", Nourse undertook to send ships

¹⁰²E.H. Burrows, Captain Owen of the African Survey 1774-1857 (Rotterdam, 1979), p.109; the details are to be found in Narrative of Voyages, vol.I, pp.123-236.

¹⁰³Narrative of Voyages, vol.I, p.235.

¹⁰⁴Owen, "The Bay of Delagoa", p.472; it was not uncommon for Africans to crew for whalers calling at the bay, particularly in the area of King George (Manica, today the Incomatil river; p.466.

¹⁰⁵Narrative of Voyages, vol.I, p.247.

¹⁰⁶Owen, "The Bay of Delagoa", p.472.

from the Simon's Bay squadron at "all convenient opportunities".¹⁰⁷ Just such an opportunity occurred in November 1823 when Nourse intended to "inspire the natives with confidence in the English, and to check any interruption or interference by Portuguese with English vessels" with the presence of his flagship, the Andromache.¹⁰⁸ At that time two of Henry Nourse's ships, the Mary, and the Jane, with Fynn and Henry Maynard (Commodore Nourse's nephew) as supercargoes were trading in the bay.¹⁰⁹ As early as November 1822, Owen had left similar instructions for the commander of the Cockburn, Lieutenant R. Owen to extend protection to any British merchant ships, and "make prisoners" of those interfering while the Leven and Barracouta were away from English River.¹¹⁰ In a letter to the governor of Mozambique, Senhor de Botelho, written in May 1825, Owen emphasised Nourse's role, stating that it was the Commodore, and not he, who took formal possession of the country.¹¹¹ Contrary to the conventional history, this description of events surrounding the treaty with the Tembe - in the form of a complaint against action taken by the Portuguese to undermine the post-1823 British presence - confirms Nourse as a figure of importance in the politics generating its formulation. It also shows that neither Nourse nor Owen's ambitions for Delagoa Bay were destroyed by the British refusal to accept either the treaty or Nourse's manifesto¹¹²: Naval ships from the Cape squadron still called at the bay in an attempt to support merchant trade against the Portuguese, and Owen continued to wrangle with the Portuguese over which country's flag was flown in Tembe.

It is not just that Commodore Nourse appears to have been working alongside Owen; his connection to a merchant interest in the south east coast prefigures Owen's 1823 promotion of its potential. This leads to the second problem with the conventional thesis: the Orange Grove's voyage, as reported by Fynn, occurred before the publicity associated with Owen's survey of the coast. When the ship belonging to Henry Nourse, merchant brother of the Commodore, put into

¹⁰⁷The manifesto is included in Commodore Nourse to Lord Charles Somerset, 16 June 1823, in Theal, Records of South-Eastern Africa, vol.IX, pp.29-31; quotes from pp.30-31 respectively.

¹⁰⁸Commodore Nourse to Croker, 15 December 1823, in Theal, Records of South-Eastern Africa, vol.IX, p.40.

¹⁰⁹Fynn Diary, p.36.

¹¹⁰Captain W.F.W. Owen to Lieutenant R. Owen, 19 November 1822, in Theal, Records of South-Eastern Africa, vol.IX, pp.20-21.

¹¹¹Captain Owen to Senhor De Botelho, 10 May 1825, in Theal, Records of South-Eastern Africa, vol.IX, p.56.

¹¹²Earl Bathurst to Lord Charles Somerset, 10 October 1823, expressed his dissatisfaction at the treaty of which he wrote: "in many of its details [it] appears objectionable and impracticable, even supposing that the Cession was in itself, a desirable object", in Theal, Records of South-Eastern Africa, vol.IX, p.36; also Captain Moorson to Commodore Christian (Nourse's successor in 1825 who too had a merchant brother, Evan Christian, formerly associated with the Cape mercantile firm, Nourse, Christian, and Co.) 24 May 1825, in Theal, op.cit., p.49.

Delagoa Bay (its first appearance in the literature)¹¹³, on December 16, 1822, little of Owen's surveying experiences had filtered down to the Cape. If at all, information might have been conveyed to the Cape merchant by his brother, but the Andromache, Nourse's flag ship, does not appear in the records of the survey party at Delagoa Bay until ten days after the arrival of the Orange Grove.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, a member of the survey party made this observation of Henry Nourse:

This enterprising gentleman had determined, it appears, to examine every part of the coast, to discover if any rational or profitable market could be opened for British commerce and manufacture.¹¹⁵

And this as early as December 1822. Nourse, then, was involved in a survey of his own which came to include the Jane, other Cape merchants such as the Maynard brothers - nephews of Commodore Nourse¹¹⁶ - and J.R. and Alexander Thomson¹¹⁷, with the later extension to Fynn, Farewell and King.

The reconstruction of a history from the material in which the myth of 1824 floats is made difficult by the "blind spots" in the evidence. But there appears to be enough to conclude that the origin of interest in the possibilities offered by trade along the south east coast of Africa stems from the merchant Henry Nourse's "survey" of the coast for its potential. The possibility must be addressed that it was the merchant's brother, Commodore Nourse, whose naval experience in these waters drew attention to the possibility for such a trade, for it was Joseph Nourse, and not Captain Owen, who was instrumental in creating the opening for regular trade (as opposed to speculations) at Delagoa Bay. Nourse acted as the "middleman" in drawing in the merchants to trade, while Owen brought in the double theme of civilizing the Tebe and eradicating the Portuguese trade in slaves to justify a British presence opposing the Portuguese at the bay. Yet another possibility in need of investigation exists: Nourse's connections with merchant

¹¹³Narrative of Voyages, vol.1, p.209.

¹¹⁴Commodore J. Nourse to J.W. Croker, 5 January 1823, in Theal, Records of South-Eastern Africa, vol.IX, p.19; Narrative of Voyages, vol.1, pp.210-211.

¹¹⁵Narrative of Voyages, vol.1, p.209.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷Fynn Diary, p.53; Narrative of Voyages, vol.1, pp.209-210, which shows that Henry Maynard and J.R. Thomson were at Delagoa Bay in December 1822 as supercargoes aboard the Orange Grove.

families in Cape Town¹¹⁰ might have sown the seed for the politics which formed the background to the treaty, with Nourse initiating the proceedings, the opportunity for which was provided by Owen's surveying expedition. It remains that, without Commodore Nourse's mercantile connections - to the Cape "Mafia" - Owen's survey would not have had the impact it did. The "odd-man-out" in these connections, J.R. Thomson, became Farewell and King's backer in 1823 in a separate bid to establish trading connections with the south east coast. After the "disaster" at St. Lucia Bay, his position was superseded by Farewell's father-in-law, another Cape merchant, J.L. Petersen and his associate Hoffaen.¹¹¹ The connection with the original Cape merchant interest in Delagoa Bay was then broken. Fynn's line from 1822 to 1824 is tenuous, but as an alibi - creating an "elsewhere" through which its history becomes a nature - it holds. In tracing that line back, however, the history is revealed, raising certain "new" questions. These deal essentially with the original themes taken for granted by the conventional history.

Two such symbiotic themes, the nature of the traders' interest in the extraction of profit and the reason for their shift in focus from the promise of Delagoa Bay to the relative obscurity of the bay of Natal, have generally been passed over, it being accepted that "Shaka" and "ivory" cover all potential avenues of explanation. As has been demonstrated above, the "Shaka" theme is highly suspect, and it is time that certain anomalies in the evidence for Fynn, Farewell, and King having a specific interest in exchanging beads for ivory be brought to the fore. In the light of Cobbing's research into the slave-trade out of Delagoa Bay, and the subsequent hypothesis and controversy over its chronology and use of evidence, the most obvious questions to be asked of the Natal traders' activities are no longer the most simple to answer.

¹¹⁰There seems to have been an extended family network, centred on the Nourse family, including merchants, merchant seamen, and members of the Royal Navy which, in the period from the second British occupation of the Cape to the 1830s, shifted from Britain, set roots in Cape Town, and expanded from there to Grahaastown. Henry Nourse arrived in Cape Town in June 1820, having previously conducted his trading transactions with the Cape through his agent (and brother-in-law) Evan Christian. In 1821 he acted as a victualler to the Royal Navy through his meat-curing business at Bathurst (at which time he first met H.F. Fynn on the frontier) - see P. Philip, British Residents at the Cape 1795-1819 (Cape Town, 1981), p.306, and Fynn Diary, p.35. Evan Christian's brother succeeded Joseph Nourse as Commodore of the Cape station on the death of the latter in September 1824 - Theal, Records of South-Eastern Africa, vol.IX, p.49. H. and J. Nourse's nephews, Joshua and Henry Maynard were equally active at Delagoa Bay between 1822 and 1823; Narrative of Voyages (vol.I, pp.210-11; pp.214, 218 respectively) records the presence of both: Joshua as lieutenant in command of the "colonial brig", the Wizard, in December 1822; Henry as supercargo of the Orange Grove in 1822-23, and of the Mary in June 1823. Henry joined forces with Benjamin Norden to trade with Natal from Grahaastown in the 1830s; Joshua established himself as a wealthy land-owner in Cape Town - Mackeurtan, Cradle Days, pp.94, 97-8, and E.C. Tabler, Pioneers of Natal and Southern Africa 1552-1878 (Cape Town 1977), p.77, respectively. Henry Nourse and Evan Christian were founding members of the Coaercial Exchange in 1822, Christian its chairaen in 1826, and Joshua Maynard a later member - R.F. Iswelaan, Men of Good Hope (Cape Town, 1955), pp.172, 225, and appendix b, p.314.

¹¹¹Fynn Diary, pp.56-7.

Since it has been suggested that the traders were involved in the procural and dispersion of slaves at Port Natal¹²⁰, it needs to be asked what opportunity for such a trade existed, and what influences, if any, were operating on the traders to do so - hence what type of trade was being conducted along the south east coast. That there was a trade in ivory - elephant and hippopotamus tusks - is indisputable, yet there was another export commodity which was of increased importance in this period.¹²¹ Furthermore, with minimal financial backing, why extend resources when ample opportunity for trading in ivory and skins existed on the frontier?¹²²

Both Fynn's writings and the accounts from Owen's survey party point to Portuguese involvement in a trade in slaves in 1823. Prior to that year, apart from apparently isolated cases of slaving, all that emerges from the literature is one of two things: either evidence relating to a broader network of slaving along the south east African coast (with Mozambique Island a collection point)¹²³ that might or might not include Delagoa Bay¹²⁴; or reference to "Vatwah", or "Hollontote", sometimes even Zulu raids in and around the bay. These last, made by members of Owen's survey, reflect the initial confusion of the observers entering and recording the turmoil of the area in 1822. Fynn's observations of slaves and slaving are explicit: he sees 80 held in irons in the cells of the Portuguese fort; he describes the nature of trade at Delagoa Bay, emphatically stating that the "principal objects for sale, however, were slaves"¹²⁵; he writes that in 1823, due to a recent defeat, many of Mayete's people had been "sold into slavery", that the Ndvandve and Zulu traded prisoners obtained in "their wars" to the Portuguese fort, and condemns the Portuguese for

¹²⁰Cobbing, "Grasping the Nettle", p.25

¹²¹Both Harries and Cobbing demonstrate the dynamics of moves to end the slave trade which shifted the emphasis on extracting slaves (to feed the burgeoning sugar plantations of the Brazils and the Mascarenes) to Delagoa Bay in the 1820s: Harries, "Slavery, Social Incorporation and Surplus Extraction", pp.312-316; Cobbing, "Grasping the Nettle", pp.4-7. The following discussion takes implicit cognizance of these trends.

¹²²Between 1819 and 1826 ivory exports from the Colony increased from 600 to 25 125 pounds, the burgeoning of the trade being associated with the increase in coasting vessels plying between Algoa Bay and Cape Town; Imperial Blue Book, Report: "Cape of Good Hope: Trade, Navigation and Harbours", House of Commons, 1829, pp.13-14. It is of significance that King and Farewell moved beyond the ambit of such developments.

¹²³Commodore J. Nourse to J.W. Croker, 26 September 1823, observed that slaves were "carried to Mozambique [from Delagoa Bay], and from thence exported to the Brazils... to Madagascar... to the Seychelles and to Bourbon"; Theal, Records of South Eastern Africa, IX, p.32.

¹²⁴See also the reports and letters collected in Theal's Records of South East Africa, vol IX, pp.1-17, dated from 1808 to 1812.

¹²⁵Harries quotes Jose Fortunado Soares to Dinis Castra, 11 April 1829 as in agreement with Fynn here in that "the dominant form of commerce" at Lourenco Marques was slavery; Harries, "Slavery, Social Incorporation and Surplus Extraction", p.315, note 28.

"encouraging" the "contests" between "rival parties" which produced slaves.¹²⁶

Owen's letters reveal more about this issue than does the compiled narrative, and yet there is a correspondence between them. From what is available of Owen's communications, it appears that evidence for the slave trade from Delagoa Bay begins in 1823. Owen's letters giving an account of the Bay (as collected by Theal) start in April, and deal from the first with the matter of territory ceded by the Tembe to Britain. His references to slaving are consequently muddled with what became an energetic, but unsuccessful, attempt to have the British ratify the treaty, introducing the double theme of the need to wipe out Portuguese slaving, and the profits of civilization.

Another possible reference to slaving in this period was recorded by William Threlfall, who, in August 1823, observed a "large number" of people seeking refuge from the "Bratwabs" (whose king he had heard was Shaka)¹²⁷ in the village where he was staying.¹²⁸ In November 1823, under very dubious circumstances and suffering from malaria, Threlfall was refused passage out of Delagoa Bay aboard the Orange Grove by both Nourse brothers. They claimed that they did not know where the frigate was next bound and it would therefore be impossible to assist Threlfall. Nor would he be permitted aboard the Andromache.¹²⁹ Instead he was left with the Portuguese, and during his stay interceded on their behalf to obtain a "treaty for peace" when the fort was blockaded by "raiders". After Threlfall's departure aboard a whaler, the Nereid, the peace was broken, so that Owen, on his next visit, found that "very few inhabitants were left".¹³⁰

Since such information correlates with the timing of Fynn's presence - hence his evidence - it has conventionally been accepted that this is the point at which the nature of trade turns at the bay, in keeping with earlier trends

¹²⁶ Respectively Fynn Diary, p.39; p.40; pp.43 and 47; p.48; pp.43, 47 and 48; also reference to "Orentot" raiders, Portuguese and Tembe [Chief Mohambie] slaving, "Delagoa Bay" by Mr Fynn, in Theal, Records of South-Eastern Africa, vol.11, p.487.

¹²⁷ Broadbent, The Missionary Martyr of Namaqualand, p.80.

¹²⁸ Threlfall's journal entry for 31 August 1823, as quoted in Broadbent, The Missionary Martyr, p.80.

¹²⁹ Threlfall was literally thrown off the Orange Grove; for full details see Broadbent, The Missionary Martyr, pp.87-92; I am indebted to Jurg Richner for this reference.

¹³⁰ Broadbent's recollection of Owen's statement, The Missionary Martyr, p.97.

further north at Mozaabique Island, Quelimane, and Inhambane.¹²¹ One wonders, however, at the scale of slaving which emerges from Fynn's writings as compared with Owen's somewhat ambiguous references. A simple counter-measure to such confusion rests in a recollection of the context of the production of such evidence.

It is simplistic to conclude that a trade in slaves began only after Fynn, Owen and Threlfall's arrival when there is ample reference to turmoil, raiding and devastation from the first days of the surveying expeditions into the hinterland.¹²² Nor can one expect that the surveying party could have an immediate grasp of the socio-political state of affairs on their first landing at Delagoa Bay. The evolution of such an awareness is noticeable in the Narrative of Voyages. Other considerations demonstrate that the party could not have grasped the full significance of the situation into which they were thrust. In September 1823 Commodore Joseph Nourse wrote to J.W. Croker that

the Portuguese upon the appearance of the surveying vessels, sent 180 natives (slaves) from their fort, in order that they should not be seen by the English men of war, probably fearing that they might be seized.¹²³

A natural reaction to prevent British interference for reasons of trade or on the grounds of an anti-slavery campaign, this explains the anomalous dating obtained from the conventional sources.

If there is any doubt as to the devastating nature of slaving activities at Delagoa Bay in the time that Owen and Fynn were there, the following evidence brought before the commission of inquiry (1826-8) into the illicit trade in slaves to Mauritius is conclusive. It was found that, in reaction to Owen's treaty with the Tebe,

a connection is stated to have been formed between the Portuguese and the French slave traders, and a marauding system commenced, the object of which was the capture of peaceable tribes inhabiting the interior of that part of Africa, to which cause has been attributed the appearance since 1823, of great numbers of starving people upon the frontiers of the Cape Colony. The slave traders at Delagoa Bay, are said to have

¹²¹As Carolyn Hamilton has recently argued by stressing that Owen's evidence points to a relative lack of slaving at Delagoa Bay. Contrary to Cobbing's use of Owen's evidence, Hamilton extricates a quote which is at variance not only with the tenor of the rest of that letter, but also with the bulk of Owen's writings collected by Theal; "The character and objects of Chaka" and their many representations in the 1820s: the Cobbing thesis reconsidered", paper presented to the Centre for African Studies, 29 May 1991, p.8; and for the controversial letter, see Owen to Croker, 11 October 1823 (obviously responding to inquiries specific to the validity of the Tebe Treaty), Theal, Records of South-Eastern Africa, vol.IX, p.37.

¹²²Narrative of Voyages, vol.I, References to Tebe river, 4 to 9 October 1822: pp.80, 86,100,109; to Dundas river, 14 October 1822: pp.109, 112; to branch of Mattol river, 14 October 1822: p.114; Portuguese at fort report "ravages" between fort and Mafoomo lake, end of October to early November 1822: p.121; reference to area around Mattol river: pp.123-4; Manice (King George) river, 6 November 1822: pp.141-2; and "The Bay of Delagoa", in Theal, Records of South-Eastern Africa, vol.IX, p.470 for Zwide and Soshangane; also p.474 mentioning Mattol in a state of "dreadful disorder" from a late "Vatwah invasion".

¹²³Commodore Nourse to J.W. Croker, 26 September 1823, in Theal, Records of South-Eastern Africa, vol.IX, p.32.

gone out in armed parties to drive off their cattle, and destroy their grain, in the expectation that a large proportion of these wretched people would repair to the coast, in quest of subsistence, where they might be seized and embarked in the slaving vessels.¹²⁴

Far from the weak, tenuous presence the Portuguese were said by Fynn and Owen to have enjoyed at Delagoa Bay, this vigorous attempt to maintain control over trade produced more than just Owen's indignant response.¹²⁵ The temptation to juxtapose this with Newitt's view of the "afecane" and its relation to Portuguese activities is too great to resist:

More than anything else it was the afecane... that really provided the opportunities for the Portuguese to develop their trade in slaves.¹²⁶

While trading at the bay between June and December 1823, Fynn encountered a similar response from the Portuguese. On an expedition up the Mapoota river in the Jane, Fynn had ample opportunity to learn the politics of trade in the immediate hinterland. Having established that he was the "chief" of the district, the traders (Fynn and Henry Maynard) began to barter with Makhasane for "elephant and sea-cow tusks".¹²⁷ In the midst of these transactions a Portuguese vessel descended upon the party and proceeded to harass their attempts at trade. Fynn described the incident:

Our trade then went on pretty briskly, but this was not allowed to last long. Two Portuguese boats, with two sergeants and armed soldiers, came and located themselves close beside us, with their Portuguese flag hoisted in defiance.

He continued with a discussion of the "cunning" manner in which Makhasane's bargaining power was raised by the presence of the Portuguese, alluding to the type of experience these people must have had with whalers and other ships calling for a similar purpose. However, Fynn shoved his hand when he told how, at his orders, one of Makhasane's councillors and Mbongi, the man's son, were seized and held captive.¹²⁸ This was supposedly an attempt to stultate Makhasane to fulfill "what he had undertaken to do", and the prisoners were released once he had done so. What were

¹²⁴British Parliamentary Paper 1829 (29), "Report of Commissioners of Inquiry upon the Slave Trade at Mauritius", p.38. I am indebted to Patrick Harries for this reference. The papers of two witnesses (Marcenay and Byam - appendices 10 and 11), relative to the involvement of colonial vessels in the slave trade were brought before the commission, but were withheld from publication for reasons that are highly obscure. Furthermore, the central witness (mentioned as of prominence in Byam and Marcenay's evidence), Letord, a convicted slaver, was employed by Commodore Mourse as a pilot in precisely the years he was involved in the illicit trade: 1822-24 (pp.5-6). Again, the gaps here can only lead to speculation.

¹²⁵Captain Owen to Senhor de Botelho, 10 May 1825, in Theal, Records of South-Eastern Africa, vol.IX, pp.55-58.

¹²⁶M.D.D. Newitt, Portuguese Settlement on the Zambezi, p.222.

¹²⁷Fynn Diary, p.41.

¹²⁸Fynn Diary, pp.41-2.

the returns for this action which Fynn was so eager to gain? Surely not ivory which could have been procured in a far more simple manner.

If the Portuguese were so much concerned with the trade in slaves at this point, as Fynn himself wrote, then what was the motivation behind this scuffle over ivory? What, also, was the nature of the "accident", which befell the Portuguese vessel necessitating its return to the fort, allowing Fynn and company to continue their activities unaltered?¹³⁹ Furthermore, why were the traders concerned with opening a trade with Makhasane's Mabudu - who were in Fynn's own estimations active slavers - when Owen and Nourse had already established a working relationship with the Tembe? Perhaps they were introduced to the possibility of trade with Makhasane through his father-in-law, "English Bill".¹⁴⁰ Questions such as these, if not the evidence for answers, abound, and what is needed is for the facts to be realigned with the slaving activities of those in the vicinity of Delagoa Bay for the picture as a whole to emerge. The strength of Portuguese antagonism toward attempts to trade in their sphere of influence, and one of increased potential at that, was perhaps the motivating factor which shifted the Natal traders' focus southward.

The complexity of such a shift has been lost in the web of history. Contrary to Fynn and Farewell's respective assertions that the expedition's speculative objective was St. Lucia Bay, Captain Owen's account, as compiled in 1833, states that Farewell, too, was interested in, and originally set out for, Delagoa Bay. He wrote that Farewell "previous to settling at Natal, visited in a mercantile voyage that port, as well as Delagoa and others along the coast".¹⁴¹ Although Owen might have been mistaken, there is some merit in this for, on 23 June 1823, Farewell received permission to leave the Colony in the Salisbury with his destination described as Delagoa Bay.¹⁴² Furthermore, Farewell, while in Simon's Bay, had sought out Owen for advice¹⁴³, and later both he and King obtained information

¹³⁹Fynn Diary, p.42.

¹⁴⁰Makhasane was married to one of "English Bill"'s daughters; Owen, "The Bay of Delagoa", in Theal, Records of South-Eastern Africa, vol.II, p.471.

¹⁴¹Narrative of Voyages, vol.II, p.220; vol.I, p.253 records that in June 1823 three vessels, including the Salisbury, were fitted out "for the purpose of opening trade with Delagoa Bay".

¹⁴²Cape Archives, CO 6067.

¹⁴³The meeting is not recorded in Narrative of Voyages, however a certain, unnamed merchant is reported to have been "particularly solicitous" in obtaining information from Owen; E.H. Burrows states that it was Farewell who sought out Owen. Captain Owen of the African Survey 1774-1857 (London, 1979), p.118; perhaps Burrows use of sources (not always clearly referenced) other than the Narrative of Voyages produced Farewell's name erased by the editing of the journals from the survey party.

relative to the coast as well as the Leven's survey map of the Natal-St. Lucia coast¹⁴⁴ which would have warned of the unsuitability of St. Lucia as a prospective landing point; the survey party had been unable to enter the bay due to the presence of a sand bar across the river mouth.¹⁴⁵ With a ship of smaller draft, perhaps Farewell and King believed they could enter the bay.

There is also the matter of the fantastical nature of the events surrounding the description of Farewell and King's attempts to land at St. Lucia. King wrote to Bathurst that they tried "at several ports" (including Delagoa Bay?) prior to the abortive attempt at what was supposed to be the focal point of their excursion.¹⁴⁶ Two abortive landings were made, during which their interpreter, "Jacob", obtained from Owen at their meeting in Algoa Bay¹⁴⁷, escaped. "Boisterous" weather during the second mishap caused the two ships, the Salisbury and the Julia, to be driven out to sea, and ostensibly prevented their return to collect the sailors they had been "obliged" to leave behind.¹⁴⁸ Since Fynn's voyage to Delagoa Bay from Cape Town at much the same time took twelve days¹⁴⁹, they could, in the interim, have accomplished much that has not been recorded.

Returning from the realm of fantasy, doubt must be placed on the claim that an early focus on St. Lucia was envisaged, since there was very little evidence prior to June 1823 to point to the Zulu as the powerful state from whom the Portuguese could have obtained the bulk of their gold, "ivory, wax [ambergris], etc.". Furthermore, the speculative voyage which brought profit to the Orange Grove's endeavours had little to do with the area south of Delagoa Bay, and even that focus was blurred to include Mozambique Island.¹⁵⁰ In any event, all that was known of the Zulu so far had emerged from the confused reports brought down by Owen's survey party. Fynn's expedition in the Jane had hardly begun by this time.

It seems more likely that the focus on St. Lucia stems from a post-1824 embellishment of the power of Shaka and the

¹⁴⁴Narrative of Voyages, vol.I, p.253; Fynn Diary, p.52.

¹⁴⁵Narrative of Voyages, vol.I, p.67.

¹⁴⁶J.S. King to Earl Bathurst, 10 July 1824, quoted in Fynn Diary, pp.52-3; quote from p.53.

¹⁴⁷Fynn Diary, p.52; Narrative of Voyages, vol.I, p.253.

¹⁴⁸Fynn Diary, p.53.

¹⁴⁹Fynn Diary, p.36.

¹⁵⁰Narrative of Voyages, vol.I, p.209. Perhaps Nourse profited from the possible "etc." obtained there!

Zulu state, in no small way related to the traders' perspective of events and interpretation of their significance.¹⁵¹ In all probability, Farewell and King were turned away from Delagoa Bay for reasons other than have been stated. That their financial backing reflected a less secure and more narrow base, and was isolated from the Maynard-Nourse (and Owen?) group, suggests a comparative lack of power in dealing with Portuguese antagonism toward their activities. What the break-down in the conventional line from June 1823 to Farewell and King's intentions has not shown emerges from a consideration of the most narrow horizon, the focus on the bay of Natal as a gateway into the interior.

Prior to sailing for Natal in 1824, Farewell responded to Cape Governor, Lord Charles Somerset's request for written communication of his plans "relative to the speculation" he was "undertaking to the South-East Coast of Africa", leaving one of the few accounts by his hand of events leading to the settlement.¹⁵² Sketching the "dangerous" and "expensive" attempts undertaken so far to "form an intercourse" in trade "with the natives on the coast between the Cape frontier and De La Goa Bay" he stated that

the natives have already requested that we would come and traffic with them and probably by a constant intercourse we shall eventually lead to a commerce of importance to the Colony and advantage to ourselves.¹⁵³

Throughout, in terms that would later characterise communications relative to the "Scramble for Africa", Farewell emphasized the potential advantages for the Colony in

furnishing articles of export as well as new sources of trade, and tending to civilize many populous nations hitherto unknown to Europeans.¹⁵⁴

In place of "civilize", read Farewell's true intentions: to enslave to European needs and whims those over whom it would be possible to wield an advantage, be it that of Empire, or any other form of force.

¹⁵¹All accounts of the first King-Farewell speculative voyage to the south east coast, bar one, were written after 1824; King to Bathurst, 10 July 1824, Cape Archives, S.H. 1/39, pp.45-59; *South African Commercial Advertiser*, 11 July 1826. The exception, Farewell to Somerset, 1 May 1824, supports the theory: Farewell's discussion of the origins of his proposed trading venture to Natal refers to an initial conviction "that a trade might be established with the natives on the coast between the Cape frontier and De La Goa Bay", and the subsequent exploration of the "capabilities of the country", as opposed to the focus on the Zulu; in Bird, *Annals of Natal*, vol.1, pp.71-2.

¹⁵²Lieutenant F.G. Farewell to Lord Charles Somerset, 1 May 1824, in J. Bird, *The Annals of Natal* (London, 1885), vol.1, pp.71-2; quote from p.71.

¹⁵³*Ibid.*, p.72.

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*

Farewell had to approach the matter of a trading settlement outside Colonial borders with caution. On the Cape frontier, to maintain a modicum of control over commercial interaction across the border, a system of trade fairs was introduced in 1817. Since trade was not deemed safe except at these fairs, in September 1822 a "prohibitory law" was proclaimed whereby a fine of 500 rix-dollars and banishment from the frontier district for five years could be imposed if transactions were found to occur outside the regulations. By July 1824, the ineffectiveness of these measures recognised, a new system was introduced, increasing the number of fairs (on the Keiskama river) to three a week.¹⁹⁵ Licencing of traders and lists of their goods for sale were also required.¹⁹⁶

By forcing a permanent settlement at the bay of Natal, Farewell in effect managed to extend the commercial frontier beyond the borders of the Cape Colony, but, as a British subject, was to a certain extent still bound by Somerset's authority. He therefore sought the Governor's "every encouragement", casting for the big fish, but satisfied when he reaped in the smaller: permission to leave the colony to trade on the south east coast. Somerset's reply emphasised that any acquisition of land could not be ratified without full knowledge of the circumstances, but implied a keen desire for commercial intercourse in the region, once more underlining the profits of civilisation in its approval of Farewell's mission "to lay the ground for civilizing the inhabitants of that part of South Africa".¹⁹⁷ Treated ambiguously by both Farewell and Somerset, the permanent nature of the settlement could be avoided, and Port Natal thereby became a quasi-sovereign state, in theory subject to British jurisdiction and regulated by Colonial laws, but effectively beyond their ambit. Such was the situation enjoyed by the traders in Natal until 1836 and the introduction of the Cape of Good Hope Punishment Act. The project of "civilizing" Africa both created and justified such politics.

In the darkness and confusion of the "afecane", Ayliff recognised that the "hellish practice of the slave trade thus begun on the coast was the origins of the wars" that had "nearly produced the entire extinction of the African Tribes of this Continent"¹⁹⁸. Observations such as this have been allowed to slip between the historian's pen and paper since there is an apparent lack of conformity to the bulk of "evidence" from which the history of the early nineteenth

¹⁹⁵G.M. Theal, *Records of the Cape Colony*, 34 vols. (Cape Town, 1903-06), XVIII, pp.179-190.

¹⁹⁶Blue Book, Report: "Cape of Good Hope Trade, Navigation and Harbours", House of Commons, 1829, pp.13-14.

¹⁹⁷G. Brink, for the Governor, to Farewell, 5 May 1824, in Bird, *The Annals of Natal*, vol.I, p.72.

¹⁹⁸Quoted by Cobbing, "Grasping the Nettle", p.25.

century has been created. Rather than examine all aspects of this history, the hypothesis - and political project - is allowed to dictate, literally, the colour ink in which it is written. For Shaka and the Zulu we have the red of bloody battles, war, and devastation; for the Natal traders, Royal blue describes best their position as the great white heroes of British civilization - thus "the most civilized nations are precisely those which have the deepest interest in the spread of civilization", as D.W. Cooley wrote. Against the darkness of the wars and migrations of the "mfecane" is juxtaposed this interest in, and the light of, civilization. The nature of that "civilization" is allowed to go unchallenged, as exemplified by the lack of research detailing the effect of Abolition on what was as central to an expanding colony as it was to "apartheid" South Africa: the procural and distribution of labour.

In accepting this project at face value, historians, in the search for that elusive "holy grail", the Truth, have allowed their documentary touchstones to become little more than a collective Blarney stone. The myth of 1824 has been allowed to preface the post-1824 history of Natal, rendering the activities of Fynn, Farewell, King, Isaacs and company more credible through such an uncritical acceptance of the gateway into the "mfecane" which their writings have created. The traders obtained more than just information from their experience of trade at its broadest horizon along the south east coast of Africa. The settlement at Port Natal paralleled the situation at Delagoa Bay. The most obvious characteristic in common is that each settlement of traders functioned on a laissez fair basis with little external (official) control over the activities of the settlers. Despite Farewell's plea for Somerset's sanction of his activities, what force could actually have been brought against the traders had they stepped out of line? In fact this is precisely what they did do, and what was known of their activities became lost in this "blind darkness", in no small way a construction of their own.

Bringing arms and ammunition into Port Natal meant that the traders could introduce a diplomacy of their own. From a position which gave them limited access to trade out of Delagoa Bay, the Zulu found in the Port Natal traders powerful allies whose guns provided the means to dominate surrounding polities. Thus "refugees" tended to gravitate toward the inlets (trader states) of the newcomers which did, in fact, provide some kind of sanctuary - but at a price. Shaka and Fynn were enabled through these umizib followers, known as the izinkuabi, or locusts¹⁰⁹, to combine forces against

¹⁰⁹James Stuart Archive, vol. I, p.254.

"emies" whom they raided for both cattle and labour. The battle against the Ndvandwe in 1826 is a case in point,¹⁶⁰ and a similar raid occurred against the Beje in February 1827, where the potential "wrath" of Shaka forced Fynn into armed action.¹⁶¹

There may be little evidence by which a counter-history can re-represent their activities more accurately, but in the study of the mechanisms whereby the evidence was distorted rests an opportunity to understand the darkness for what it was. As background to the myth, the history of interest in trade along the south east coast of Africa is particularly interesting and deserving of more intense study than it has so far received. The "mfecane" was not merely concerned with the interior of Africa; it encompassed a trading network criss-crossing the Indian Ocean and included a trade to the Brazils. Once the origins of the traders interest in Natal is noted, the importance of this connection cannot be ignored. It is not that the traders caused the "mfecane", but that they were a part of the process which moved Africa into the world of Empire in the early nineteenth century, concomitantly shifting the emphasis from chattel to wage labour. In fuelling their trading states on "refugees", Fynn, Farewell, and company were intimately part of this process, and, as the deconstruction of the "myth of 1824" suggests, their response to the opportunities for trade was a part of the more general, over-arching process.

If historians are to address themselves to the questions raised by Cobbing's hypothesis (whether in acceptance or denial) theirs is a double task: to ensure that the evidence used in the debate is not distorted, manipulated, or transformed according to some pre-ordained political objective, however tempting; and hence to be aware of the dangers of rewriting the old myths. It is, as Worger observed, more important to be aware of variations and disjunctures in the evidence than to be able to tack them on to some convenient frame.¹⁶² Of this process by which myths are unscrambled, turned around, and held up for what they are, Barthes wrote that it entailed entering "a subjective dark night of history where the future becomes an essence, the essential destruction of the past".¹⁶³ In this darkness we need not be unsighted.

¹⁶⁰See Fynn Diary, pp.125-7; Cobbing, "Grasping the Nettle", pp.26-7.

¹⁶¹Fynn Diary, p.128.

¹⁶²Worger, "Clothing Dry Bones", pp.148-9.

¹⁶³Barthes, "Myth Today", p.148.

