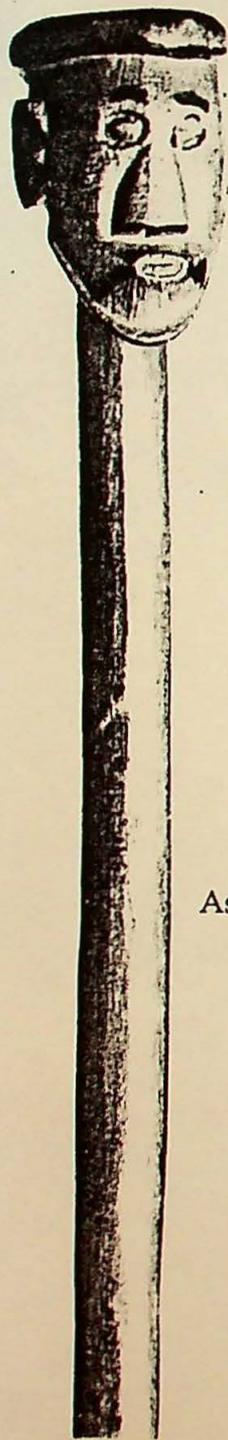


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THE 'MFECANE' AFTERMATH

towards a new paradigm

6-9 September 1991

LANGUAGE AND ASSASSINATION:
Aspects of white writers' portrayal of Shaka and the Zulus

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Paper presented to the colloquium
"The 'Mfecane Aftermath': towards a new paradigm
 University of the Witwatersrand, 6-9 September 1991

LANGUAGE AND ASSASSINATION

Some aspects of white writers' portrayal of Shaka and the Zulus

Dan Wylie, Rhodes University

The range of attitudes towards Shaka in "colonial" writing is wide and tangled, but the strongest and most consistent has undoubtedly been one of "character assassination". This has varied from the openly vicious (Nathaniel Isaacs and Elizabeth Watt) through the jarringly ambivalent (Bryant and Ritter) to the concealed (Omer Cooper and Thompson). It runs counter to, and often in confused company with, the tendency to lionise Shaka; it permeates even the most recent historiographical efforts to assess him "objectively".

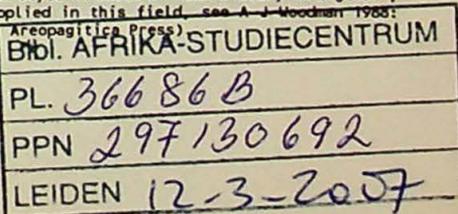
This paper is concerned with recognisable patterns of language-use in the Shakan literature through which some common "assassinator" attitudes are expressed. Virtually all attempts to convey the Zulu "reality", inevitably, inscribe the individual and cultural identity of the writer as powerfully as it describes the subject. More accurately, what is inscribed is a certain perception of the subject, a mode of thinking about it, which is discernible in the manner in which words are chosen, juxtaposed, or deployed in argument. I take it as axiomatic, then, that style, or rhetoric, is an absolutely integral part of any portrayal of "Shaka", and that any assessment of our primary or secondary sources depends in large part on an assessment of the heritage, resources and implications of their rhetorical choices.

There is no unmediated historical documentation of Shaka's reign (this is as true of the earliest eye-witness accounts¹ as of James Stuart's oral traditions or of the latest research): "Shaka" is in every sense a "verbal construct". His "history" consists very largely of legends, or anecdotes, or lies, or inventions, rather than what we conventionally think of as "historical evidence" (i.e. statements which we can unproblematically assume to have a direct representational relationship with "what happened"). His portrayal is conditioned by a plethora of Eurocentric prejudices, inherited concepts, and narrative conventions; his is a "literate" mythology, whose selection of words (and by extension, selection of allusion, metaphor, sentence structure, tense, narrative strategy, even genre) has so far hardly been examined.²

I can perhaps sharpen the point with an example. In almost all works on Shaka, the origin of his name is discussed as a kind of synecdochal lens through which the question of his own origins - his birth, exile and accession to Zulu chieftainship - is refracted. A "folk etymology" is used to support or crystallize the story. In each case the name "Shaka" is translated, and into the gap between original word and interpretative translation, the writer's predilections are inserted (this happens with many words, including "Zulu", "Gubulawayo", "Gibixhegu", and, a more general case examined by

¹ For a more detailed examination of Nathaniel Isaacs's account, for example, see Dan Wylie, "Autobiography as Alibi: History and Projection in Nathaniel Isaacs's Travels and Adventures in Eastern Africa (1836)", in Current Writing, Vol.3, Oct.1991 (forthcoming).

² Unlike some other disciplines, South African historiography has been generally dilatory in coming to a full awareness of its rhetorical practice. See, for instance, James Clifford and G E Marcus (eds) 1986: Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography (Berkeley: University of California Press); and Paul Atkinson 1990: The Ethnographic Imagination (London: Routledge). For a rare South African foray, see Christopher Saunders 1986: "Our Past as Literature: Notes on Style in South African History in English", Kleig XVIII. For a methodology which could be fruitfully applied in this field, see A J Woodman 1988: Rhetoric in Classical Historiography: Four Studies (Portland: Areopagitica Press).



Christopher L Miller, "Africa" itself³). This is, in effect, a microcosm of the process which occurs in all transcriptions of the reality of one culture (or the past) into the discourse of another (or the present).

An ambivalence in the translation of Shaka's name is present from the beginning. Nathaniel Isaacs, without comment, gives two versions, deriving it from "Chekery or dysentery", which his mother Nandi, the story goes, was said to have contracted, so concealing her pregnancy; and secondly, "in Sichuana at least", from the word for "battle-axe".⁴ The first is closely aligned with the notion of Shaka's illegitimacy, which itself, as William Wörger wrote, "forms, and becomes an emblem of, the man";⁵ it is also echoed by Isaacs's allusions to disease and insanity in his descriptions of Shaka's "symptoms" (264) and the repulsion informing his innumerable epithets of "inhuman", "insatiable", "detestable" and so on. (It is also jettisoned as an etymological source, again without comment, when Isaacs avers that the name was changed from Checker to Chaka [269]). The second translation carries the obvious connotations of insatiable warfare; it also, incidentally, demonstrates the ease with which early travellers transferred information from one tribe to another, tending to see them as at bottom undifferentiated.

Except for the plagiarism by D C F Moodie (1888), Isaacs's interpretations vanish from the literature. So does Henry Francis Fynn's more plausible derivation of "looseness of the bowels" - with the exception of J D Omer-Cooper.⁶ These were overtaken by a more colourful explanation: that of the "intestinal beetle". This only appears in the literature (as does so much else) with A T Bryant's *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal* (1929), a century after Shaka's death. In virtually every subsequent writer,⁷ and in conjunction with the "stunted penis" story (also started by Bryant), it is utilised to support new, crudely Freudian explanations for Shaka's violence: a childhood of belittlement, implied in the "beetle" appellation, fuels vengeance and ambition. Thus Huntly Stuart (nephew of James), in his play "Shaka" (1981), has Dingane mock his predecessor with his "royal BEETLE power ... royal beetle authority"; and Lynn Bedford Hall's children's account (prudishly?) suppresses the illegitimacy-connection and has Shaka's young bullies use the term "beetle" merely as insult.⁸

³ C L Miller 1985: *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 10-11.

⁴ Nathaniel Isaacs 1836 [1936]: *Travels and Adventures in Eastern Africa*, Vol.1 (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society), 45.

⁵ W Wörger 1979: "Clothing Dry Bones: The Myth of Shaka", *Journal of African Studies*, 6/3, 147. A pioneering but, through neglect, not yet seminal essay.

⁶ D C F Moodie 1888: *The History of the Battles and Adventures of the British, the Boers, and the Zulus, etc* (Cape Town: Murray & St Leger), 395; J Stuart and D McK Malcolm (eds) 1950: *The Diary of Henry Francis Fynn* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter), 12; J D Omer-Cooper 1966: *The Zulu Aftermath* (London: Longman) adds, without explaining: "This name which came to be attached to the boy is symbolic of much in his life and character" (29-30)

⁷ A T Bryant 1929: *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal* (London: Longman Green & Co), 48. See also Viola Ridgway 1944: 40; S G Millin 1948: 125; E A Ritter 1955: 16; J Michener 1980: 539; P J Schoeman 1983: 17; W Faure 1986; L B Hall 1987: 2. To judge by the testimonies in C DeB Webb and J B Wright (eds) 1976-86, *The James Stuart Archive*, (4 vols, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press), the "beetle" story did exist before Bryant's popularisation of it, having been given in evidence by Jantshi in 1903 (I 179). Most oral accounts refer to "itshaka" or, more commonly, "itshati", a "particular disease" rather than a beetle (as does M M Fuzze 1979: *The Black People and Whence they Came* [Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press], 45); most accounts say that the attempted cover-up was made, but do not state that this was the origin of Shaka's name (I 5, 188; IV 198, 202, 213, 222). One account does make the connection explicit (II 230); one equally emphatically denies it (II 246). Cetshwayo asserted in 1880 that Shaka meant "bastard"; an alternative word was used thereafter, according to his editors C DeB Webb and J B Wright 1987: *A Zulu King Speaks* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press), 3 and 3n.

⁸ Huntly Stuart, unpubl. play "Shaka", first performed at the Foundation Theatre, Durban, 7 July 1981, with Henry Cele as Shaka; ms. in Killie Campbell Africa Library, Durban, 38. Lynn Bedford Hall 1987: *Shaka: Warrior King of the Zulu* (Cape Town: Struik), 2.

The importance, in this context, is not in the truth of the epithet but in how it is used; thus Charles Ballard, in *The House of Shaka* (1988), wishing to lionize the man, evades the connotations of both the ludicrous and the Freudian in the "beetle" story and gives the meaning of the name as "break of day", "fury", or possibly "firebrand" (citing no source, but presumably resurrecting the obscurer derivation of Rev J L Döhne and William Holden⁹). Accordingly, Ballard suppresses the illegitimacy issue, asserting that Senzangakhona "officially" received Shaka as his "legitimate son and heir designate by adoption", and has Shaka assume the Zulu chieftainship as "his birthright", rather than by murder (16). In effect, given the tenuousness of the evidence, this tells us more about Ballard than about Shaka; it is of a piece with Ballard's overriding concern to place himself on the right side of the modern political fence, to align himself in a kind of "affirmative action" with emerging Zulu power: "I sincerely hope," he writes in his Acknowledgements, "that the interpretation rendered in the following pages lives up to Chief Buthelezi's expectations of a work that embraces a Zulu perspective of the Zulu monarchy".

I have dwelt on this to highlight the manner in which a single lexical choice can be incorporated into the writer's ideological stance, personal affiliation, and awareness of audience. This process of translating a single Zulu word into the icon of an essentially Eurocentric posture is a microcosm of the processes involved in most European inscriptions, whether fictionally empathetic or historiographically explicatory, of "the other culture". It is some broader patterns of these processes I want to deal with.

The aim here is to propose a tentative terminology for those textual expressions of attitude, perhaps best termed *gestures*, which I see as being most widespread in the Shakan literature. I isolate three such gestures, which I have termed *enterrment*, *layback*, and *deadlighting*. Such a "synchronic" terminology, which to some extent overrides "diachronic" historical variation, is justified, I think, by the exceptionally high degree of incestuous plagiarism, paraphrasing, and unquestioning repetition which characterises much of the Shakan literature.

Because I am viewing these works in a strong sense as *documents of a culture*, these terms may find applicability to colonial literature more generally, but I have not attempted to discover how far this might be so. Nor do I offer my terms as being comprehensive, or conceptually omnipotent or normative; rather, they should be viewed as momentary crystallizations of cultural gestures which by nature are fluid, protean, and subject to manifold qualification. Hence I will range freely over the genres of "history", "fiction", "poetry", to focus on gestures common to all of them.

Enterrment

By the term *enterrment* - en-earth-ment - I denote a gesture of derogation, of dismissal or suppression, which is expressed by aligning Shaka and his Zulus with the earth, that is, positioning them on a "lower" rung of an implicit or explicit hierarchy.

The manifestations are many-layered. Europe's intellectual heritage of the "Great Chain of Being" and, later, bowdlerised forms of Darwinism, polygenist anthropology and literate history, combined in various ways with the practical superiorities of numerate commerce, firepower and progressionist technology to rejustify the ancient imageries. Blacks were easily assimilated to ingrained symbolisms of darkness "below" enlightenment; lack of "enlightenment" is easily expressed in terms of the earth-bound - the static, the animal, the "natural", the sensual; the sensual is easily subsumed by a puritanical evangelism in the Satanic, and hence the unrestrained, the insane, and the simply unintelligible.

⁹ Charles Ballard 1988: *The House of Shaka* (Durban: Emboyeni Books), 15. Cf. J L Döhne 1851: *A Zulu-Kafir Dictionary* (Cape Town: G J Pike); William Holden 1866: *The Past and Future of the Kaffir Races* (London: Paternoster Row), 9.

One persistent, broad strategy is to enterr Shaka amongst a people who themselves are conflated with the landscape. This usually takes the form of a kind of qualified "Edenism" - qualified because it is not an Eden in which the white writer actually participates. J M Coetzee has argued that a pure Eden-myth failed to take hold of the South African literary imagination as it did the American: the white settlers here were rather "apprehensive that Africa might turn out not to be a Garden but an anti-Garden, a garden ruled over by a serpent, where the wilderness takes root again in men's hearts".¹⁰ Shaka is the symbol of that fear.

A T Bryant puts it this way in *A History of the Zulus*:

Out on the grassy plain, amidst the blue forget-me-nots and the pink gladioli, placidly moved the grazing herds, while groups of merry herdboys, clad only in the sheen of the setting sun, fluted plaintively on their panpipes hard by, as though to say, "Sun! goodbye! goodbye!" Away in the distance, circles of grass brown huts, each with its attendant patch of waving millet, were scattered here and there where, had we approached, we should have found the elder folk peacefully assembled - busy women in their leathern kilts and swarthy damsels in their girdles of fringe, moving artlessly to and fro, while the men squatted leisurely about, plying their simple trades of wood-carving or basket-making, little knowing that the angel of death even then hovered above them.

Such was the pleasing idyll that everywhere rejoiced the traveller's gaze as he passed through the breadth of Lalaland betwixt the Tukela and Mngeni in the year 1810. And with the dawn all this picture of living loveliness was to be blotted out. The reign of Appollyon [Shaka] would enter in the night and this happy spot would become the Armageddon on which the corpses of the wood carvers and basket makers would be strewn o'er the plains. Infants would be pinned to the backs of their slaughtered mothers, tender trembling children would be struck down in their homes, cattle and panpipes would be swept furiously from the hillsides - bloody devastation would stalk triumphant through the land and beautiful peace would die a violent death.¹¹

Romantic language of sensual indolence and music in a Georgian landscape of levelled, floral luxuriance, in which nakedness is unabashedly paraded and labour is blissfully aimless, is reinforced by a sequence of gently tumbling relative clauses, present participles, and archaisms, evoking a timeless idyll of humans in harmony with nature and each other. Superficially, this is not a gesture of enterrment, appearing more positive than derogatory. But Bryant deliberately distances the scene: it is panoramic rather than insightful; some things we would observe only "had we approached"; the traveller remains a hypothetical one, despite the deceptive specificity of "1810"; the views of

¹⁰ J M Coetzee 1988: *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press). Not that this attitude was absent from American writing: as William Bradford wrote in 1640 of the early settlers, in language very close to that of South African "anti-Edenists": "It is recorded in Scripture as a mercy to the Apostle and his ship-wrecked company, that the barbarians showed them no small kindness in refreshing them, but these savage [American] barbarians were readier to fill their sides full of arrows than otherwise. What could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men..." (quoted in Peter Conn 1989: *Literature in America: An Illustrated History* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press]). Cf Isaacs, I 8, 20, 58; also W F W Owen 1833: *Narrative of Voyages to Explore the Shores of Southern Africa, etc* (London: Bentley). An unnamed officer of Owen's, writing as early as 1823, was perhaps the first to characterise Shaka as disruptor of a paradisaical land, a "tyrannical monster" whose "bloody proceedings promised soon to leave the whole of this beautiful country ... totally desolate". But his practical experiences prompted him to scorn the Romantics' vision of beneficent primitivism:

The state of these countries, which have scarcely had any intercourse with civilised nations, is a direct proof in refutation of the theories of poets and philosophers, who represent the ignorance of the savage as virtuous simplicity - his miserable poverty as frugality and temperance - and his stupid indolence as a laudable contempt for wealth. How different are the facts! We ever found uncultivated man a composition of cunning, treachery, drunkenness and gluttony. (71)

¹¹ A T Bryant 1964 [1911-13]: *A History of the Zulus and neighbouring tribes*, (Cape Town: Struik), 74.

boys "clad only in the sheen of the setting sun" and of "swarthy damsels" are distinctly voyeuristic. The anachronisms ("panpipes"), clichés and stereotypes (the "corpses ... strewn o'er the plains" is a staple of Shakan literature from Fynn and Isaacs onwards) also serve to dislocate the scene from a reader's involvement; this is a world altogether whimsical and in any case destined to vanish. A taint of melancholy, as in the "plaintive" music and "Sun! goodbye! goodbye!", presages the drum-beat of "would" verbs that enact the violence and, supported by the Biblical millennialism of "angel of death" and "Armageddon", imply an inescapable fatedness.¹² The apparent approbation of the idyll, in short, is enclosed in a lexical and stylistic envelope which verbalises a dismissal, a burial, and a vicarious nostalgia for a world which was not, in any case, the writer's own.

Similarly, in his magnum opus, *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal*, Bryant uses the stereotypical language of popular fiction to enliven an alleged incident of Shaka's reign, in which "natural" sensuality is murderously punished:

One hundred and seventy boys and girls caught in the height of their merriment, were hurled like sheep for the slaughter within the cattle-fold, tremblingly awaiting their doom. Nor needed they wait long. His majesty, the personification of death, appeared at the gateway like an awful spectre, picked out several fine lads, 'the worst,' ordered their necks to be wrenched by their own 'brothers,' then be dragged away and beaten by sticks until life became extinct. After this fiendish prelude, a general and indiscriminate butchery followed ... a happy spot on God's earth, a moment before sparkling with youthful vivacity, became at once transformed into a hell of moaning and pain; and with the golden sunshine as their pall, one hundred and seventy battered children, like withered wild-flowers from the veld, were cast away on the green. (1929: 640)¹³

Again, a paradisaical, flowered, green "happy spot" is exploded by the implacable doom of an apocalyptic bearer of death, here even more explicitly associated with the fiendish and with Hell; again, the theme of a paradisaical innocence of the young is ruptured by sibling-murder;¹⁴ and again, the very language, the saccharine hyperbole of the closing metaphors, serves to insulate us from real sympathy.

Bryant's enterrment of the people, as opposed to the place, is more clearly revealed in another description of the rape of Paradise:

The Bantu on the whole are tame and genial savages. But there are fighting-cocks amongst the hens, who now and again, here and there about the continent, grow fitfully gamy and make the feathers fly. Among such game-cocks our Nguni folk were numbered. Those halcyon days

¹² This is strongly reminiscent of another missionary's view that Shaka was a "scourge of God", an integral part of His plan to "desolate nations, and 'pour out the vials of his wrath' upon offending men" (Holden 1866: 42). This of course was part of Holden's justification for his own salvationist, very like the kind of 'theodicy of occupation' which both informed the "mfecane" concept and the pragmatics of apartheid.

¹³ Doubtless Bryant is also indulging here in a kind of *logographia* - a term I take from Thucydides, meaning a compilation "aimed at audience entertainment rather than truth" (Woodman, *Rhetoric*, 8) - which permeates all narrative history and could well be further developed in this context.

¹⁴ This also originates with Isaacs (269); it is implicit in this description of the "faulty Paradise" in Charles Eden's 1871 novel, *An Inherited Task, or, Early Mission Life in Southern Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), which functions as a prelude to Shaka's own predations:

The scene was indeed most attractive. The swallows skimmed the surface of the lake; flocks of guinea-fowl...sought refuge from the heat of the plains...; the ravens croaked from the pliant boughs of the weeping-willows; hawks and vultures poised themselves in mid-air, swooping down with lightning rapidity on the young duckling incautious enough to stray from its mother...; the green serpent ascended the trees to suck the eggs and devour the young, while the parent birds, uttering piercing cries, fluttered round the enemy... (40-41)

of the Golden Age ere Dingiswayo first disturbed the idyllic peace marked but an interval wherein the aggressive, plundering spirit of the race lay for the moment torpid. Once the ancient fire had been by Dingiswayo re-kindled, then fanned by Shaka to roaring conflagration, there was no longer any power to stay the natural impulse of the race. One after another wild spirits emerged among the clans, and led forth, north and west and south, fierce blood-thirsty hordes, revelling in slaughter and destruction... (446)

Here the people as a whole are animalised, their attackers simply more so; Shaka is seen merely as one form of animal life preying another, a "wolf" (128), the "king of beasts" (477), a "wild animal" (537), a "hyena" (637).

Shaka and his "irresistible" armies are also identified with the violent natural force of fire, another persistent form of enterrment, incorporating floods, deluges, storms, and so on, which deserves a brief digression. Isaacs, for instance, states that "After a form of government had been established [by Shaka] recognising all these barbarities, a calm ensued, not unlike that which intervenes between the first and last shocks of an earthquake..." (269). Holden put it even more hyperbolically: "As the raging volcano vomits forth from its fiery crater smoke, and ashes, and burning lava... entombing villages and cities at its feet, spreading dismay, destruction and death around; so, from the mouth of this despot a stream of fire was vomited forth..." (1866: 25). This is not, at bottom, much different from Nickie McMenemy's characterisation of Shaka, hovering between dread and admiration, as "a most magnificent product of nature", a "personification of the darkness of earth, of the imperturbability of air in which silver lightning sets the sky ablaze, of the revivifying, malleable, fertile-making power of water, and the triumphant, unsubduable, all-changing potency of fire".¹⁵ These are not isolated examples; and the metaphors persist into the mainstream histories. Thus Shaka unleashes a "wave of bloodshed" (Cory), or becomes the "storm-centre" of the "mfecane" (Eric Walker; Omer-Cooper); the "upheaval" and "turbulence" caused by a "galaxy of leaders" (Omer-Cooper) is "cataclysmic" (Davenport), an "eruption" (Ballard). In this way the central idea of the revolutionary and irresistible power of the Shakan state is built into assessments otherwise quite different from each other.

To return to Bryant: the "pre-cataclysmic" "Golden Age" evoked in the first two descriptions quoted above is, in the last, revealed to be merely a temporary hiatus, a period of repression of innate ferocities which are capable of exploding anywhere on "the continent" and in any direction - surely an expression of projected fears of a resurgence of African rebellion, such as that of 1906, through which Bryant himself had lived. More accurately, it becomes plain that Bryant invokes a myth of an Edenic state only opportunistically to reinforce a notion of revolutionary change, impelled by Shaka's personal violence.¹⁶ Indeed, true paradise has no (indigenous) men in it at all: the many battles "pollut[ed] the virgin sward with gore and putrid corpses ... Such was the coming of man into this hallowed paradise where heretofore nature had luxuriated undefiled in unruffled bliss" (380-1). Happily, the blacks' inveterate, autophagous violence, here expressed in the metaphors of disease, creates a "No-Man's-Paradise" (237, 390) into which the white man opportunely arrives: "anon this most beautiful and fertile garden in all South Africa, this Black Man's arcady smiling, century long, in the joy of peace and plenty and perpetual sunshine, had become transformed into a sullen and desolate waste; and into this wilderness, in the nick of time, two streams of colonizing Whites, from east and from west, had as suddenly walked, and taken possession" (236-7).

Arguably, Bryant is here turning his characteristic sarcasm against the whites: the "No-Man's-Paradise" is "all a mirage, an illusion", the thousands

¹⁵ Nickie McMenemy 1973: *Assegail* (London: Macmillan), 62, 66.

¹⁶ Elsewhere, contradictorily, Bryant adulates Dingiswayo for bringing peace to a far-from-Edenic "tumultuous and disintegrated mass of humanity" who are "powerless and unproductive, because of continuously wasting their thought and energy on fighting each other" (96-7).

of inhabitants were "in being all the time, unseen, in hiding or in captivity", and soon making their unwelcome presence felt (237). Bryant is not above pouring vitriol on his own party (eg. 78, 162, 297, 300, 563, 580) - within limits:

The history of modern European colonization among primitive peoples has proven beyond all gainsay that, where the White man wills he goes; that with him still might is right... this arrogant, greedy, lawless element struts over the face of the globe, disturbing all, molesting everybody, in its insatiable lust for further lands and further wealth. (235)

This sounds precociously "liberal", but it is framed as a tentative hypothesis ("something of the Black man's criticism ... might run somewhat on these lines"), and quickly slips into a revelation of Bryant's underpinning hierarchy:

To be sure, the Black man is not one whit better; but when the White man descends to do as the Black man does, he thereby lowers himself to the Black man's level and can claim no other justification for his deeds than that conferred by the Black man's sanctions. For, after all, that might is right is a law of nature; but of nature at its lowest, brutish stage, not of that higher and nobler nature which is enlightened by reason, guided by conscience, and ruled by a recognition of altruistic duties and responsibilities. (235)

This invokes the threat of "going native" - another gesture of enterrment - of becoming, like Shaka, "arrogant, greedy, lawless". Shaka is that man "reverted not to the savage, but to the brutish stage" (648); the archetypal "armed burglar" (236) and the real propagator of imperialistic violence. So Bryant goes on ingenuously to exonerate the Natal whites altogether:

The acquisition of Natal by Briton and Boer was not, we are happy to state, accomplished by such methods - in the last instance... The Natives of Natal lost their fatherland largely owing to a misunderstanding and a mischance [!]. (236)

Bryant continues to place himself and his culture on the moral high ground, so entering "the Other", with a palpable defensiveness. In effect, he postulates a kind of "reconstructed Eden", built by hard European work and suffused with Christian values.¹⁷ Bryant's withdrawal from insight and empathy here has everything to do with the language of clichéd, formless, exaggerated violence with which he inscribes the Zulu, the language of all subsequent popular literature (to which, until recently, Shaka has almost uniformly been confined; the very choice of genre is a gesture of enterrment). Elizabeth Paris Watt's novel *Febana* is paradigmatic:

All the torture and damnation of hell itself rent the shuddering night as human flesh and blood in searing anguish ran this fearful race of death ... No words at the command of civilized man could describe the horror of all that followed ... the awful bloodshed, the wild mingling of battle-cries, the screams of hate and fury, the groans of anguish, the massacre and revolting mutilation.¹⁸

¹⁷ This was Isaac's view, too, as evidenced by his repeated assessments of the landscape in terms of its agricultural potential, "rich in verdure and lack[ing] only the art and industry of civilized man" (26; cf. 57, 111, 149 etc); the remedy "prescribed against Africa's insidious corruptions was cheerful toil" (Coetzee, *White Writing*, 3).

¹⁸ Elizabeth Paris Watt 1962: *Febana* (London: Peter Davies), 128. The conjunctions of various enterrments are exposed with startling clarity in D J Darlow's 1937 epic poem "Tshaka: King of the Amazulu", in *African Heroes* (Lovedale Press):

What words are there to tell of deeds of blood?
Like a great torrent after weeks of rain
The Zulu army swept across the land,
A ruthless desolation. Those who fled,

This kind of dismissively unindividuated description still echoes through the histories: in Leonard Thompson's *A History of South Africa* women and children are still "massacred" with "unprecedented ferocity" in a "reign of terror", the landscape "littered with human bones" in the Zulus' "zeal for conquest".¹⁹ Thompson's "despotic and capricious" Shaka is still the centrepiece of this "internal" development, the history of this characterisation itself being intimately related to the ultimate entrenchment of relegating the Zulus to the underworld. In Watt, Shaka is "Satan himself hearing the hiss of hell's flames and the dying agonies of the damned" (130), echoing Isaacs's duplicitous "monster" and Bryant's "Satanic majesty" (1905: 49), "devil" (1929: 532), and "arch-demon of iniquity" (1964: 98).

Perhaps most importantly, Watt explicitly states the incapacity of her "civilized" language to accommodate the Zulu reality - hence the resort to cliché. As Russell Martin has noted, this syndrome begins with Isaacs's struggle "to devise a suitable language that will convey his apprehension of an historical figure and a society, utterly outside his own and his audience's experience and understanding".²⁰ Hence, for instance, Isaacs's statement that Shaka "finally succeeded in establishing a sort of Zoolacratical form of government (if I may so term it, for I do not know of anything resembling it in either ancient or modern history), a form that defies description or detail" (269), and his more ambivalent withdrawal from the effort to describe Shaka's atrocities "too harrowing to be narrated" (266). Similarly, William Holden noted that "those who have written about [Shaka] have laid the English language under contribution in order to find suitable epithets to describe his horrible and revolting conduct" (1866: 9), adding, "No language can describe the frantic joy of the conquerors: their hideous yells, their vociferous songs, their savage delight, exceeded all bounds" (23). This is echoed a century later by Brookes and Webb, for whom the suffering caused by Shaka is "almost indescribable" (1965: 8).

In effect, language-use enacts those "bounds", constitutes a "pale" beyond which Shaka and the Zulus are linguistically banished, in its extreme form to a realm of utter incomprehensibility. The Zulus are reduced to a "blank darkness", to use Miller's title, the ultimate form of the negatives so commonly used - unrestrained, irredeemable, insatiable, inhuman, and so on. In a broad sense, this is one of the preconditions developed for white narratives of Africa, as Edgar Wallace wrote: "There are many things that happen in the very heart of Africa that no man can explain ... a story about Africa must be a mystery story".²¹ Thus, for Bryant, "The Bantu character is one to us not easily analyzed. It is largely a study in contrasts; one may say, even in paradoxes" (1929: 156). Shaka is the epitome of this indecipherability: "But who shall fathom the devious ways of Shakan diplomacy?" (219). His "caprice" and "deviousness" is thus seen as iconic of a general incomprehensibility inherent in "the Bantu character" (itself a reification which writers "observe" and "study" while simultaneously inscribing its impenetrability); this caprice serves as a cornerstone of historical explanation right up to, as already noted, Leonard Thompson. Brookes and Webb, again, attribute to Shaka "complete unpredictability", then in order to circumnavigate the threat to a logical historical explanation this poses, resort to a neat tautology: "To reconcile these conflicting qualities

In earnest of the flood worked their revenge
 On who withstood them; ruin everywhere;
 Behind the host the wolves devoured the slain,
 Dogs that trotted at their masters' heels,
 Hounds of Hell obedient to fiends,
 Ranging th'Inferno slaving with joy. (40-41)

¹⁹ Leonard Thompson 1990: *A History of South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 83-86.

²⁰ S R J Martin 1982: "British Images of the Zulu c.1820-1879", unpubl. PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 51.

²¹ Quoted in Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow 1970: *The Africa That Never Was: Four centuries of British writing about Africa* (New York: Twayne), 107.

is difficult except by the assumption that Shaka, like Napoleon, considered himself above morality, responsible to none, and free from ordinary restraints" (1965: 11-13). This is the historiographical version of McMenemy's fictional gesture of simultaneous repulsion, mystification, and enterment: Shaka is finally "neither good nor evil; more, he was a personification of that affliction which life produces now and again, an impersonal product of nature" (1973: 73).

In this context of numerous, interlocking and mutually reinforcing sub-species of enterment, it becomes clear that a certain type of discourse is being more or less explicitly privileged, one expressed in terms of a distinctively Western logical structure of cause-and-effect, classification, judgement. This is inscribed, for example, in Isaacs's faintly ambivalent condemnation of Shaka as a "giant without reason" (269) - a judgement consonant with and dependent on the views expressed in his Introduction. There, Africa is characterised as "vast", "trackless", and "impenetrable", full of "wild", "noxious" and "ignorant" people; Isaacs's ideal explorer's task is to achieve an Africa "accurately described", "delineated", and "minutely investigated" by a "general and comprehensive" mind, resulting in a "stock of information" "elaborately and clearly laid down" (xxiv-xxxii); the reconstructed Eden, again. This is the kind of discourse privileged by Bryant, who repeatedly relates oral traditions in a wickedly sarcastic vein, only to revert triumphantly to his own conception of adequate historical explanation. The same is true of Watt's historical novel, in which a good deal of very precise documentary research into the whites' activities, expressed in the unvarnished style of the serious researcher, is dramatically juxtaposed with the virulence of the Zulu scenes.

If broad implications can be drawn from all this "enterment", they may be seen on two roughly congruent, superimposed planes. On one plane, a complex European mythology of an ambivalent Edenism permits the use of a particular iconography of suppression which is essentially a psycho-cultural attitude towards the Zulu; it is the kind of iconography which has always been used by colonials in everyday life to justify and empower the practice of political control. The animal, the demonic, the lazy, the static, the irrational and the incomprehensible are categories everywhere used to establish the overlord identity of a people wishing to project themselves as humane, pious, vigorous, progressive, rational and knowledgeable.

The second plane is the *linguistic manner* in which that stance is described: the same broad division is re-enacted in the styles and structures of literary works. For instance, in virtually every historical work on Shaka's reign, the account begins with a more or less static description of "Nguni society" as it "stood" before the Shakan "revolution"; then "history" proper begins, coinciding, of course, with the advent of written records and the possibility of reconstructing a sequence of explicable linked events. This is the case even with recent works deliberately aimed at rehabilitating Shaka, such as Louis du Buisson's *The White Man Cometh* and Charles Ballard's *The House of Shaka*. Of course the lack of written records is in part responsible for this, given that this is just what "history" has come to comprise. But there are virtually no written records for the "state" of pre-Shakan society either, and I suggest that the stylistic and structural antinomies are equally the result of the received, centuries-ingrained "iconographies of enterment".²²

²² Thus du Buisson 1987: *The White Man Cometh* (London: Jonathan Cape) writes:

Zululand was a vast natural paradise, one of the most fertile on earth ... a country with a gentle, generous climate devoid of extremes and with all the animals of creation intact, pursuing their own evolution.

Including *homo sapiens*.

... They were settled in thriving, self-sufficient communities who lived such an organic existence on the face of the sun-drenched landscape that they left no trace of their passing. ... Unwarlike, fun-loving and hospitable, they lived in harmony with their neighbours and when conflicts arose they were settled in the gentlest possible way. (17)

Note the odd collocation of "creation" and "evolution", the slight distancing in "*homo sapiens*". Like

I illustrate the point with a final knot of examples. A structural partition between "ethnographic observation" and "historical narrative" begins with Isaacs, who, in the convention of the day, appended his notes on customs and practices to the end of his work. Notable is his intensive use of stative verbs and possessives:

They are, doubtless, the most extraordinary people in existence, if we look into their peculiarities of character, and it is difficult to determine whether we should pity their ignorance or guard against their duplicity; for although they are proverbially in a state of perfect simplicity, yet there is a cunning about them, and an irrevocable desire for indulging in all their savage propensities... (II 243)

This is a good example of what Johannes Fabian has termed "the ethnographic present". As Fabian points out, this is another form of distancing, since the use of the present tense strongly implies a present speaker and hearer, a "dialogic situation" from which the subject (here the Zulus) are in effect excluded; they are denied both "person-ness" and an evolved and evolving position in time. Furthermore, the ethnographic present "presupposes the givenness of the object of anthropology as something to be observed."²³ "Anthropological" knowledge is privileged; the Other is entered.

Similar traces of this structurally differentiating gesture of enterrment can be found in the mainstream histories, even one like Omer-Cooper's *The Zulu Aftermath*, which explicitly states that the pre-Shakan world was "far from idyllic" (1966: 21). Times were still "relatively peaceful", by contrast with the "anarchy" which Shaka, working with "forces which had been gathering strength over centuries" (2), unleashed in the 1810s. While Omer-Cooper's historical explanations are certainly more sophisticated than most of his predecessors', he still demonstrates a tendency to attribute an essential stasis to pre-Shakan society: "the southern sub-continent seems usually to have evolved at a slower pace than the rest" (2). This more muted "Edenism" is inscribed in what might be termed an "ethnographic past":

Administrative authority in the tribe was distributed between the chief and a hierarchy of subordinates. Depending on its size, the tribal territory was divided into a number of sub-divisions, provinces and districts. Each of these was under the authority of a sub-chief and where the tribe was large there might be a two-tier system ... All the important subordinate chieftaincies were normally held by close relatives of the chief. (17)

Phrases such as "where the tribe was large there might be", and "normally", admit of the possibility that "Exceptions to this might arise", but essentially this is the language of Western categorization and normative anthropology which would regard any deviation from it as aberrant. The use of the preterite, effectively distancing the subject, thus comes close to that "narrative past" characterised by Roland Barthes as "part of a security system ... one of those numerous formal pacts made between the writer and society for the justification of the former and the serenity of the latter".²⁴ This same gesture, as Shula Marks has pointed out, commands the account in *The Oxford History of South Africa*, in which the "pre-colonial history of the black man has been relegated to an anthropologist, and is handled in wholly static, a-

Ballard, du Buisson does not entirely escape the perceptual stranglehold of his white sources. Cf. also Peter Becker 1962: *Path of Blood* (Harmondsworth: Penguin), 22-27; Desmond Morris 1966 [1968 edn]: *The Washing of the Spears* (London: Sphere), 22-39 ("These, then, were the Kaffirs ... an aimless people, happy and careless, with little sense of time and less of purpose"); Ballard 1988: 13-14. For a survey of historiography on pre-colonial South Africa, noting more recent blurrings and transcendences of these attitudinal rifts, see Johannes de Bruyn 1984: "The 'Forgotten Factor' sixteen years later: some trends in historical writing on precolonial South Africa", *Kleio* 16, 34-45.

²³ Johannes Fabian 1983: *Time and the Other: How anthropology makes its object* (New York: Columbia University Press), 80, 87.

²⁴ Roland Barthes 1953: *Writing Degree Zero* (1987 edn. New York: Hill and Wang), 32.

historical terms" (1981: 300): Monica Wilson states, for example, that "the manners of 1686 are those of the same countryside nearly three centuries later".²⁵

It may only be through this kind of analysis that we can come close to explaining why, even in a book like Omer-Cooper's, which argues that Shaka's violent revolution had its positive corollary, inasmuch as the formation of larger states Omer-Cooper regards as good by definition, a perceptible repugnance is revealed in the language he uses to describe the changes, a diluted form of that diction of predation, rape and aberration used by Isaacs and Bryant: "ravenous hordes of pillagers" threw "peaceable tribes" into "turmoil and confusion" (3), "accompanied by carnage and destruction on an appalling scale" in which "whole tribes were massacred" (4); Shaka's armies "ravished" others' territories and inflicted "monstrous sufferings" on his own (41). As we have seen, traces of this language persist in the historiography as late as Leonard Thompson's *A History of South Africa*.

Two final points can be made. Firstly, the whole concept of the "mfecane" - as a kind of subcontinental, endemic autophagia²⁶ - is, in this perspective, as much the result of the myth of a destroyed paradise, constantly reinforced by the fear of renewed destruction of the reconstructed idyll, as it is the result of actual evidence. This is inscribed in numerous ways in the language of the overlord's judgementalism (enterrment). Secondly, of course, the concept (and whatever concepts may arise to replace it, including those in the present study!) itself is the inscription of that logician's discourse of cause-and-effect, explication, categorisation, and the representational word which, in the end, may conceal as much as it reveals.

Layback

When Nathaniel Isaacs, in a rare moment of self-reflection in his *Travels*, acknowledges his "anomalous description of Zoolas - savage yet hospitable" (II 102), he is not merely balancing two irreconcilable facets and leaving the judgement to his narratee. Embedded in massive derogation and undisguised Eurocentrism, this momentary "admission" is more likely to be just another reification of the incomprehensible. This is not to deny that there is a genuine inner tension here, but the actual manifestation of the tension, when placed in context, serves rather to reinforce the Eurocentric foundation of the discourse itself.

The Shakan literature is riddled with ambivalences, contradictions, and paradoxes: admiration vies with repulsion, derogation with lionisation, ethnographic insight with Eurocentric judgement, assiduous fascination with practical oppression. Doubtless a good deal of this is simply unavoidable in any kind of cross-cultural discourse. Some of it, however, like the example from Isaacs here, is more than simple equivocation; it actually functions, in a more backhanded way than enterrment, to promote the interests of the writer and his group. For this gesture I offer the term *layback*.

The word is derived from rock-climbing; it describes a technique used to climb a vertical crack in a chimney, in which the feet are placed against the rock and push outwards, while the hands, inserted in the crack, pull inwards; by the friction and tension thus achieved progress is made upwards. In the textual context to which I now transfer it, it denotes an inner tension or ambivalence, used within a single narrative gesture to reinscribe an aspect of Eurocentrism; for this reason I will isolate it largely among *stories* told

²⁵ Shula Marks, "Towards a People's history of South Africa? Recent Developments in the Historiography of South Africa", in Raphael Samuel (ed) 1981: *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London: Routledge), 300. Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson (eds) 1969: *The Oxford History of South Africa*, Vol. I (Oxford), 129.

²⁶ I am reminded irresistibly here of MacGillray's 1790s cartoon of cannibalistic French revolutionaries (itself echoing the many, probably apocryphal but widely-repeated stories of Zulu-induced cannibalism; see eg. Thompson 1990: 85). Such imagery cannot circulate without an ambience of extreme xenophobia and "superiorist" revulsion.

of Shaka (stories of which even the "history", or perhaps more accurately, the "biography" of Shaka almost wholly consists).

The layback gesture is frequently made quite plain. For instance, when Viola Ridgway characterizes Shaka in her novella as "the cruel Brave", this is not merely the inscription of an unresolved paradox. It is already the distillation of numerous illustrative anecdotes; the adjective "cruel" has already been laden with judgement. In its context, the epithet serves as the touchstone for the assertion of the writer's own values, which are kindness, even-handed justice, restraint. Much the same can be said of the antithetical motion of approbation contained by "Brave". Ridgway happens to make this explicit in her very next lines:

If these stories from the life of Shaka have softened the old ideas of this great leader, and brought the reader a deeper understanding of his faults and his greatness, they will not have been written in vain. Perhaps, some day, there will be another leader among the black men, with Shaka's genius for leadership and organization, tempered with the democratic ideas of the white man for trade, scientific cultivation of the soil and development of the wonderful inventions of the modern world, a leader who will believe in the doctrine of "Live and let live," with mercy and justice for all.²⁷

The echoes of Isaacs's agricultural Eden and the missionary stance of the nineteenth century are clear here: "leadership and organization" are primary virtues, structured by science, technology and the tolerance of a democratic judiciary. The "deeper understanding" of Shaka, ostensibly Ridgway's objective, is not in fact to resolve or explain the antinomy of "cruel Brave", but to exploit it in the inscription of a European world-view. Neither the Zulu chieftain nor his people are viewed as whole or are accorded their own voice; instead, approved aspects - "the one who never allowed a worthy man to go unrewarded" (95), the "genius", and so on - are split off, while the condemned aspects are attributed to, say, an unexplained "madness" (87, 89). This schizoid quality, it needs hardly be added, arises from an interpretation founded on a writer-centred adherence to values irrelevant to the Zulus themselves: the split attributed by Isaacs and his numerous clones to the Zulu character and thence epitomised by Shaka is inherent not in the Zulu but in the colonial mind, in what Abdul JanMohamed has termed a "Manichean allegory".²⁸

Few writers, especially the more recent, are so blatant. But the tension of this kind of layback is present in, for instance, Brookes and Webb's history of Natal, which has the same schizoid undercarriage: "the qualities of the Zulu at his best are the qualities so fearfully taught in Shaka's blood-stained school - submission to authority, obedience to the law, respect for superiors, order and self-restraint, civic duty" (1965: 14).²⁹ Terror and blood as instruments of this education are condemned, but the values attributed to it are precisely those "taught", by precisely this process of fear and bloodshed, to the subject black peoples by white authorities.

²⁷ Viola Ridgway 1946: Stories From Zulu History: Izindaba zakwazulu (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter), 95. A Bryant clone.

²⁸ Abdul R JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature" in Henry Louis Gates Jr, ed. 1985: "Race", Writing and Difference (University of Chicago Press), 78-106. "We can better understand colonialist discourse, it seems to me, through an analysis that maps its ideological function in relation to actual imperialist practices. Such an examination reveals that any evident 'ambivalence' is in fact a product of deliberate, if at times subconscious, imperialist duplicity..." (80).

²⁹ This was in fact plagiarised almost verbatim from Bryant: "Strange, but true, this Shaka was as sublime a moral teacher as martial genius. Submission to authority, obedience to the law, respect for superiors, order and self-restraint, fearlessness and self-sacrifice, constant work and civil duty, in a word, all the noblest disciplines of life were the very foundation-stones upon which he built his nation. So rigorously enforced was the life-long practice of all these excellencies, that he left them all a spontaneous habit, a second nature, amongst his people" (1929: 641).

A particularly common species of anecdote which embodies my notion of layback involves the meeting of Shaka with items of European technology. There are numerous stories (many common to all colonial literatures), involving mirrors, medicines, Mr Petersen's music-box, the figurehead of the wrecked vessel *Mary*, firearms, writing, a knowledge of astronomical phenomena, and so on. In almost all cases, what is superficially told at the expense of the white man reveals an inner tension which, on examination, rebounds to promote the white over the black.

Almost all these gestures of layback are underpinned by the promotion of particular species of logic, of the "scientific" thought-processes and modes of expression which are by definition opposed to irrationality, "superstition", or unintelligibility. The underlying attitude is unconcealed in the earlier texts. Isaacs, for instance, makes no effort to hide his derision even when apparently bettered in argument, as in this exchange between Isaacs, Shaka, and a Portuguese man:

[Shaka] then asked me to fight with the Portuguese, but I told him that, although our nation had conquered the Portuguese, we were now not only at peace with them, but were by treaties their protectors...

"Well," said he, "what need you care? You have once conquered, and may conquer again." My Portuguese new acquaintance sat all this time and heard our conversation with concealed chagrin, and swelling with rage; but when we had left the presence of Chaka, we both laughed at the vanity of the savage. (I 60)

The implicit agreement between writer and narratee in this telling is that open derision is as acceptable to the narratee as it was to the white protagonists. The story is really designed primarily to reassert the superiority of European morality over Shaka's unbridled violence. The same comfortable derision informs Isaacs's other stories of Shaka's encounters with medicines, firearms and mirrors (eg. 90, 93, 236), which became staples of the dramatisation of this culture-contact. Similar, though less arrogant, is Fynn's story, also frequently repeated, of Shaka's encounter with purgatives supplied by Petersen, one of the whites' financial backers:

During my [Fynn's] absence Mbikwana informed Shaka that Mr Petersen also had medicine. Mr Petersen was requested to produce it and state its virtues. He produced a box of pills which he said were good for all diseases and strongly advised Shaka to take two. The King took four and giving one each to four chiefs, made them swallow them. Mr Petersen was also desired to take four. Mr Petersen after vainly endeavouring to convince the King that four were too much for one person was reluctantly compelled to swallow the four.... The King now swallowed two and ordered Mr Petersen to keep him company. This Mr Petersen peremptorily refused to do, but the King insisting, and the chiefs adding the pressure of the argument that one who recommended medicines should not refuse to take them himself, Mr Petersen was compelled to swallow two more, that is, six in all. The consequences of this to a person of 63 does [sic] not require to be explained in detail.³⁰

All the elements of subsequent stories of Zulu encounters with white technology are present here. Fynn laughs at his companion's predicament; the white man is apparently overcome by "native logic". But throughout there persists an awareness that it is Shaka who is misinterpreting the nature of the medicine, is being characteristically unrestrained; comment on the purgatives' effects on Shaka himself is conspicuous by its absence; and Fynn suggests in an alternative version that it was "fear", rather than logic, which forced Petersen's hand (79).

Other stories, such as that of Shaka besting King by forcing him to bend his house-building nails on a piece of ironwood, or demonstrating the

³⁰ James Stuart and D McK Malcolm, eds 1950: *The Diary of Henry Francis Fynn* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter), 79n.

impossibility of a round world by showing how pips fall off a turning pumpkin (Fynn 1950: 90; Ritter 1955: 300), also momentarily demonstrate the efficacy of Shaka's "native logic" within the confines of his own paradigms; but they inevitably carry the layback dimension of exposing limitations to those paradigms, so promoting the whites' wider ones. The incident of Shaka's encounters with a meteor or eclipse (another perennial of colonial fictions³¹), has similarly been used to assert the expertise of the white man.

The incident is presumably derived from a brief note in Fynn's *Diary*: "On Shaka's preparing to attack the Ndwandwes, a meteor appeared which detained him some time from proceeding until perceiving it throwing its meteoric sparks in that direction announced a favourable issue, it being a sign that the enemy would be entirely defeated, which was verified [by the outcome of the battle]" (1950: 317). Though Fynn is largely free of Eurocentric sneering here, there is no doubt that he disbelieves this explanation himself, and regards it as an ethnological curiosity symptomatic of "the uninformed and unenlightened state of [the Zulus'] minds, the result of ages of the grossest ignorance" which make the Zulus, "feeling conscious of existing superior powers[,] endeavour to supply that deficiency by invention from their own limited ideas" (267).

It is worth touching on one retelling of this story which is not a layback, in order to sharpen my definition. In Elizabeth Paris Watt's account in *Febana*, Shaka is depicted as "petrified, the victim of his own superstitious fears" and "desperate that [the comet] might be subject to the influence of the white men". The hero Francis Farewell, of course, is "astronomer enough to know" when the comet will disappear, and turns this to advantage. The inevitable "verification of [Farewell's] prophecy earned Frank a veneration which secretly amused him" - and which, by virtue of this privileged insight into Farewell's mind, less secretly amuses Watt and her narratee, at Shaka's expense (1962: 94). The derogation of Shaka's fear and "superstition" and promotion of "science" is totally undisguised here: hence it does not qualify as layback. Where Fynn, or rather James Stuart, relegated the incident to the "ethnographic" back pages, Watt transforms it into a turning-point of the plot, a hinge of "historical" efficacy: such is the empowerment of logographic discourse.

A different, and subtler story of Shaka's reaction to a similar celestial phenomenon, an eclipse, is related by E A Ritter. There are no white characters involved here, and it is Shaka's stature which apparently is elevated, in accordance with Ritter's general lionising project. But there is a layback gesture involved nevertheless. Ritter portrays the Zulus as terrified, Shaka as calm but disturbed, "mutter[ing]"; he is handed some medicine by one Mqalane, to spit at the sun, "commanding it to return". This Shaka does, the sun duly returns; Shaka's "commanding figure seemed to be magnified to majestic proportions in that weird and unreal light"; and "like Joshua of old, Shaka continued to exploit the dramatic possibilities of the situation", until, the eclipse over, "there was one continuous roar of victory, which continued in triumphant waves of adulation for the all-powerful Warrior-King who had saved the nation".³²

This may or may not be tolerably close to how the Zulus might have seen it, but it is certainly not how Ritter sees it, or expects his readership to see it. It is, in Ritter's own, only partially-concealed, view, no more than a "dramatic" situation of which Shaka can shrewdly take advantage; he only "seems" to be magnified; and the medicine is shown to be really beside the point, the "saving of the nation" in some sense spurious. In the commandeering of a "superstition" to a political stratagem, Shaka is seen to

³¹ See, for example, Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*; Bertram Mitford's *John Ames*; Charles Gilson's *In the Power of the Pygmies*; even Patrick White's *Voss* (1957).

³² E A Ritter 1955: *Shaka Zulu* (1976 edn. St Albans: Panther), 241-2. See also Stephen Gray and Cecil Skotnes 1974: *The Assassination of Shaka* (Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill), 23: "you don't believe that I am a god/this spurt out of my lungs/had a god's power/I will get it over with/when the royal sun/was eclipsed/I stood before it and spat the blackness out/and the sun/was reborn".

exploit the Zulu people's "credulity"; but the credulity is also being exploited by Ritter. While there is an implicit admiration for Shaka's self-control and shrewdness, the final flow of sympathy is in fact against Shaka, since Ritter (and, he assumes, his narratee) still knows better; were it not for the implicit gap between species of knowledge, of which the European is clearly seen as the superior, this story would not have been told at all. Hence, Ritter manipulates narrative "suspension of disbelief" up to a point at which, in this and numerous other cases in *Shaka Zulu*, he interrupts with an explicatory comment designed to reassert the primacy of European paradigms of logic or historical perspicacity: "It is appropriate at this point to note that Shaka was far too wary to engage in the very uncertain business of rain-making, which all other chiefs, and kings, dabbled in" (243). Ritter's contempt is evident in the word "dabbled", and here Shaka is commandeered to support him; Shaka's stature in the novel, in the end, depends upon his being crafted to conform with Ritter's own values. Like Viola Ridgway, Ritter cannot resist making these values plain:

One outstanding fact, however, emerges and stands forth like a shining beacon above the haze of time and controversy, and that is that the White men had some dominant quality even when in rage which compelled the black men to regard them as their superior. Shaka not only recognised this but had it proclaimed to all his nation. It had nothing to do with sky-rockets or horses or firearms, for these had been met with in the hands of Portuguese half-castes, and of the White men's Hottentots who were regarded with contempt.

Not the root of the European's superiority lay in his possession of *ubu-kosi* - the quality and air of chieftainship - for which only the Zulu language has a single word which fully defines that otherwise indefinable aristocratic ascendancy which radiates authority without any apparent effort. (238)

Thus at least part of Shaka's stature in Ritter's eyes depends on his "perception" in the whites of precisely the quality which Ritter has projected onto Shaka in the first place; thus, at best, Shaka is admired for his "white" traits, and at worst, positively overshadowed. Moreover, it is a Zulu word which is invoked as most adequately descriptive of this quality, a quality "instantly and instinctively recognized by every Zulu"; a Zulu perspective is domesticated in order to justify the white assumption of superiority; the Zulus, in effect, are obliged (textually) to connive at their own subordination. In this textual acquisition of a "Zulu point of view", layback overlaps with what I call *deadlighting*, which I will treat shortly.

One final example will serve. A crucial question which lurks behind a great deal of the writing on Shaka is the question of what light to judge his actions in. From the beginning the whites have with varying degrees of fervour condemned Shaka's alleged atrocities, even inventing more dastardly deeds with which to "assassinate" him. Isaacs almost certainly projected a great deal of his own violence onto Shaka. As we have seen, some, like William Holden, try simply to assimilate the atrocities into God's plan for the world. Some attempt in various ways to explain Shaka's violence in terms of practical politics: Lewis Grout, for instance: "Cruel and bloody as this mighty African conqueror is reputed to have been, or as he really became in the progress of his triumphs, his policy, especially at first, was not so much the utter destruction of the neighbouring tribes, as to subdue, and incorporate them with his own".³³ However, Grout adds delicately, in Shaka's final years "his own mind seems not to have been at rest" (74); there are hints here of the fast-developing idea, which would be carried by Bryant and Ritter in particular into the later histories, that after the death of his mother Nandi he went positively insane. Once again, Western logic seems determined either to dragoon Shaka into the realm of the perfectly logical, or utterly to banish him beyond it.

But a more subtle tack has been to compare Shaka's policies to those

³³ Lewis Grout 1862: *Zulu-land, or Life among the Zulu-Caffres of Natal and Zulu-land, South Africa* (London: Trubner), 72.

pertaining to the England of the time. This has been hinted at in numerous instances since Isaacs and Fynn related how horrified Shaka was at hearing of the practice of imprisonment. There appears to be a kind of irrefutable logic to the Zulu's argument in favour of the death sentence, and the white men are, again, momentarily bested in the exchange. But there is no question that Fynn believed, on moral grounds, that imprisonment was preferable to the atrocities which he and Isaacs repeatedly condemn in Shaka. Here again we see the gesture of layback.

Louis du Buisson's *The White Man Cometh* is a more recent representative. The opening paragraph of du Buisson's Foreword is:

It was a savage age. In England, the most 'civilised' nation in the world, boys were sent to sea at the age of six, children were made to labour for sixteen hours a day, seven days a week, in mines and cotton mills. In London, Mondays were still public hanging days.

Du Buisson then quotes A K Millar on the "heartless" customs of the English, with "no fewer than two hundred offences for which death by hanging was the prescribed punishment", and notes that in North America "Europeans were systematically exterminating the natives and the animals and taking over their land", and doing the same in Africa with the pernicious addition of taking slaves (1). This appears a useful reminder that, after all, Shaka's atrocities were not unusual. But du Buisson fails to press the point, continuing

1815. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* topped the bestseller list, Beethoven's *Fidelio* was first performed in Vienna, the waltz was all the rage in the ballrooms of Europe, Napoleon Bonaparte faced his Waterloo and President John Madison unveiled America's latest weapon, the *USS Fulton*, the world's first steam-powered warship. And in a grass-hutted village on the south-east coast of Africa a young Zulu invented the stabbing-spear. In the context of time and place he might as well have invented gunpowder. By the end of that year, with the great European star of Napoleon in its final eclipse, a new star was rising in Africa. *Shaka*. (2)

Du Buisson's purpose becomes immediately obscure. Is he merely setting the scene? But the juxtaposition of hanging-days and Austen is disconcertingly abrupt, even irrelevant, inviting awkward comparisons. The "invention" of the stabbing spear is manifestly overstated, the tone of the passage melodramatic. This is a list of items designed for the Eurocentric reader, and whatever du Buisson's stated purpose, "grass-hutted" sounds either condescendingly "natural", or slightly pathetic, against "ballrooms", "stabbing spear" frail against "warship" and "gunpowder". It seems that something of Europe is meant to rub off on this *Shaka*, particularly something of Napoleon (I will have more to say on this gesture under deadlighting). It is by no means clear whether we are to read this warship as iconic of laudable industry, or (rather indirectly) of the threat of the white man, or (perhaps unconsciously) of a belittlement of the Zulu. And it is by no means clear whether du Buisson intends a defence of Zulu, alongside his condemnation of nineteenth-century English punishments, or to include Shaka in this "savage age" and condemn both. In either case, the lens through which we are initially introduced to Shaka here is undeniably European; so, presumably, is the concept of justice which we are invited to bring to bear. Du Buisson goes on:

Fynn and Isaacs ... professed themselves horrified that condemned criminals were dragged out of the [Zulu] capital and clubbed to death. But then king Shaka was equally horrified that Europeans should deprive people of their freedom for ever, something he considered more inhuman than the death penalty.

... It is ... true that the Zulu monarch's power was absolute and that life was cheap. Yet in the Cape, during king Shaka's lifetime, executions were still public affairs and accompanied by hair-raising brutality....

Isaacs was aware of this.

'In such a rude state of society,' he wrote, 'the death penalty

for crimes of a capital nature does not differ from more civilised nations, but the execution is exceedingly revolting and only to be found amongst barbarous hordes.'

Yet, curiously, when 'king' Henry Fynn of Natal and his chief legislator Nathaniel Isaacs set up their own government and began meting out death sentences, their victims were executed in the traditional Zulu manner - by clubbing!

Isaacs crowned his own duplicity with the following comment: "These executions contributed not a little to enlighten them and prepare them for receiving those more important blessings which civilisation brings." (8-9; cf.121)

Several ambivalences are tangible here. Firstly, du Buisson seems concerned to damage the credibility of Fynn and Isaacs: his insinuation is that they were not actually horrified by Shaka's misdeeds - but Shaka was "equally horrified" by theirs. Shaka is at least honest, it seems - or equally dishonest - even if, for him, "life was cheap". Not only does du Buisson appear to accept the picture of Shaka as violent despot, he also implicitly agrees with Isaacs's judgement of "exceedingly revolting", while simultaneously attacking Isaacs for his "duplicity". The final sentence here seems less an example of duplicity than of sheer, if defensive, Eurocentric arrogance; and one wonders why the contradiction between Isaacs's revulsion at Zulu executions and the meting out of his own should be merely "curious". "Curiously" signals du Buisson's hesitancy, evident throughout his book, adequately to press his conclusions; in this passage he fails to address the question of why, if Fynn and Isaacs really were not horrified, they "professed" to be; or why, if everybody were living in a "savage age", they thought their moral outrage should have had any effect. Behind these inner tensions, the layback gesture is visible: du Buisson contextualises Shaka's world both against and within a European value-system which is equally distant; the nineteenth-century English being as "other" to du Buisson as the Zulu, he effectively inscribes his own, late twentieth-century morality over the heads of both.

Deadlighting

A third narrative gesture, closely related to layback, I term *deadlighting*, which I take from the nautical term for a storm-shutter which is dropped over a cabin window or cannon-port. By it I denote a gesture by which the writer claims to "shed light" on the Other, but inadvertently hides more than he reveals. There is often a certain defensiveness about this manoeuvre, a desire to conceal the writer's own predilections, or a lack of real knowledge, or a quiver of "colonial guilt", which the image of the deadlight also catches.

An extremely common gesture of deadlighting involves the comparison of the Other with something or someone European. This is a natural enough reaction for anyone trying to make sense of the culturally different; the Other is appropriated to, or domesticated by assimilation into a familiar metaphor or figure. Essentially, this is a defence against the threat of the absolutely Other, an attempt to explain (and explanation is the psychological cornerstone of a great deal of colonial discourse) what might otherwise be unassimilable, thus uncontrollable. The effect of this assimilation is to create a new, metaphorical "reality" - here, a new, textual "Shaka".³⁴

A particular instance will demonstrate how this works. The comparison of Shaka to other "tyrants" - Attila, Napoleon, Alexander and so on - has become almost a reflex, so ingrained a gesture that it earns a term of its own: *vindice*. This I have taken from the character in Cyril Tournear's play *The Revenger's Tragedy*, in which Vindice induces the Duke to self-destruct by

³⁴ See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson 1980: *Metaphors We Live By* (University of Chicago Press): "metaphors allow us to understand one domain of experience in terms of another...[They] can ... define reality ... through a coherent network of entailments that highlight some features of reality and hide others ... Such 'truths' may be true, of course, only relative to the reality defined by the metaphor" (117, 156-8)

kissing a poisoned skull disguised as his lover. This is, in effect, what happens to Shaka; he is poisoned (or at least violently misrepresented) by being juxtaposed with another autocrat or general with whom he is supposed to have affinities. This is frequently linked to a defensive admission that Europe has also had its tyrants and its injustices (e.g. Bryant 1929: 649); the term vindice thus appropriately carries the twinned connotations of vindictiveness and of vindication (either of Shaka, or of the writer's condemnation of him, or of the condemnation of his own society: the ambivalences here, as we have seen with du Buisson, are multiple).

Once again, an example from Bryant will clarify these points. He writes: "One judges the worth of an object by its contrast with the rest of its class. And one can gauge the true worth of Dingiswayo's character only by comparing him with other men of his position whose greatness is universally acknowledged" (1929: 168). The first sentence here demands judgement by intra-cultural contrast (the epitome is the characterisation of Shaka as the "active doer", utterly distinct from the rest of the Nguni). The second, which Bryant in fact proceeds to follow, proposes assessment by cross-cultural similarity. Bryant then gleans examples of "the outstanding political geniuses of the ancient Mediterranean and Oriental world" to demonstrate "how identical were the mental characteristics which drove these men to such glorious deeds". Significantly, Bryant chooses models from "5000 or more years ago", assuming that this is bound to be equivalent to the present African "stage" of development. He also selects foreign (i.e. non-British) examples, even as he argues that these were "the founders of our own civilization": a necessary defence to accommodate his own clear preference for enlightened European advancement. Thus he goes on to argue that Dingiswayo's talents "were buried in a field whereon the light of knowledge had never shone, and whereto the fertilizing waters of foreign intercourse never penetrated", but these abilities were fortuitously liberated by his momentary contact with a white man or men (a legend if ever there was one). After several pages, in which Bryant provides more information on other leaders than he is able to provide on Dingiswayo himself (and I suspect one of the primary impulses behind the vindice gesture is to compensate for the extreme paucity of concrete evidence), he concludes that "If Shaka was the Timur and the Attila of his race, Dingiswayo was its Menes and its Alfred the Great" (171).

At least part of this contrast derives from, and is designed to reinforce, the notion of Shaka's revolutionary violence and unnatural cruelty. Two further points need to be stressed. The first is the non-Britishness of the vindice comparison: in Bryant, it is Attila, Napoleon, Caesar, the Spartans, Timur. While the gesture is occasionally in praise (particularly with Napoleon), the figure is at best ambivalently heroic himself. The second point is to note the way in which the vindice gesture is constantly updated. Russell Martin detected a shift from the Attila comparison to Napoleon as Shaka becomes gradually less monstrous (though the Attila comparison persists sporadically right up to the 1986 SATV series); Alexander the Great also becomes more common in the twentieth century, where Nero was more popular in the nineteenth. After the second World War, Hitler and the Nazis are invoked; after the 1960s, Stalin. Leonard Thompson summons "Robespierre, Stalin, Mao Zedong" to illuminate the process whereby the rule of "revolutionary leaders" "degenerated into a reign of terror" (this last phrase, like "cohorts", "legions", "Golden Hordes", even "regiments", is itself a kind of vindice).³⁵

The effect of this is surreptitiously to associate Shaka with better documented examples of genocide, the evidence for which in the Zulu case is extremely shaky, to reproduce the undocumented prejudice evident in the

³⁵ For example: Hugh Tracey 1948: *Zulu Paradox* (Johannesburg: Silver Leaf), 21; S G Millin 1950: *The King of the Bastards* (London: Heinemann), x; Rex Niven 1964: *Nine Great Africans* (London: Bell), 81; E V Walter 1969: *Error and Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press), 127, and reprinted in Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, eds, 1990: *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and case studies* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 225. For Stalin, see Marc de Villiers 1987: *White Tribe Dreaming* (New York: Viking) 109; and L Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 85. J M Coetzee 1990: *Age of Iron* (New York: Random House), has his white heroine say to a black man: "The Germans had comradeship, and the Japanese, and the Spartans. Shaka's impis, too, I am sure. Comradeship is nothing but a mystique of death, of killing and dying..." (150).

earliest comparisons with Nero and Tamurlaine, to obscure the individuality of Shaka's reign, and by proxy and proximity, rather than by evidence, to exaggerate the extent of Shaka's conquests and depredations. After all, Shaka could not possibly have conquered as much as Napoleon did, or murdered as many people as Hitler or Stalin. Writers are sometimes aware of the potential absurdity; and so provide a counter-balancing argument that Shaka had as dramatic effect in his smaller, more primitive, less technological world as these other dictators had in theirs.

This is to introduce a slightly different species of cross-cultural comparison, the difficulties of which Bryant lays almost inadvertently bare:

In writing or reading of the rulers of simple, primitive tribes, we are wont to use the grandiloquent terms and to imagine the magnificent state appropriate to our modern European royalties. We assume that our reader possesses the ability to visualize things in their proper perspective and to realize that, though the events herein recorded occurred but one short century back, the conditions under which they occurred were those of many thousands of years ago. Yet it is not easy for everyone to place himself mentally two or three thousand years back in the days when our own 'kings' wore raiment and ate food and dwelt in habitations we would now not offer to a beggar, and ruled over 'peoples' too few to run a modern factory. We call wretched and unsavoury grass hovels 'palaces,' and speak of 'great battles' and 'conquests' fought and won where the combatants were a couple of score a side.... The general idea of presenting history in this fashion, is, of course, to create a proper atmosphere around the reader, to produce in his mind a relatively accurate impression by transporting him into the 'other people's' place and so enabling him to regard things as they appeared to, or were felt by them. (1929: 319)

Bryant shows himself keenly aware of the problem of the cross-cultural translation of terms, concepts and categories, and subsequent historians might have done well to take fuller heed of his initial warning. But Bryant himself continues the practice in the service of creating a "proper atmosphere", that is, making the imaginative leap into the mind-space of the Other, producing a "relatively accurate impression". The word "relatively" has an interesting *double entendre*: Bryant surely means it in the sense of "more or less", allowing that the impression is bound to be no more than an approximation; but it also invokes the "relativity" of the writer/reader's culture to that of the subject. Bryant seems to intend that when his narratee reads 'king' in *Olden Times* he is to imagine a man who, however undistinguished his accoutrements or "relatively" mean his principality, commands a reverence from his subjects analogous to that accorded a European 'king'. But it is arguable that this importation of a European terminology functions as much to obscure the Zulu reality as to illuminate it. Instead of gaining insight into the individual particularity of the Zulu experience, the narratee in fact constructs a mental image relative to the European experience; instead of difference being inscribed, and the narratee carried over the cultural boundary into that difference, in this conceptual overlay (of 'kingship', say) the two cultures are effectively conflated. The use of Eurocentric terminology, in other words, embodies an implicit agreement between writer and narratee that the European concepts will finally dominate. The distortive effects of this are dramatically evident in the SATV series, in which costumes and 'palaces' are absurdly exaggerated, precisely to cater, not for the Zulu reality, but for the potential viewers' Eurocentric preconceptions.

Probably the commonest deadlighting gesture of this kind is the ostensible assumption of the "Zulu point of view", an essentially fictional, cross-cultural foray of the white writer's imagination into the mindset of the world of his subject, an essay at giving the Other his own voice. I am far from arguing that such imaginative leaps and transcriptions should never be attempted; it is probable (following Schopenhauer) that no communication whatever can take place without some such empathetic effort, a temporary shedding of self-consciousness. However, these leaps - the diametric opposite of the logical imposition of more "scientific" discourses noted earlier - are themselves clearly fraught with the dangers of false transpositions or

distortive translations, and in a number of cases they undoubtedly obscure more than they enlighten.

The most immediately accessible example of this is the "quotation", more often invention, of the "voices" of Zulu people themselves. This occurs from the eyewitness accounts onwards. Francis Fynn generally refrains from making direct quotations - with good reason, since he was writing in retrospect. His accounts of discussions with Shaka are almost wholly in reported speech; he simply summarises verbal exchanges, and there is no pretence to be giving the precise words. On three significant occasions he departs from this practice. On the first occasion, he records one of his earliest conversations with Shaka in the form of a drama, with a touch of annotation stylistically more appropriate to the novel:

"I hear you have come from umGeorge, is it so? Is he as great a king as I am?"

Fynn: "Yes; King George is one of the greatest kings in the world."

Shaka: "I am very angry with you," said while putting on a severe countenance. "I shall send a messenger to umGeorge and request him to kill you. He sent you to me not to give medicine to my dogs." All present immediately applauded what Shaka had said. "Why did you give my dogs medicine?" (in allusion to the woman I was said to have brought back to life after death). (1950: 76)

And so on. This seems straightforward enough, but there are several difficulties with it. Its unembellished format signals an attempt to erase bias, to reduce the event to its essentials, to position the narratee himself, as it were, within earshot; the purely "auditory" quality of the recording is aided with a minimum of interpolation. But this very paring down to "pure" audition itself necessarily excludes a multiplicity of factors that may have coloured the situation. And what happened in the unsettling shift of subject from king George to Shaka's anger with Fynn's medical activities: did Shaka simply ignore Fynn's reply about George, show disbelief or embarrassment, unaccountably switch topics, displace unexpressed anger? How did the process of translation progress, when by all accounts, "Jacob" the interpreter was hardly a fluent speaker of English - nor perhaps of Zulu - and Fynn himself characterises him as untrustworthy? Furthermore, if James Stuart's annotation is correct (58n), this account was written up from memory in 1854, that is, thirty years later, and it is highly unlikely to have been recalled with the accuracy that its presentation is designed to suggest.³⁶

Fynn's second deviation from the recorded-speech form is presented as the oration of Shaka's induna Ngomane:

"The tribe had now lamented for a year the death of her [Nandi], who had now become a spirit, and who would continue to watch over Shaka's welfare. But there were nations of men, inhabiting distant countries, who, because they had not yet been conquered, supposed that they never should be. ..." (139)

The implication of the textual presentation of this as direct speech is that Fynn is reiterating, presumably as closely as his translation will allow, Ngomane's actual words. But the displacement of the tenses from, for instance, "have" to "had", in fact inscribes Fynn's own distance from the original delivery of the speech; while we have no evidence to maintain it does not capture the gist of the original, it is certainly not the speech itself. That this hybrid of direct and indirect speech was conventional at the time - Isaacs also uses it (eg.138) - only reinforces the point: what we are reading is a twice, perhaps three-times veiled shadow of an original, for the veracity, even the occurrence of which we have no external evidence.

³⁶ For the high degree of inaccuracy contained in even eyewitness accounts, see R Buckhout 1974: "Eyewitness Testimony", *Scientific American*, 231, 32-31; and A J Woodman: *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography*, 12-23.

Historiographically, this is no trivial point, for Ngomane's reported speech concerns the 1828 Zulu attack on the Mpondos and its aftermath along the eastern frontier of the Cape Colony - an attack in which Fynn himself was involved, may even have engineered, and which he has in this text therefore every reason to conceal. It is quite possible, if unprovable, that Ngomane's speech is a fictionalised attempt to authenticate with a "genuine Zulu voice" a story which may well be an alibi. The same reservations affect a reading of another "quotation" of Fynn's, a song, said to have been composed by Shaka and sung on the impi's return from the Mpondo raid, and Fynn's exegesis of it (149-151). It is perhaps significant in this context that virtually the only instance in which Fynn "quotes" Shaka's actual words - my third instance - is also during an argument about the Mpondo campaign. Fynn buttresses his personal defence by arguing that he attempted to dissuade Shaka from an attack too close to the Colony; his account slips abruptly from a consideration of practical politics to a display of Shaka's innate violence: according to Shaka, "Black people who had committed an offence should not be talked to but killed":

"How is it," he observed, "they attempt to play on your superiority of force and arms? You know they steal your cattle and kill your countrymen. By destroying a tribe entirely, killing the surviving chiefs, the people would be glad to join you on your own terms..." (146)

Apart from this sounding rather like a justification for what the whites did on the eastern frontier - and perhaps for what Fynn was trying to do himself - this bears all the hallmarks of a fictional invention.

The attribution to Shaka of such speeches, of course, tends to be substantial in the novels and to be leached from the histories. A T Bryant hovers over the ill-defined ground between the two; thus, into his chapter "Shaka's Home-life at Dukuza: Its Dreams and Realities", which wavers between the sensationalist and the ethnological, he inserts this anecdote:

On one very rare occasion Shaka became - in a way - suddenly humane: he abrogated the law prohibiting courting - for one night only. Towards evening, being in a playful mood, he popped his head above the *isiGodhlo* fence and bellowed out the general order, "Proclaim to the *izimPohlo* boys that they dress and be off to *soma* (have intercourse with girls)"; then as suddenly vanished. This was indeed an equivocal pronouncement. But none awaited further explanation; dressed or undressed, they were off in a jiffy. After a while Shaka affected great surprise. "Dear me!" quoth he, "things seem very still in the barracks tonight. Where are they gone?" "Insooth, sire," replied an attendant, "there is not a soul in the kraal." "So, then, they heard that word of mine, and went? I have given them an evening out; but do they really then so like the girls?" - which, indeed, was what he wanted to discover. "Most obviously, *baba*; not one of them not gone." "Well, call out the *emBelebele* brigade, and let them go and confiscate all *izimPohlo* cattle." Thus was it that the *izimPohlo* boys got the girls for once, but lost their cattle for ever. They can't have their bread jammed on both sides, thought Shaka. (1929: 641)

Whether or not this is extrapolated from a genuine tradition, it is very clearly cast as a fiction, is a logographia; the tone of derision dismisses any idea that it might be intended as a genuine attempt to elucidate the Zulu mind or mores. The concentration is on Shaka's caprice; Bryant playfully colludes with his character (and with his narratee) in making the boys the butt of an obliquely lubricious jest: "Of course, it was very wicked of Shaka to encourage vice in this wholesale fashion - if, indeed, vice there be in Nature's dictates" (641). A strange statement for a priest to make, this verbal indulgence towards Africans' apparently liberated sexuality is characteristic of white writers' mingled envy and defensiveness towards a perceived threat to their own moralities. More important in the context of deadlighting is the way in which an absurd levity and contrived archaism (quoth he, insooth, and so on) serve not to clarify the reality of Shaka, but to distance it. In the sentence in which Bryant pretends to "quote" Shaka's

actual thoughts (a technique possible only in a fictional, not an historiographical context), the "light" is effectively extinguished by the trivialising anachronism.

Archaisms of language are frequent in the literature, particularly in direct speech. Probably Rider Haggard was the primary exponent of this "imaginative, pregnant, compressedly aphoristic way [of speaking] which later writers have taught us to think typical" of "natives", largely a legacy of Macpherson's *Ossian*, Hereward the Wake, and the colonial literature of the Amerindians.³⁷ This combined with the kind of heirarchization touched on earlier. Colonial writers' cross-cultural imaginative foray tended to be predicated on interwoven heirarchies of technological, religious and societal or political development, at the pinnacle of which the European, and his current modes of expression, was perceived to stand. As with Bryant's injunction to step back "5000 years", the perception of a temporal or evolutionary progression is transposed to the immediate spatial, social and racial differentiations of actual contact, and the difference expressed in a 'speech of temporality'; that is, "primitives" were accorded the modes of expression thought appropriate to a much earlier stage of European development.

Archaic language is, ostensibly, intended to display with greater veracity the "feel" of primitive society; in fact it banishes understanding in favour of logographic sensationalism. The Zulu world is portrayed as being as different as possible from that of the European writer. As Georg Lukacs writes of the historical novel: "it is a present-day story-teller who speaks to present-day readers of [the past] ... It follows therefore that archaism must be ruled out of the general linguistic tone of the historical novel as a superfluous artificiality. The point is to bring a past period near to a present-day reader".³⁸ Lukacs is being prescriptive in terms of his Marxist framework, but his perception is accurate that the true ideological purpose of such popular novels and stories is often not to bring this particular past closer, but defensively to defuse it with varying admixtures of derision, improbability and voyeurism, to make it into a harmlessly bloodthirsty object of entertainment. This distancing, this spatialisation, is no different in its roots from that which impelled the pragmatics of apartheid.

Nada the Lily was among the earliest of many stories ostensibly delivered by a Zulu narrator, among them W C Scully's poem "Aceldama" (1892),³⁹ P A Stuart's *An African Attila* (1927), Geoffrey Bond's *Chaka the Terrible* (1960), and Cecil Cowley's *Kwa-Zulu: Queen Mkabi's Story* (1966). Even third-person narratives like Esther Roberts' claim to give "a picture of

³⁷ H N Fairchild 1961: *The Noble Savage: A Study in Romantic Naturalism* (New York: Russell), 92. In Rider Haggard 1895: *Nada the Lily* (London: Longman Green), the narrator Mopo confronts Shaka:

Only I stood still, covered, as I was with mire and filth, for I did not fear to stand in the presence of the king. Chaka drew near, and looked at the piled-up heaps of the slain and the cloud of dust that yet hung over them.

"There they lie, Mopo," he said. "There lie those who dared to prophesy falsely to the king! That was a good word of thine, Mopo, which taught me to set the snare for them; yet methought I saw thee start when Nobela, queen of the witch-doctrresses, switched death on thee..." (1892: 63)

Haggard weaves an envelope of occult spirituality, heroism, weapons with legendary names, and neolycanthropy which is more Nordic than Zulu in its mythic atmosphere, with an anti-mercantilism expressed as atavistic medieval chivalry. Within this, both direct speech (here laden with thee, thine, methought, and the coinage of "switched death on thee", intended to mimic the closeness of a translation direct from a vernacular) and the narration are delivered in orotund archaisms, a simplified vocabulary and sentence structures which characteristically eschew relatives and subordination in favour of the conjunctives of narrative flow, uncomplicated cause-and-effect, and stark contrast (and, but, then, so, are the commonest). Intellectualism, subtlety, qualification is thereby excised.

³⁸ George Lukacs 1962: *The Historical Novel* (London: Merlin), 232.

³⁹ Curiously, the only full works which pretend to be delivered in Shaka's voice are poems: Scully's successors are F T Prince 1938: "Chaka" in *Poems* (London: Faber) and Stephen Gray, *The Assassination of Shaka*.

Zulu life before the coming of the White man"; P J Schoeman considers it "of vital importance that we as whites should have a deeper knowledge of 'the man behind the black skin' and a thorough knowledge of his past, before he was influenced and perhaps contaminated by western civilisation".⁴⁰ This tendency is by no means confined to self-confessed fiction: several "histories" also claim to be offering the Zulu point-of-view, including Bryant, Ritter and Ballard.

Probably the majority of Shakan works, from novels to theses, invoke the "genuine" Zulu voice in another way: the appeal to "oral tradition". Again, it began with Fynn and Isaacs; subsequently William Holden claimed the authority of oral accounts to counter some of their assertions: "I have been brought into contact with some of the oldest and most intelligent natives themselves, enabling me to look at what transpired from *their own stand-point*, and record events in the light in which *they beheld them*" (1866: 7). Yet Holden's account alters little of substance, and, as we have seen, even the appeal to the testimony of Shaka's nephew, "Abantwana", is literally buried in Eurocentric comparisons and judgement, Shaka appropriated to the Christian mythology, the Zulus said to be of "Ishmaelitic descent" (2), and so on. Nowhere is Abantwana quoted, even explicitly paraphrased. The essential defensive deadlighting of this stance is finally made clear:

We know "how great a matter a little fire kindleth" sometimes among civilized nations; but among barbarians a single spark has been deposited in the heart, which lies smouldering for years, and then in some unexpected moment, without any apparent cause, has burst forth into a mighty flame, consuming all within its reach. (33)

This is the Shakan "revolution" generalised; the fear of its resurgence - once again, capricious and mysterious - haunts almost all the white literature, often explicitly. Thus John Colenso wrote, with good reason: "[If the] tide of passion [remains] pent up within the bosom of the [Zulu] race, they will either stagnate in sullen hatred, or burst forth again ere long in another terrible outbreak" (1855: xxxi). The worry persists long after 1879, as the figure of John Laputa in Buchan's *Prester John* (1902) attests, and long after 1906. D J Darlow ended his epic poem:

Where is the Thing
That shook the hosts of men and made them cringe,
The Thing that hurled them prostrate at his feet
And bent their hearts to fervent loyalty?
Perchance 'tis fleeing from the Hound of Heaven,
Or else, maybe, it ever rests and broods
Undaunted in the Amazulu hearts. (48)

The same formless fear shadows Viola Ridgway's pious hope, offering sentiments no different from those of Isaacs a century before: "Perhaps some day the Zulu nation will rise again and, with the help of education, that fine spirit that existed under Shaka will find expression in usefulness and so tread the paths of peace and be a blessing on the world!" (1944: 90). Even more recently, Sir Rex Niven, drawing closer to the ideological facets of the resurgence-fear, asked: "Is it Chaka and his successors on the Zulu throne who are the real authors of Apartheid? Is it the unspoken fear of the great Chaka's spirit that forces the South African Government to take the line that has made them so unpopular abroad?" (1964: 103). More recently still (1986), the narrator of the SATV series asserts that the Zulu "can and will rise again". Perhaps here lies, in the ambiguously fearful and deeply guilt-ridden situation out of which colonial writers have attempted to write themselves, the root of the ambivalences perceptible in their rhetoric - the fascination and the revulsion, the liberalism and the derogation, the inability to transcend the limitations of their own language.

Conclusion

⁴⁰ Esther Roberts 1950: *The Black Spear* (London: William Earl), 8; P J Schoeman 1983: *Pamphata: The Beloved of King Shaka* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins), Preface.

Two deep, contrary problems run beneath this paper. One is the possibility that the logical structures of our historiography are a gesture of implicit enterrment, that they fail to capture the reality of Zulu dynamics (how many modern histories integrate Zulu spiritual beliefs as historical cause?); more, that history itself is a form of oppression, is part of the armature of what Edward Said calls a "saturating hegemonic system" which is "predicated upon exteriority".⁴¹ The second is the possibility that the opposite alternative, the "nonethnocentric, nonprojective" imaginative leap into the Other's *weltanschauung*, is itself doomed to failure, an endeavour which "will remain both indisputably desirable and ultimately unattainable".⁴² Both impulses are embedded and at war within our colonial narratives, producing the protean gestures of layback and deadlighting. It is simply a greater awareness of this war I have attempted. At no point in this paper have I attempted to argue the historical, representational truth or untruth of any of these many texts' assertions. Without doubt my tentative terms will bear a great deal of refinement; a great deal of work remains to be done on distinguishing the numerous influences of mythologies and their attendant rhetorical tropes on the deployment of historical evidence. The two are certainly inseparable; mythologies suffuse evidence, the way the evidence was recorded and has been preserved, and even what we choose to stand as evidence; most of all the way we embed that evidence in narratives of our own.

It may be I am working here with nothing more exciting than a worn tautology: a writer from one culture writes about another culture; he is very different and we can see this difference in his writing. But in South Africa, the inscription of difference has too often been turned to pernicious ends; we need to be intensely aware, I think, not only of what we write, but how.

⁴¹ Edward Said 1978: *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin), 14, 20.

⁴² Christopher L Miller, "Theories of Africans: The Question of Literary Anthropology", in Gates 1985, 282.