

# Fact(or) Fiction in Dominee Du Toit's Inscription of the White Queen into the Origin of African Civilisation—Notes on an Extract from *Di Koningin fan Skeba*<sup>1</sup>

Stephan Meyer

The contingent event legitimises itself by total possession of history and is shattered on the ostensive representation of this claim (Blumenberg 1982:55)

The following pages look into the use of myth to legitimate power. The specific myth is that of the white queen of Sheba who is the purported founder of civilisation in southern Africa. The specific power is that which both emanates from, and is awarded to white, male, Christian, colonial, capital. The thesis proposed is that Du Toit invents a myth about the white origin of civilisation in southern Africa (which can be neither falsified nor verified) with which to legitimate expansion into Zimbabwe, presented as a second coming which is the fulfilment of that original, but now dormant cultural and economic promise.

After contextualising the publication of *Di Koningin fan Skeba* in section (i), section (ii) will deal with the use of myth as medium of

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper was written to coincide with the publication, one hundred years ago, of one of the first Afrikaans novels—one which was widely read far into the twentieth century. Many thanks to Thomas Capitelli, Elma Meyer, Johan van Wyk, Minnaar van Wyk and Henriette Roos for their respective contributions to this paper.

legitimation. In section (iii) the use of the myth of the white origin of civilisation in Africa to legitimise the expansion of white Christian capital in southern Africa in Du Toit's novel will be dealt with. The conclusion (iv) points out the inevitable failure of this intention due to the means used.

### (i) The Contextual Setting of the Publication of *Di Koningin fan Skeba*

*Di Koningin fan Skeba* is the promised sequel to another publication, namely Du Toit's travel journal which appeared under the title of *Sambesia of Salomo's Goudmijnen Bezocht in 1894* (published in 1895 by D.F. Du Toit & Co., Beperkt, Drukkers of Paarl) of which an altered English version *Rhodesia Past and Present* was printed by William Heinemann of London in 1897. *Sambesia* itself follows other travel reports of Du Toit's on trips to destinations such as England, Germany, and the Middle East. In *Sambesia* he reports on his trip to the region Rhodes had begun to claim with a treaty of friendship with Lobengula in 1888, followed by the founding of the British South Africa Company, the building of a fort in 1890, and the sanctioning of settlement by the British in 1894.

*Sambesia* and *Rhodesia* both contain at least three inducements to Afrikaner and English readers (the former presumably a Cape readership rather than the Boers of the Transvaal, the latter including an international audience). They are a call for a joint venture between Afrikaners and English to (i) spread 'civilisation' to the north, (ii) to excavate the gold of the area, and (iii) to excavate the past through archaeological research. The co-operative colonisation ('spreading of civilisation') is possible because of the complementary skills of the English and the Boers, concretised in their respective technologies which both pull together under the same godly mandate<sup>2</sup>:

The old voortrekker opened the country with the oxwagon, the Englishman is now opening it with telegraph and railway line. We are living in the time of transition. What can be more appropriate than to think now: what the oxwagon and what the railway line respectively have done for the opening of our country; to what extent both still mutually need each other; and to what extent the Afrikaans Boer and the Englishman have to co-operate under the same Godly

<sup>2</sup> The feasibility of this co-operation is illustrated throughout *Di Koningin fan Skeba* in a similar division of labour between Du Toit and his partners. Their interest is in the gold and in the future finding of it. His is in knowledge and excavating the past. But his apparently past directed search for the truth about the past has a special place in their venture because it is this knowledge of the past which is necessary in the search for the new riches of the future.

mandate to develop our great and good country—the country of the future (Du Toit 1895:5)<sup>3</sup>

Co-operation between English and Afrikaner under the godly dictate is future directed and aimed at development related to both size ('groot') and morality ('goed') of that which already belongs to them—the reference is not to *the* land but to *our* ('ons') land. Selling this political joint venture, a northerly expansion of 'civilisation' to his readers, is possible because of the presence of gold in the area<sup>4</sup>. Thus much of *Sambesia* and *Rhodesia* is spent on descriptions regarding the practicalities pertaining to mining and living in the area. It is very much a 'How to live and work in Sambesia' for the 1890s, inviting individuals and companies to embark on a gold rush on the back of which political and cultural expansion could ride<sup>5</sup>.

As a scholar of antiquity, Du Toit is intrigued by the remnants of an ancient civilisation to be found in Zimbabwe. He offers this apparently neutral theoretical interest in the past as one of his reasons for the occupation of the area north of the Limpopo. Two well concealed knowledge guiding interests are at work behind this front though: the one is to provide clues leading to the hidden gold, the second is to search there for reasons for the collapse of this ancient civilisation which was perceived to be in a similar situation to that of the newly founded Boer republics and British colonies with their Afrikaans subjects, who should learn as much as they can from the past to prevent history repeating itself:

Generally it is however not difficult to guess what made an end to this blooming colonial settlement here. It has become quite evident, both from the mineworks as well as these ruins, that a *higher developed race*, presumably *descending from elsewhere*, or in any case in living contact with *Phoenicia, Egypt and Palestine*, were in command and had these works executed by a subjected slave race, which had to be constrained given all the fortifications. When now the motherland goes

<sup>3</sup> De oude voortrekker opende het land met den ossenwagen, de Engelschman opent het nu met telegraaf en spoorrein. Wij leven in den tijd van overgang. Wat kan gepaster zijn dan nu even na te denken: wat de ossenwagen en wat de spoorrein respectievelijk gedaan hebben voor de opening van ons land; in hoever beiden wederkeerig nog steeds elkaar noodig hebben; en in hoever dus ook de Afrikaansche boer en de Engelschman onder éénzelfde Godsbestuur moeten samenwerken tot de ontwikkeling van ons groot en goed land—dit land der toekomst (Du Toit 1895:5).

<sup>4</sup> The fact that Du Toit's party doesn't find the gold, but conjure up enough proof that it is still there, of course acts as a further incentive to future treasure hunters.

<sup>5</sup> It may be worthwhile investigating the use of the widespread myth that Solomon's goldfields were located in Zimbabwe, to establish to which extent it was used by political strategists to coax economically interested companies and individuals into paving the way for political expansion.

under and such a *colonial settlement* receives no support from there any longer, then it is easily understood, that a *general uprising of the subjected tribes could put an end to the colonial settlement* (e.a.) (Du Toit 1895:216)<sup>6</sup>

Such research, Du Toit acknowledges, is hampered by the absence of written historical records from, and about these times. These absences are indicated in the 'blank spaces' scattered throughout *Sambesia* in the form of open and unanswered questions about who these mysterious original inhabitants were.

These 'blank spaces' are too tempting to allow let them pass by, and Du Toit rises to the challenge set up by himself to fill them with speculations which hardly succeed in concealing the self-promoting knowledge guiding interest which is at work here:

What drew our attention most of all were the great aqueducts. We had so often seen them in Oriental countries, for instance around Damascus. We were firmly convinced that the Kaffirs had not made these aqueducts. On our travels through Rhodesia we had seen a hundred places where the ancients had dug gold, where they had lived in their towns, but now it became apparent to us that they had also been agriculturists. Who were these ancients? (Du Toit 1897:181).

To answer this question, Du Toit has to go beyond the covers of *Sambesia*. This promise of a supplement, which goes beyond the purported factual travel journal of *Sambesia* is an opening at the closure of that book, funnelling the reader from *Sambesia*, into *Di Koningin fan Skeba* from 'fact' to fiction as unobtrusively as possible:

And with this we end our description of the old mineworks and the old ruins as they appear now and what can now be deduced from them. If we are granted the execution of our will, then we hope, later, in the form of a historical novel, to let the old times relive, and to let the Queen of Sheba relive, with Solomon and the whole environment of the population which lived and worked here in the far away times. Thus not a *history*, nor a complete *fiction*, but a *revival* of this time as closely as possible, according to the information which we have in old historical works and in these remains,—but then you will rediscover Zimbabwe and the whole of Zambesia full of life and motion, the gold industry in full bloom, the whole social interaction; and we especially hope to let you realise then that the old

<sup>6</sup> Over het algemeen is het echter niet moeielijk te gissen wat een einde maakte aan deze bloeiende volkplanting alhier. Het is toch alleszins gebleken, zoowel uit de mijnwerken als uit deze bouwvallen, dat hier een *hooger ontwikkeld ras*, denklijk van *elders afkomstig*, of in elk geval in levend verkeer met *Fenizie, Egypte en Palestina*, gezag voerde en deze werken deed uitvoeren door een onderworpen slavenras, dat in bedwang gehouden moest worden blijkens al die fortificaties. Wanneer nu het moederland ten onderging en zulk eene volkplanting geen steun vandaar meer kreeg, dan is het licht te begripen, dat een *algemeene opstand van de onderworpen stammen een einde aan de volkplanting kon maken* (e.a.) (Du Toit 1895:216).

ones were people too, who lived, felt, loved, hated, knew joy and sorrow, just as we do<sup>7</sup> The readers of *Zambesia* we thus wish Farewell!, and till we meet again! (e.a.) (Du Toit 1895.217)<sup>8</sup>

## (ii) Fact(or) Fiction and the Legitimising Power of Myth

Between March 1886 and May 1889 this promise is fulfilled with the publication, in serial form, of *Di Koningin fan Skeba in Ons Klyntji*. It neatly supplements the facts (?) of *Sambesia* with a fiction which intentionally shrouds the distinction between two types of writing, the factual travel journal and the fictitious adventure novel<sup>9</sup>. Aware of the risks involved in his venture of inscribing a white origin of civilisation into African history, Du Toit has to immunise it against possible attack. This is done, firstly, by associating it as closely as possible with factual texts and the newly invented and still to be trusted medium of photography<sup>10</sup>. Should this fail, the second

<sup>7</sup> It is more important for Du Toit to establish a common humanity with the ancient white predecessors than with the black contemporaries by which he uncritically accepts the tradition of black enslavement by white colonists

<sup>8</sup> En hiermee eindigen we onze beschrijving van die oude mijnwerken en die oude bouwvallen *zoals ze er nu uitzien en wat er nu uit af te leiden is*. Wordt het ons vergund ons voornemen uit te voeren, dan hopen we later, in den vorm van een historisch roman, die oude tijden te doen herleven, en de Koningin van Scheba te doen herleven, samen met Salomo en heel de omgeving der bevolking die in die verre tijden hier leefde, en arbeide. Dus niet een *geschiedenis*, ook niet een algehele *verdichting*, maar eene *herleving* van dien tijd zoo na mogelijk, volgens de gegevens welke wij hebben in oude historische werken en in deze overblijfselen;—maar dan hervindt ge Zimbabwe en heel Sambesia vol leven en beweging, de goudindustrie in vollen bloei, geheel het maatschappelijk verkeer; en vooral hopen we u dan te doen beseffen, dat die ouden ook menschen waren, die leefden, gevoelden, beminden, haatten, vreugde en smart kenden evenals wij. Den lezers van *Sambesia* roepen we dus toe. Vaartwel! en tot wederziens! (e.i.o.) (Du Toit 1895.217)

<sup>9</sup> I am not arguing that one can always identify a purity of genres, and that the factual (travel journal) is not imbibed with the fictitious. This is evident from various travel journals on southern Africa and elsewhere. The point is that there are differences (although they may sometimes be hard to separate) in the *ways in which texts are postured* as either fact or fiction, with different claims as to the consequences that posture should have as regards the reception of the text and possible action which might flow from it

<sup>10</sup> The first edition of the book contains several photographs as evidence of Du Toit's trip to Zimbabwe. One of the photographs which has this function is the one where he is seated at one of the towers of Zimbabwe, with the caption reading 'Di gehymsinnige toren in Simbabwe, waaronder di perkamentrol ontdek is' (Du Toit 1898.5) in which his authority is confirmed ('he has been there himself'), and the 'reality' of the scrolls is enhanced by their connection to a materially existent building.

strategy is to place it between the factual and the fictive in the space usually occupied by myth. With this Du Toit employs one of the strategies used in the ideological legitimization of domination which Thompson calls narrativisation<sup>11</sup>.

The opening lines of *Sambesia* are as appropriate, or maybe even more appropriate, to *Di Koningin fan Skeba* in this respect:

More diverse pages and chapters have seldom been found by the reader in one book (Du Toit 1895: Preface)<sup>12</sup>

Although Du Toit wants to convey here that his journal was written under varied circumstances during his journey—and that the last part, which deals with King Solomon's mines, was written upon his return in his study and library, relying on books about the north, especially the 'oude delverijen en bouwerken', making it a summary of much reading and thought combined with own investigation and observation (Du Toit 1895: Preface)—it can also be taken as an unintended acknowledgement of the conflation of fact and fiction. This blend determines the very nature and status of both texts (*Sambesia* and *Di Koningin fan Skeba*), but especially that of the 'novel'. *Di Koningin fan Skeba* capitalises on its origin in the (apparently) factual travel journal, but like *Sambesia*, consists of such a precise mixture of fact and fiction that it procures the benefit of both, without incurring any of their respective strictures.

As a supplement to a text which postures as non-fiction, i.e. *Sambesia*, *Di Koningin fan Skeba* feeds off the latter's claimed status as a true report and calls for a special type of reaction. But, as a supplement to an even truer, the ultimately true text, i.e. the Bible, it feeds off even greater authority. As an aspiring apocryphal text which is excluded from formal religion only because it deals with its more worldly/historical aspects, it is conveniently situated between the contemporary empirical facts, as reported in *Sambesia*, and quasi-metaphysical history as reported in the Bible. The factor fiction is thus veiled in such a way that the question, 'Fact or fiction?' does not arise

<sup>11</sup> Claims are embedded in stories which recount the past and treat the present as part of a timeless and cherished tradition. Indeed traditions are sometimes *invented* in order to create a sense of belonging to a community and to a history which transcends the experience of conflict, difference and division. Stories are told, both by official chroniclers and by individuals in the course of their everyday lives, which serve to justify the exercise of power by those who possess it and which serve to reconcile others to the fact that they do not (Thompson 1990: 61f). For differing views, see *inter alia* Hamilton (1993: 63-78) and Cobbing (1988).

<sup>12</sup> Ongeljiksoortiger bladzijden en hoofdstukken heeft de lezer zelden in één boek gevonden (Du Toit 1895: Voorrede).

so that the conclusion—‘this cannot be true’ cannot follow. It is this very placing of *Di Koningin fan Skeba* in the realm where this question is suspended, which allows Du Toit to import his ideological claims into the self immunising safehold of myth.

Using historical material in a novel is nothing unusual, and not problematic in itself. (No novel can be absolute invention, and it would probably be of no interest nor understandable to us if it were.) Two possible categories of historical novels which bring something new to light may be those which bring to the fore *new facts* about the past which were previously little known, and those which *give a new interpretation* to the old facts. But Du Toit’s ‘novel’ does something very different. It invents ‘facts’ about the past and places them in a space he has declared blank because there are, according to him, no reliable sources about it. In this way what Du Toit poses as fact, is immunised against comparative critique based on historical sources.

It may be retorted by some that this is a feature of all literature, i.e. that it exists in that region beyond truth and falsity. Whether this is indeed the case is not at stake here. My criticism of Du Toit is that he wants it both ways. He resorts to uncriticisable invention (a feature of fiction) without ceding the claim that what he writes isn’t fiction (‘niet een *geschiedenis*, ook niet een algehele *verdichting*; maar een *herleving* van dien tijd’). To claim unquestionable truth (in the sense of truth which cannot but be right) while at the same time claiming to be unquestionable truth (in the sense of truth which is immunised against questioning) is one of the typical features of ideology. In *Di Koningin fan Skeba* we thus have the confluence of two self-immunising strategies, the fictive and the ideological, each in service of the other.

This blend of fact and fiction is typical of *Ons Klyntji* in which *Di Koningin fan Skeba* originally appeared. The very tensions found in the ‘novel’ are rooted in that magazine. A glance at the contents pages reveals that *Ons Klyntji* is made up of an aggregation of fact and fiction. The fiction includes humours and romantic poems, and by 1900 fact-related fiction like war poetry. The non-fiction includes scientific and quasi-scientific pieces on astronomy, farming hints, and history<sup>13</sup>. Between the covers of *Ons Klyntji*

<sup>13</sup> The index for 1900 gives insight into this melange: the headings include ‘Liefde in Oorlog’; ‘Skets fan di teenwoordige Oorlog’; ‘Grappe in di teenwoordige Oorlog’; ‘Straffe op Boere Komandos’; ‘Wat Mensehande kan doen’ (‘Di langste Tunnel op Aarde’; ‘Di Sues Kanaal’ etc.); ‘Wondere fan die Sterrehemel’; ‘Kaffer Folksstories’; ‘Liidere met Musiik’; ‘Gedigte’; ‘Oue Liidjiis’; ‘An di Fergetelhyd ontruk’; ‘Dire Storiis’; ‘Gemengde stukke’; ‘Portrette en Prente fan Predikante’ (*Ons Klyntji* 1900) The January edition of that year contains an article ‘Nuttig en Fermakelik’ subtitled ‘Fer gesellige Ferkeer’ (under the category ‘Gemengde stukke’) from which the following extract illustrates this mixture of entertainment, education, and politics: ‘Persi’e alleen foer jaarliks 500 miljoen pond an dadels uit. Egipte is di enigste land fan di wêreld waar meer mans-mense as frou-mense is. Daar is 160,000 meer mans as frouens; dis ’n goeie kans fir di mysiis’ etc. (*Ons Klyntji* Jan 1900:17).

fact and fiction exist next to each other, and it comes as no surprise that this coexistence should rub off on *Di Koningin fan Skeba* in which the distinctions are conveniently erased<sup>14</sup>.

This erasure of the fact-fiction divide means that Du Toit's narrative aspires to more than fiction and more than history. It aspires to the status of myth by insinuating itself into the classic histories and myths of the Middle-East from which Christianity sprung. His narrative of the origin of civilisation in Africa thus acquires those qualities typical of myths of origin. Because they deal with the gods, they demand undoubting acceptance which rests on the authority of those gods. Where this fails, they stand beyond question, because they report on times beyond ours which allow neither verification nor falsification. As such they are the ideal medium of

<sup>14</sup> On the connection between the rise of capital, the travel report, the novel, regular publication of magazines and newspapers, and the emergence of the public sphere in Europe, which has some analogies with *Ons Klyntji*, *Sambesia* and *Di Koningin fan Skeba*, see Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. His comment on the connections between the power of the interpreting author, the historical/ancient truth, and the mixture of fact, fiction and the absurd, from which the creation of a passive public sphere arises, throws light on Du Toit's role as interpreting authority of ancient truths, one who ritualises representation, thus participating in the generation of a passive public through the medium of *Ons Klyntji*. 'The traditional form of authority included as one of its elements the right to represent and interpret whatever was held to be "the ancient truth". Communications concerning actual events remained anchored in this knowledge of the tradition. Anything novel appeared under the aspect of a more or less marvellous event. "New facts", if only they were sufficiently unusual, were transformed in the court of the "ancient truth" into something "extraordinary"—into signs and miracles. Facts were transfigured into ciphers. Since they could only be representations of knowledge vouched for by tradition, the novel and the surprising assumed an enigmatic structure. In this respect no distinction was made between events in the world of nature and in human history; natural catastrophes and historical incidents were considered equally suitable for miraculous stories. The fifteenth-century broadsheets and sixteenth-century single sheet prints called *New Journals* still bore witness to the strength with which an unbroken traditional knowledge was able to assimilate communications whose rising stream, to be sure, already pointed to a new form of public sphere. Such sheets indiscriminately spread the news of religious wars, campaigns against the Turks, and Papal decrees as well as news of rains of blood and fire, freaks, locust plagues, earthquakes, thunderstorms, and heavenly phenomena, of Papal Bulls, electoral agreements, and discoveries of new continents as well as of baptisms of Jews, punishments by the devil, divine judgements, and resurrections of the dead. Often the *New Journals*, like the broadsheets before them, were written in the form of songs or dialogues, i.e., were meant to be declaimed or sung, alone or with others. In this process, the novelty moved out of the historical sphere of "news" and, as sign and miracle, was reintegrated into that sphere of representation in which a ritualized and ceremonialized participation of the people in the public sphere permitted a merely passive acceptance incapable of independent interpretation' (Habermas 1991:254, footnote 35).



ideological legitimisation. Those who dare to question are branded as heretics. And those who are not scared off by this threat have nothing to hold up as a comparative against myth and the power which is legitimised by it.

### (iii) The Myth of the White Origin of Civilisation in Southern Africa

*Di Koningin fan Skeba* is a contradictory and muddled<sup>15</sup> attempt by Du Toit to write Africa into the history of Christianity and Europe. He does this by situating one of the strands of (European Christian) civilisation in Zimbabwe, rather than the Orient, as scholars of his time did. In doing this he may be misunderstood to be countering the Hegelian view that history passed Africa by, by writing the history of early black African civilisation. But, although Du Toit writes the 'forgotten history' of one of the 'foundations of civilisation', it is not the history of a black Athena, but of a fictitious white origin of civilisation in Africa. Thus, rather than bringing to the surface the African foundations of European civilisation, he plants into Africa a white origin, which not only cleanses the roots of European civilisation from non-European impurities, but also confirms the special role of whites as an elected people in southern Africa.

Du Toit, who is at once author, narrator, and character in the novel, cleverly conceals his own voice and interests by placing the dubious story about the origin of civilisation in Zimbabwe in the mouth of the disaffected black 'witchdoctor' Umsalomi. As with most myths of origin, Umsalomi's narrative obscures the point of origin with a long and irrecoverable trace which fades into the distant past. This allows for unquestionable arbitrariness in its selection of a point of beginning, as well as the nature of this beginning. As a form of pre-history, which lies beyond the point of the beginning of history, myth is not susceptible to the type of logical and empirical criticism which can be levelled at historical claims. These immunisation tactics are evident from Umsalomi's narrative which starts as follows:

My father has told me, that my father's father told him, many moons backwards, more dead moons than I can say, that 'Abalanga' (white people) with long hair once lived here. And they had a white queen, with very long hair which hung to nearly on her feet. And then other white people came here from the big water, where the sun rises. They came with wonderful pack oxen, not like our oxen (camels) and they brought a lot of limbo and copper and beads. They built the

<sup>15</sup> The fact that it was written over an extended period, and as a serial without the possibility of returning to the beginning to change it, may explain some of the confusion and contradictions in the text. Yet another cause for this confusion is certainly the difficulty that arises in writing a piece which is neither wholly history, nor wholly 'verdichting' (fiction), and in which the knowledge guiding interest in the past is the legitimisation of current power against the odds of the facts.

large kraals with stone walls and stone roofs. They had many assegaais and arrows and sables, and they were masters in fighting our nations, and made slaves of us. They let us dig holes in the ground to take out 'Isipsi'. The white people built the large stone kraals, as high as the trees, and they lived in the land for many moons (Du Toit 1898:3[4])<sup>16</sup>

That the beginning of this 'history' is lost in time immemorial, makes it possible to postulate an origin which suits Du Toit's intention of writing the origins of (African) civilisation in white. Because the origins go beyond the ambit of empirical evidence he can state that the original inhabitants of the area, and the founders of civilisation, as well as the second generation which came from across the sea as colonists, were white, without any danger of being proven wrong.

Of course it also means that his claim cannot be corroborated, a state of affairs which Umsalomi is acutely aware of. For this reason he closes his report with the self-validating claim: 'And this is the truth which I have now told you' ('En dis di waarhyt wat ek nou fer julle fertel het') (Du Toit 1898:3[4]). As Umsalomi's conclusion indicates, the only backing for the truth of these mythical claims is derived from the authority of the speaker. For this reason Umsalomi's status as keeper of knowledge is stressed because it counts as verification by authority: 'From time immemorial it has been the case, only the captain of the hull and his witchdoctor know the secrets of the ... place' ('Fan fanmélewe af is dit so, net di kaptyn fan di kop en syn towerdokter weet di gehyme fan di (di) ... plek') (Du Toit 1898:3[3]). That the reader should be lead to accept this strategy of verification through enshrinement in authority by the way in which Du Toit receives it, is of the utmost importance to Du Toit. Here he guides the reader into accepting a verification strategy which is extrapolated to the novel as a whole, since his own claims raised by the novel are enshrined in similar authority as Umsalomi's. As master and keeper of divine knowledge in his own society Umsalomi is

\* Page numbers in square brackets refer to the modified and modernised Afrikaans edition of 1963.

<sup>16</sup> 'Myn fader her fer my fertel, dat myn fader syn fader fer hom fertel het, baing mane agteruit, meer dooie mane as ek kan sê, dat hiir eenmaal 'Abalanga' (witte mense) gewoon het met lange hare. En hulle het 'n witte koningin gehad, met baing lange hare, wat tot amper op haar foete gehang het. En toen is hiir ander witte mense gekom fan di grote water af, waar di son opkom. Hulle het gekom met wonderlike pakt osse, ni nes ons osse ni (kaméle), en hulle het baing limbo en koper en krale gebring. Hulle het di grote krale met klip-mure en klip-dakke gebou. Hulle het baing asgaai en pyle en sawels gehad, en hulle was fer ons nasiis baas om te feg, en het fer ons slawe gemaak. Hulle het fer ons gate laat grawe in di grond om 'Isipsi' (goud) uit te haal. Di witte mense her di grote klip krale gebou, so hoog soos di bome, en hulle het baing mane in di land gewoon' (Du Toit 1898:3[4])#.

equivalent but not equal to Du Toit who occupies a similar position in his own tradition. As a dominee, Du Toit is closely connected to the authority of the gods, he is an authority on the gods (who are the ultimate source of authority) and thus carries authority<sup>17</sup>. This authority validates the narrative of the white origin of civilisation in southern Africa, which in turn legitimises Du Toit's authority as legitimate successor to that civilisation<sup>18</sup>.

The loss of the beginning of the history, which suits him as it allows free space for his ideological intention, is evident both in Umsalomi's oral narrative above, and 'corroborated' by the similarly lost beginning of the Hebrew manuscript which the party discovered in the tombs and which narrates the history of the classic civilisation:

Yet they [the parchment scrolls] are for the largest part well legible *mainly at the beginning that they are damaged*. The reader should now imagine a scroll: 2 covers ... and the joint where the casing in which it was locked is damaged; *thus the beginning is illegible*, then the further cover on the other side is legible again, and the second cover opposite the joint is illegible again (e.a.) (Du Toit 1898:36[30])<sup>19</sup>.

Thus both Umsalomi's oral narrative of the white origins of civilisation in southern Africa, and Du Toit's translation from the written Hebrew corroboration, postulate a beginning which go beyond their own range. The fact that the origin is beyond the range of oral memory, and beyond the range of

<sup>17</sup> The title page of *Di Koningin fan Skeba* clearly states the author as 'Ds. S. J. Du Toit'.

<sup>18</sup> For a similar criticism of the priesthood, see Nietzsche's 'The Anti-Christ', especially # 9, 12 and 26. According to Nietzsche, the priest, who takes upon himself the task of improving, redeeming and saving, is elevated, and elevates himself to the position of sole determiner of right and wrong (#12). He declares one, i.e. his, perspective as the only valid one and by denoting it as eternal and godly knowledge, beneficial to salvation, makes it sacrosanct. Like the priest which Nietzsche writes about, Du Toit too, translates the 'Volksvergangenheit', the historical reality, into a quasi-religious one. His 'historical inquiry' is thereby immunised against empirical criticism. The priest, then, becomes the expert on both the present and the past (which is now but an extension of his field of specialisation, i.e. religion). Through this translation of historical knowledge into religious knowledge, the priest secures his power over an even larger sector of social life and thereby becomes more and more indispensable (#26). Disagreeing with the priest, even about facts, now becomes more than disagreement about the facts of the past. It becomes revolt against god, i.e. sin.

<sup>19</sup> Tog is dit fer di grootste gedeelte nog goed leesbaar. Dis mar meer by di begin wat hulle beskadig is. Di leser moet sig nou 'n rol voorstel: 2 omslage by di foeg waar di koker waar dit in was sluit is beskadig; dus di begin is onleesbaar, dan is di verdere omgang [?]n di andere kant weer leesbaar, en di tweede omgang teeno'er di foeg weer onleesbaar (Du Toit 1898:36[30]).

preserved written 'history' allows for its easier usurpation by Du Toit's contemporary ideological interests aimed at the legitimization of yet another wave of white colonisation.

One of these ideological interests is evident from the connections which Du Toit wishes to forge between the Egyptian civilisation, Judaism, Christianity, and *ons* (us):

And here we now have the memoirs from King Solomon's time, nearly 3 thousand years old, and which refer to *our* land and the old mines and ruins of which we want to know the reality so much (e.i.o.) (Du Toit 1898:36[29])<sup>20</sup>

What is portrayed here as a purely theoretical interest in the past, is soon revealed as more than that. Du Toit uses the knowledge guiding interest of the other members of his party—which is the discovery of gold and treasure for purposes of personal enrichment—as a foil to show the purity of his own, apparently theoretical, interest in the past. As a matter of fact though, his own knowledge guiding interest is to legitimate his own current occupation of the land with a mythical history which ascribes the origins of civilisation in Africa to white, longhaired people, both indigenous, or from across the ocean, who are *his* religious ancestors rather than the ancestors of what he describes as the Bushmen currently inhabiting the area.

Besides elevating himself and his own project, the other function of the myth as ideology is, for Du Toit as ventriloquist using Umsalomi as a front, to identify an enemy. According to him this civilisation was destroyed by crafty black people who by implication, together with what he perceives to be deceitful Bushmen (Du Toit 1898:91[134]) and the unreliable Umsalomi, still pose a threat to white efforts to civilise Africa:

But later on we became rebellious ... And then we cornered the Abalanga here, and threw poison into their water, and burned down their large kraals And so that they shouldn't come again, we, as much as we could, broke down their kraals and filled the holes with ground (Du Toit 1898 3[4])<sup>21</sup>.

Despite its dishonourable effort, black craft was unable to destroy the white foundations of civilisation which survive underground, waiting for the white dominee to reveal (and English technology and capital to rejuvenate) them,

<sup>20</sup> En hiir is nou gedenkskrifte uit Koning Salomo syn tyd, amper 3 duisend jare oud, en wel wat betrekking het op *ons* land en op di oue myne en boufalle waarfan ons so graag di werkelykhyd wil weet (e.i.o.) (Du Toit 1898 36[29])

<sup>21</sup> Mar naderhand het ons opstandig geworde ... En toen het ons di Abalanga hiir fas gekeer, en gif in hulle water gegoi, en hulle grote krale ferbrand. En dat hulle ni weer moet kom ni, het ons sofeul as ons kan, hulle krale afgebreek en di gate fol grond gegooi (Du Toit 1898:3[4]).

thus confirming the true white roots of African civilisation and at the same time affirming their own status as god's elect:

I then asked him: 'But what happened to the white queen when your fathers burned down this city'.

'We don't know' he says. 'Some say she fled to the mountain Fo ra, there far where the sun goes to sleep in the evenings. Because up to there the Abalanga dug for "isipsi" everywhere. But some say she went into a big house under the hill with the white young maidens who were always with her, and that they are still living under the hill. And we think so too' (Du Toit 1898:3[4])<sup>22</sup>

Thus, just as god had set Solomon on the select Israel's throne to make it 'endure for ever' (2 Chronicles 9:8), Du Toit and his company (*ons*) claim this role by virtue of their white Christian heritage and the power/knowledge their archaeological skills, knowledge of the language of the chosen people (Hebrew), capital, and technology affords them. They are the present fulfilment of a dormant civilisation, the white princes on iron horses, who, with the kiss of power/knowledge and capital will reawaken the white queen from her subterranean slumber, thus restoring history to its original intention.

In what, on a certain level, looks like religious tolerance remarkable for a dominee and which was soon to vanish from popular Afrikaans culture (see footnote 23), Du Toit displays an expansive knowledge of ancient Egyptian culture, the Semitic, and the Islamic traditions. Initially this comes across as an acceptance of religious diversity. However, an early sign that this is not the case is Du Toit's failure to pay equal respect to the indigenous religions of the San, who, according to him, also posit one of the main threats to his party's survival. Du Toit is so fixated on the classic cultures which feed into the Christian West that the only way in which he can perceive civilisation in Zimbabwe, is as an extension of the Middle-Eastern roots of European history into southern Africa. The glory of Zimbabwean civilisation (which is under the control of Sheba, the woman) derives from its connection to the classic Jewish and Christian cultures (epitomised here by Solomon, the man), which Du Toit, the Christian dominee with his European roots and knowledge of the classical Jewish and Christian cultures, combines in southern African (un)holy matrimony.

It also soon becomes clear that his exploration of the varied origins of Christianity should not be confused with the propagation of religious

<sup>22</sup> Ek fra toen fer hom. 'Mar wat is fan di witte koningin geworde toen julle faders hiir-di stad ferbrand het?'

'Ons weet ni', sê hy. 'Party sê sy het geflug na di berg Fo ra, daar fêr waar di son saans gaan slaap .... Want tot daar oral het di Abalanga "isipsi" gegrawe. Mar party sê, sy is in 'n grote huis onder di kop ingegaan met di witte jong nois wat altyd by haar was, en dat hulle nog altoos onder di kop woon. En ons denk oek so' (Du Toit 1898.3[4])

diversity and tolerance of even the traditions related to Christianity. Like any historian who wants to excavate a normative ideal from the past, Du Toit too has to confront problems of continuity and discontinuity between it, the present, and the future<sup>23</sup>. Such a confrontation can have various aims and take various forms. One aim could be to unearth those voices buried under the ruins and/or excluded by the designs of specific civilisations. Du Toit seems to be going some way in this direction in bringing the various voices from the Christian related past to speak in the present. Yet, at the same time he is bent on reducing this multiplicity by eliminating those differences which could deprive him of his position of master and keeper of the tradition. Thus, in the specific form which his relation to the past takes, he deprives it of its potential civilisatory resources. Instead of taking a rational critical stance towards the past, panning a more humane future from it, Du Toit uses the opportunity to install himself as normative authority. He, and even more so the cultural experts who succeeded him, purify the past to a single voice—that of the authoritative interpreter of the tradition, who in his act of interpretation authorises himself<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> [O]ur responsibility also extends itself to the past. The past is not simply accepted as something factual and complete .... We can definitely not compensate for past suffering and injustice, but we have the weak power of an atoning memory. Only the sensibility towards the unjustly tortured, on whose inheritance we live, also produces a reflective distance to our own *traditions*, a sensitiveness towards the abyss-like ambivalences of the traditions that formed our own identity. However our identity is not only something to simply be discovered, but it is also and at the same time our own project. We cannot pick out our traditions, but we can know that it depends on us *how* we continue them. In this respect Gadamer [who practices a hermeneutics of the past] thinks too conservatively. Every continuation of a tradition is selective, and precisely this selectivity today has to pass through the filter of criticism, a willful appropriation of history, if you wish: through a consciousness of sin (Habermas 1996:7).

<sup>24</sup> I have been unable to trace the origin of the difference between the Smit (1921) and Nienaber (1962) editions on the one side, and the first edition in book form of 1898 in the following extract which illustrates the increase in dogmatic purity began by Du Toit and continued by his later editors: 'Wat die vorme van godsdiens aangaan, in die Bybel self sien ons uit gevalle, soos van Job en Melgisedek en Jetro, dat self oorblyfsels van die diens van die ware God toe nog in die heiden wêreld op enkele plekke bewaar gebly is. Maar al die verskynsels beoordeel ons volgens die Bybel, wat die enige bron en maatstaf is van ware godsdiens' (e.a.) (Du Toit 1963:96).

Compare to:

'Wat di suiwere godsdiens aangaan, in di Bybel self siin ons uit gefalle, soos fan Job en Melgisedek en Jetro, dat di diins fan di ware God nog in di hydenwereld op sommige plekke bewaar gebly is. En in geleerdhyd was Egipte di leerskool fan di wysgere geskiedenisryers en digters fan Grike en Romyne en alle oue folke" (e.a.) (Du Toit 1898:71).

The difference seems to confirm Du Toit's relative tolerance when compared to that of later editors and cultural experts who not only wanted to play down the non-Christian and African influences on Europe and the white colonists, but wanted to make it clear that the Bible is the final standard by which all knowledge is measured.

The presentation of these Christian related religions is clearly constrained and directed by Du Toit's, and his likely reader's, commitment to reformed Christianity. The Middle-Eastern and Zimbabwean histories are only pre-histories to Christianity (and not its equal) which is purged first by the Mosaic, and then by the Christian (and probably Calvinist) traditions:

'But the Bible says it itself', remarks cousin Gideon, 'that Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and it would be a wonder if no trace should be found in his legislation. It doesn't damage the godly revelation to him; because we see he kept what is good, but the idolatry and other wrong things he, under God's guidance, did not only take up in the religion, but even forbade them' (Du Toit 1898:72[96])<sup>25</sup>

As a case in point the Hebrew scribe Elihoref actually suffers a destructive fate because he betrayed the god of Israel, 'the only true God' ('di enige ware God') (Du Toit 1989:93[138]). Just as Moses drew on a heathen past which he revised in Judaistic/pre-Christian sense, so Du Toit implies that the new colonists in Africa (god's new elect brought to Africa, if not to found, then to find again and revive civilisation and the true religion) can draw on African wisdom of Egyptian and Judaic origin, as long as it is acknowledged that it is originally white. Furthermore, where the white origin of civilisation has become tainted by black and heathen ideas it can, and has to be cleansed with the measure of the Bible which dominee Du Toit, the new Moses (who, like the one of the Bible leads his people to the holy land and inscribes his power in history with the power of the W/word) controls.

Du Toit radicalises Gregory of Nyassa's and the Jewish historian Josphus's views that the queen of Sheba reigned in the region of Ethiopia, placing it even further south in Zimbabwe. By thus positioning her queendom in the geographic area of his own sphere of influence Du Toit can claim for himself, if not to be biological heir to Solomon and Sheba (as Haile Selassie did), heir to their ideas and wisdom, which he reforms by testing them against the Bible as he as qualified dominee, keeper and master of sacred knowledge, reads it. Such an appropriation in which geographic expansion supervenes on cultural imperialism would not have been possible if he had placed Sheba in South Arabia which would be the logical consequence of the fact that he at times uses her Arabic name, Balkis. As is well known from the

<sup>25</sup> 'Mar di Bybel sê dit self, merk Neef Gideon en 'dat Moses onderwese was in alle wyshyd fan di Egiptenare, en dit sou 'n wonder wees as daarfan gen spore sou te finde wees in syn wetgewing ni .... Dit doen ni te kort an di goddelike openbaring an hom ni; want ons siin wat goed is het hy behou, mar di afgodery en ander ferkeerde dinge het hy onder Gods lyding ni alleen ni opgeneem in di godsdiins ni, mar selfs belet' (Du Toit 1898:72[96]).

histories of various peoples such geographic quibbles are of the utmost importance when it comes to the legitimization of the occupation of land, of power, and rights of succession.

#### (iv) Successor or Precursor to the Unpanned Treasure in the Ruins?

Du Toit's aspiring apocryphal supplement-with-political-intent to the Holy Scriptures tries to avoid being labelled as either *fact* or *fiction*. This doesn't however hinder him from using every possible fictive and non-fictive appendage, to capitalise on both genres. His conflation of history, religious dogma, archaeology, anthropology, contemporary popular legend, and contemporary political intention attempts corroboration from all possible resources to give credibility to his fictive claims. This is a repetition of a narrative strategy which goes back several hundred years to the earliest 'historical novels' of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These too called themselves *historia*. They too were so called 'eyewitness reports' (Müller 1984:258) of the historically as well as geographically distant. And they too used similar strategies of 'authentication' (e.g. references to the authority of the narrator) in narratives in which the distinction between the entertaining and informative is obscured (Müller 1984:253).

But, Du Toit's eclectic, and at times disparate use of these resources, as well as his obsessive drive to convince, no matter the means, indicate a fissure in his ideological intention which does not always succeed against alternative historical evidence and pure common sense. More than this, his intentional erasure of the fact-fiction distinction doesn't only make it possible for him to invent arbitrary facts about the origin of civilisation in southern Africa—at the same time it also makes the postulation of facts impossible. The factor fiction which is the cornerstone of his narrative, and which can be neither verified nor falsified, corrodes the fact-fiction divide. By posturing *Dt Koningin fan Skeba* as both fiction and more than it, he collapses the distinction which differentiates between fact and fiction, a distinction without which truth isn't possible. And with the loss of the possibility of truth goes the loss of the possibility of Du Toit's legitimization of his own position as coloniser. It is in other words the very strategy which allows Du Toit to invent his legitimization for his position, which undermines the possibility of legitimization as such. The erasure of the fact-fiction divide on which Du Toit's legitimization rests, itself triggers an upsetting reading of *Dt Koningin fan Skeba*, revealing it for what it is: an ideological attempt to legitimate power which, when read closely, reveals like all ideology, that it has set itself up.

Du Toit's posturing of his own tradition (which he represents as the legitimate successor to a fictitious white civilisation) aims at presenting itself



as the resurrection and fulfilment of that dormant civilisation. As mere resurrector Du Toit would be an old conservative (Habermas 1981:13). As fulfilling successor he could possibly be mistaken for a proponent of 'the project of modernity [which] has not yet been fulfilled' (Habermas 1981:12). But precisely because he provides a 'hermeneutic' of 'his past' (with the sole aim of showing how his presence is an extension of the glorious past into the horizons of the present) which stops short of critique<sup>26</sup>, he misses this opportunity in favour of bolstering his own authority. Thus the emancipating potential of hermeneutics made possible by a critical appropriation of the past, is ceded in favour of a technical interest in manipulation. In his very strategy then, Du Toit rather shows himself to be a precursor to those young conservative postmoderns (Habermas 1981:13) who fall back beyond a constitutive distinction of Modernity, i.e. the distinction between fiction and non-fiction. In collapsing the fact-fiction divide Du Toit, like these conservative postmoderns one hundred years later, thereby liquidates the possibility of the critique of domination (Habermas 1985:219ff.), thus contributing to the ruining of the remaining chances of civilisation, rather than panning from the past the undeveloped potentials of a more humane future.

University of Basel

## References

- Blumenberg, Hans 1981 *Arbeit am Mythos*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp
- Cobbing, J 1988 The Objectives, Historical Fantasies, and Working-Methods of James Stuart, with Counter-Argument. *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* XI
- Du Toit, SJ 1895 *Sambesia of Salomo's Goudmijnen Bezocht in 1894*. Paarl: DF du Toit & Co Beperkt
- Du Toit, SJ 1897 *Rhodesia Past and Present*. London: Heinemann.
- Du Toit, SJ 1898 *Dr Koningin fan Skeba of Salomo syn one Gondvelde in Sambesia: Historiese Roman, met Prente*. Paarl: DF du Toit & Co Beperkt
- Du Toit, SJ 1963 *Die Koningin van Skeba*. Second revised edition. Nienaber, PJ (ed). Cape Town: Tafelberg
- Habermas, J 1981 Modernity versus Postmodernity. *New German Critique* 22 3-14

<sup>26</sup> That he does not even employ such a literary form of critique as irony, which is premised on the doubling move of both closeness and distancing, is an indication of his unreflected absorption in his own tradition and in his fabricated origin of that tradition. (For a discussion of irony as a form of critique, see Richard Rorty's (1989) *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, published by CUP). For an example of its use in a historical novel, compare Etienne Leroux's ironical relation to the past, and his self-irony in *Magersfontein, O Magersfontein!*).

- Habermas, J 1985 *Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Habermas, J 1991 *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge MIT
- Habermas, J 1996 The limits of Neo-Historicism *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 22,3. 1-8.
- Hamilton, C 1993 *Authoring Shaka: Models, Metaphors and Historiography*. Unpublished PhD, The Johns Hopkins University.
- Müller, Jan-Dirk 1984. *Curiositas und Erfahrung der Welt im frühen Deutschen Prosaroman*. In Grenzmann, L und K Stackmann (Hgs): *Literatur und Laienbildung im Spätmittelalter und in der Reformationszeit*. Stuttgart: JB Metzler.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich 1980. *Der Antichrist. KSA Vol 6*. München: De Gruyter
- Ons Klyntji 1900. Jaargang 5.
- Thompson, John B 1990. *Ideology and Modern Culture*. Cambridge: Polity.