ADDRESS
on the opening of
THE NEW HALL
of the
LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY
Sunday March 6th 1881
Delivered by Mr. Theodore Wright
Written by James Thomson (REV)
Author of the City of Dreadful Night & Vanes Story

Leicester Secular Society’s pamphlet

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CHARITY COMMISSION'S "FINAL DECISION" REGARDING THE SUNDAY CONCERTS

In April 1999, the then South Place Sunday Concerts sub-committee (SPSC s/c) appealed to the Charity Commission to support their plea that SPES had a duty to sign the sub-committee's accumulated funds over to a yet-to-be-formed charity, now called the London Chamber Music Society. Somewhat later, members of the SPSC s/c began claiming that SPSC had always been an independent association and its funds did not rightfully belong to SPES. The SPES General Committee contested both these assertions. The Charity Commission gave its 'final decision' regarding these matters in a letter to the Society (5/9/00). Below are relevant extracts from this letter - they should be carefully noted:-

"There is clear documentary evidence that the concerts are an activity of SPES, but no clear documentary evidence that the concerts comprise a separately constituted unincorporated association."

"On the basis that SPSC is not a separate charity, we were correct to advise that property obtained by the SPSC Committee whilst it was part of SPES belongs to SPES, notwithstanding that some funds are subject to special trusts for the purposes of concerts.* Any funds not held on special trusts would appear to be general funds of SPES."

Former members of the SPSC s/c are currently engaged in a mediation procedure with SPES. SPES has made a proposal designed to ensure the funds are used for the benefit of concert-goers at Conway Hall.

*A reference to the Rogers Bequest [Ed.]
BLAKE’S INFLUENCE ON SOME 19th CENTURY FREETHINKERS

Shirley Dent Ph.D

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 15 October 2000

The Enlightenment set rationalism and religion on a collision course. A wedge was driven between sceptical logic and speculative poetry. William Blake was an anachronism in this respect and at this time, refusing all divisions of discourse and language. To emphasise however, as we embark on this history of Blake and freethought, that enigma in Blake does not necessarily equal irrationality, let us consider the meaning of one line of Blake’s poetry - ‘Without Contraries is no progression’ (Marriage of Heaven and Hell, p.3, E34).

What does this mean? As some SPES members suggested, it could refer to Blake’s famous dialectics, shadowing a Hegelian reading of the human universe. Or it could mean that we should always challenge the status quo of a capitalist and industrial society. Or we could read it within one of the most dynamic - literally - discourses of Blake’s time: Newtonian physics. ‘Without Contraries is no progression’ is simply a poetic restatement of Newton’s third law of motion: ‘for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction’.

The descent of the French Revolution into the rule of the guillotine may to many mark the apex of the ‘head-on’ (no pun intended) culture clash between reason run riot and faith forgotten. But theodicy’s triumph - the reactionary conclusion voiced by Burke that humanity without fear of God ‘is the principle of Evil himself, incorporeal, pure, and unmixed, dephegmatized, defecated evil’ (A Letter to a Noble Lord, p.57) - is denied by the subsequent history of nineteenth-century rationalism and the growth of freethought groups in Britain. This was a period of sea changes. The subtle permutations of nineteenth-century freethought exhibit the plurality of thought and purpose that distinguished nineteenth-century unbelief.

The way in which William Blake was received by such groups demonstrates a deep understanding on their part that Blake and Blake’s belief could not be chiselled away to represent an easy category of atheism. Freethinking appropriations of Blake’s work display an inventiveness that returns reason to imagination. This talk will demonstrate that the strength and longevity of both Blake and freethought lies in their ability to engage with life without dogma: freethought is an evolutionary way of thinking, allowing for the unknown to become the known; Blake’s visionary creations are, likewise, freeforms of thought reaching out to express that which is as yet unknown. One of the most striking examples of freethought’s Blakean expressions occurred at the Leicester Secular Hall.

The Opening of Leicester Secular Hall
The pamphlet of the Address on the Opening of the New Hall of the Leicester Secular Society is an aesthetic phenomenon. From a cultural perspective, it exhibits the flexibility and inclusiveness of the humanist movement being integral to the movement’s history, but part, also, of a far wider history. From a production
perspective, it is a wonderful ‘sham’, an exact copy but not a facsimile, not entirely truthful as to its origins but not a forgery, back-flipping between mirrors of production and reproduction.

The New Hall of the Leicester Secular Society was opened on Sunday, 6 March, 1881. A strange communion of saints, sinners and scholars was chosen to represent the intellectual tenets of Secularism. To the illustrious company of poets and philosophers built into the pillars of the Secular Hall were joined on 6 March 1881 Annie Besant and James Thomson. For the occasion Thomson had written an address on the opening of the New Hall of the Leicester Secular Society to be delivered by Mrs. Theodore Wright. The pamphlet that was produced to transmit this acknowledged Thomson’s status as the ‘poet of pessimism’, the illuminated title page describing him as the author of The City of Dreadful Night and Vane’s Story. But the poetic address is not apocalyptic but prophetic, creating a new ideology based on a radical humanist inversion of the creator:

To build our Temples on another plan,
Devoting them to god’s Creator, Man;
Not to Man’s creature, god. And thus, indeed
All Men and Women of whatever creed
We welcome gladly if they love their kind;
No other valid test of worth we find.

Into the syntactical chiasma of the first three lines is compressed the secular and mystical universe. In those poetic lines there is a transfixing admixture. The secular and the divine are lyrically wrapped around each other, while at the same time the crucial difference between them is sharply carved out.

An Extraordinary Conundrum

We gaze into the Living World and mark
Infinite Mysteries for ever dark:
And if there is a God beyond our thought
(How could He be within its compass brought?)
[...]
He cannot love the blasphemous pretence
Of puny manikins with purblind sense
To see Him thoroughly, to know Him well,
His secret purposes, His Heaven and Hell,
His inmost nature - formulating this
With calmest chemical analysis
Or vivisecting it, as if it were
Some compound gas, or dog with brain laid bare.

This is an extraordinary conundrum to drop into the middle of a work celebrating the rationalism of secularism and the self-determination of humanism. If a secularist cannot trust scientific empiricism to decode humanity’s place in the universe, what discourse is left to explain a humanist ontology? The answer is not provided as a neat truism, but is there in the address, in Thomson’s twisting metaphysics. Humanity has the ability to create its own ontological blueprint - its own sense of being - from its own inherent creativity, and does not necessarily have to conform to a design dictated by the deistic tendency of rationalistic science. Walter Benjamin has argued in The Work of Art in the Age of Technical Reproducibility that the nineteenth century grafted technology on to theology, and aesthetic production became the ritual creation of a profane world. This is a

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restatement in terms of technology of art for art’s sake. The problem for the radical inclinations of the freethinkers with l’art pour art reproducibility was the denial of social function.

The pamphlet, ostensibly published to celebrate the opening of the Leicester Secular Hall is a stunning example of the social integration of aesthetic technology within a communal text. The illustrations for the pamphlet can all be broken into semiotic units that are taken directly from the designs of William Blake. It is not true to say that these are facsimile reproductions as they are a synthesis of fragments assimilated and re-inscribed in the pamphlet.

The Human Imagination Is God

The marginal illustrations are exact replicas of Blake’s Illustrations of the Book of Job, and a fragment taken from Jerusalem. There is hermeneutic appropriateness in Blake’s Job appearing in a pamphlet celebrating Secularism. As Andrew Soloman tells us:

‘Blake’s image of God is in the exact likeness of Job himself [...]. To him there was no other God than the Human Imagination, the Divine Humanity, the creative power in man’.

In fact the plates used have a carefully constructed significance to ‘god’s Creator, Man’. For example, Kathleen Raine tells us that the vine in the margin of plate 20 is one of Blake’s symbols for ‘the Divine Body of Jesus the Imagination’ and quotes A Vision of the Last Judgement in this context: ‘All things are comprehended in their Eternal Forms in the divine body of the Saviour, the True Vine of Eternity, The Human Imagination’.

Nowhere on the detailed and precise title page is Blake (or the facsimilist) acknowledged. The illustrations are silent to their own significance and, at the same time, brimming over with unspoken meaning. What the producers of the text have done is to make the material presence of the text evoke the unconscious continuum between Blake and Thomson, mysticism and secularism, aestheticism and materialism. An ‘open secret society’ has been constructed, whereby seemingly opaque symbolism has distinct and transparent meaning. James Thomson, writing under the pseudonym of ‘B.V.’ (Bysshe Vanolis or Shelley-Novalis, mixing muscular atheism with mystical vision) wrote in 1866 (the same year as his essay on Blake), a series of articles on ‘open secret societies’. He defines them initially as a communion of thought and spirit manifest throughout the ages in cultural symbols. Significantly, Thomson lists poets and mystics among those that enjoy this unconscious membership. The poem for Thomson is a symbol illuminated by mystical correspondence. As Blake’s composite art creates a textual play, so the marginalia of the 1881 pamphlet recalls the mystical imagination at work beneath the rational surface of the text. However, the ‘eternal Return’ of the mystical imagination is only manifested in material or bibliographic codes. In this way, the bibliographic reproduction of Blake’s works constructs an ‘open secret society’ amongst the aesthetic devotees of Blake enthusiasts. A certain aesthetic elitism seems to be suggested by this nod and wink towards Blake - artists and poets as the patrician class, recognising the sovereign figure of Blake, the lone bard surviving in the isolated figure of a textual fragment taken from Jerusalem.

So who was the anonymous secular artisan? Although the 1881 pamphlet has no clues as to illustrator, printer or publisher, there are many paths that converge
between the facsimilist of the 1863 edition of Alexander Gilchrist's *The Life of William Blake* and the illustrator of the 1881 pamphlet. Step forward William James Linton, engraver, poet and radical republican - described as a latter day Blake. There is one figure who is absolutely identical between the *Life* (in both the 1863 and 1881 editions) and the Secular Hall pamphlet. This is the figure of the shepherd boy from *Jerusalem*, which appears as a tailpiece upon page fifty of the *Life*. At this point in *The Life of William Blake*, William Blake, the original author and creator of the shepherd boy, is reflected upon in Gilchrist's biography as an original and isolated outsider.

**Moncure Conway's High Estimate of Blake**

It is time to return to London and Conway Hall. Blake had made appearances in freethought circles before 1881. But Moncure Conway is one of the most prominent figures in the freethought promotion of Blake. Conway was to describe Blake as 'one of the devoutest men of genius whom England has produced' (*Demonology and Devil Lore*, I, p.13).

Moncure Conway demonstrates the plurality of both nineteenth-century avant-garde aesthetics and political radicalism. He was the son of a Southern American plantation owner who grew up to be a leading figure in the fight to abolish slavery. He made a fateful error in approaching the Confederate envoy when they were both in London, offering terms to end both slavery and the American Civil War (D'Entremont, *Moncure Conway*, p.17). In this episode, ‘The contrast between the sympathy shown him by artists and the abuse heaped on him by politicians seemed stark. The artists accepted him: the politicians judged him. Conway quickly convinced himself that he stood for a higher morality than even other abolitionists, who seemed now more interested in conquest than emancipation’ (*op. cit* p.18). Conway was also at the hub of the renaissance of South Place, a chapel in Finsbury, which became a focal point for intellectuals in the 1870s and 1880s ‘Moncure Conway, to borrow a phrase from Walt Whitman, contained multitudes’.

The Blake that Swinburne brought before the world in 1868 was in many ways ideally suited to Conway's growing cynicism with revolution based purely on a material or moral idiom that exchanged one type of tyranny for another. In Conway's review of Swinburne's *William Blake: a critical essay* for the *Fortnightly Review* (February, 1868), it is precisely the historical dialectic between mysticism and materialism that provides the main argument of the article:

“This is the natural history of mysticism, which has scattered its seed throughout the world, - seed that has from time to time sprung up in Plotinus, Behmen, Swedenborg, Blake. Neither the times at which the great mystics appear, nor the forms of their oracles, are accidental. As a general rule, they would seem to come at the end of sceptical generations, and to be representatives of advancing reactions against prevalent and inadequate materialism - itself a reaction against some previous inadequate mysticism. The human mind shares the general peristaltic movement of things, and like the span-worm, now lifts itself heavenward, now stretches itself along the earth.” (Conway, ‘William Blake’, p.216).

Conway is representative of a freethought that was deeply reflective and open to the unknown. In many ways, reasoning atheists treated the magic of Blake as
unknown science. For the introspective thinkers, such as Conway and James Thomson, Blake inflects their humanism and ethicism with an imaginative impulse allowing access to the 'unknown' through a secularised version of mystical correspondence.

"The case of Asmodeus is stated well, albeit radically, by William Blake, in that proverb which was told him by the devils, whom he alone of midnight travellers was shrewd enough to consult; 'The pride of the peacock is the glory of God; the lust of the goat is the bounty of God; the wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God.' When that statement is improved as it well may be, it will be when those who represent religion shall have learned that human like other nature is commanded by obedience." (Conway, Demonology and Devil Law, II, p.263).

For other freethinkers, Blake was not only a conduit to a secular spirituality, but a catalyst of political and religious iconoclasm.

George William Foote's 'Cultural Terrorism'
Amidst the cut and thrust of Secularism's political and anti-religious publishing, the mystical figure of Blake is memorialised by one of Secularism's cause célèbres, George William Foote, the editor of the Freethinker. For his atheistic agitation, Foote deployed a mode of 'cultural terrorism' which was a direct amalgam of his secular beliefs and his literary pursuit. His 1875 article on Blake in the National Reformer continued to challenge the cultural status quo, bringing literary vision into contact with political expediency: 'Indeed, his [Blake's] Republicanism was more pronounced and defiant than that of the practical un-visionary politicians who met at Johnson's [the bookseller]; [...]. Readers will be pleased to hear that mystical Blake saved practical Paine's life in all probability'.

The beautiful balance of Foote's mystical Blake and practical Paine betrays an unexpected equilibrium. Blake's reception in the nineteenth century did not entail mutual exclusivity between mysticism and progressivism. Blake is not seen by the Secularists as solely a visionary precursor of the modern state, nor did students of mysticism see in Blake only the purveyor of mystical and NeoPlatonic knowledge. Foote, the ardent freethinker and Secularist, was tried in 1883 for blasphemy, in what was to become one of the most notorious blasphemy cases of the day. The issue was the Freethinker, satirical vehicle of freethought, which used the respectability of the established church as a lampoon. Foote was indicted, as editor, together with Ramsey as publisher, and Kemp as printer in 1882. It was particularly the inflammatory nature of the visual designs that caught the popular imagination. These follow the best traditions of radical satire, and David Nash has suggested that one of them, 'I do set my bow in the cloud' - Genesis ix., 13, is a parody of Blake's Ancient of Days (Nash, Blasphemy in Modern Britain, p.113).

It is this hard-edged approach to appropriating Blake, in putting those enlightened images into the common domain of freethought that we see repeated in the Secular Hall Pamphlet. What is more, there may be a closer relationship between the two productions than at first glance seems apparent.

One of the arguments against Linton's involvement in the illustrations to the Secular Hall pamphlet is that he was no longer living in England in 1881. Linton left England in August 1866 (Radical Artisan, p.151), and was to die in New Haven on 29 December 1897 (Radical Artisan, p.215). However, Linton returned to England in the period 1882 - 1884 (Radical Artisan, p.203). 1882 was the year of James

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Thomson’s death. It is possible that the *Job/Jerusalem* illustrations in the Secular Hall pamphlet may, more than anything, be Linton’s memorial to Thomson, created after his death while Linton was still in England. It is perfectly possible that the pamphlet was not produced until a date later than 1881.

If this suggestion is correct, the graphic text takes on a new symbolic weight. The little shepherd boy who stands at the end of Thomson’s address is a romanticised and isolated figure, akin to that ‘weary wanderer/ In that same city of tremendous night’, who ‘Will understand the speech, and feel a stir/ Of fellowship in all-disastrous fight’ (*City of Dreadful Night*, p.3). Blake’s design has become a melancholy figure of textual reflection, serving as a silent comment both on the tragedy of James Thomson’s life and the failure of secularism and humanism to prevent the alienation and isolation that haunted the godless self. So far, so pessimistic: an aesthetic triumphant but a humanist failure.

But what if the lone figure at the end of the Secular Hall pamphlet is not representative of humanity’s isolation but celebrates a hero of the secular community? When G.W. Foote was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment with hard labour, the severity of the sentence caused outrage. Foote became a secular martyr (Nicolas Walter, *Blasphemy: ancient & modern*, pp.49 - 55).

The little figure at the end of the Secular Hall pamphlet, when seen as a comment on the secular bard, the freethought voice of truth, is revitalised. Joss Marsh writes of Foote’s campaign that he sought ‘[...] to deconstruct and desacralize the bible [...] to forge a new language stripped of biblical resonance’.

If someone were to reissue verse celebrating freethought in support of the martyred Foote, if they were to reforge a discourse out of past visions, they could do worse than the Secular Hall Pamphlet with its *Job* illustrations: Job the patient recipient of a wrathful, dictatorial God or figure of arbitrary authority; the little shepherd boy, an isolated figure refusing to stop playing his seditious song. Blake’s work becoming a cartoon: a double bluff blasphemy. Linton could have had a part. He was in England for the whole of 1883 and although he was not a secularist, he had a great liking for Charles Bradlaugh, who particularly supported Foote.

**Did Forgery Play A Part?**

It is also possible that one of the most notorious forgers of rare books in the nineteenth century had a hand in the production of the pamphlet. Harry Buxton Forman, together with his partner in crime, Thomas Wise, first started on the dubious course of illegal printing in 1887. Forman, like Foote, was a freethinker. He met his wife at a positivist lecture and his sympathy with freethinking ideals, particularly Comte’s positivism, has been described as ‘intense in youth’, an enduring influence throughout his whole life (*Two Forgers*, pp.33 - 6). He also had connections with Linton and a taste for Blake.

Even if Linton did not act in collaboration with Forman, there is another link between Forman and the *Jobs* of Gilchrist’s *Life*. In the second edition of 1880, the Job plates are listed as being reproduced by photo-intaligo method and printed by the Typographic Etching Company. Could the facsimile plates have been spirited away to the atheist forger?

All these questions are reflected straight back at the reader/viewer/critic when we realise that the pamphlet designs are not just a comment on secular discourse but on technical process. On closer examination of the pamphlet marginalia, it becomes...
evident that the model for the illustrations was a specific model, which is, however, not the Blake original. The model is the 1863 photolithographs in Volume II of Gilchrist's Life, copied down to the mistakes. The obvious explanation is that the same plates were used for production of the Secular Hall pamphlet and the 1863 facsimiles.

However, there is no conclusive evidence as to who executed the designs for the Secular Hall pamphlet. But we can draw conclusions on freethought production in the age of technical reproducibility. The ability to reproduce induces and entails imperfection, and reproduction, in turn, becomes caught up in criticism. Imperfection makes visible the muddy fingerprints on the aesthetic ideal, the necessary mark of aesthetic mortality. Freethought is also freeform, enlightened comment not only on arbitrary authority but arbitrary art - there are no god-given geniuses in art.

Notes and Bibliography

F.J. Gould, The History of the Leicester Secular Society, (1900) p.20: ‘In the carved capitals of the five stone pillars which carry the front on the ground storey are to be read the names of Socrates, Jesus, Voltaire, Thomas Paine and Robert Owen: and in niches above are placed terra-cotta busts of these personages.

James Thomson, An Address on the Opening of the Leicester Secular Society, Sunday, March 6th 1881 (no publication details, no page numbers).


‘If, however, these poems be read silently in books, instead of being heard chanted by the human voice, then for the eye which has vision an underlight stirs and quickens among the letters, which grow translucent and throb with life’ (‘Open Secret Societies’, p.134).


David Nash, Blasphemy in Modern Britain: 1796 to the present (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), pp.107 - 166.

The National Reformer, 26 (21 February 1875), p.115.


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On Monday 11 April, 1994 the French newspaper, Liberation, carried a dramatic news story from Rwanda in which a Swiss journalist Jean-Philippe Ceppi described the capital Kigali filled with the sounds of screams and gunfire. Militia were battering down doors and chasing Tutsi from house to house and from room to room. Soldiers were rampaging through hospital wards looking for Tutsi. Ceppi visited a parish called Gikondo and saw the mutilated bodies of men, women and children.

This was an important news report, but not because of its graphic detail. It was important because Ceppi put a name to what was happening. It was genocide, he wrote. It was the genocide of the Tutsi and given its speed, it would soon be over. And so five days after it began, the fact of it surfaced in a newspaper.

Others went to Gikondo. UN peacekeepers visited the parish and found near some of the bodies a pile of charred identity cards, each card with the designation Tutsi, and burned to try to eradicate any evidence that these people had existed. Two of these peacekeepers were Polish, and they too recognised genocide. One of them used a camcorder to film the bodies in Gikondo so that there would be proof. Gikondo, he told me later, should have alerted the world.

In the next three months massacres like this would become commonplace. There were no sealed trains or secret camps in Rwanda. But genocide was obscured nonetheless. The word would become wrapped in a mixture of fiction and half-truths. Most news reports described a frenzy of bloodletting, the killings anarchic, chaotic and tribal. The media's failure to report that genocide was taking place, and thereby generate public pressure for something to be done to stop it, contributed to indifference and inaction. In 1994 with no moral outcry about genocide it was easier for politicians to claim that the hatred in Rwanda was impervious to outside help.[i]

And so, like the Jews, the Tutsi were abandoned to their fate.

The 1948 Convention on Genocide
The world's 1945 promise of 'never again' is enshrined in the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The convention is of unique and symbolic importance. It was the first truly universal, comprehensive and codified protection of human rights, and the convention stood for a fundamental and important principle; that whatever evil may befall any group, nation or people, it was a matter of concern not just for that group but for the entire human family. To prevent and punish genocide the convention relies on the UN, on its procedures and institutions. The Security Council of the UN is central to this purpose.

This then raises a fundamental question; was the international community capable of implementing the genocide convention in the circumstances of Rwanda - either to prevent its occurrence or, afterwards, to stop or at least control it once it began? Why this spectacular failure? And why were politicians so keen for the 'the UN' to get the blame?

The Secretary-General of the UN, Kofi Annan, believes that Rwanda will define for our generation the consequences of inaction in the face of mass murder.
What went wrong and can we assure that this will never happen again?

In Rwanda during three months in 1994 one million people were killed in planned and systematic slaughter. The killing rate was five times quicker than that achieved by the Nazis. Rwanda is the size of Wales, and one of the poorest countries in the world. And yet the extremist government of this tiny country managed to spend a total of $US 134 million on weapons. In 1993 $US700,000 was spent on machetes. The money to pay for the killing machine, the training of Rwanda’s unemployed youth into party militias and the weapons they used came from quick disbursing loans from international funding, the money provided to the oligarchy ruling Rwanda by the World Bank and the IMF. In the weeks before the killing started, the UN peacekeepers estimated that some 85 tons of munitions had been distributed in the tiny African country.

Rwanda - A Genocide With A Paper Trail
Unlike the previous genocides of the last century the genocide in Rwanda does have a paper trail, and this vital collection of documents details the purchases of the arms and machetes, the evidence left behind in Kigali when the genocide was over.[ii]

A key element in genocide is a racist ideology, used to legitimise any act, no matter how horrendous. The Nazis used racist ideology to identify the German people as possessing a distinct identity that was based on blood. Others, the Jews, Gypsies and the homosexuals, were inferior and alien. And so it was in Rwanda, with the Tutsi demonised through one of the most effective propaganda weapons ever created - the hate radio. It was murderously effective in an overwhelmingly illiterate population.

We may never know the moment exactly when the Hutu Power extremist conspirators decided to commit a genocide in order to cling to their power. By the time the UN peacekeepers arrived in December, 1993 it was probably too late to make a difference. On the face of it their assignment was unambiguous. A three year civil war ended in peace, with a handshake between the Hutu government and the mainly Tutsi rebels. A more tangible peace was enshrined in the Arusha Accords promising a new Rwanda. There was to be reform of the corrupt and racist government and the creation of a parliamentary democracy.

The UN, in the form of the Security Council, was to be Rwanda’s last resort. But it was not so simple. By the time the peacekeepers arrived the plans for genocide were well advanced. Genocide was to be a political weapon and it was intended to eliminate all opposition to Hutu Power, a rabidly anti-Tutsi ideology, racist and nationalistic and opposed to power-sharing.

The genocide plot was hardly a secret. The Belgian, French and US governments had detailed knowledge, but kept the information to themselves. There was more public information: Human rights groups reported how genocide was already present in Rwanda with organised killing of Tutsi in massacres that were government organised. One French journalist reported: ‘the death squads are operating a genocide against the Tutsi as though it were a public service’.

The Security Council had assumed responsibility for Rwanda in October 1993 when it decided to create a peacekeeping mission, the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda, (UNAMIR), a mission intended to last no more than two years. In the first few months of 1994 Rwanda became increasingly violent. The Force Commander of the Peacekeepers, the Canadian Lt. General Romeo Dallaire, asked for reinforcements. None were sent. He lacked sandbags, petrol - the most basic

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equipment and at one point he was obliged to borrow cash from another UN agency. The mission lacked essential personnel - no humanitarian or human rights expert, no public affairs officer. The majority of people in Rwanda had no idea why peacekeepers were in their country. Dallaire had estimated he would need 4,500 troops. The Security Council agreed 2,500.

The half-hearted Security Council’s commitment to Rwanda was plain to see. Dallaire wanted to be allowed to seize weapons. If the arms continued to be distributed then his peacekeepers would be unable to carry out their mandate. Permission to seize weapons was denied by officials in the UN Secretariat. In his cables in the weeks immediately before the genocide Dallaire used the phrase ‘the situation is deteriorating rapidly’ eleven times.

‘Genocide’, one of the Polish peacekeepers told me, ‘hung in the air’. So terrified were the Tutsi that some left the country, and others prepared emergency evacuation. In Kigali the International Committee of the Red Cross and Medecins sans Frontieres began contingency planning for a huge number of casualties. A UN Commission on Human Rights Report revealed that the 1948 Genocide convention was applicable to Rwanda. In the past two years the Rwandan government had conspired to murder 2,000 of its citizens, the overwhelming majority being Tutsi.[iii] The author of this report said later that for all the attention it received he might as well have put it in a bottle and thrown it into the sea. Neither this report, nor the warnings from the field, dozens of warnings from Dallaire, were given to the Security Council.

Rwanda Abandoned As Genocide Starts
Belgium had contributed to the peacekeeping mission for Rwanda with 450 soldiers. The Belgian Foreign Ministry cabled their UN ambassador in New York: ‘It would be unacceptable if Belgian troops were to find themselves as passive witness to a genocide about which the UN would do nothing’. Their ambassador was instructed to lobby to reinforce the peacekeepers in Rwanda but he was told that there would be no increase in the mission for Rwanda because the US and the UK were opposed for financial reasons.[iv] Indeed the Clinton administration was so fed up with the lack of progress towards peace in Rwanda and the continual delays in the peace process that American pressure was put on Security Council members to close the UN mission altogether. Some non-permanent members of the Security Council argued that Rwanda should be given a reasonable time to achieve democracy especially in the light of UN resources spent elsewhere, particularly in former Yugoslavia. Most peace processes were long and complex. Warnings were sent to Rwanda, threats that the international community was fed up with delay.

There was consternation in Rwanda about these threats to withdraw the peacekeepers. The Prime Minister in a temporary government, created in accordance with the peace agreement, was Agathe Uwilingiyimana. She was a Hutu moderate and a democrat and she appealed against the withdrawal threat in a moving interview made by a radio journalist from Brussels. She said:

‘When you have a dictatorial regime... for twenty years, how do you expect this dictatorship to give up power without any pressure? the international community helped us to persuade the President that the war could end... why doesn’t the international community go the last step...? extremists will always be wrong... the people of Rwanda want peace’. It was the last appeal she made.

On 5 April, 1994 in the Security Council in New York, the decision was taken
to give Rwanda another six weeks to get the peace agreement back on track otherwise the UN would withdraw. Only hours after this vote the genocide had begun. One of its first victims was the Prime Minister. She was shot. In the first few hours every Hutu or Tutsi who wanted power-sharing was hunted down, the lists already prepared. Every journalist, every lawyer, every civil servant, every activist. And while pro-democracy politicians were being killed, the Hutu Power politicians were whisked away to safety. Then the genocide began.

Kigali was a fortress, an arsenal for the Rwanda army and Presidential Guard, Dallaire informed New York that his Belgian troops were isolated in fourteen different places by road blocks, with no supplies of petrol, and food and water for only one or two days. He was critically short of ammunition and medical supplies and the majority of his troops were untrained, under-equipped and had run for fear of their lives. Early in the morning of 7 April ten Belgian para-commandos were brutally killed by Rwandan soldiers. Dallaire was ordered by New York not to risk further losses. ‘If there is no risk, they could have sent Boy Scouts, not soldiers’, he would say later. Within six days of the beginning of the genocide every aid agency, every UN agency, all the development and co-operation missions had closed their offices with the vast majority of Rwandan staff abandoned to their fate. Every embassy, apart from the Chinese, had closed. No one has ever explained why there was such a speedy exodus from Rwanda.

**UK and US: Intervention Not Appropriate**

On 21 April, when the Security Council voted to withdraw the bulk of the peacekeepers, it seemed as though the whole world had abandoned Rwanda. It did not. Dallaire remained with 470 volunteer peacekeepers, together with a medical mission run by the International Committee of the Red Cross led by the remarkable chief delegate, a Swiss national, Philippe Gaillard. The achievements of these people were extraordinary and are documented in my book.

But not once, in the secret Security Council meetings of this time, was there any debate at all about what these people were managing to achieve, nor any discussion about how reinforcements could help. Two of the Council’s most powerful members, the US and Britain, had already decided that intervention in Rwanda was not appropriate, arguing that this was another Somalia. It was not. The situation in Rwanda was nothing like that which had existed in Somalia. But the impression given was that the situation was impervious to action. Dallaire’s own estimate that some 5,000 troops could largely prevent the slaughter of civilians was not even put to the Security Council as an option in the crucial four weeks of killing - during which most people died in systematic slaughter and in places where the Tutsi had thought they would be safe - in schools, in churches, and in clinics. It remains incredible to Dallaire that people had been massacred by the thousands almost every day and yet the world remained impassive. In early May, the UN Security Council, for the first time in possession of overwhelming proof of genocide, thought only of one action - to create a committee of experts to ‘evaluate the evidence’. The council failed even to resupply the volunteer peacekeepers left behind with Dallaire in Kigali.

The genocide in Rwanda occurred in the year in which we wept through Stephen Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List*. In June 1994 western leaders had walked along the D-day beaches and celebrated the defeat of fascism. It was left to ‘the UN’ to get the blame for Rwanda, while politicians remained safe in the knowledge that their own decision making would be free from scrutiny.
There were governments who knew what was planned but failed to share their intelligence with the UN commander - most certainly France and the US. Apparently Britain knew very little. I have been told that for Britain, Rwanda was a small far away country about which we knew nothing.[vii] This is a somewhat astonishing claim from a permanent member of the council, a member that in October 1993 had voted in the Security Council to create a mission for Rwanda. Did Britain then not monitor how this mission was faring?

The Security Council Met In Secret Session
The meetings held by the Security Council to discuss what to do about Rwanda took place behind closed doors. Twenty years ago, when most council meetings were held in public it would have been possible to hear the options discussed, but nowadays most debates take place in a side room where the deals are concluded which make up UN policy. The ambassadors only go into public session to vote resolutions and to make set speeches. In the UN's first years the organisation operated in the full glare of publicity and the press was vigilant. Public diplomacy, as exemplified in the debates in the Security Council, made it necessary for states to justify their national behaviour in the eyes of the world. Every nation was amenable to some extent to world publicity. But this has changed with time.

Throughout the genocide the Security Council was in almost constant secret session, meeting sometimes twice daily and long into the night. We only know what was said in these secret and informal council meetings because someone leaked to me the minutes of them. They are detailed in my book. These minutes reveal that in April 1994 it had been a British suggestion, backed by the US, to pull out most of the peacekeepers. The British ambassador said that the best idea was for a few UN peacekeepers to remain behind because a total pull out would 'send a negative signal to public opinion which would be damaging'. On 29 April the British ambassador made strenuous efforts to prevent the word genocide being used in a Presidential Statement issued from the Security Council, and this at a time when genocide had become evident. Indeed the fact of it by now was in an Oxfam press release. I wonder if some of the ambassadors in the council in April 1994 had to justify their positions in public, how the positions of those ambassadors would have changed.

By May most of the large-scale massacres were over. Yet in the House of Commons there was no attempt to address the issue of genocide. On 9 May after nearly five weeks of genocide and more than 500,000 victims, the House was told in a written answer by a parliamentary under-secretary of state for foreign and commonwealth affairs that 200,000 people 'may have perished in the recent fighting in Rwanda... it is an horrific and tragic civil war'. A debate on Rwanda did not take place until 24 May when Tony Worthington MP expressed his shock in an adjournment debate: 'It is inconceivable that an atrocity in which half a million white people had died would not have been extensively debated in the House. The press had dismissed the events as tribal. "Has there ever been a clearer example of genocide?" he asked an almost empty House.

The founders of the UN believed that public support was the key to success. And yet we tolerate a secret council that takes decisions behind closed doors. We fail even to know what is being said in the Council on our behalf. And the decision making process within the government of John Major leading to British policy to Rwanda in 1994 remains a mystery. Individually those in power decided not to act over Rwanda. But this is not a story of indifference. It is a story of almost deliberate negligence.
One of the many important lessons of Rwanda is the necessity for vigilance. One of the most important tasks, certainly of the UN Association, is to scrutinise the behaviour of the government to ensure that it abides by its commitment to the UN Charter and to the important requirements under the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and the Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and that it is held accountable for its actions.

Whether or not to intervene is the human rights issue of the age. No one can know how humanitarian intervention will work out. If it ends in disaster then those who take the decision to sacrifice soldiers to save citizens have to answer for it. In 1994 the politicians were determined to conduct casualty-free interventions and, with a lack of public awareness of genocide because of the inadequate press coverage, there were no choices given and no risks were taken.

Raphael Lemkin On Genocide
I have dedicated my book to the memory of the man who coined the word genocide, a Polish lawyer called Raphael Lemkin. ‘Genocide is part of our history’, Lemkin wrote in 1944, ‘it follows humanity like a dark shadow from early antiquity of the present time’. A young lawyer, he had studied the circumstances of the Armenian slaughter, a genocide overlooked, a genocide that took place in a remote part of the world, and a genocide that did not attract much attention. Hitler would say on 22 August, 1939, a few days before the German attack on Poland, that his formations were in readiness to send to death mercilessly and without compassion men, women and children of Polish derivation and language. Only then would Germany gain the living space needed. ‘Who, after all, speaks today of the Armenians?’ Hitler asked.

Lemkin believed that genocide could be predicted and therefore prevented. And we can see today that with the three clear cases of genocide of the last century - Armenia, the Holocaust and Rwanda - there are dreadful and startling similarities: a pervasive racist ideology and propaganda; a dependence on military security; monolithic political parties and a certainty that outside interference would be at a minimum.

No tragedy was ever heralded to less effect than the genocide in Rwanda. Anyone who knew anything about Rwanda knew what was threatened. The failure to act before the genocide, and then while one million people were slaughtered, is one of the greatest scandals of the twentieth century. Only by exposing how and why it happened can there ever be any hope that a reformed and accountable international community will be created. Only then will this new century break with the dismal record of the last.

Linda Melvern is an investigative journalist. For four years she was a member of the award-winning Sunday Times Insight Team. The documents obtained during her investigation into the genocide, including arms contracts, Security Council minutes, and other unpublished materials, are to be archived at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth.


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BEN JONSON(1572-1637) AND HUMANISM
Tom Lockwood
Girton College, Cambridge
Lecture to the Ethical Society, 29 Oct 2000

In the second decade of the seventeenth century, when he was in his early
forties, Ben Jonson made two journeys: one to Paris, in 1613, and one to Scotland at
the end of 1618. Born in London in 1572, Jonson lived until 1637: as a lifespan it
was long, by the standards of his time, and so was his writing career, from its
beginnings under Elizabeth in the early- to mid-1590s right on until its somewhat
muted end under Charles I. But before we turn to those journeys, and their many
incidents, I ought perhaps to offer (if only briefly) an account of what I take
humanism to mean in Jonson’s lifetime, and the century or two before it, for this
understanding will shape the features of his career with which I shall be concerned.

The most compact of the most recent articulations of what our noun
‘humanism’ denotes is Nicholas Mann’s. Owning his misgivings as to the
falsification necessarily imposed by what he calls ‘historiographical labels’, Mann
nevertheless draws confidence in advancing such a description from the fact that
humanism ‘was originally an activity and not a concept’, shaped, he writes, by a
“concern with the legacy of antiquity - and in particular, but not exclusively, with its
literary legacy - which characterizes the work of scholars from at least the ninth
century onwards. It involves above all the rediscovery and study of ancient Greek
and Roman texts, the restoration and interpretation of them and the assimilation
of the ideas and values that they contain.”

‘Grounded’ in research, he suggests, these practices ‘rapidly found expression in
teaching.’

Mann here offers two focuses I want to employ as we approach Jonson: the first, a
classicism which was both recovered and imitated; and which in turn, and this is the
second, drove a powerful interest in education, a concern with what it meant to
instruct and what it meant to learn. The third focus, which I take to be politics,
formed by a reading in and imitation of classical themes and ideas, has elsewhere
been described by Anthony Grafton.

Jonson’s Travels
But what of Jonson’s travels? We owe much of our knowledge of what happened to
Jonson in Paris in 1613 to the later journey to Scotland, and it is to that trip - though
trip is not quite the word to describe such an undertaking - that I turn now. It is likely
that Jonson set off to walk from his home in London to Scotland in the month in
which his 46th birthday fell, June 1618. His reasons for doing so are unclear: King
James, his patron, had been north in the previous year, and it is possible that Jonson’s
interest was sparked by what he had heard on the king’s return; but it is just as likely
that at least part of his interest in the walk was financial: incidences of travellers
taking bets on their successful return are common in the period, and indeed in
Jonson’s own plays. Jonson certainly knew Thomas Coryat, whose fame now rests
almost entirely on the books he wrote to commemorate such travels; and he will also
have known Will Kemp, clown to the Chamberlain’s Men until late 1599, who in the
following year took nine days to morris dance his way from London to Norwich: the
nine day’s wonder, as it became known.
If Jonson, already in his forties, is to be considered slightly old to be entering upon such an undertaking he is certainly to be considered rather large. His later poetry offers a number of self-descriptions which bulk out our knowledge of the physical poet. The poem Jonson called ‘My Picture Left in Scotland’ (Und. 9), which must have been written just after his return to London, recalls ‘My hundred of grey hairs’, ‘My mountain belly, and my rocky face’. Another poem from the same period, the ‘Epistle to my Lady Covell’ (Und. 56), is similarly unsparing in its pen portrait of the poet. Addressing Lady Covell directly, Jonson informs her that she has gained in him both a servant and a muse:

The first of which, I fear, you will refuse;  
And you may justly, being a tardie, cold,  
Unprofitable Chattell, fat and old,  
Laden with Bellie, and doth hardly approach  
His friends, but to break Chaires, or cracke a Coach.  
His weight is twenty Stone within two pound;  
And that’s made up as doth the purse abound. (6-12)

These are slightly later poems, but Jonson was already, as he ruefully recalled, by 1618, a large man.

Self-laden or not, though, Jonson did arrive in Scotland and was treated like the famous man of letters which at this stage of his life he undoubtedly was. In 1616 he had published his *Workes* - plays, poetry, and masques - in folio, a big, expensive, substantial book largely without precedent in the history of the book trade; he was moreover the unchallenged writer of the court masques in which James’ court delighted over the Christmas and New Year’s festivities with ever-increasing splendour and expense. Some measure of this fame can be taken in the banquet which the city of Edinburgh threw for Jonson’s arrival in October 1618: the records of payment for the ‘twa hundred twenty ane pund six schillingis four pennyis deburisit’ by James Ainslie for this occasion still survive in the Council Register. It was a notable expense, even if in English money of the time closer to £25.

**Governer to Walter Raleigh’s Son**

We don’t know when Jonson travelled the seven miles south from Edinburgh to Hawthornden Castle, solitary home of the minor poet, book-collector and monied potterer William Drummond; but we do know when he left (17 January 1619) and, thanks to Drummond having kept a series of compacted, elliptical notes, we have a record of the topics on which he and Jonson conversed. We know these records today as the *Conversations with Drummond* and, they contain much of what little is known of the second of the journeys in which I’m interested, the European tour Jonson undertook as tutor to Sir Walter Raleigh’s son, also called Walter, in 1613. Here is how Drummond recollected what Jonson had told him:

“Sir W. Raleigh sent him governor with his son, anno 1613, to France. This youth, being knavishly inclined, among other pastimes (as setting the favours of damsels on a cod-piece), caused him to be drunken and dead drunk, so that he knew not where he was; thereafter laid him on a car which he made to be drawn by pioneers through the streets, at every corner showing his governor stretched out, and telling them that was a more lively image of the crucifix than any they had; at which sport young Raleigh’s mother delighted much, saying, his father young was so inclined; though the father abhorred it.” (245-53)
The 1602 double portrait of the Raleighs, father and son, in the National Portrait Gallery, offers, in the hard eyes of the nine year old thug painted there, every assurance as to the truth of this tale. The younger Raleigh - who had, even while at Oxford, as his tutor reported, been addicted to ‘strange company and violent exercises’ - was to die only five years later on his father’s expedition to Guiana, much at the same time as he was recalled by Jonson to Drummond.

This ‘cross business’ speaks directly to our concerns. (Cross business was the delightfully measured term used by Jean Beaulieu, then secretary to the English ambassador in Paris, in the letter of introduction he gave to Jonson and Raleigh as they made what seems to have been their speedy exit from the capital early in March 1613.) For in the Catholic city of Paris, where it is well to remember King Henry IV had only recently been assassinated for his religion, there were real dangers in such inebriated mockery of the crucifixion as Wat Raleigh made with his tutor. It has been suggested that had the exploit not taken place during the Mardi Gras festivities its outcome would have been far more serious. Moreover, since matters of religion are the fourth of the focussing lenses I want to employ this morning, it seems to me far from coincidental that the incident in Paris should bring contested religion together with the humanist educative impulse which sent young Raleigh off on his continental grand tour.

It is important to remember, as Tony Davies reminds us, that in this period, “the itinerant umanisti [the word by which they knew themselves] and their patrons, students and enthusiasts formed a peripatetic and informal network of personal contact and correspondence which conveyed ideas, languages and (most importantly) books to schools, universities, private collections and solitary scholars across the European continent and its islands.”

**Learning Founded On Legwork**

So too, the tremendous recovery of classical texts on which humanist learning was founded depended upon much (literally pedestrian) leg work on the part of the scholars who searched out manuscripts in their repositories across the continent. Petrarch, who left Italy for the papal court at Avignon, and left Avignon for Paris and Liege, where he discovered and transcribed a manuscript of Cicero’s *Pro Archia*, is in more than one way emblematic of this strain of humanist travel. The early modern English word travail indeed captures both senses in which I’m interested: it meant both the words now separated for us as travel and travail, journeying and work.

Such travel as young Raleigh and Jonson were engaged in should not, then, seem merely tourism in our modern, post-romantic sense. The other Parisian incident to which we should attend offers exactly this corrective, as it also, suggests clear links between at least three of the different focuses around which I have been structuring my account. Here is what Jonson told Drummond as part of a larger section from the *Conversations on French, Italian* and Latin writing: That he told Cardinal de Perron (at his being in France, anno 1613) who show[ed] him his translations of Virgil, ‘that they were naught’ (52-3).

**Little Humanist Gatherings**

It is certain that earlier in the same year Jonson had witnessed a theological debate between Catholic and Protestant Champions in Paris; himself only recently converted to Catholicism, his position in front of the cardinal, whose free translations of Virgil were already famous when Jonson dismissed them, is
intriguing. The Cardinal was moreover a powerful man, one with whom, others might have expected. Jonson would have done well to remain politic, or at least not venture such dismissive rudeness: 'naught' would kill most conversations. Nonetheless, the bringing together in Paris of a shared humanistic classical inheritance with such a powerfully religious and political figure seems remarkable.

But more largely the incident has to do with Jonson's wider affiliations, affiliations which reach out from the current state of his own religion towards what we might call a network of European intellectuals, for whom translating the classics could sit alongside their secular or religious employments: what is sometimes called 'human learning' nowadays accorded comfortably with matters of state and church. And it seems to me important that these same little clusters, these little humanist gatherings one might say, keep coming up in Jonson's life.

Jonson's Library Burns
In many ways the works of Jonson's which do not survive tell more eloquently of his humanism than those which have. In November 1623, there was a fire in Jonson's library; he recorded his immense irritation over this event in a poem, 'An Exeaction upon Vulcan', which circulated widely in manuscript from the time of its composition until it was first printed in 1640. In effect one long curse, Jonson chides the combustible Vulcan not only with the indiscriminate consumption of his writings. Written throughout in Jonson's own urbane, flexible voice, 'Why me?', the poem asks, 'Why my papers?'

Had I wrote treason there, or heresy,  
Imposture, witchcraft, charms, or blasphemy,  
I had deserved, then, thy consuming looks;  
Perhaps to have been burned with my books.  
But, on thy malice, tell me, didst thou spy  
Any least loose or scurrile paper lie  
Concealed or kept there, that was fit to be,  
By thy own vote, a sacrifice to thee? (15-22)

I haven't written in any trivial verse forms, Jonson continues; I haven't written 'curious palindromes' and the 'finer flams' of shape-poetry; and proceeds then to imagine Vulcan's reply:

But, thou'lt say,  
There were some pieces of as base allay,  
And as false stamp there: parcels of a play,  
Fitter to see the firelight than the day,  
Adulterate moneys, such as might not go;  
Thou shouldst have stayed till public fame said so. (41-6)

So much we might have expected from a poet and dramatist; these kinds of literary production come as no surprise, however their loss to posterity might be lamented. But Jonson moves on from here, canvassing the multiple modes of romance and erotic epic he chose not to write, in marked contrast to his contemporaries: these writings, he suggests would have 'made a meal for Vulcan to lick up.' (The verb is particularly fine: it reminds us of where our metaphor 'tongues of flame' comes from and to what it owes its power). And then he moves to another question:

But in my desk what was there to accite

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So ravenous and vast an appetite?
I dare not say a body, but some parts
There were of search, and mastery in the arts.
All the old Venusine in poetry,
And lighted by the Stagirite, could spy
Was there made English; with a Grammar too,
To teach some that their nurses could not do,
The purity of language; and among
The rest, my journey into Scotland sung,
With all the adventures; three books not afraid
To speak the fate of the Sicilian maid
To our own ladies; and in story there
Of our fifth Henry, eight of his nine year;
Wherein was oil, beside the succour, spent
Which noble Carew, Cotton, Selden lent;
And twice twelve year's stored-up humanity,
With humble gleanings in divinity,
After the fathers, and those wiser guides
Whom faction had not drawn to study sides.
How in these ruins, Vulcan, thou dost lurk,
All soot and embers, odious as thy work! (85-106)

The poem continues to lament other burnings - that of the first Globe theatre in 1613 among them - before drawing itself together finally to curse Vulcan: 'Thy wife's pox on thee, and Bess Broughton's too.' Bess Broughton, as John Aubrey tells us, was a great beauty who escaped from the tower her father had locked her up in, came to London and took up with rich men. You can guess the end: 'At last she grew common and infamous and got the Pox, of which she died.'

Lost Works Lamented
I have time only to gloss a fraction of the lost works which Jonson so indignantly laments in the 'Execration', but I would hope that the sheer extent of his perished industry might intimate initially something of the humanist credentials I have been outlining thus far. The Venusine and Stagirite are Horace and Aristotle respectively, referred to, eruditely, by their birth-places, the work Jonson records a translation of The Art of Poetry with a commentary derived from the Poetics. Versions of this translation, which seems to have occupied Jonson across his mature career, were published posthumously; of the commentary, nothing survived. The grammar, too, was re-written, though never fully finished, and published after his death. The journey into Scotland we have been much concerned with today: some indication of what the work might have included is given by the letters of Jonson to Drummond inquiring after arcane details of Scottish custom, and a single line of verse, in which he called Edinburgh 'The heart of Scotland, Britain's other eye' (Conv.348). The Sicilian maid was perhaps the cruellest blow at the time: a translation of John Barclay's Latin romance, Argenis, Jonson's translation, which King James had invited him to work on in 1622, was certainly finished and had been entered on the Stationer's Register in October, prior to its printing. It didn't make it.

Carew and Cotton were antiquaries of renown, Selden a famous jurist; books known to have belonged to Cotton's library (a collection now incorporated in the holdings of the British Library) are recorded as having been burnt - certainly they were never returned! - in this fire. And lastly we come to Jonson's commonplace book, or more probably books: one concerned with the very humanist studies I have
been talking of today - ‘twice twelve year’s stored-up humanity’ - the other, pre-Reformation theology, a time when it was not a choice between but of. Something very like the former collection was published, again posthumously, in 1640 as Timber; or Discoveries. It is a fascinating collection, at which I can do no more than glance here, of thoughts and arguments drawn from a vast range of classical and humanist writers, a digest of previous scholars and discoverers whose voices meld with Jonson’s in his prose: sentences written in the first person turn out on research to be derived straight from earlier authors. The gleanings in divinity were either not restarted or simply never published.

The fields of Jonson’s learning and achievement are only, then, imperfectly represented by the modern image of the somewhat crabbed and envious author of a few mostly dark-toned comedies which are put on at the RSC every now and again, to no more than mixed reviews, as a foil to the natural, unlearned brilliance of the nation’s favourite poet, Shakespeare. Indeed, the year in which these works burned, 1623, was the year when Heminges and Condell, Shakespeare’s fellow actors in the King’s Men, gave ‘To the great Variety of Readers’ the folio edition of their colleagues’ Comedies, Histories & Tragedies - perhaps the most iconic book to issue from the Elizabethan and Jacobean book trade. That the first words one reads on opening the book are Jonson’s, and that the first of the commendatory poems is Jonson’s tremendous ‘To the Memory of My Beloved, The Author, Mr William Shakespeare, And What He Hath Left Us’ - a poem which Jonson never again reprinted in his lifetime - seems largely to have been forgotten. I don’t even have time now to talk about the importance of his education at Westminster school for Jonson’s career and late friendships; about his associations with, and responses to, the foremost classical scholars of his time; or about what the two hundred or so of his books which have survived can tell us about his habits of mind, scholarship and reading. I hope at the least, however, that I’ve managed to convey something of the astonishing range of Jonson’s humanist and humane learning, and to say a little too about why that might matter to us today.

3 Quotations from Jonson are taken from Ian Donaldson, ed., Ben Jonson (1985).
4 I am grateful to Ian Donaldson for advice on Jonson’s walk northwards.
5 The best recent biography, to which I am here much indebted, is David Riggs, Ben Jonson: A Life (1989).
8 Jonson had been to the continent once before, as a foot-soldier in the 1590s, fighting Spanish Catholics in the low countries; he undertook single combat in front of both armies, killing his adversary, and taking opima spolia from him, as he proudly reported to Drummond.
9 In passing we might remember Drummond’s conclusion to this section of the Conversations: ‘All this was to no purpose, for he [Jonson] neither doth understand French nor Italian.’ (55-6)

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21
RECOGNISING THE WORD

Book Reviews by Brian Docherty

11 Musley Lane, Ware, Herts SG12 7EN ISBN 1 873 468 66 0

Anne Beresford, *No Place For Cowards*, (London, Katabasis, 1998) £6.95
10 St. Martins Close, London NWI OHR ISBN 0 904 872 29 7

ISBN 0 904 872 30 0 £6.95

There is a long and honourable English tradition of protest and dissent from the established views of society. In poetry, this view has its roots in Blake, Shelley and Milton, as well as the anonymous broadsheet and ballad tradition, now preserved as folksong. Blake once stated ‘I write by a process of unconscious dictation, much against my will’. Dinah Livingstone, a poet who honours Blake, has been a part of this radical tradition for over 30 years now, as writer, tutor, translator and publisher. *Time On Earth* presents an overview of her work, bringing back into print poems from a series of early publications as well as selections from her most recent collections, *Second Sight* and *May Day* (both available from Katabasis). These are poems rooted in particular places, Camden Town, Devon, Suffolk, Greenham Common. Domestic life in Camden Town is interspersed with political events in England, Chile, Nicaragua. Livingstone’s children appear throughout, from babies to young adults. There are poems condemning water privatisation, and a sequence setting out Livingstone’s view on the City of London, as well as many poems set in rural locations. Throughout the book, the personal is intertwined with the political in ways that, say, Mary Wollstonecraft or Gerrard Winstanley would have understood. Elements of a radicalised Christian spirituality are combined with non-partisan leftist politics and feminism in ways which are currently unfashionable in the polite world of literature, where readings are publishers’ promotional opportunities. Livingstone is a principled and independent voice well worth listening to.

Anne Beresford’s book takes its title from the opening of the last poem, ‘Finale’, ‘These hills are no place for cowards’; a poem in the tradition of Dante or John Bunyan written in the voice of someone anticipating the end of their life, the moment when soul and body must part company. Earlier in the book, we are introduced to George Eliot’s piano tuner, Elgar, and a range of biblical or mythological figures. Beresford’s own voice appears to be a mystical or prophetic voice, sometimes employing the traditional tropes of religious mysticism, eg lots of light and dark imagery, at times rooted in the mundane world without losing sight of larger ‘realities’. ‘Big Deal’ is a critique of late capitalism in religious terms, while ‘Death on the NHS’ paints an unflattering portrait of an overstretched, underfunded Health Service. No solutions are offered, whether more funding from our common taxes, or privatisation; the reader is left to make up their own mind. Tact is here preferred to preaching. In ‘Tea Dance’, Beresford announces

There is a nostalgia in my soul
for a world without atom bombs.

While in ‘For Dinah who is glad God is not in her garden’, she says

we search for the same thing / utopia, God / what’s in a name?
Unless we are irredeemably bound by religious or political dogma, who could disagree?

Andrew Hawthorne’s work is recognisably in the same tradition, although more openly politically engaged. He is a vicar in Dorchester, but that does not prevent him from writing on secular subjects, or titling a poem ‘Pub Lunch, Cerne Abbas, Dorset’ (where I come from, neither priest nor presbyterian minister would be likely to do such a thing). ‘The Story of Olaf Bjornson’ typifies this side of Hawthorne’s work; a story about a Viking chieftain who reached Madagascar. His legacy is a stand of Norwegian spruce trees and blue-eyed descendents,

proof of the erratic forces of nature,
strong currents and good fortune.

Archaeology as a means of recuperating the past, both literally and figuratively, features in a number of poems here, while other poems introduce a more personal note, such as ‘Blackberrying’

Berry stains mingled with pricked blood which we exchange reaching for the same fruit.

Poems of political or social comment are well represented, such as ‘The Last on the Tyne’, where unemployed shipbuilders have to go to the South taking any work available, while ‘The Policeman Remembers the Crash Scene’ gives a firsthand reaction to an event,

the way J.S.Bach on continuous play
sounded the same to the living and the dead.

The book’s fourth part ‘Against the Beast’ is openly political, as a list of titles makes clear: ‘A History of Helicopters from Vietnam to the Gulf War’, ‘Holocaust’, ‘For Ken Saro-Wiwa’. Religious poems also feature here, with a poem from the perspective of Jesus on the road to Calvary, and two poems from the perspective of the Roman soldiers who participated in the Crucifixion. The book’s final poem, ‘By-Pass’, speaks in the voice of the Newbury road protesters,

Some might applaud us as we rise, but silently
others will look us in the eyes
and remember us for the future.
Then we will part, each uncertain of the winner.

All three of these books are handsomely produced and well-printed, something it was not always possible to say of small press books in the past. The Katabasis books in particular have an easy on the eye 12 pt. typeface, a contrast to the mean little books produced by some other poetry publishers. However, what counts is the quality of the writing, and the values expressed therein; we may not buy poetry for the ideas or philosophy embodied in a writer’s work, but rather for the pleasure it gives us as a reader in the ways in which the writer makes use of the language. (Thus it is possible to enjoy a poet whose social or political views we may dislike). I commend these three books to poetry lovers who also share an interest in writing which deals with the English radical traditions of Winstanley, Milton and Blake.
DECEMBER 2000

74th Conway Memorial Lecture
ETHICS and CITIZENSHIP:
A NEW AGENDA FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
Bernard Crick
Professor of Politics (Emeritus)
Chairman: Gabby Rowberry
7.30pm Thursday 14 December 2000, main hall

Sunday 17
AN EXTRA-ORDINARILY SHORT GENERAL MEETING
2.30 pm (SPES Members only) followed by:.............

THE REAL ANTI-MILLENNIAL YULETIDE EXPERIENCE
A FUN TIME FOR ALL ASPIRING ETHICISTS
Close Up Magic with Janet Clare, Inner Magic Circle
quizzes, winter reveries - Phillipe on piano.
mulled wine, festive fare, all welcome £2

JANUARY 2001

Sunday 14
11.00am THE THREE STEPS TO HUMANIST ETHICS
Bill Cooke, New Zealand Rationalist
Recent speaker at IHEU Australia 2000 conference

3.00pm DYING AND DEATH: physiological & ethical issues
Dr Harold Hillman

Sunday 21
11.00am ‘EXISTENTIALISM IS A HUMANISM’
Peter Heales discusses J.P. Sartre's assertion