

The Rhetoric and Literary Style of J. M. Keynes in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*:

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Abstract

When published in 1919 *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* attracted considerable controversy and its author, Maynard Keynes became a widely known name among other economists and the public. Although there has been considerable debate as to the intentions and nature of the book, Keynes himself intended this to be a serious analysis of the economic consequences of the Versailles Conference and the subsequent Treaty between Germany and the Allies that followed the end of World War One. However, on a first reading it is the politics and rhetoric of the prose that strikes the reader rather than any persuasiveness of economic arguments. Published reactions in the first few years of the books release support this view. However, on closer reading of the text, and a critical analysis of the many references and allusions used by Keynes in *Economic Consequences*, there is strong support for Keynes' own argument that this was a serious economic study.

Based on Donald McCloskey's argument in *The Rhetoric of Economics* that economists use of mathematical models and statistical tests can be seen as 'figures of speech – metaphors, analogies, and appeals to authority,' a close study of the many statistics provided by Keynes supports the view that he often uses numbers as important figures of speech. Furthermore, a careful analysis of Keynes' prose reveals just how important his use of metaphors and analogies are to supporting his economic arguments. When Keynes refers to Wordsworth's *The Excursion Book Third*, and provides a lengthy quotation of poetry from Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, it is to demonstrate that the prophetic and apocalyptic theme of such literary works can be directly compared to his own prophetic view that if the harsh penalties in the Treaty of Versailles are enacted the resulting economic emasculation of Germany will lead to further revolution and destruction for all the nations of Europe. In other examples, Keynes draws on the literary works of Tolstoy (*War and Peace*), George Bernard Shaw (*The Man of Destiny*), and Thomas Hardy (*The Dynasts*), all fictional works based on the person of Napoleon Bonaparte, to support his argument that it is due to the failures of the allied leaders at the Conference of Versailles that Europe is embarking on an economic dark age. Contrasting the young Napoleon of Shaw's play to President Wilson, Keynes highlights that Wilson came to the Conference with great promise for the economic restoration of Europe. However, high expectation turned to great disappointment as Keynes judges Wilson to be weak and incompetent as his allies in leadership, Clemenceau and Lloyd-George, manipulate him. This is a level of disappointment that can be compared with the Napoleon of Tolstoy and Hardy's works and the economic destruction Napoleon's later failed campaigns bought upon Europe.

Most studies of economics do not interest themselves in rhetoric or literary style. However, when looking for explanations as to how economic ideas are communicated, rhetoric and literary style become important, for it is in these areas that we can best understand some of the reasons why a particular idea or set of ideas were effectively communicated, while others were not.

When Maynard Keynes published his book *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* during December 1919 it was an immediate publishing success. However, reaction to the book was mixed. While some understood the major theme to be economics, many others judged its content and message as nothing more than political polemic, the disgruntled arguments of an ‘insider’ whom many suspected to be a ‘pro-German’ sympathiser. Such criticism stung Keynes deeply and he continued to maintain that his book was a serious work of economics that carried with it a serious warning. Namely, that if the terms of the Treaty of Versailles were allowed to stand then all the nations of Europe would suffer an economic dark age, which would most likely culminate in another cataclysmic European civil war. That many of Keynes’ arguments are now seen as prophetic and prescient has led scholars to question and examine *Economic Consequences* in new ways. Many economists now agree that Keynes did indeed promote convincing economic arguments. However, what, to date, has been poorly researched are the ways in which Keynes used statistics, literary references and techniques to support his economic arguments. Furthermore, there is little understanding of how Keynes developed a unique literary style specifically with the intention of highlighting his serious economic arguments. Keynes was explicit in his use of a rhetorical style as the means through which he could explain and persuade others as to the validity of his arguments. It is the objective of my research to understand how Keynes came to so effectively communicate his economic ideas through the use and development of this unique rhetorical style.

(1)

The term rhetoric is usually defined as a “body of rules,” which enables a speaker or writer “to persuade or influence others” and “express themselves with eloquence.” Keynes was explicit in his attempts at persuading opinion, even publishing a collection of his works under the title *Essays in Persuasion*. Furthermore, he unashamedly used elevated language so as to “express himself with eloquence.” Both these attributes of rhetoric, eloquence and persuasion, have their roots in classical Greece and Rome. During his time at Eton Keynes received a classical education for, as Moggridge points out, ‘the heart of the curriculum was classics.’¹ While Victorian reforms had meant a

¹ Moggridge, D. E., (1992), *Maynard Keynes: An Economist’s Biography*, Routledge, London, p. 44.

greater focus on subjects such as mathematics and French, classics still took most of the student's time at the turn of the twentieth century. From this education Keynes would have understood that effective rhetoric involves the sanctioned use of phrasing, diction, metaphor and other features of linguistic expression so as to achieve the twin rhetorical aims of persuasion and eloquence. And so it was that Keynes drew on a rich arsenal of linguistic expressions to present the most important theme of his book that there were serious and significant economic consequences for all Europe directly as a result of the Treaty of Versailles. Keynes argues with the use of metaphor, analogy and allusion that the consequences of the Peace Treaty, negotiated and imposed on the defeated German nation and her allies, would result in economic consequences of considerable disadvantage to all the nations of Europe, not just for Germany.

(2)

The figures of speech Keynes uses to support his arguments take both literary and mathematical form in *Economic Consequences*. For example, he uses numerous sets of statistics to support his argument that The Treaty, as proposed, would place an excessive burden on Germany, destroying not only German industry but put at risk the economies of all European nations. He makes the claim that 'the statistics of economic interdependence of Germany and her neighbours is overwhelming.'² According to Keynes economic interdependence came down to three parts of the economy that really mattered, food, coal, and transport. In the matter of coal he provides a set of statistics that provides an 'appeal to authority' and metaphorically provides an illustration of how the consequences of The Treaty are economic. First, the coal mines in the Saar Basin were to be ceded to France absolutely. The Saar district, Keynes points out, had been part of Germany for 1000 years. Second, Upper Silesia had 23% of the total German output of hard coal, yet would be, following a plebiscite, be ceded to Poland. But, argued Keynes, Upper Silesia had never been part of Poland and 'economically' was 'intensely' German. Third, out of the coal that would remain to her, Germany was obligated to make good year by year the estimated loss, which France had incurred by the damage and destruction in the coalfields of her Northern Provinces. Fourth, sums due for Reparation

² Keynes, M. J., (1919), The Economic Consequences of the Peace, MacMillan and Co., Limited, London, p. 14.

were to be partly paid in kind rather than cash. To a number of allied countries she was to provide 40,000,000 tons, leaving 70,000,000 tons against a pre-war consumption of 139,000,000 tons. Fifth, a number of other Treaty provisions would add to this burden. Daily shifts were to be reduced from 8.5 to 7 hours. The mining plant, due to the allied blockade, was in bad condition. The physical efficiency of the men was impaired by malnutrition ‘made worse by a lowered standard of living because of the reparation demands.’ And, the casualties of war had diminished the number of efficient mines. All taken together Keynes argued that only 60,000,000 tons of coal would be left for local consumption, based on the hypothetical calculation of there being only 110,000,000 tons available per annum, of which 40,000,000 were to be mortgaged to the allies. Added to the likelihood that German industry would be destroyed as a result of these terms, the situation in other countries would only add to a burden for all European nations. France’s own output had diminished through the wars destruction. In the UK and Italy a secondary cause of there being inadequate coal supplies to enable industry to recover and provide for the economic needs of the population was organizational breakdown and inefficiencies of new governments. ‘The coal position of all Europe [was] nearly desperate.’³

Writing twenty five years after the publication of *Economic Consequences* Étienne Mantoux in his book *The Carthaginian Peace*, Mantoux challenged all the statistics Keynes had used, arguing that contrary to Keynes’ own assessment of the ‘general accuracy’ of his figures, they were anything but accurate and, according to Mantoux, Keynes had used statistics in a way that were either out of context or deliberately exaggerated so as to persuade his readers that the central arguments of *Economic Consequences* were supported by the authority of statistics. To the present day there are divergent views of whose numbers, Keynes or Mantoux’s, represented reality but this debate supports McCloskey’s argument that ‘the economic conversation has heard much eloquent talk, but its most eloquent passages have been mathematical’ and that ‘rhetoric does not deal with Truth directly; it deals with conversation.’⁴ Furthermore, while Mantoux disputed many of Keynes’ numbers he acknowledged that *Economic Consequences* had been very successful in persuading public opinion as to

³ ibid., pp. 75-85.

⁴ McCloskey, Donald N., (1986), *The Rhetoric of Economics*, Harvester Press, Sussex, pp. 3 and 28.

the correctness of his economic conclusions. Mantoux cites Winston Churchill who, writing in 1929 wrote 'Mr. Keynes, a man of clairvoyant intelligence and no undue patriotic bias [was] saturated in the Treasury knowledge of the real facts [and] revolted against the absurd objectives which had been proclaimed, and still more against the execrable methods by which they were achieved. [In his book, Keynes] showed in successive chapters of unanswerable good sense the monstrous character of the financial and economic clauses. On all these matters his opinion is good.'⁵

(3)

In addition to Keynes' rhetorical use of statistics he also makes numerous literary references to the works of other writers so to leave no doubt as to the seriousness of the economic consequences for all European nations if the terms of The Treaty are carried out as proposed. One of the more significant of these is the way Keynes draws on apocalyptic references from the literary works of other writers. For example, when referring to the 'folly and impracticality of the European statesman,' Keynes refers to a poem of William Wordsworth's *The Excursion Book Third* to poor scorn upon all statesmen responsible for the Peace Treaty

Rot, then, in your own malice, and we will go our way –
 Remote from Europe; from her blasted hopes;
 Her fields of carnage, and polluted air.

These words of Wordsworth's are from the tale of a wanderer's sensation, especially around despondency, affliction, dejection and solitariness. Roused by the French Revolution the wanderer leaves to journey to America but disappointment and disgust pursue him. On his return he experiences languor and depression of mind, from want of faith in the great truths of Religion, and want of confidence in the virtue of mankind. The emotions expressed here are similar to emotions that Keynes experienced as he wrote *Economic Consequences*. In addition to references such as this, intended to chasten the statesmen of Europe, Keynes uses similar language to criticise the 'great capitalist class' of Europe who he holds responsible for not restoring economic prosperity to Europe.

We are thus faced in Europe with the spectacle of an extraordinary weakness on the part of the great capitalist class, which has emerged

⁵ Mantoux, Étienne, (1946), The Carthaginian Peace or The Economic Consequences of Mr. Keynes, Oxford University Press, London, p. 12.

from the industrial triumphs of the nineteenth century, and seemed a very few years ago our all-powerful master. The terror and personal timidity of the individuals of this class is now so great, their confidence in their place in society and in their necessity to the social organism so diminished, that they are the easy victims of intimidation. This was not so in England twenty-five years ago, any more than it is now in the United States. Then the capitalists believed in themselves, in their value to society, in the propriety of their continued existence in the full enjoyment of their riches and the unlimited exercise of their power. Now they tremble before every insult; - call them pro-Germans, international financiers, or profiteers, and they will give you any ransom you choose to ask not to speak to them so harshly. They allow themselves to be ruined and altogether undone by their own instruments, governments of their own making, and a press of which they are proprietors.⁶

The lack of resolve and failure of the 'capitalist class' to work for the economic restoration of Europe will, argues Keynes, result in further European upheaval and revolution, a prophecy that many believed did come to pass with the events of The Great Depression, the rise of Nazism, Mussolini, Franco, and Stalin and finally World War Two.

(4)

While Keynes believed the 'capitalist class' to be complicit in the economic failure associated with the Treaty he keeps his harshest criticism of failure for the political leaders of the victorious allies, especially Lloyd-George of Britain, Wilson of The United States of America and Clemenceau of France. In *Economic Consequences* Keynes has a great deal to say on the subject of leadership and in particular on the failures demonstrated at the Conference of Versailles. He uses a number of analogies from the life and times of Napoleon to elevate the points he is making about the events and consequences of the Conference. Prior to World War One, Napoleon's militarism was the last time Europe had been engulfed in a "civil war" anywhere near the magnitude of the events of 1914 to 1918. However, Keynes is not using references to Napoleon to explain the magnitude of military destruction wrought by Napoleon, compared to the military leaders of World War One, but rather, he wants to draw the reader's attention to the impotence displayed by Napoleon's enemies and the allied leaders of 1918. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Napoleon posed an increasing threat to the countries of Europe in the same way, Keynes argues, that the terms of the Versailles Treaty posed a

⁶ Keynes, The Economic Consequences of the Peace, pp. 222-223.

threat to the safety and stability of the European nations, should the allies proceed with enforcing the Treaties terms. He describes ‘the proceedings of Paris’ as an event that ‘had this air of extraordinary importance and unimportance at the same time. The decisions seemed charged with consequences to the future of human society; yet the air whispered that the word was not flesh, that it was futile, insignificant, of no effect, dissociated from events.’ From this summary of impotence Keynes then elaborates by quoting from Tolstoy and Hardy’s fictionalized accounts of the Napoleonic threat:

One felt most strongly the impression, described by Tolstoy in *War and Peace* or by Hardy in *The Dynasts*, of events marching on to their fated conclusion uninfluenced and unaffected by the cerebrations of Statesmen in Council:

Spirit of the Years

Observe that all wide sight and self-command
Deserts these throngs now driven to demony
By the Immanent Unrecking. Nought remains
But vindictiveness here amid the strong,
And there amid the weak an impotent rage.

Spirit of the Pities

Why prompts the Will so senseless-shaped a doing?

Spirit of the Years

I have told thee that It works unwittingly,
As one possessed not judging.⁷

For Keynes Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* summarises the position Wilson, Clemenceau and Lloyd-George found themselves in. Tolstoy did not subscribe to the “great man” view of history since he believed events shaped themselves and great men take advantage of them. While Napoleon was such a man, taking advantage of the chaos from the events of the French Revolution, Keynes saw the “Statesmen in Council” at Paris as taking advantage of the events of World War One to exact a “Carthaginian Peace” on Germany. Furthermore, Tolstoy’s novel is centred on the impotence felt by five aristocratic families caught up in Napoleon’s siege of Moscow. There are no great men in either *War and Peace* or the Versailles Conference. There is only ‘vindictiveness here amid the strong, and there amid the weak an impotent rage.’

Keynes’ next reference to Napoleon is once again in comparison to the leaders at Versailles, this time by comparing Napoleon and the President of the United States as

⁷ ibid., pp. 4-5.

men both of great promise, ‘a man of destiny from the West.’⁸ From the play *The Man of Destiny* by George Bernard Shaw, written in 1898, Napoleon Bonaparte, at 27, is a young man on the rise, with great promise and expectations of things to come. Shaw’s play is set in 1796, 12th May, in the north of Italy, at Tavazzano, on the road from Lodi to Milan. Two days previously, at Lodi, the Austrians had tried to prevent the French from crossing the bridge. But, the French, commanded by Napoleon, had rushed the ‘fireswept’ bridge and overcome the Austrians. This young commander is ‘an original observer,’ whose mastery of cannonading is a ‘technical specialty’ based on a ‘highly evolved faculty for physical geography and for the calculation of time and distance.’ Furthermore, this man of great promise, ‘had prodigious powers of work, and a clear, realistic knowledge of human nature in public affairs, having seen it exhaustively tested in that department during the French Revolution.’ He is, in short, a man of great promise with the expectations of an entire nation resting on his actions and success.

With similar promise and expectation, ‘when President Wilson left Washington he enjoyed a prestige and a moral influence throughout the world unequalled in history ... with what curiosity, anxiety, and hope we sought a glimpse of his features and bearing of the man of destiny, coming from the West, was to bring healing to the wounds of the ancient parent of his civilization.’⁹ But, just as the promise and hope that Napoleon could heal the wounds from the terrible events of the French Revolution ended in disillusion, so too the promise and hope that President Wilson could heal the wounds of Europe’s bloody civil war, also ended in disillusion, so much so, ‘that some of those who had trusted most hardly dared speak of it. ... What had happened to the President? What weakness or what misfortune had led to so extraordinary, so unlooked-for a betrayal.’¹⁰

While Keynes’ comparison of Wilson to Napoleon highlights disappointed expectations, his later reference to Napoleon is for an entirely different reason. During Keynes’ discussion of suggested remedies for heading off the apocalyptic doom that he believes will follow the economic emasculation of Germany by the allies, he devotes a section specifically to the problems associated with a weakened Russia as well as Germany. Keynes once again draws on the person of Napoleon and a possible ‘new Napoleonic domination, rising, as a phoenix, from the ashes of cosmopolitan militarism,’

⁸ ibid., p. 35.

⁹ ibid., p. 35.

¹⁰ ibid., p. 35.

should the allies seek to economically emasculate both Germany and Russia.¹¹ At the time of writing *Economic Consequences*, the allies had blockaded Russia with an economic embargo in the hopes that this would bring the rise of the Bolshevik threat to an end. For many of Keynes' readers, both a weakened Germany and a weakened Russia were necessary ways of ensuring the world did not plunge back into war and destruction. However, Keynes argues 'a victory for Spartacism' would likely have the opposite result for such a victory 'in Germany might well be the prelude to Revolution everywhere: it would renew the forces of Bolshevism in Russia, and precipitate the dreaded union of Germany and Russia; it would certainly put an end to any expectations which have been built on the financial and economic clauses of the Treaty of Peace. Therefore Paris [as in the allies at the Versailles Conference] does not love Spartacus.'¹²

Keynes analogy of Spartacus to equate the allies' policy of economic emasculation of Germany with the Roman slave Spartacus is then compared by Keynes to the opposite but equally unpalatable idea of an economically strong Germany. For many people this would inevitably mean a new military power 'establishing itself in the East, with its spiritual home in Brandenburg'.¹³ Historically, Brandenburg was an independent state, which grew to become the core of independent Prussia and later the German state and it was the site of the kingdom's capitals Berlin and Potsdam. For those who feared the possibility of a militarily strong Germany re-establishing itself within the geographical area of historic Brandenburg, this would be similar to the emergence of a new Napoleonic domination, in the manner of the rising of the mythical phoenix bird. Keynes' allusion to the phoenix bird is perhaps prescient because of the legend that it has a 1000 year life-cycle, the same period of time that Hitler attributed to the Third Reich (based as it was on the 1000 year existence of the combined Roman Republic and Empire) that Hitler believed would herald a new world order and domination. The fears associated with the scenario of a newly independent and militarily threatening Germany gave rise to the feeling among the allies at the Versailles Conference that whilst 'Paris does not love Spartacus,' nor does 'Paris dare not love Brandenburg'.¹⁴

¹¹ ibid., p. 272.

¹² ibid., p. 271.

¹³ ibid., p. 271.

¹⁴ ibid., p. 272.

While Keynes expresses sympathy with the viewpoint that Germany should be punished and Russia treated with caution, he argues that there is only one remedy for the dilemma faced by the allies and that is to recognise that an economically strong Germany is in the best interests of the whole of Europe as much as an economically strong Russia would be. ‘The blockade of Russia [for example] is a foolish and short-sighted proceeding; we are blockading not so much Russia as ourselves.’¹⁵ Furthermore

The more successful we are in snapping economic relations between Germany and Russia, the more we shall depress the level of our own domestic problems. This is to put the issue on its lowest grounds. There are other arguments, which the most obtuse cannot ignore, against a policy of spreading and encouraging further the economic ruin of great countries.¹⁶

In short it is Keynes’ argument that in bringing economic ruin on great countries such as Germany and Russia will also bring economic ruin upon the rest of Europe and usher in a ‘new Napoleonic domination’ of all Europe.

In summary, the analogy with Napoleon develops three important themes. Firstly: the impotence of the leaders of the allied countries who develop and enact ineffective economic solutions to the problems created by World War One. Second: both Napoleon and Wilson were leaders who were great disappointments. Finally: the notion of another Napoleonic domination is used by Keynes as a way to argue that the only effective remedy to head off such a threat was to do the very thing the leaders at the Versailles Conference feared most - to rebuild the shattered economies of both Germany and Russia, a remedy that was in the best interests of all the countries of Europe.

(5)

At the time of writing *Economic Consequences* no one, including Keynes, had any idea of the economic and political instability that were to dominate European affairs up to and including the events of World War Two. However, Keynes makes it clear that an economic apocalypse will engulf Europe if people do not heed the message of his book. To this end he concludes *Economic Consequences* with reference to *Prometheus Unbound*, a four part play written by Percy Bysshe Shelley.

¹⁵ idid., p. 274

¹⁶ ibid., p. 277.

In this autumn of 1919, in which I write, we are at the dead season of our fortunes. The reaction from the exertions, the fears, and the sufferings of the past five years is at its height. Our power of feeling or caring beyond the immediate questions of our own material well-being is temporarily eclipsed. The greatest events outside our own direct experience and the most dreadful anticipations cannot move us.

In each human heart terror survives
The ruin it has gorged: the loftiest fear
All that they would disdain to think were true:
Hypocrisy and custom make their minds
The fanes of many a worship, now outworn.
They dare not devise good for man's estate,
And yet they know not that they do not dare.
The good want power but to weep barren tears.
The powerful goodness want: worse need for them.
The wise want love; and those who love want wisdom;
And all best things are thus confused to ill.
Many are strong and rich, and would be just,
But live among their suffering fellow-men
As if none felt: they know not what they do.

We have been moved already beyond endurance, and need rest.
Never in the lifetime of men now living has the universal element in the soul of man burnt so dimly.¹⁷

The original *Prometheus Unbound* is a play by the Greek poet Aeschylus concerned with the torments of the Greek mythological figure Prometheus and his suffering at the hands of Zeus. This inspired Shelley's play of the same name, first published in 1820. Shelley did not intend that the play be produced for the stage but in the tradition of Romantic Poetry, Shelley wrote for the imagination, intending his play's stage to reside in the imaginations of his readers. Shelley seeks to create in his play a perfect revolutionary in an ideal, abstract sense. In the apocalyptic tradition it could be loosely based upon the Jesus of both the Bible, Christian orthodox tradition, as well as Milton's character of the Son in *Paradise Lost*. While Jesus or the Son sacrifices himself to save mankind, this act of sacrifice does nothing to overthrow the type of tyranny embodied, for Shelley, in the figure of God the Father. Prometheus resembles Jesus in that both uncompromisingly speak truth to power, and in how Prometheus overcomes his tyrant, Jupiter.

¹⁷ ibid., pp. 278-279.

Most scholars agree that Shelley wrote *Prometheus Unbound* as a response to the revolutions and economic changes affecting his society, and the old views of good and evil needed to change in order to accommodate the current civilization. This is Shelley's answer to the mistakes of the French Revolution and its cycle of replacing one tyrant with another. He wished to show how a different kind of revolution could be conceived which would avoid this cycle of tyranny. Similarly Keynes forewarns against the possibility of another European civil war (revolution) and calls instead for a revolution of economic possibility. Interestingly, the quotation used by Keynes from Shelley's play is repeated in William Butler Yeats poem *The Second Coming*, first published in *The Dial* (November 1920). Yeats, by his own admission, was in "religious awe" of Shelley's play and in *The Second Coming* draws on religious symbolism to illustrate his anguish over the apparent decline of Europe's ruling class (similar to Keynes's anguish over the timidity of the European capitalist class), and his occult belief that Western civilization (if not the whole world) was nearing the terminal point of a 2000-year historical cycle. As with Shelley and Keynes, Yeats was concerned with the revolutions that had gone before, including the Irish, German and Russian revolutions, in addition to the French Revolution and the continual cycle of destruction that accompanied them. Like Keynes, Yeats believed that at this point in time the world was on the threshold of an apocalyptic moment although his vision of destruction rendered by "the beast" differs from Keynes's vision of reconstruction through revolution. Yeats found the beast satisfying, rather than terrifying, and approved of its brutality, as a period of complete destruction was needed for a new civilization to arise "from the ashes." Keynes, on the other hand, found the prospect of economic ruin terrifying and suggests a vision of collective economic reconstruction as the only way to avoid further destruction.

To this point I have argued that Keynes successfully uses literary allusions and analogies to argue, with some clarity, that the failings of the Treaty of Versailles meant serious economic consequences for all European nations. In addition to some of the examples given above Keynes makes a number of other significant references such as to the witches from Shakespeare's *MacBeth* to describe the corruption that results from the deceitful behaviour of the allied leaders at the Conference. He also compares President Wilson to the blind Don Quixote who enters the 'cavern' of Lloyd-George's manipulative deceptions. In another reference to the "false idols" of hatred and nationalism that came to possess the European family during the war, Keynes draws on comparison to the 'policy of reconciliation' advocated by the United States and some

European nations (but only a minority) with the Jewish people (another minority among a family of fellow Semitic people) who rejected the false idols of paganism for the “truth” of monotheism. Keynes calls for the United States to not lend ‘a penny to a single one of the present Governments of Europe’ until such time as they give up the worship of the false idols of hatred and nationalism.¹⁸

(6)

Having analysed in some detail the components that go toward making up *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* I now turn to an analysis of the style of writing adopted by Keynes. Furthermore, when undertaking this analysis it is clear that Keynes' own style was strongly influenced by the style used by Lytton Strachey in *Eminent Victorians*. Strachey was a close friend of Keynes through both men's involvement with the Cambridge Apostles (from their time at Cambridge University together) and Bloomsbury. Strachey had published *Eminent Victorians* the year before Keynes' *Economic Consequences* and, like Keynes, enjoyed publishing success. Quoting David Garnet (*Great Friends*, 1979, p. 140) Michael Holroyd claimed that Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* ‘was to influence the style of *Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919) persuading Keynes to be more indiscreet than he was by nature and to have the courage to print what he would have said in conversation.’¹⁹ Given the close friendship of Strachey and Keynes up to the time of publication of both *Eminent Victorians* (1918) and *Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919) Holroyd's claim would be difficult to refute.²⁰ However, Holroyd provides us with little material by which we might be able to judge the degree to which Strachey's style in *Eminent Victorians* influenced Keynes's own style in *Economic Consequences*. Rosenbaum is another scholar who has no doubt

¹⁸ ibid., p. 267.

¹⁹ Holroyd, Michael, (1995), Lytton Strachey, Vintage, London.p. 428.

²⁰ For a period of time Strachey and Keynes were the ‘effective’ leaders of the Cambridge Apostles and their correspondence during this time is voluminous, rich in detail, at times very personal and at other times, engages in gossip that only close friends would exchange. Following graduation from Cambridge Strachey and Keynes remained close friends through their association with the Bloomsbury set that continued, *albeit* not as intensely during the Apostle days, up until the mid-1920s.

that there is a strong correlation, *albeit* poorly researched to date,²¹ between those associated with the Bloomsbury set and the literary works produced by individuals closely associated with Bloomsbury.²² Rosenbaum also argues that 'the basic premise of a literary history of the Bloomsbury Group is that their writings are historically interrelated in ways important if not essential to their interpretation.'²³ In commenting specifically on Keynes' *Economic Consequences* and Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*, Rosenbaum claims that the entire texts of both works are related to each other.²⁴

If we accept Rosenbaum's argument, then his claim that: 'Bloomsbury's writings display such a similarity, and one of the main functions of a literary history is to describe this resemblance,' calls for examination. Given the publishing success of both Strachey and Keynes' books one of the objectives of my research is to determine how, and the degree to which, their styles did influence one another. My starting point is with an examination of Strachey's prose style by Barry Spurr.²⁵ We have seen that Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* was published a year ahead of Keynes's *Economic Consequences*. If we accept Spurr's analysis we can map and compare Strachey's style with that used by Keynes in *Economic Consequences of the Peace*. Spurr notes that in Strachey's book there is a persistent use of triplets in words, sentences and phrases, something that literary critics of *Economic Consequences* have also noticed, although rarely commented on. Spurr refers to this characteristic of Strachey's style as his 'elaboration of phraseology' and that his use of the triplet of words, phrases, sentences 'in an immense

²¹ Some scholars have looked closely at the prose styles of individuals within Bloomsbury. For example Barry Spurr has written a book and journal articles dealing specifically with Strachey's prose style. Refer: Spurr, Barry, (1995), A Literary-Critical Analysis of the Complete Prose Works of Lytton Strachey (1880-1932), The Edwin Mellen Press, New York. and Spurr, Barry, 1990), "Camp Mandarin: The Prose Style of Lytton Strachey," English Literature in Transition (1880-1920), 33:1, pp. 31-45. However there is little in the way of comparative analysis between the Bloomsbury friends and the degree of influence each others writing styles had on the others.

²² Rosenbaum, S. P., (1981), "Preface to a Literary History of the Bloomsbury Group," New Literary History, Vol. 12, No. 2., (Winter), p. 330. Rosenbaum uses Leonard Woolf as the 'most detailed and reliable historian of the group' to establish the original members of the Memoir Club (Bloomsbury core members) as Leonard and Virginia Woolf, Vanessa and Clive Bell, Lytton Strachey, Maynard Keynes, Duncan Grant, Roger Fry, Mary and Desmond MacCarthy, E. M. Forster, Saxon Sydney-Turner, and Adrian Stephen.

²³ ibid., p. 331.

²⁴ ibid., p. 338.

²⁵ Spurr, op. cit.

variety of guises is the most extraordinary manifestation of this preoccupation.²⁶ Strachey and Keynes' use of a triplet style is unusual for writers of this 'modernist' period but it does enjoy a rich history of usage, especially from the medieval English and Restoration periods, whose writers looked back to a Latin tradition for rhetorical inspiration.

Alvin Vos whose study of Roger Ascham's (c. 1515 – 1568) prose style supports the view that the use of triplets became popular during the middle ages notes the important influence of Cicero's style on Ascham. Ascham admired the 'balanced structure' of Cicero's rhetoric. Nathan Drake (1766 – 1836, English essayist and physician) was also interested in the use of triplets by writers of the medieval English period and there continued use by writers such as Samuel Johnson through to the Restoration period. He undertook an exhaustive analysis of Johnson's style and published his views in a number of contemporary periodicals. What is striking about Drake's analysis is that while he gives no opinion, as such, on whether or not the use of triplets is a good or bad feature of literary style he argues that the use of the triplet in the hands of a master stylist such as Johnson brings an element of precision to his prose.²⁷

Other scholars have noted that the desire for precision is at the heart of the use of the triplet. Politzer, for example, argues that this is why the triplet style has its origins in legal documents because there is a desire for accuracy when putting forward legal arguments. Furthermore, the increasing use of synonymous repetition (doublets and triplets) 'laid the foundation for the effectiveness of such repetition as a stylistic device. The use of 'Romance' Latin words in conjunction with 'classical' Latin words was not only a stylistic device, but has also the useful purpose of making phrase more generally comprehensible.'²⁸ Vos also argues that the desire for 'neatness' and accuracy explains why Cicero opted for the triplet style.²⁹ As does Burnley who provides us with a further important explanation for why the triplet style became popular. In his examination of the Rolls of Parliament from the fourteenth century he argues that 'in this period the history of the curial style illustrates a general tendency towards elaboration at the expense of

²⁶ Spurr, "Camp Mandarin," p. 36.

²⁷ ibid., p. 159.

²⁸ Politzer, Robert L. (Oct. – Dec., 1961), "Synonymic Repetition in Late Latin and Romance," Language, Vol. 37, No. 4, pp. 486-487.

²⁹ Vos, op. cit., p. 364.

clarity.³⁰ In making this argument it would be a mistake to think that the one (clarity) takes the place of the other (elaboration). As studies of Cicero's style have shown, there was a careful and balanced concern for both objectives in the use of a device such as the triplet. In *Orator*, p. 140, for example, Cicero states that the ornate (*ornatus*) use of words is the aspiration of the perfect orator and 'springs from the writer's aspiration to the praise which is the reward of all perfect oratical art.' Furthermore, this ornate use of words can be created in one of two ways, 'through using single words, and through using words as they are arranged or joined together (*Orator*, p. 80),' ... and that 'units of threes are best.'³¹

In striving to persuade through rhetoric the desire for clarity and elaboration lie then at the heart of a writer's use of the triplet style. I have already argued that Keynes used a variety of devices such as metaphors, analogies and allusion so as to bring clarity to his economic arguments and in his frequent use of the triplet he adds additional weight to this objective. For example, when Keynes writes 'the Supreme Economic Council received almost hourly the reports of the misery, disorder, and decaying organization of all Central and Eastern Europe,' he wants the reader to clearly grasp the magnitude of the problem. While people are living in misery because of the destruction from the war, this misery is being added to because of the disorder among the countries of Europe and that, furthermore the corruption at the heart of the governing and capitalist institutions not only has a decaying effect but piles more misery onto the peoples of Europe.³²

While Keynes uses the triplet to bring clarity to his writing, often by using synonyms and words with similar meaning in one sentence, Keynes also uses the triplet device so as to elaborate his argument. For example, in describing Clemenceau at the Conference of Versailles Keynes uses a triplet phraseology: 'he closed his eyes often' and 'sat back in his chair with an impassive face of parchment,' with 'his grey gloved hands clasped in front of him.' This phrased elaboration follows the triplet of words to describe that Clemenceau's 'walk, his hand, and his voice' were vigorous but the phrases following portray an old man 'conserving his strength for important occasions.'³³

³⁰ ibid., p. 596.

³¹ Vos., op. cit., p. 349 and 362.

³² Keynes, *ECP*, op. cit., p. 5.

³³ Keynes, *ECP*, op. cit., p. 27.

In describing Wilson's performance, Keynes again uses elaboration of phraseology to make his point that 'the President would be maneuvered off his ground,' and 'would miss the moment for digging his toes in,' then 'before he knew where he had been got to, it was too late.'³⁴

Keynes "elaboration of phraseology" also presents itself when he expresses his frustration with the politicians whom he blamed for the Carthaginian Peace spelled out in the Treaty of Versailles. In comparing Wilson's performance to that of Lloyd George he asks the reader the question, 'What chance could such a man have against Mr. Lloyd George's unerring, almost medium-like, sensibility to every one immediately around him?' Having asked the question Keynes answers his own question in triplet form. The British Prime Minister, states Keynes, possesses 'six or seven senses not available to ordinary men ... judging character, motive, and subconscious impulse.' These senses, unique to Lloyd George, allowed him to anticipate what Wilson was going to say next, which in turn allowed Lloyd George to frame his appeal or argument 'best suited to the vanity, weakness, or self-interest of his immediate auditor.' This meant that the "poor" President would be playing 'blind man's buff in that party.'

(7)

That Keynes was a gifted and committed economist is without argument. However, the means through which he sought to communicate his ideas remains controversial. Some scholars argue that the weakness of Keynes is that he is context bound and that his ideas and theories will not stand the test of time and changed circumstances. Others have misgivings about his self-promotion and use of 'flashy' literary techniques that lead to misunderstanding and misinterpretation of complex economic concepts beyond the grasp of non-economists. None of this would have troubled Keynes in 1919 when he wrote in deep anger and concern about the state of Europe and what he viewed as the deceitful terms of the Treaty of Versailles imposed on an enemy already in deep economic strife. While Keynes took his commitment to the discipline of economics seriously, he also took seriously the task of communicating economic ideas to as wide an audience as possible. The rhetoric and literary techniques used in *Economic*

³⁴ ibid., p. 40.

Consequences highlight just how important Keynes saw this need. By use of metaphor, analogy and the development of a unique rhetorical style Keynes worked to bring the twin objectives of precision (of economic facts and arguments) and elaboration (with the use of rhetorically elevated language) together in a way that enabled him to effectively communicate and persuade his readers that his economic ideas were to be taken seriously.

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