

EAE 0422 A	Sujet Jury	Sujet Candidat	Code Sujet	CLG 34
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Your main commentary should be focused on *negation*. Other topics may also be addressed.

I wasn't sure what to make of these three odd pieces of writing. I found them both intriguing and irritating. The irritating aspect – well, the *most* irritating, there were others – was the air of perfunctory secrecy or deception about the whole enterprise. What was the point of withholding the identification of the protagonists (if that was what they were) for so long? I had no trouble identifying Ibsen, even before his name crept in at the end. There are not so very many great Norwegian dramatists with white whiskers. I also had little trouble with Carl Linnaeus, since if you look up *Linnaea Borealis* or *Systema Naturae* in any decent encyclopaedia you find potted biographies of the great taxonomist with no trouble. I took longer sorting out Francis Galton, grandson of Erasmus Darwin, cousin of Charles Darwin, now forgotten because the idea he believed to be his great contribution to humanity – the idea of eugenics, as a statistical, scientific, progressive, political and ethical way of life – is regarded with horror by all right-thinking men after what the National Socialists made of it. I discovered that there still exists a Galton Professor of Human Genetics. I discovered, in fact, all sorts of leads about all three heroes of these fragmentary narratives – no doubt, at some point in *this* narrative, I shall find myself impelled to reveal some of these discoveries. Nobody likes keeping discoveries to himself. But my project was not to start projects of research into Linnaeus, Galton and Ibsen. My project was to discover, to come to grips with, Scholes Destry-Scholes. I had now read three unpublished pieces by him. In a sense I knew a lot more about him than I had. And in another sense, I knew nothing at all. I could start work on Ibsen, Galton and Linnaeus, as I had worked on the movements and preoccupations of Sir Elmer Bole. There were tiny factual connections, which might lead directly to Destry-Scholes. Linnaeus had visited the Maelstrøm. Destry-Scholes's letters to his publishers asking about grants to go to South Africa may have been to do with Galton's youthful trek into Ovampoland. Or I could do a semiotic analysis of those teasing half-concealments, in an attempt to reconstruct the man who invented them. There were also odd

35 moments where the professional biographer revealed his own preoccupations. I might track him through his unconscious (or conscious) assumptions. Even that became almost immediately almost impossible. For one thing, a semiotic analysis shows only the choice of available sign systems, from the culture in which the signs were made – in Destry-Scholes's case, a 1950s prestructuralist culture. A semiotic analysis is not an instrument designed to discover a singular individual. Indeed, it assumes that there is no such thing. It could be argued (a dreadful phrase I find myself using, still, *in extremis*, when I want to hedge or hide or prevaricate) – it could be argued that Destry-Scholes himself, in evading the identification of his "characters" for so long, was intending to show that identity, that the self, is a dubious matter, not of the first consequence. It could equally be argued that he made such a to-do about it because the identity of his people was of consequence, because the events he narrated only made sense if the narration concerned these people precisely, and no others. I found myself, ludicrously, reacting as if Destry-Scholes had put together the three faded blue carbons under the hanging folders in the Lincoln University archive, in order to baffle and intrigue me, me personally, Phineas G. Nanson. All this writing was a conundrum bequeathed by him to me. I wasn't born, when he drowned, if he did drown. It has been dinned into me that objectivity is an exploded and deconstructed notion. But subjectivity – the meeting of two hypothetical subjects, in this case Scholes Destry-Scholes and myself – is just a suspect, since it can't be looked at objectively. A drowned, or possibly drowned, biographer, in 1965, could have had no conceivable reader in mind for this limp cache of unbegun and unended stories. I also could not help thinking about the three stories, or parts of stories, as though, taken together, they were all part of some larger work in progress.