Erewhon Like New Zealand Like England Like Utopia.
Samuel Butler's Refractions of National and Cultural Identities.

Paola Spinozzi

Università di Ferrara

Abstract: While writing the history of European nations, nineteenth-century historiographers drew attention to foundation myths that valued national identities and encouraged people to preserve the nation's unity. The creation of a utopian or dystopian place incorporates concepts of nation, nationality, and culture defining the native country of the writer. The construction of Great Britain as a nation in the Victorian age and portrayal of New Zealand as a colony of Queen Victoria permeated the utopian imagery of Samuel Butler. His pioneering years as a settler are vividly rendered in *A First Year in the Canterbury Settlement* (1863) and in the journal *Samuel Butler at Mesopotamia* (first published 1960). In *Erewhon* (1872) New Zealand is re-figured as an ambiguous utopian otherwhere, taking shape through assimilation and displacement, both geographical and conceptual. New Zealand was powerfully mythicised in the nineteenth century and its myth of foundation has been constantly reinforced. Butler's renditions of the British colony and its settlers are pivotal in understanding the de/construction of New Zealand's identity in the contemporary age, in which bipolar attitudes towards national identities have been exacerbated.

Keywords: Utopia as a literary genre, national and cultural identity, Samuel Butler, *Erewhon*, *A First Year in the Canterbury Settlement*, Victorian England

Resumo: Escrevendo sobre a história das nações europeias, os historiadores do século XIX chamaram a atenção para os mitos fundadores que valorizavam as identidades nacionais e encorajavam à preservação da unidade da nação. A criação de um lugar utópico ou distópico incorpora os conceitos de nação, nacionalidade e

cultura que definem o país de origem do escritor. A construção da Grã-Bretanha enquanto nação durante a era Vitoriana e o retrato da Nova Zelândia enquanto colónia da Raínha Vitória permearam o imaginário utópico de Samuel Butler. Os anos de exploração que protagonizou na condição de colono são retratados, em traços fulgurantes, em *A First Year in the Canterbury Settlement* [Um Primeiro Ano no Povoado de Canterbury] e no diário *Samuel Butler at Mesopotamia* [Samuel Butler na Mesopotâmia], publicado pela primeira vez em 1960. Em *Erewhon* (1872), a Nova Zelândia é reconfigurada como um ambíguo *outrolugar* utópico, que toma forma através de processos de assimilação e deslocação a nível geográfico e conceptual. Fortemente mitificada no século XIX, a Nova Zelândia viu o seu mito fundacional ser constantemente reforçado. Os retratos que Butler nos oferece da colónia britânica e dos seus colonos são instrumentais para o entendimento da des/construção da identidade da Nova Zelândia na contemporaneidade, caracterizada pelo exacerbamento de atitudes bipolares em relação a identidades nacionais.

Palavras-chave: Utopia enquanto género literário, identidades nacionais e culturais, Samuel Butler, *Erewhon*, *A First Year in the Canterbury Settlement*, Inglaterra Vitoriana, Nova Zelândia

I. Historiography and National History in Nineteenth-century Europe

History in Great Britain was long regarded as a branch of literature, or a subject to be studied for utilitarian purposes by soldiers, public officials, and lawyers. It gained momentum at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge precisely when its usefulness as a distinct field of study was acknowledged and valued (Marwick 1989: 54-55). While it became established as an autonomous academic discipline, the construction and circulation of a compelling historical account of Great Britain became essential to the formation of national identity in the nineteenth century. A systematic interest for history grew from a nostalgia for an ideal past: the retrieval of historical roots for each European country would legitimate the present, brutally accelerated by industrialisation, and ease anxieties about the future. A historicist 'spirit of the time' idealised nations born in a mythical past and progressing in a historical continuum. Within this perspective, the development of each nation's nature, which German historian Leopold von Ranke connected to God's design (Von Ranke 1867-1890: 78), was at the core of the historical process. New values, emerging after the destruction of the pre-industrial world, required validation: a linear, progressive view

of history, able to support a vision of continuity, comprised an idea of nation as a unique and indivisible entity, born from the pristine spirit of the people. The writing of national histories was the paramount task of historiography in nineteenth-century Europe. Expanding on the concept of *natio* developed in Roman antiquity and literally meaning 'birth', national historiographers stressed the connection between the identity of a nation and its origin.

The notions of state, nation, empire, and Britishness became pivotal in Victorian Britain, when Benjamin Disraeli and his successors Robert Salisbury and Arthur Balfour pursued the policies of Tory democracy in order to reinforce the social cohesion between the 'two nations' of owners and labourers and expand British overseas domains into a world empire (Schulze 1994; Eldridge 1973). Supported by the Minister of the Colonies Joseph Chamberlain, 'constructive imperialism' planned to consolidate the British power by constituting an empire of states around the oceans. Nationalistic and imperialistic ideologies circulated through educational programmes and newspapers, popular fiction and children's literature, classical theatres and music halls, figurative arts and architecture. A massive public campaign diverted attention from an Irish minority claiming national independence and enhanced the international status of England, competing with Germany, France and Russia (Schulze 1994: 286-287). [1]

Historiographers wrote the history of European nations by focusing on foundation myths that validated the existence of national identities and encouraged people to preserve the nation's unity. How does the construction of a utopian or dystopian place respond to specific concepts of nation, nationality, and culture shaped in the country of the utopian writer? The ideology and rhetoric defining the history and identity of Great Britain as a nation in the Victorian age permeated the utopian imagery of an author who lived for a few years in a country colonised by his native country.

II. Samuel Butler's New Zealand

The historiographic construction of Great Britain in the nineteenth century incorporated the construction of New Zealand's national and cultural identity. In 1840, the

Treaty of Waitangi, signed by representatives of Britain and Māori chiefs, declared British sovereignty over the islands. In 1841, New Zealand became a colony within the British Empire:

> New Zealand was the first new colony of Queen Victoria's reign and the only one to be annexed by treaty (the Treaty of Waitangi of 1840) with the Crown as signatory. A royal seal was hurriedly dispatched. It styled Queen Victoria as 'fidei defensor' and represented the Maori chiefs as elderly, Caucasian and wise Corinthians (or ancient Britons perhaps), their heads bedecked with laurels, their spears laid to rest. (Taylor 2016: 37)

The relationship between a European nation at the height of its imperial power and a remote country in the Southwestern Pacific Ocean throve on specific myths of foundation and colonial appropriation.

Evoked by Samuel Butler in *Erewhon* (1872), New Zealand is a colony of Queen Victoria re-figured as an ambiguous utopian otherwhere. On 30 September 1859, the 24-year-old Butler left England for New Zealand; by February 1860, he had set up a sheep farm in the Canterbury settlement. Meanwhile he pursued intellectual activities, culminating in the study of Darwin's *Origin of Species* and the writing of two articles, "Darwin among the Machines" and "Lucubratio Ebria", published in 1863 and 1865 respectively. In the former he imagines that machines are living organisms competing with humans in the struggle for existence, in the latter he pursues the opposite idea, according to which machines are extracorporeal limbs and human beings will be able to evolve by adopting them as prosthetic enhancements. These writings originally appeared in the New Zealand newspaper *The Press*, which also published Butler's report on the first Canterbury-England cricket match in mock-serious Shakespearean blank verse. In 1864 he returned to England and in 1872 published *Erewhon or over the Range*, which incorporates expanded versions of both articles, as the author himself explains in his "Preface to the Revised Edition" dated to 7 August 1901:

> The first part of *Erewhon* written was an article headed 'Darwin among the Machines,' and signed Cellarius. It was written in the Upper Rangitata district of the Canterbury Province (as it then was) of

CADERNOS DE
LITERATURA COMPARADA

> New Zealand, and appeared at Christchurch in the *Press* newspaper, June 13, 1863. A copy of this article is indexed under my books in the British Museum catalogue. In passing, I may say that the opening chapters of *Erewhon* were also drawn from the Upper Rangitata district, with such modifications as I found convenient. [...] In 1865 I rewrote and enlarged "Darwin among the Machines" for the *Reasoner*, a paper published in London by Mr. G.J. Holyoake. It appeared July 1, 1865, under the heading, "The Mechanical Creation," and can be seen in the British Museum. I again rewrote and enlarged it, till it assumed the form in which it appeared in the first edition of *Erewhon*. (Butler 1917: XI-XII)

His pioneering years as a settler in New Zealand are vividly rendered in the long letters to his family, edited by his father and published as *A First Year in the Canterbury Settlement* (1863), as well as in his journal, edited by P. B. Maling and published as *Samuel Butler at Mesopotamia* (1960).

Butler's utopian imagery takes shape through assimilation and displacement, both geographical and conceptual. Erewhon shows clues of his belonging to and detachment from England, which is a European nation and his native country, and his appropriation of New Zealand, which is an English colony and a country with its own cultural identity. Responding to Victorian Englishness, he exhibits a strong interest for the contemporary debate on evolutionism and an ambivalent attitude towards ideological discourses on the origins of the English people and the history of England as a leading European nation. Butler sees New Zealand as a country with a bipolar identity, where natural landscape is perceived on the one hand as unique and pristine, and on the other as colonized and anglicized. The early chapters of *Erewhon* describe an Englishman's reception of the majestic and puzzling landscape which extends 'over the range' and bears clear resemblance to Canterbury High Country in New Zealand. His access to the utopian place marks the beginning of a thorough critique of England, articulated through the interaction of the foreigner with the Erewhonians. The cultural background of the English traveller, the landscape he strives to map and the imaginary community he encounters generate a notion of Englishness and otherness imbued with issues of race and colonialism. The narrative, built on an extensive use of paradox and parody, of irony and hyperbole, disrupts the

apparent soundness of the traveller's statements and modes of interaction, and prompts the reader's constant re-assessment of the author's attitude toward the narrator's assumptions, biases, and cultural stereotypes. The questionable reliability of Higgs's straightforward statements about national and cultural identity, religion, morals, and culture makes it particularly complicated to assess Butler's view.

III. Utopian Landscape

The traveller's destination, identified in the title of the first chapter, evokes a spatial idea of emptiness along with a metaphorical sense of rejection, uselessness, and superfluity. "Waste Lands" point to a vacuum, a space lacking in definition and deprived of identity. The features of the landscape are then brought into prominence to delineate a land of uncertain ownership, which exists only because its possession can be gained through colonization.

> The colony was one which had not been opened up even to the most adventurous settlers for more than eight or nine years, having been previously uninhabited, save by a few tribes of savages who frequented the seaboard. The part known to Europeans consisted of a coast-line about eight hundred miles in length [...] and a tract of country extending inland for a space varying from two to three hundred miles. [...] the country was timbered, but not too heavily; it was admirably suited for agriculture; it also contained millions on millions of acres of the most beautifully grassed country in the world, and of the best suited for all manner of sheep and cattle. The climate was temperate, and very healthy; there were no wild animals, nor were the natives dangerous, being few in number and of an intelligent tractable disposition. [...] when once Europeans set foot upon this territory they were not slow to take advantage of its capabilities. Sheep and cattle were introduced, and bred with extreme rapidity; men took up their 50,000 or 100,000 acres of country, [...] till in a few years there was not an acre between the sea and the front ranges which was not taken up, and stations either for sheep or cattle were spotted about at intervals of some twenty or thirty miles over the whole country. (Butler 1872: 10)

Butler's meticulous description presents all the hermeneutic categories that W. J. T. Mitchell identifies to define an imperial landscape: it is both natural and mediated by human intervention, it frames and is framed, it is real and symbolic. European imperialism is variously defined by the specificity of places, peoples, and historical moments: "It is not a

'one-way' phenomenon but [...] something like the "dreamwork" of imperialism, [...] folding back on itself to disclose both utopian fantasies of the perfected imperial prospect and fractured images of unresolved ambivalence and unsuppressed resistance" (Mitchell 1994: 8-10).

Butler's *ου τοπος* takes shape through the contrast arising from the foreigner's ecstatic contemplation of the 'otherness', the massive exploitation of the land's natural resources, and resistance to colonization due to its topography.

> I was delighted with the country and the manner of life. It was my daily business to go up to the top of a certain high mountain, and down one of its spurs on to the flat, in order to make sure that no sheep had crossed their boundaries. [...] The country was the grandest that can be imagined. [...] Never shall I forget the utter loneliness of the prospect – only the little far-away homestead giving sign of human handiwork; – the vastness of mountain and plain, of river and sky; the marvellous atmospheric effects– sometimes black mountains against a white sky, and then again, after cold weather, white mountains against a black sky– sometimes seen through breaks and swirls of cloud–and sometimes, which was best of all, I went up my mountain in a fog, and then got above the mist; going higher and higher, I would look down upon a sea of whiteness, through which would be thrust innumerable mountain tops that looked like islands. I am there now, as I write; I fancy that I can see the downs, the huts, the plain, and the river-bed-- that torrent pathway of desolation, with its distant roar of waters. Oh, wonderful! wonderful! so lonely and so solemn. (Butler 1872: 5-6)

The traveller's familiarization with the utopian place discloses aspects of English cultural identity, which point to the colonial and imperial history forming the historiographic discourse of Victorian England. Specifically, "New Zealand is at the periphery of European imperialism, the last and remotest outpost of the British Empire, an unspoiled paradise where the nineteenth-century fantasies of ideal, picturesque, and romantic landscape would seem to be perfectly preserved" (Mitchell 1994: 20).

Distinctive marks of national and cultural identity, lost and re-affirmed, emerge from the protagonist's complex response to the landscape and human settlement. The tension between the sense of estrangement, which testifies to the traveller's belonging to another world, and acculturation, through which 'other' critical parameters are acquired, is a

fundamental thematic constant of the utopian genre. In every utopian journey, the interaction with unknown places and people disrupts the hermeneutic categories of the traveller. The dual act of mapping a new place and understanding the customs and beliefs of the other society qualifies the utopian journey as an experience defined by geographical and cultural trauma. Comparisons between different places and cultural systems expose the relativity of the traveller's beliefs.

Higgs's desire to go beyond the known regions of the Canterbury settlement and explore the areas across the river and over a mysterious mountain range arises from a colonial attitude: "though every one said it would be madness to attempt taking sheep farther inland, [...] I resolved that after shearing I would remain in doubt no longer, but saddle my horse, take as much provision with me as I could, and go and see for myself. [...] Even if I did not find country, might I not find gold, or diamonds, or copper, or silver?" (Butler 1872: 7). The first signs to be deciphered are the features of the unknown geography 'over the range', of the wilderness with which he engages a struggle for survival. Feeling cut off from human life, he begins to doubt his own identity and the continuity of his past and present existence, until he feels overwhelmed by the silent, gloomy rocks in the wilderness. Butler marks the beginning of Higgs's process of acculturation through an initiation rite, which emblematizes the mental and psychological bewilderment experienced by the traveller, no longer able to use his own national and cultural points of reference. The moaning statues symbolize the first, overpowering ordeal of otherness, from which the English settler slowly recovers through gradual familiarization with the Erewhonian environment. The emphasis is on identification by nomination:

> The more I looked at everything in the house, the more I was struck with its quasi-European character. [...] And yet everything was slightly different. It was much the same with the birds and flowers on the other side, as compared with the English ones. On my arrival I had been pleased at noticing that nearly all the plants and birds were very like common English ones: thus, there was a robin, and a lark, and a wren, and daisies, and dandelions; not quite the same as the English, but still very like them—quite like enough to be called by the same name; so now, here, the ways of these two men, and the things they had in the house, were all very nearly the same as in Europe. It was not at all

> like going to China or Japan, where everything that one sees is strange. I was, indeed, at once struck with the primitive character of their appliances, for they seemed to be some five or six hundred years behind Europe in their inventions; but this is the case in many an Italian village. (*idem*: 40)

> Then I had another visitor […]. He brought a book with him, and pens and paper – all very English; and yet, neither paper, nor printing, nor binding, nor pen, nor ink, were quite the same as ours. (*idem*: 49)

Higgs' appreciation of Erewhon is mediated by successive acts of nomination, which show his reliance on the English idiom as the master language. Higgs' Englishness emerges from the ways in which the relationships between signifier and signified revolve around himself as an English speaker. Butler describes an Englishman who perceives the objects, plants, and creatures in the utopian place as "all very English", yet, not complete in their Englishness. Not only do slight differences and partial correspondences convey the traveller's sense of estrangement, they also highlight the degree of proximity to Englishness. When he starts learning the foreign language, he does not appreciate it *per se* but uses it instrumentally, as a tool for communication and cultural mediation.

In the famous lecture "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?" delivered at the Sorbonne in 1882, Ernest Renan claimed that languages are historical formations and as such do not reveal much about the blood of their speakers, nor do they play a significant role when human bonds are formed. Thus, language is not a highly indicative racial mark (Renan 1882: 21). Renan highlighted that feelings are universal and words in different languages refer to the same things, overlooking that acts of nomination vary and differ. The ways in which tangible and intangible things acquire a name are rooted in distinct cultural systems. National identity involves the acceptance of conventional connections between the world and the words through which it can be nominated and described.

Erewhonian things are mentioned whenever they match the things Higgs can relate to in his native country, and everything Erewhonian is understood in relation to everything English. His 'compare and contrast' exercise can be better understood by focusing on *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement*, where he articulates a fine analysis of the similarities and differences between British and Australian English:

> The all-engrossing topics seemed to be sheep, horses, dogs, cattle, English grasses, paddocks, bush, and so forth. [...] A few expressions were not familiar to me. When we should say in England "Certainly not," it is here "No fear," or "Don't YOU believe it." When they want to answer in the affirmative they say "It is SO," "It does SO." The word "hum," too, without pronouncing the U, is in amusing requisition. I perceived that this stood either for assent, or doubt, or wonder, or a general expression of comprehension without compromising the hummer's own opinion, and indeed for a great many more things than these; in fact, if a man did not want to say anything at all he said "hum hum." It is a very good expression, and saves much trouble when its familiar use has been acquired. Beyond these trifles I noticed no Yankeeism, and the conversation was English in point of expression. I was rather startled at hearing one gentleman ask another whether he meant to wash this year, and receive the answer "No." I soon discovered that a person's sheep are himself. If his sheep are clean, he is clean. He does not wash his sheep before shearing, but he washes; and, most marvellous of all, it is not his sheep which lamb, but he "lambs down" himself. (Butler 1863: 31-32)

Butler's sensitivity to idiomatic expressions, idiolects and linguistic mannerisms is a fine example of sociolinguistics: the slightly diverse ways of speaking, dialoguing, emphasising and referring to activities in England and in Australia point to specific and peculiar attitudes in different geographical and cultural environments.

IV. Nation and Evolution

A discourse more overtly ideological than the one constructed around the master language stems from sociology and anthropology appropriating evolutionary theories. British newspapers and periodicals dating from 1880 to 1914 reveal the spreading of a brand of nationalism, which misread and exploited Darwin's theories on natural selection. Evolutionism pseudo-scientifically applied to social thought and reformulated as social Darwinism was predicated upon the idea that, since mankind was not naturally inclined to peace, only morally and physically superior beings would be able to survive the eternal antagonism among the races (Spencer 1857: 445-465). In *The Descent of Man* (1871) Charles Darwin was very cautious about suggesting that there could be a connection between natural selection and race, and above all about acknowledging innate racial attitudes to expansion and dominion over other races:

> It is very difficult to say why one civilized nation rises, becomes more powerful, and spreads more widely, than another; or why the same nation progresses more quickly at one time than at another. We can only say that it depends on an increase in the actual number of the population, on the number of the men endowed with great intellectual and moral faculties, as well as on their standard of excellence. Corporeal structure appears to have little influence, except so far as vigour of body leads to vigour of mind. (Darwin 1871: 177)

The core of Darwin's argument is that there exists such a thing as the supremacy of one nation over another, but the tentative exposition of his hypotheses testifies to his awareness that acknowledging traits of national identity based on alleged natural racial propensities or qualities would invite ideological manipulations.

Butler initially gained credit within the scientific community thanks to his contribution to the debate on evolutionism. The intellectual energies he devoted to the study of natural selection and evolution originated from his determination to understand the origin and purpose of life by adopting scientific methods that should bypass religious fideism. A fervent supporter of Darwin's theories soon after his arrival in New Zealand in 1859, he made a point of publicly declaring himself a Darwinian in 1872.[2] By 1879, after studying the passionate counterarguments expressed by eminent biologist St. George Jackson Mivart in *On the Genesis of Species* (1871), he rejected Darwinism[3] and became a strong advocate of neo-Lamarckism. Butler's doubt is already evident in *Life and Habit* (1878), and the following *Evolution, Old and New* (1879), *Unconscious Memory* (1880), and *Luck or Cunning* (1887) are unforgiving critical anatomies of Darwinism. As Darwin failed to provide an explanation for the variations on which natural selection worked, Butler discarded the notion of chance and proposed that creatures respond to needs, acquiring necessary habits and organs which they pass on to their offspring as unconscious memories. The principle of life force allowed Butler to reintroduce teleology, expunging God's design.

The Descent of Man and *Erewhon* were both published in 1871. Butler's reception of Darwin's evolutionary theories resonates throughout the utopian narrative. While Butler ridicules evolutionary theories transformed into sociological and anthropological laws, his

argument leaves the reader wondering to what extent he undermines or shares the Victorian belief that specific features of national identity would allow Great Britain to achieve supreme colonial and imperial power.

> Even a potato in a dark cellar has a certain low cunning about him which serves him in excellent stead. He knows perfectly well what he wants and how to get it. He sees the light coming from the cellar window and sends his shoots crawling straight thereto: they will crawl along the floor and up the wall and out at the cellar window; if there be a little earth anywhere on the journey he will find it and use it for his own ends. […] He that is stronger and better placed than I shall overcome me, and him that is weaker I will overcome. (Butler 1872: 193-194)

By playing with the idea that every living species, even the most basic ones like plants or vegetables, possesses the faculty of struggling for survival, he turns the survival of the fittest into a paradoxical hyperbole. Although *Erewhon* shows Butler's adherence to Darwinism, the life struggle of a potato provides a fine example of how an over-interpretation of evolutionism can generate mockery.

Butler targeted the Victorian discourse on race revolving around the innate disposition to dominate, prosper and subject uncivilised populations, attributed to the British (Mock 1981). In "Lucubratio Ebria" he overemphasises the notion of national identity as the result of both nature and biological evolution, and conjures up a typical Victorian bourgeois equipped with the quintessential Victorian paraphernalia:

> By the institutions and state of science under which a man is born it is determined whether he shall have the limbs of an Australian savage or those of a nineteenth century Englishman. The former is supplemented with little save a rug and a javelin; the latter varies his physique with the changes of the season, with age, and with advancing or decreasing wealth. If it is wet he is furnished with an organ which is called an umbrella and which seems designed for the purpose of protecting either his clothes or his lungs from the injurious effects of rain. His watch is of more importance to him than a good deal of his hair, at any rate than of his whiskers; besides this he carries a knife, and generally a pencil case. His memory goes in a pocket book. (Butler 1926: 51)

This is the ironic portrayal of a human type whose specificity is to be found in

features of national and cultural identity. His emphasis on essentialism reaches its climax in a hyperbolic distinction between exposure to the natural environment and lack of sophistication, which point to the savagery of the Australian savage, and conformity to an established cultural model and acceptance of definite social behaviours, which exhibit an Englishman's Englishness. The Englishman portrayed in "Lucubratio Ebria" anticipates the Englishman in "Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation?": "Un Anglais est bien un type dans l'ensemble de l'humanité. Or le type de ce qu'on appelle très improprement la race anglo-saxonne n'est ni le Breton du temps de César, ni l'Anglo-Saxon de Hengist, ni le Danois de Knut, ni le Normand de Guillaume le Conquérant; c'est la résultante de tout cela" (Renan 1882: 17).[4] Renan deconstructs the notion of *ethnie* as a fixed, immutable genetic heritage, and chooses the English people to exemplify the composite, multiple identity of a national type. Butler's and Renan's reflections shed light into the circulation of the debate on national identity and national stereotypes in nineteenth-century Europe.

V. Nation and Religion

Butler delves into the connections between race and religion and shows how religious consensus, one of the most powerful factors of national cohesion, served Great Britain's imperialistic ideology. The spiritual unity of the crown and the nation was emphasised to explain and validate the British vocation to expand its territories by taking advantage of the missionary spirit inherited from Puritanism. The christening of Chowbok parodies the subjection of the native through an act of conversion performed by the coloniser.

> I thought of Chowbok. […] I had set my heart upon making him a real convert to the Christian religion […]. I used to catechize him by our camp fire, and explain to him the mysteries of the Trinity and of original sin […]. Indeed, on one occasion I had even gone so far as to baptize him […]. I then set myself to work to instruct him in the deeper mysteries of our belief, and to make him, not only in name, but in heart a Christian. […] Indeed, on the evening of the same day that I baptized him he tried for the twentieth time to steal the brandy, which made me rather unhappy as to whether I could have baptized him rightly. (Butler 1872: 35-36)

CADERNOS DE
LITERATURA COMPARADA

The zeal of the missionary is further ridiculed through Higgs' conjectures about the discovery of the lost ten tribes of Israel waiting to return to Palestine, which would transform him into a brilliant anthropologist, and about the conversion of all the Erewhonians, which would make him the beneficiary of an eternal reward as well as of a personal profit. The result is the metamorphosis of the utopian journey into a parody of an imperialist enterprise disguised as a religious mission.

> To restore the lost ten tribes of Israel to a knowledge of the only truth: here would be indeed an immortal crown of glory! [...] What a position would it not ensure me in the next world; or perhaps even in this! [...] I should rank next to the Apostles, if not as high as they—certainly above the minor prophets, and possibly above any Old Testament writer except Moses and Isaiah. [...] I had always cordially approved of missionary efforts. (Butler 1872: 51)

The utopian traveller becomes the evangeliser, the catechiser, the baptiser, the missionary. He fulfils noble tasks, makes amends, and calculates the moral profits of the religious enterprise to be pursued after the unsuccessful start with Chowbok. By ironically presenting a racist attitude as a form of religious humanitarianism, Butler draws attention to an idea of nation constructed on race and empire and suggests that in the last decades of the nineteenth century religion was losing its authentic cohesive force. While parodying the missionary spirit supported by an imperialist ideology, Butler mocks the construction of 'good Englishness' based on the innate leading role of England: "I will guarantee that I convert the Erewhonians not only into good Christians but into a source of considerable profit to the shareholders" (259).

Arrogance, hypocrisy, and utilitarianism eventually stand out as the specific traits of national identity, on which Butler constructs Higgs' colonialist attitude. His journey indicates a British colonial enterprise disguised as a mission pursuing the advancement of civilisation and validated by a pseudo evangelical attitude.

CADERNOS DE
LITERATURA COMPARADA

VI. Butler's New Zealand, New Zealand Now

By describing a society founded on the reversal of the norms and customs Higgs is accustomed to, Butler follows the paradigm of the utopian genre, which presupposes a thorough critique of the social system belonging to the traveller's native country. Yet, while Higgs's journey becomes a colonial enterprise, Butler's extensive use of paradox raises doubts as to whether the imperialistic traveller, who draws constant comparisons between the Erewhonian and the English society and believes that English parameters are superior, coincides with the author.

The utopian genre allows Butler to imagine England through a looking glass, which reflects everything he identifies with and takes distance from. Being within and outside allows him to discuss English national identity as it gradually emerges though expressions of cultural habits, racism, and imperial hegemony. The duality between England and its reverse is rooted in the double identity of the author himself: Butler targets Higgs, but cannot help mirroring himself in the characterization of his protagonist. Butler is always oscillating between detachment and identification, playing with the deconstruction of Englishness and its acknowledgement. The *pars destruens* characterised by satire and parody challenges the *pars construens* and, while the British Empire mirrored in Erewhon is dis- and re-located, the question remains as to whether Englishness is confirmed more than it is deconstructed.

Myth and reality coexist, thriving upon one another, in the idea of nation. New Zealand was powerfully mythicised in the nineteenth century and its myth of foundation has been constantly reinforced. The dualities highlighted by Butler define the de/construction of New Zealand's identity in the contemporary age, in which bipolar attitudes towards national identities have been exacerbated, generating fixations and integralism while borders are redefined by transnational flows of financial investments and cultural cross-fertilizations. The beginning of the new millennium was marked by the awareness that the myth of New Zealand's perfection called for comparative investigations encompassing contemporary literature, cinema and politics, while the significance of the

land for the symbolic and political construction of New Zealand invited new critical attention:

> What is New Zealand? A series of communities cemented by sport (particularly rugby), a clean, green pastoral paradise, a place of predominantly Maori cultural inheritance or a nation of enterprising capitalists? The stridency with which different versions of the 'real' New Zealand are asserted reveals an absence of consensus, and perhaps a fear that the nation no longer exists as an easily recognisable collective entity. (Brown 1997: http://www.kakapobooks.co.uk/books2.htm)

> The formation of national identity involves the acceptance of certain myths. Inherent within New Zealand culture are the myths of the white-settler pioneer and the mastery of nature, the DIY Kiwi bloke, an enterprise culture that favours a 'have-a-go' spirit, and a pastoral paradise that is clean and green. The most dominant and persistent New Zealand myth is of an Edenic garden, an Arcadian pasture, a natural utopia. Initially, this concept was fabricated as nineteenth century propaganda to attract *emigrés* and European settlers. (Conrich and Woods 2000: 8)

It is remarkable that these contemporary views echo Butler's own assessment of New Zealand in *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement*. Matter-of-factness, pragmatism, utilitarianism, spontaneity, and lack of sophistication are noted and appreciated as the shared traits of the settlers.

> New Zealand seems far better adapted to develop and maintain in health the physical than the intellectual nature. The fact is, people here are busy making money; [...] There is little conventionalism, little formality, and much liberality of sentiment; very little sectarianism, and, as a general rule, a healthy, sensible tone in conversation, which I like much. But it does not do to speak about John Sebastian Bach's 'Fugues,' or pre-Raphaelite pictures. (Butler 1863: 51)

> I am forgetting myself into admiring a mountain which is of no use for sheep. This is wrong. A mountain here is only beautiful if it has good grass on it. Scenery is not scenery—it is 'country,' *subauditâ voce* 'sheep.' If it is good for sheep, it is beautiful, magnificent, and all the rest of it; if not, it is not worth looking at. (*idem*: 51)

While indicating that life and nature in New Zealand may offer an enticing alternative to the conventional aspects of English life, Butler offers his most valuable

recommendation about the prerequisites needed to cope with this antipodean country: money, good sense, self-respect, and strength of purpose. Erewhon like New Zealand like England like Utopia.

Notes

[1] The articles published by the historian James A. Froude in *Frazer's Magazine* and Alfred Tennyson's celebration of "our ocean-empire with her boundless homes" in "To the Queen" (1851) show the wide consensus gained by Disraeli's project of Great Britain's overseas expansion and formation of a world empire controlled by London.

[2] See Samuel Butler's "Preface to Second Edition," dating to 9 June 1872: "I regret that reviewers have in some cases been inclined to treat the chapters on Machines as an attempt to reduce Mr. Darwin's theory to an absurdity. Nothing could be further from my intention, and few things would be more distasteful to me than any attempt to laugh at Mr. Darwin … The only question in my mind was how far *I* could afford to be misrepresented as laughing at that for which I have the most profound admiration" (Butler 1872, revised edition: 4).

[3] In 1879 Darwin published a revised version of Erasmus Darwin's biography by Ernst Krause with his own lengthy essay on Erasmus and Butler accused Darwin of including without explanation a strong attack on him. Following the advice of friends such as Thomas Huxley, Darwin did not respond to Butler, who was shunned by the scientific community.

[4] "An Englishman is indeed a type within the whole of humanity. However, the type of what is improperly called the Anglo-Saxon race is neither the Briton of Julius Caesar's time, nor the Anglo-Saxon of Hengist's time, nor the Dane of Canute's time, nor the Norman of William the Conqueror's time; it is rather the result of all these [elements]" (Ernest Renan 1990: 15).

Bibliography

Bell, Claudia (1996), *Inventing New Zealand: Everyday Myths of Pakeha Identity*, Auckland, Penguin Books.

Brown, Ruth (1997), *Cultural Questions: New Zealand Identity in a Transnational Age*, London, Kakapo Books.

Butler, Samuel (1863), *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement*, London, Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green.

-- (1926), "Lucubratio Ebria" [From the Press, 29 July, 1865], in *The Note-Books of Samuel Butler.* Selections arranged and edited by Henry Festing Jones, London, Jonathan Cape.

-- (1872), *Erewhon or over the Range*, London, Trübner and Co.

-- (1872), *Erewhon. Erewhon Revisited*, Revised Edition, Introduction by Desmond MacCarthy, London, Dent.

-- (1878), *Life and Habit*, London, Trübner & Co.

-- (1879), *Evolution, Old and New; or, the Theories of Buffon, Dr. Erasmus Darwin, and Lamarck, as compared with that of Mr. Charles Darwin*, London, Hardwicke & Bogue.

-- (1880), *Unconscious Memory; a comparison between the theory of Dr. Ewald Hering ... and the "Philosophy of the Unconscious" of Dr. Edward von Hartmann*, London, David Bogue.

-- (1887), *Luck, or Cunning, as the Main Means of Organic Modification? An attempt to throw additional light upon the late Mr. Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection*, London, Trübner & Co.

-- (1917), *Erewhon or Over the Range*, E. P. Dutton & Co.

Conrich, Ian and David Woods (2000), "Introduction" to *New Zealand: A Pastoral Paradise? Studies in New Zealand Culture*, ed. Ian Conrich and David Woods, Clifton, Kakapo Books, 8-10.

Cosgrove, Denis E. (1984), *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, Madison, The U of Wisconsin P.

Cosgrove, Denis/ Stephen Daniels (eds.) (1988), *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design, and Use of Past Environments*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP.

Darwin, Charles (1871), *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex. In Two Volumes*, Volume 1, London, John Murray.

Eldridge, Colin C. (1973), *England's Mission, The Imperial Idea in the Age of Gladstone and Disraeli 1868-1880*, London, Macmillan.

Garrett, John Charles (1984), *Hope or Disillusion. Three Versions of Utopia. Nathaniel Hawthorne, Samuel Butler, George Orwell*, Christchurch, NZ, U of Canterbury Publications Committee.

Jones, Joseph Jay (1959), *The Cradle of Erewhon; Samuel Butler in New Zealand*, Austin, U of Texas P.

Maling, Peter Bromley, ed. (1960), *Samuel Butler at Mesopotamia, together with Butler's 'Forest Creek' Manuscript and his Letters to Tripp and Acland* [With plates, including a portrait], Wellington, R. E. Owen.

Marwick, Arthur (1989), *The Nature of History*, London, Macmillan [1970].

Mitchell, W. J. T. (2002), *Landscape and Power*, Chicago, U of Chicago P [1994].

Mock, Wolfgang (1981), "The Function of Race in Imperialist Ideologies", in *Nationalist and Racial Movements in Britain and Germany before 1914*, ed. Paul M. Kennedy and Anthony Nicholls, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 190-203.

Morrell, William Parker (1969), *British Colonial Policy in the Mid-Victorian Age: South Africa. New Zealand. The West Indies*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Perry, Nick (1994), *The Dominion of Signs: Television, Advertising and Other New Zealand Fictions*, Auckland, Auckland UP.

271

Renan, Ernest (1882), "Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation?" Conférence faite en Sorbonne, le 11 mars 1882, Paris, Calmann-Lévy.

-- (1990), "What is a Nation?", in *Nation and Narration*, ed. H. K. Bhabha, London and New York, Macmillan, translated and annotated by Martin Thom, 8-21.

Schulze, Hagen (1994), *Staat und Nation in der europäischen Geschichte*, München, C.H. Beck Verlag.

Spencer, Herbert (1857), "Progress: Its Law and Causes", *The Westminster Review*, Vol. 67, April, 445-465.

Taylor, Miles (2016), "The British Royal Family and the Colonial Empire from the Georgians to Prince George", in *Crowns and Colonies: European Monarchies and Overseas Empires*, ed. Robert Aldrich and Cindy McCreery, Oxford, Oxford UP, 27-50.

Von Ranke, Leopold (1867-1890), *Zur Geschichte Deutschlands und Frankreichs im 19. Jahrhundert*, *Sämtliche Werke*, 54 vols, Leipzig, Duncker & Humblot, vol. XLIX/L.

Paola Spinozzi é Professora Associada de Literatura Inglesa da Universidade de Ferrara. A sua investigação incide sobre as teorias e metodologias dos estudos verbais e visuais. É autora de *Sopra il reale. Osmosi interartistiche nel Preraffaellitismo e nel Simbolismo inglese* (Firenze: Alinea, 2005) e co-autora, com E. Bizzotto, de *The Germ. Origins and Progenies of Pre-Raphaelite Interart Aesthetics* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012). Spinozzi debruça-se sobre as representações literárias de teorias científicas e, em colaboração com B. Hurwitz, é editora de *Discourses and Narrations in the Biosciences* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2011). Desenvolve também investigação na área da utopia em torno de questões de arte e de estética, imperialismo, racismo, Darwinismo e pós-apocalipse, sendo editora de *Histoire*

transnationale de l'utopie littéraire et de l'utopisme (Paris: Champion, 2008), em colaboração com V. Fortunati e R. Trousson. Uma outra área de investigação a que se dedica é a da sustentabilidade nas humanidades e, neste contexto, é editora, com M. Mazzanti, de *Cultures of Sustainability and Wellbeing: Theories, Histories, Policies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

CADERNOS DE
LITERATURA COMPARADA