UTOPIA, RELIGION AND DISSENT IN ROBERT WILLIAMS BUCHANAN'S *THE REV. ANNABEL LEE: A TALE OF TO-MORROW*

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the novel *The Rev. Annabel Lee: a Tale of to-Morrow* (1898) by Robert Williams Buchanan, focusing on the conflict between a secular utopian society of the future, built on the principles of Comtean Positivism, Owenite Socialism and Social Darwinism, and a Christian revivalist movement led by a female preacher. While exploring the connections between gender, social engineering, and faith, the article also interrogates ambiguities implicit in two conflicting worldviews which are dependent, respectively, on science and a revealed religion.

Keywords: literary utopia; Christianity; evolution; science; eugenics.

RESUMO

Este artigo analisa o romance *The Rev. Annabel Lee: a Tale of to-Morrow* (1898) de Robert Williams Buchanan, concentrando-se no conflito entre uma sociedade utópica secular futura, baseada nos princípios do positivismo comteano, do socialismo owenita e do darwinismo social, e um movimento revivalista cristão liderado por uma pregadora. Explorando as ligações entre género, engenharia social e fé, o artigo interroga também as ambiguidades implícitas em duas cosmovisões em conflito, que dependem, respetivamente, da ciência e da religião revelada.

Palavras-chave: utopia literária; Cristianismo; evolução; ciência; eugenia.

Robert Williams Buchanan is mostly remembered today, if at all, as the fierce Scottish ogre of a critic who disparaged the poetry of Charles Algernon Swinburne and Dante Gabriel Rossetti as immoral and who allegedly contributed to the latter's suicide attempt (for details see Cassidy, 1973: 37-58). Irrespective of his role in the so-called Fleshly Controversy of 1871, Buchanan was a poet, playwright, and fiction writer in his own right. He was also, like many of his contemporaries, a conflicted man. His admiration for Comtean Positivism and Owenite Socialism, as well as the religious scepticism inculcated in him by his Owenite upbringing, were pitted against his profound anxiety as an outcast from Christianity and his yearning for transcendence (Cassidy, 1973: 34-35). This inner conflict found its way into the novel *The Rev. Annabel Lee: A Tale of to-Morrow* (1898), a work virtually neglected by scholars, which depicts a scientific utopia of the future, gradually undermined by the forces of a Christian revival led by a woman, Annabel Lee[1], whose followers long for consolation offered by spirituality and the promise of afterlife.

This article analyses the utopian aspects of Buchanan's imagined society, which has been engineered through the application of some scientific and philosophical ideas of his own day, more specifically the theories of Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Charles Darwin, and Francis Galton. The article also interrogates the ambiguity implicit both in the apparently eutopian[2] new world and in the forces of the aforementioned religious revival that seek to

[1] The name of the character echoes that of the eponymous character of Edgar Allan Poe's poem "Annabel Lee". The connection is established by means of an epigraph on the novel's title page. The two texts are linked by the idea of immortality, which in Buchanan's novel is specifically religious in nature, while in Poe it is the immortality of love between the young lovers even after one of them, the beautiful woman Annabel Lee, dies.

[2] I use the terms "utopia" and "eutopia" after Lyman Tower Sargent: "[Utopia is a] non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space. In standard usage utopia is used both as defined here and as an equivalent for eutopia or a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived" (Sargent, 2010: 6).

overthrow and replace it. Key in this respect will be the examination of the role of Christianity as a vehicle of dissent and the champion of the rights of the excluded, but also as a potential cause of violence and oppression, as the anthropocentric utopian order based on prevailing rationality and science is increasingly threatened by its ideological opposite, a theocracy underpinned by Christian eschatology.

In the novel, the world of the 21st century is objectively the fulfilment of humanity's dreams regarding health, education, social and gender equality, and peace, all effected by the careful and methodical application of scientific principles to social engineering. As the narrator informs us: "Man was master of the world and of his own destiny, and Science, by abolishing nearly all the evils which had devastated the earth for so many centuries, had produced an almost perfect race" (13)[3]. Darwin and Spencer are explicitly mentioned as philosophical inspirations (66), but the construction of the future society is equally indebted to the voluntarist strand of evolutionism represented by Francis Galton's theories of positive and negative eugenics. Other important inspirations include Comte's Positivist philosophy and his Religion of Humanity, as well as the Socialism and reformist propositions of Robert Owen, Buchanan's formative influence (see Cassidy, 1973: 16-21).

In this Darwinist, Positivist, eugenic utopia of "the New Race", thanks to the successful alteration of the physical and psychological qualities of the population, diseases and crime have been eradicated, leading to the sublimation of the species at large. The (un)natural selection of desirable traits at the level of the individual has therefore resulted in the general overhaul of humankind and its social formations and activities. Considering its biologically determined character, the future society offers a perfect embodiment of the idea of functionalism, dating back to Comte and Spencer, which, as Anthony Giddens notes, looks to biology as "a guide to conceptualizing the structure and the functioning of social systems and to analysing processes of evolution

[3] All references to and quotations from Buchanan's novel come from the 1898 edition, published in London by C. Arthur Pearson. The page numbers will be given in parenthesis.

via mechanisms of adaptation", and which "emphasize[s] the pre-eminence of the social whole over its individual parts" (1986: 1). Accordingly, Buchanan's utopian society is a seamlessly working organism, driven by its acquiescence to the existing norms and its recognition of a common purpose: "everywhere the sun shone down on happy human organisations, familiar with the laws of life, and eager in the pursuit of social happiness" (14)[4].

By the same token, owing to the elimination of baser instincts and thus competition, science has ensured unity at a global level, obliterating political conflicts and leading to universal peace. We learn that with "arbitrary differences between the countries [being] abolished" and monarchies changed into representative democracies, there is no longer any threat of an international war (65). In the vein of utopian societies following the tradition of Plato's *Republic* and Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, Buchanan's world, too, is ruled by men of science and learning: "men of every nationality [are] devoting themselves, under the guidance of Wise Men elected by popular suffrage, to the perfection of social and moral institutions" (65). Thirty such Philosophers (or Wise Men) govern Europe (65), which constitutes "a body of free and united states existing in close political conjunction with the other Free States beyond the Ocean" (65), a kind of forerunner of the European Union and its transatlantic alliances. Europe and "the Free States beyond the Ocean" (65) are in turn part of "one vast Terrestrial Federation", whose unity and peaceful coexistence is underscored by regular air connections between the continents, with flights lasting only a few hours (66-67).

The above reflections bring to mind Krishan Kumar's theses on the 19th-century transformations of the utopian genre, whose depictions of the progress and infinite perfectibility of humankind are indebted to the writings of Turgot and Condorcet, which, in turn, inspired Comte's Positive Philosophy (1991: 44). Moreover, the concept of science as instrumental to

[4] Buchanan's vision dovetails with Auguste Comte's views on the progress of humanity, or the Great Being, towards harmonious transcendent unity and universal order (see Manuel and Manuel, 1997: 727).

the development of an egalitarian, enlightened, and peaceful society of the future is symptomatic of the 19th-century development of Bacon's scientific utopia, which is now given "the dynamism of the historical process itself". Consequently, *eutopia* (a good place) turns into *euchronia* (a good time), and its scope is "world-wide", "beyond all national frontiers" (Kumar, 1991: 45-46).

As in Bacon and his utopian followers, the application of scientific principles to society has resulted in the economic well-being of all citizens, poverty being practically stamped out by the discovery of the true economics of Nutrition and its vital principle, which is considered "the first step towards perfection" (74). People can now survive on a chemical product that makes it sufficient to eat once per week, but, as one of the Wise Men, Auberon Shelley Espinosa[5], chief of the Department of Ethical Investigation, Archdoctor of Physics and Professor of Practical Causation (64-65), predicts, "[t]he time is coming when there may be no necessity to eat oftener than once a year" (67). "Man needs no longer his sacrifice of slaughtered beasts, or his endless pyramids of grain" (73), notes further Espinosa, equating old humanity with voracious ancient deities or tyrannical pharaohs, who treat nature as a slave to their insatiable appetites. Science, paradoxically, once a prime reason for humankind's Cartesian alienation from the natural world, which made them treat nature as an Other only fit for mastering, reaping and violence, now fosters a new environmental sensibility. In the world of the future, chemically produced food allows the new race to live ethically and ecologically, no longer pressing on the natural environment for its means of subsistence. Sustainable living has replaced the centuries-old exploitation of the planet and other living creatures, and the politics of squeezing the land into increased productivity at the cost of imbalance of its various ecosystems. Eating is no longer a chief pleasure in life, as often happened in the past. Neither is drinking, which, according to Espinosa, poisoned three-fourths of

[5] The name "Shelley" connotes with Mary Shelley and her novel *Frankenstein*, whose eponymous character can be treated as a precursor of the Promethean plasticators of humankind in *The Rev. Annabel Lee*. The surname Espinosa obviously calls to mind the philosopher Baruch Spinoza (Espinosa), a chief representative of 17th-century Rationalism.

the world's population back in the 19th century, leading to rampant crime and psychiatric problems (74). The changed relationship between humans and the natural world affects their relationship with their own bodies, eliminating unhealthy excess and addictions in eating and drinking, and re-orientating the pursuit of pleasure and fulfilment into other directions. Thus, scientific methods which fine-tuned human consumption have taken the strain off the world of nature on the one hand, and contributed to social peace on the other. Humanity may have subdued the world, as Annabel notes (49), but by subduing it, they have also set it free[6].

The novel's preoccupation with the environment and its impact on individuals and communities, and vice-versa, is also reflected in the balance between the urban and the rural as regards the living space. Buchanan's novel is set in London, now simply called the Great City, in which the main cultural opposition of many early utopian texts, namely the one between nature and civilisation, is obliterated (see Blaim, 2013: 146). Future London is a city of clean white buildings, parks, flowery gardens, lakes, and open spaces; the great River (i.e. the Thames) is crystal clear, and one can drink its water without risk (50). This image is juxtaposed with the pictures of 19th-century London viewed by Annabel in a public library, in which both the city and the river are ugly, polluted, and dismal (51).

The future city-planners have none of Francis Galton's concerns about the dangers connected with the urban spaces and their tendency to "sterilise rural vigour" in the population (1909: 27). There are "no slums, no beggars, no sickly children" in the Great City, only clean and pretty houses (79). The society's focus on bodily and mental health is further underscored by classes given to pupils outdoors, and by open-air gymnasiums, where young men and women can exercise and use "appliances of all descriptions for testing and perfecting the vital conditions of the human body" (63). One can hear echoes

[6] The aforementioned aspects of utopian foodways can be found in a number of 19th-century utopian texts in which ethical, ecological, and hygienic preoccupations foster the development of artificial nutrients and pave the way to restrictions on meat consumption (see Ramos 2019: 166-167; cf. Belasco, 2006: 107, 112-116).

of Robert Owen: his recognition of the importance of outdoor education and play, as well as his idea of social regeneration as being predicated on the balance between the urban and the rural, which features prominently in his plan for cooperative villages (see Owen, 1991: 41, 111-112, 167-169, 233-235; and Donnachie, 2005: 169). The influence of Owen's Socialism and views on the equality of the sexes (see Manuel & Manuel, 1997: 690) can also be detected in the egalitarian organisation of education, labour, and leisure (79).

Society being as healthy as each of its citizens, it is not surprising that marriage and reproduction in the future are regulated by strictly observed Social-Darwinist laws, a principle found in many late Victorian utopias which can be traced, however, as far back as Thomas Robert Malthus (Claeys, 2019: 165; for details about utopia, evolution, and Social Darwinism see Claeys, 2009: xiv-xxiv and 2017: 295-302). As the chief principle of the social organisation is "the survival of only the fittest" (49), the future society aims at the reproduction of desirable characteristics and the elimination of undesirable ones. Couples are matched on the basis of their physical and intellectual equality, with the necessary certificate of physical perfection from the Holy Office of Health obtained before marriage. The age limit for marriage is 25-50 years in the case of men, and 21-35 in the case of women, conforming to "the prescribed form of marriage, a form which was under the direct guidance and control of the First State, or philosophical Chamber" (61). The eugenic laws, which we learn were especially stringent in the past, have produced a race of physically and intellectually perfect men and women. However, some atavisms still appear here and there in the form of congenital diseases, but those are, at least officially, tackled with the utmost severity and immediacy. According to the doctrine of Elimination, "the eternal, the unimpeachable wisdom which forbade the Unfit to propagate their kind" (236), all weak or disabled children are euthanized after birth. So are usually those who suffer grave injuries ruling out complete recovery and fitness. Those, however, who are allowed to live, because of some special talents or usefulness to society, have their names inscribed in the Book of the Unfit, which means they have to stay celibate, and any infringement on this order or a revealed and persistent intention of acting against it, are punishable with

death. As one of the Wise Men remarks: "The stream of Humanity must not be polluted by the dregs of the sanatorium" (158).

It is this eugenic ruthlessness implicit in the otherwise benevolent social order that leads the eponymous character to look up to Christianity as a model of true compassion and to engage in a rebellion against the new world which has put Man in place of God. Interestingly, the unquestionable achievements of humanity are not lost on Annabel Lee, especially when she considers the world as it was back in the 19th century: rife with cruelty, injustice, human and environmental degradation, backward and driven by greed and war (45-46). The utilitarian objective of the greatest good for the greatest number of people has indeed been attained, Science, "like a beneficent angel" (55), having largely removed pain and suffering from human life. However, it has also claimed, through its "beneficent tyrannies" (49), the lives of innocent victims, whose existence was terminated in state laboratories and Halls of Euthanasia. Moreover, as both life and death are regarded as merely scientific phenomena, tied to the natural world with no hope of continuity beyond the grave, feelings such as love and grief have practically disappeared from human relationships, being considered excessive and unhealthy. Annabel knows it from experience. When she was a small girl, she suffered a great loss with which she has never come to terms: her ten-year-old brother Eric died of some previously undetected congenital disease. Her childlike grief, misunderstood by the adults, for whom Eric's death was a natural case and thus inevitable, was only assuaged by the glimpse of the supernatural and eschatological offered to her by a crippled boy, Uriel Rose,[7] an unfit musician of exceptional talents who was given to religious thinking. Finding consolation in her belief in life after death, Annabel cannot help feeling that the social order which elevates science to the position of religion deprives people of solace and hope, and truncates their "natural" emotions. Moreover, it is insensitive to the pain of the afflicted few, "the stragglers from the glad

[7] The name harks back to Archangel Uriel, the Archangel of prophecy, and means "fire of God" (Webster, 2012: 201).

march of Humanity" (122) – the bereaved parents and spouses, the incurably ill children, the crippled and the outcast like her friend Uriel – with whom Annabel feels close affinity due to her personal tragedy and whom she offers the consolation of the Gospel (40-41).

It is worth mentioning that the society of the future has its established religion called the Religion of Humanity, deriving from a Positivist concept by Auguste Comte, with Churches and Temples where "men and women worshipped all that was best and beautiful in human character, all that shed peace and happiness on the human race" (38). The Temples of Humanity have paintings and statues representing ancient philosophers, spiritual leaders, reformers, artists, writers, and men of medicine (e.g. Gautama, Aristotle, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, Shakespeare, Comte, Owen, Dickens, or Florence Nightingale), "the shining spirits of the Race, the strong, the wise, the gentle, and the good", many of them martyrs, who contributed to the progress of humanity and its enlightenment, and whose spirit continues in and inspires the new race (113). Annabel, too, is initially drawn to such worship as a source of sympathy and inspiration. However, going on "errands of mercy" around the City as part of the semi-religious order Sacred Sisterhood, visiting the sick, the old, and those who suffered accidents, Annabel is brought into close contact with the invisible suffering of the modern world. It is then that she realises that the Religion of Humanity, which exalts perfection and progress, strength and happiness, is of little or no avail to this minority: "its appeals were to the wise and strong, not to the frail and the unfit" (41). Jesus, on the other hand, is painted by Annabel as "the great Revolter" against this kind of God, being himself "the God of Failure, Weakness, Pain, and Sorrow" (145), legitimising such human qualities and emotions and preaching the virtue of compassion. Annabel rejects the established Religion of Humanity as the creed that both originates in and justifies the ruthless scientific order. As she argues in a conversation with Espinosa, science has made people happier but not better, as it has killed man's Living Soul in its attempt to redress material needs like food and clothing, and to establish Heaven upon earth (159). Summoned before the Wise Men of the Holy Office, Annabel scorns the society's happiness, unmindful of sorrow and devoid of deeper reflection on the meaning of suffering (160).

Significantly, Christianity (and religion in general) is presented in the novel as a women's thing. At one point, Annabel reads an old book from 1890, which prophesies the end of Christianity as a completely impracticable theory of life "whose dogmas have retarded the progress of mankind" (43), a claim which, paradoxically, underlies the new order's criticism of old religious systems and their supernaturalism. The text also addresses some contemporaneous controversy concerning female priesthood, arguing that religion is bound to "fall more and more into the hands of the sex which is the less logical and the more impressionable". "Even now our clergymen exhibit many characteristics which might be described, without disrespect, as very feminine," the text continues. "In the near future the survival of Religion, especially in its supernatural form, may be due entirely to the fact that it will still continue to embody the vague hopes and yearnings of the more emotional half of the human race" (44-45).

However, the equation between religious feelings or vocation and alleged gender characteristics (women and effeminate men seen as irrational, unbalanced, governed by affect) also imputes a patriarchal/masculine origin of the new world without a supernatural religion, as it is based on science, which, along these lines of thinking, belongs to men (considered rational, unprejudiced, emotionless). As such, the Christian revival led by a woman acquires feminist undertones, as it becomes a rebellion against the scientific and "heartless" society devised and virtually run by men. It is a struggle for the right to mourn, to express "human" feelings over loss and suffering, and an equally human hope in continuity other than the material continuity of genes and human works.

This feminist connection becomes even more explicit in the following episode when Annabel puts on the robes of some ancient priest and looks at herself, "possibly the last Christian", in the mirror (52). She is surprised by Eustace Combermere, an illustrious young man and her (unwelcome) suitor, who tells her she is "much too clever and too beautiful to wear the livery of any creed", to which she angrily replies: "I am tired of being called beautiful. I should like to be unhappy, and ugly, and foolish, just for once!" (53). Her rebellion against the male gaze is at the same time a rebellion against the

principles underlying the perception of another person in the new society, and its cult of beauty, strength, physical attraction, and intellectual excellence as the markers of happiness. Eustace's ambitions concern worldly affairs, including marriage to Annabel, who is deliberately presented in the novel as the flower of the race, its highest eugenic success. Her interest, however, lies elsewhere: afraid of Death that closes all, she yearns for afterlife. Significantly, Eustace's attitude towards Annabel resonates with the prevalent 19th-century view that likened women's psychological qualities and responses to those of children: in an explicitly patriarchal/paternalistic manner, he treats Annabel's longings with "affectionate forbearance as one might show to a child" (54). This attitude is repeated later when he informs her of the potentially dire consequences that her preaching may have, comparing his good intentions to saving a child playing with fire (220). Her final opposition to him, when she declares angrily that she will marry Uriel, thus acting against the eugenic laws, is to a large extent a result of his patronizing attitude, as she desires "to match her strength against that of Eustace, and prove to him that she was no such child in his hands as he had fancied her to be" (226). Unsurprisingly, he comes to regard Annabel as "utterly unaccountable and out of the order of Nature" (71), i.e. nature as controlled by science and social engineering originated by men, which is only a more modern version of the evolutionary nature "red in tooth and claw", grinding down the weak on its way to a "brave new world".

Importantly, for Buchanan, oppression in its various forms is invariably connected with patriarchy and paternalism; "the male principle, so to speak, seem[s] to him selfish and predatory opposite to the female and humane qualities of love and sympathy," argues R. A. Forsyth (1969b: 401). By extension, the Father figure and evolutionary Nature are two sides of the same coin, God-Father being synonymous with "the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest" (Stodart-Walker, 1901: 8, cf. Forsyth, 1969b: 401). This view is voiced by Annabel, who associates the Spirit of Humanity with God the Father of the Old Testament: "the God of Strength and War and pitiless Evolution, the God whose voice was in the Sea and the thunder-cloud, and whose foot was on the neck of the weak and fallen"

(139). To this pitiless and cruel God, the "God of Strength and Happiness", whose modern face is one of eugenic perfection and hedonistic materialism, Annabel (and by implication Buchanan[8]) opposes Jesus Christ, "the God of Failure, Weakness, Pain, and Sorrow" (145).

If Christianity is a propensity of the kinder and more emotional of the sexes, it also appeals to those who have fallen through the cracks of the scientific utopia, namely those whose emotions have been necessarily suppressed in the new world, or to "many thoughtful men and dreamers of poetic temperament", the existence of whom has been overwritten by the official and unifying Positivist discourse of the centre represented by the Great City. Christianity activates such latent romantic tendencies "beneath the peaceful and contented surface" (161-162). Significantly, it also finds most followers on the peripheries of the state, in the North and West of the island. Especially in what used to be called the Lake District, Annabel's proselytizing incites widespread interest:

> The mountaineers and dalesmen, with their women-folk and children, lived sufficiently remote from the great centres of civilisation to be less under the control of its dominant ideas, and more under the influence of primitive thoughts and feelings. [T]he power of lonely Nature, which had been celebrated in centuries past by the great Dreamers of the Lakes, had not altogether departed. The hills were still there, and the solemn waters – indeed, the Wise Men of that period had been careful to preserve them inviolate, fully realising that many of the noblest yearnings of the race were developed in solitude. (174-175)

The reference to the Lake Poets and their nature mysticism is made with no apparent irony. As such, it may suggest something of Buchanan's own attitude to the literature of the 19th century, perhaps a preference for

[8] Buchanan compares Jesus to Prometheus, claiming that Jesus "led the war against Nature, against the God of Nature, […] the great unknown God who is at once the master and servant of His own inexorable Will" (after Stodart-Walker, 1901: 229).

Romanticism, for the Lake Poets' idealism, spirituality, and close connection to wild and untainted nature, rather than the later city poets of his own time, like Swinburne and Rossetti, whom he considered decadent[9]. The passage above can also be read in the context of the spirit of the times, and more specifically the shift in man's position in the universe that occurred in the Victorian Age, which was caused, as Forsyth notes, by the rise of evolutionism on the one hand, and by the technological progress connected with the harnessing of steam power and the resultant development of cities on the other:

> Hitherto the English ethos had been essentially rural and God-oriented, enshrined in a pattern of values and attitudes rooted in the soil, and ritualistically determined by the cyclic demands of seasons. With the emergence of the new man-made urban-industrial environment, however, this traditional ethos was steadily discredited as the real context of human endeavour. Understandably, the supplanted ethos became increasingly associated by many with nostalgia for a lost paradise of tranquil stability. And such feelings were heightened by the broad acceptance of the Romantic philosophy of natural idealism, more especially as presented by Wordsworth. […] The industrial city, in short, came to be the visible symbol of the reversal of the time-honoured relationship between God, Man, and Nature, necessitating in the process a new configuration of the components of that fundamental trinity. (1969a: 647-648)

Buchanan's obvious vindication of Romantic poetry and philosophy naturally entails a Romantic idealisation of common man as uncorrupted,

[9] Buchanan's early poetry is often imitative of Romantic poets like Burns, Keats and Wordsworth, who were highly respected by the Owenites (Cassidy, 1973: 81). Even some of his poetry of the city demonstrates Romantic influences in his use of conventional Romantic symbols and metaphors (for details see Thesing, 1981). Well-known was also Buchanan's dislike for the city itself: he saw London as an immoral place and as soon as his finances permitted, he would leave it for more rural locations such as Sussex, the Scottish Highlands, or County Mayo in Ireland (Murray, 1983: 20).

and of rural life as simpler, purer, and conducive to a more spiritual and intimate relation with God and the world. The "primitive thoughts and feelings" of the Northerners, a phrase which brings to mind the Wordsworthian conception of nature as man's moral and spiritual teacher, translate into their increased receptivity to Christianity and its teachings. Those are matched by the weakening of the central authority as regards the eugenic laws, which on the outskirts of the state are observed with more leniency. In his final accusatory speech in the Hall of Judgement, where Annabel and Uriel are facing trial for their intention of marriage, Eustace points out that while in the Great City (the centre) unequal relationships producing flawed offspring are virtually non-existent, in the North and West, they are overlooked by officials out of misguided "mercy", and children suffering from congenital diseases are allowed to live instead of being sent straight to the Hall of Euthanasia (237). Interestingly, Buchanan regarded evolutionary Nature and the industrial City as equally ruthless, their "paternalism" showing "no loving concern for individuals or pity for the weak" (Forsyth, 1969b: 412). In the light of the above, it is not surprising that mercy to the unfit increases in direct proportion to the distance from the Great City, in which evolutionary Nature disguised as science reigns supreme.

This enhanced emotionality on the part of the people from the fringes of Britain is intensified additionally by the tragedy on Lake Coniston, when a landslide produces numerous casualties, and the Religion of Humanity cannot provide satisfactory explanation and solace. The grief and frustration of bereaved parents, children, and spouses becomes a fruitful ground for Annabel's sermons about Christ and the afterlife, criticizing the spirit of materialism and its flimsy consolations (177). In their response to Annabel's sermons, the population is gripped by fear and there are reported cases of epileptic seizures and even deaths (168). When the angry crowd wrecks one of the Temples of Humanity, knocking down the pictures of its human "saints" and replacing them with a Cross, while the story of the end of the world spreads through the dales, Annabel realizes she has stirred up a tumult that is difficult to subdue, a fanaticism that has turned a peaceful religion into a vehicle for conflict and violence (179-180).

In fact, neither the Christian revival nor the future state are presented unambiguously. Just as the movement of the suffering and the excluded contains within it the seed of theocratic despotism, so the state, painted as oppressive and built on the blood of the innocent victims of its eugenic laws, reveals a weakness directly connected to its democratic and anthropocentric principles. The future society, in which civil liberties are respected, becomes its own enemy through the very mechanism that ensures freedom of speech and peaceful assembly. Needless to mention the emotional equilibrium, which prevents the authorities from acting without due reflection. The state, in the best liberal tradition, does not interfere with the liberty of the subject – the most cardinal and important doctrine in the new political institution, allowing complete liberty of private opinion in spiritual matters (149). Over the course of the novel, the state has the face of Espinosa, which is one of moderation, as opposed to Eustace's calls to decisive action. According to Espinosa, the philosophy which underpins the new social order shares many important aspects with Christ's teachings:

> In turning back to the gentlest and tenderest of teachers Annabel is with us, not against us! […] [T]he supreme gift to be recognised in Jesus was the socialistic instinct, not the supernatural bias. He saw, no one ever saw so clearly, the evils of Egoism, War, Wealth-hunting, and all other forms of competition. Unfortunately, the remedy he suggested, a belief in another life which would redress the miseries of this, was unscientific, and led to endless waste of time; but it was an age of superstitions, and he could not escape his environment. Were such a genius born to-day he would love his fellow-men no less, but he would work for them from a new philosophic platform. (76)

The claim that Jesus was a product of his environment resonates with Owen's view on education, according to which human character is shaped by external influence. It can also be placed within an evolutionary perspective, the influence of the environment on the evolution of species being noted by both Lamarck and Darwin. However, Espinosa explicitly denounces the Darwinist

mechanisms of competition and territorialism, which in human society took the form of war and the laissez-faire consent to greed and self-aggrandizement at the expense of kindness and empathy. Moreover, the statement inevitably calls to mind the three stages of history as defined by Auguste Comte, Jesus being a product of the theological stage, as opposed to the new world order, owing its existence to the third, scientific or Positive stage, in which the world is entirely possessed and shaped by humankind (see Wilson 2000: 49; Nickles 2005: 1853; and Manuel & Manuel 1997: 725). Simultaneously, Christianity, regarded by Eustace as the hotbed of conflict, is seen by Espinosa as an ancient contribution to society's moral reformation: however distinct, both Christianity and scientific humanism aim at humanity's improvement. Therefore, when a proposition appears to put Annabel and Uriel in a madhouse, Espinosa counters such strict measures as follows: "[S]cience teaches us that we should be complacent and compassionate to all dissent, however incoherent, so long as it does not threaten public good" (157). Only when the old/new creed preached by Annabel, which Buchanan compares explicitly to the impact of Jesus's teaching in Judea in Roman times (162), indeed begins to threaten the existing order by causing social unrest, do the Wise Men of the nation decide, though unwillingly, to take proper action (162).

Interestingly, the action on the part of the state is presented as having its main source in individual rancour and far-from-unbiased motivations. The most passionate advocate of firm action is Eustace, a newly elected member of the Holy Office and Annabel's rejected suitor. Annabel's rejection awakens powerful emotions in him that he did not know were possible (so much for the power of science): he becomes furiously jealous of her relationship with Uriel, the infirm and thus disgusting (163-165). Hollowing the stone of moderation by persistent persuasion and ever new evidence, he produces concern and opposition to Annabel's supernaturalism among "[m]en of his stamp", "incapable of any wanton cruelty, but stern in their determination that Humanity should be saved from the poison of Superstition" (166). Eustace argues for the use of Force, which has after all been (and here Annabel would agree with him) "the very watchword of [their] progress", "[t]he principle that it is lawful, in order to ensure the general happiness, to limit that of the

minority"; otherwise everything is anarchy (171). However, Espinosa, who can see through Eustace's hypocrisy, retorts calmly that "[s]elfishness and hate are the only soil of Anarchy", especially when fuelled by sexual passion (172). Owing to Eustace's groundwork, unfortunately, the opinions of moderates like Espinosa cease to matter, and the "righteous indignation" at the "public excitement awakened by Annabel" (166) can no longer be controlled (173).

In the last scenes of the novel, Annabel and Uriel are facing trial in the Hall of Judgement for attempting unlawful marriage. The young, beautiful woman challenging the most important law of the state, the Doctrine of Elimination, sacrificing her own life for the sake of love, awakens in the audience "pity, horror, revolt against the tyranny which was so pitilessly crushing a natural human affection in the name of a cold scientific abstraction" (246). When the Christian fanatics invade the Hall coming to the pair's succour, emotions suppressed "under an icy veneer of culture and custom" (249) overpower both sides of the conflict, and a battle follows in which Uriel receives a fatal blow. Annabel stops the fighters and declares Uriel the first martyr. Attributing his death to the false and cruel God of Humanity (251), she prophesies the end of His reign, calling upon Jesus "to over-throw [the former's] altars" (252).

If the intention of Buchanan's uchronia was to vindicate Christianity and its final victory over the scientific utopia and its anthropocentric religion, the ending disappoints. What seems to be more explicit is not the power of faith, but rather the failure of science to breed out the affective component of human nature. Nor are the Christians of the future entirely devoted to their cause, as is the case with Uriel, who only follows Annabel out of love, having no real feelings for God or belief in His benevolence, secretly blaming Him (if he really exists) for his disability (186-189). Annabel cannot shirk off completely her eugenic upbringing either: she may pity Uriel for his disability and the injustice implicit in his social exclusion, but she still finds him physically repugnant. Her decision to marry Uriel against the law is avowedly "an act of loving self-abnegation", a duty of agape which increases her "moral and spiritual enthusiasm" (226), to the point of turning her into a willing martyr for her religious convictions. But

it may be seen equally as an act of defiance against Eustace, his masculine power and eugenic disdain for Uriel, which she inwardly shares, and which is so entirely un-Christian.

More importantly, however, if eugenic politics is the major bone of contention between Christianity and the new order, the two cannot be reconciled. By abolishing its Doctrine of Elimination, and allowing an individual "free will" to become a law of the state, the scientific utopia would degenerate, simply by not being able to control the perfection and imperfection of its citizens, in physical as much as intellectual and moral terms. Annabel's religious movement, therefore, does threaten public good, insofar as it involves humanity's (genetic) regression to an earlier stage of development and the likely reappearance of social and political atavisms long left behind.

Written at the end of the 19th century, Buchanan's novel reflects the late-Victorian disillusionment with the century's foundational ideologies and with its initial belief that science could change the world for the better, but its Christian solution does not seem to work entirely either, at least not in its professed peaceful paradigm. Annabel's last words, that Uriel's blood will be "an oriflamme to lead the faithful on" and prophesying the overthrowing of the pagan altars (252), sounds like an invitation to violence which religious fundamentalists will be only too happy to accept. After all, early Christianity also began as a religion of peace, and the reader is left with the premonition that history *as shown in the novel* has come full circle, and that Annabel has unleashed forces which may, like Jesus's followers, forget about peace, and try to impose their theocratic worldview on the rest of humanity.

Being a product of the fin-de-siècle, Buchanan's novel is therefore surprisingly relevant for our times, in which the idea of liberal democracy, predicated, among other things, upon the freedom of conscience, secularism and general welfare, has been under attack from the rising forces of conservatism and religious fundamentalism. Equally timely is Buchanan's preoccupation with what could be termed as posthuman fears, as it dovetails with the present debates on the limits of scientific interference into the human body, genetic engineering, and the ethical ramifications of abortion and euthanasia. Moreover, Buchanan's presentation of a society which re-

veres physical perfection inevitably resonates with the contemporary cult of beauty and an ideal body, impacting the spheres of fashion, entertainment, and politics. Last but not least, in its depiction of two conflicting and apparently irreconcilable worldviews in a world that has come close to perfection, *The Rev. Annabel Lee* constitutes yet another voice in the long tradition of dissent in utopia, going back to Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* and finding its culmination in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. It demonstrates how an individual desire to be unhappy in a world of mass happiness threatens the foundations of a seemingly benevolent state, thus subjecting the idea of eutopia, the *good* place, to renewed critical scrutiny by suggesting that even an ideal society contains within it a lurking dystopian opposite.

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