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THEMATIC BLOCK: UTOPIA AND DEMOCRACY

Evolution, Utopia, and Satire in Robert Ellis Dudgeon's *Colymbia* (1873)

Katarzyna Pisarska
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7567-5529

ABSTRACT
This article is devoted to the utopian novel *Colymbia* (1873), written by the Scottish doctor and homeopath Robert Ellis Dudgeon. The analysis focuses on the work's indebtedness to the evolutionary discourse of natural selection, the survival of the fittest, and adaptation, which contributes to the vision of Colymbian society as a biopolitical utopia and turns it into a satirical reflection of contemporary Victorian mores and beliefs as regards matters like education, eugenics, and the role of the state. The article also investigates the engagement of Darwinism with the discourse of the empire, informing the novel's preoccupation with nationhood and race. Finally, the article lays emphasis on the question of scientific progress in Colymbia, which not only enables the state's aquatic existence through a more sustainable relationship with the natural environment, but also underpins its claims of evolutionary superiority and dominance. (KP)

KEYWORDS: Darwinism, empire, eugenics, satire, utopia

Introduction

Robert Ellis Dudgeon (1820–1904) was a Scottish doctor, homeopath, translator, and author of numerous publications promoting alternative medicine. He was also the author of the utopian novel *Colymbia* (1873), written "in a spirit of competition with" *Erewhon: or, Over the Range* (1872) by Samuel Butler, Dudgeon's patient and friend (see Nicholls, and Power: 57).[1] *Colymbia* follows the vicissitudes of De Courcy Smith, an Englishman intent on making his fortune on one of the big Australian farms belonging to his cousin. However, he is shipwrecked on the way to the colony and instead finds an ideal Social Darwinist society living underwater around an equatorial volcanic island somewhere in the Pacific Ocean.

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This article analyzes the work's entrenchment in the evolutionary discourse of natural selection, the survival of the fittest, and adaptation, which at once contributes to the utopian vision of Colymbian society and turns it into a satirical reflection of contemporary Victorian mores and beliefs as regards matters like education, eugenics, and the role of the state. The article also explores the ways in which Darwinism in Colymbia engages with the discourse of the empire, and how evolutionary preoccupations inform the questions of nationhood and race. Finally, it lays emphasis on the question of scientific progress, highlighting some elements of proto-ecological thinking in Dudgeon's depiction of Colymbia, whose submarine existence inevitably involves a more sustainable engagement with the natural environment—the ocean, its wildlife, and its natural resources. Though referred to in several scholarly studies (see, for instance, Claeys, "General Introduction," xix; Claeys, *Dystopia* 296; Walton 7; Blackford et al. 20), so far *Colymbia* has been given relatively scant attention, a critical oversight which the present article aims to redress.

Darwinism, the body, and the environment

In his monumental study *Dystopia: A Natural History*, Gregory Claeys notes:

> Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection had an immense impact on utopian and dystopian writing alike. For a genre long fixated on ideas of both the distant past and remote future, an elongated species history provided by natural science was a godsend (it also sent the gods packing). A human history formerly supposed to be a few thousand years in extent could now be reimagined in terms of millions of years. The prospect that science might aid the progressive development of the human species echoed traditional concerns for perfectibility evident since Plato, and even more, Bacon. . . . One result was utopia's leap towards science fiction. . . . Another, however, was the threat that a different descent of man, not upwards from the apes, but backwards towards animality or degeneration, was also insinuated by Darwinian principles. (Claeys, *Dystopia* 295)

These concerns also resonate in *Colymbia*, in which human biology, dependent on the exchange of (desirable) genetic material, is inseparably linked with science and engineering, both technological and social. In other words, in *Colymbia* Darwin's template of natural selection is combined with institutional policies and customs involving artificial selection and eugenics. Over the course of the novel the reader learns that the Colymbians descend

from an ancient race who mixed with castaways and sailors from British ships, a practice which intensified in the age of Britain's naval domination. As a result of this crossbreeding, as it is believed in Colymbia, old features have become recessive or eliminated. The ancient, more thick-skinned peoples could withstand the scorching equatorial heat, but in their descendants, this resilience has considerably diminished, and they are unable to live on land for longer than a few hours. Their adaptation to an aquatic life is regarded by certain Colymbian philosophers as evidence in favor of man's aquatic ancestry. Even though many missing links remain undiscovered, they believe that "an animal allied to the seal-tribe [could be their] not very remote progenitor"; some trace their origin to a fish or even to a mollusc (Dudgeon 36), says De Courcy Smith. The comment echoes—with a hint of irony—the contemporary evolutionary discourse, which traces humanity's descent from an ape-like ancestor, and the theories of the marine genesis of terrestrial life.

Interestingly, the Colymbians' adaptation to submarine life does not involve the development of gills, fins, or webbed feet. In fact, as Smith is informed by Julian, one of his Colymbian acquaintances who is also a philosopher and a rationalist/positivist, such developments would be seen as aspects of biological atavism and thus as evolutionary regression unworthy of a superior race (Dudgeon 103). Adaptation to new conditions was facilitated not by nature but by science—the Colymbians remain *Homo sapiens* trying to control their natural environment as far as they technologically can. The Colymbians' move to a different ecosystem was made possible by "the genius of [their] engineers and chemists," who succeeded in building permanent dwellings under the water (35). Moreover, the leaving of the land for water required the improvement of the eye structure, which was accomplished thanks to the invention by local opticians of a special corrective lens to be used in goggles worn underwater (37). Another scientific invention is the system of air tubes supplying air underwater so that the Colymbians do not have to go to the surface to breathe. Advanced engineering ensures the right pressure of air in the pipes and breathing in the water is as easy as on the surface, while the purity and extra oxygenation of air makes it possible for the Colymbians to breathe no more than once in four or five minutes (38–39). The natural buoyancy of the human body is balanced by special weight-belts, whose weight is "calculated on the basis of the natural gravity and the cubic contents" of the person's body; resurfacing is accomplished by inflating the belt's India-rubber cells (40). The rest is done by training and prolonged exposure to the

environment: after a while, De Courcy's eyes become adjusted to salt water, and he can keep his nostrils closed on his own without the help of special nose-clips (46). The combination of evolved physiology and advanced technology is also visible in the Colymbians' feeding habits. The natives imbibe water through their skin, so they do not need to drink (63). However, when it comes to eating, the Colymbians do not feed straight from the water, but eat their cooked food in special air-tanks in their houses, or by means of vessels with tubes of ingenious construction, which prevent the food's contact with water (124–25).

The aforementioned (scientifically aided) adaptation to the submarine environment also entails the adaptation of the Colymbians' social ways and domestic life to the element they inhabit. Due to the natural buoyancy of the body, the floor in their houses is up and the ceiling down, and the former is the place of sleep (Dudgeon 53). People communicate by means of small clicking instruments operated by an index finger and a thumb, or by tapping a message resembling the telegraph code on their interlocutors' bodies (a satirical take on the fast communications system, spanning the British Empire). As already indicated, every house is equipped with an air-tank, into which you put your head in order to speak to your family and guests in a traditional way (54). The Colymbians do not dance but gyrate in water, instead of fox hunting, they hunt for sharks, and they are enthusiastic about seal races just as Britons are about horse races. Seals are bred as pets, just as dogs are bred in Britain, and there are many seal breeds. Although the Colymbians keep cattle and sheep on land, their main source of meat and merchandise is turtle (it is what cattle and sheep are to Britons [123]). They are very fond of reading—they keep up to date with English literature (both belles-lettres and scientific works [29, 74–75]), which they reprint on waterproof paper.

The most significant example of the environment's shaping of social activity are Colymbian sartorial habits, suited to submarine mobility and differing significantly from those in Britain. Their garments are loose, neither obstructing their movements nor concealing their bodies, and they wear no shoes, which is juxtaposed with the Victorian conventions regarding dress and propriety. No ethical values are attributed to clothes in Colymbia, and, after some time spent in this country, De Courcy notes, in criticism of the suffocating Victorian morality, that "modesty does not require yards of silk and muslin for its preservation, but may exist independently of flowing robes" (Dudgeon 70). The beauty of the body is visible and open to appreciation, and Colymbian women seem to him

"beings of another and much superior race" when compared to the "high-heeled and tight-laced damsels at home" (51). European clothes, and especially corsets, which allow little movement and, in the words of one Colymbian lady, make a woman resemble a turtle in its shell (140), are seen as yet another atavism that the underwater society has successfully put behind along with their terrestrial ways. Scarce robes, which allow the sexes to see each other's bodies and thus form an "informed" attraction between the two parties, play an important role as regards marriage and parenthood in Colymbia, as those two institutions are based on the concept of selective breeding. As opposed to Europeans, the Colymbians are not tricked into lifelong relationships by means of clothes, shoes, and wigs which cover the defects of their future partners (107). As the overriding policy of the state is the transmission of health, physical and mental, and the perpetuation and/or further enhancement of the beauty of the race, all the flaws (rare as they are among the Colymbians) must be exposed for the desired selection to run its course. The visibility of the bodies as a prerequisite of this selection echoes the custom described by Thomas More in his *Utopia* (1516) according to which prospective spouses are allowed to see each other naked and inspect each other's bodies for defects, on the basis of which they make the final decision regarding marriage (More 79–80).

Adaptation to a submarine life in Colymbia becomes a marker of Darwinist fitness and unfitness based on the possession or lack of desirable traits. This, in turn, underpins the discourse of superiority and inferiority with respect to citizens. Natural selection, as Smith learns from one of the locals, "caused the gradual extinction of those who were unfit for subaqueous life" (Dudgeon 44). However, there are still those, probably new arrivals like Smith, who cannot adjust to a life underwater. Such people are given houses on land, but because of "[t]he discomforts of a land residence . . . most of them pine away and die" (43). Others, thanks to "some sundry contrivances" (again science and engineering) can withstand the heat and bothersome insects better and live tolerable lives, performing tasks that can only be done on land. They are, however, looked down upon by the sea population, and they feel inferior to those "endowed by nature with the necessary faculties for a subaqueous life" (44).

The Colymbians regard themselves as a superior race on account of their subaquatic faculties, which can be noticed in one of the conversations between De Courcy and Julian. Julian knows biology, he is "an enthusiast for the evolution of species, and thoroughly believe[s] in the continuous advance towards perfection of the human race" (Dudgeon 97). Convinced

of the superiority of submarine to terrestrial ways, he considers his fellow citizens "the most advanced of human beings" (97). Submarine life, argues Julian, fosters physical health and perfect beauty, without terrestrial diseases and without "deformed limbs," "crooked backs," "dyspepsia," and other disadvantages of too much gravitation (99–100). It increases speed and proper application of natural bodily predispositions. The shape and structure of human limbs, hands, and feet show man was not made to walk on land but to swim like a seal with his or her head submerged, which gives them the same advantages as those enjoyed by other marine animals, observes Julian (101). Moreover, organs like spleen in lung-breathing animals are more useful in the water than on land (102), and "when a child is born into the air, it screams with pain and fright" because it is born into an unfamiliar element, as opposed to being born into water, all the above pointing to man's subaquatic ancestry (104). Finally, many ancient cultures on land constructed their dwellings on big lakes, which shows humankind's affinity with (sub)marine life, and constitutes one more piece of evidence that man's proper element is water, and it is here that he can "assert and prove his superiority to brute creation" (104). Julian is aware that northern seas are too cold for humans but he has faith in the "ingenuity of man"—one day, people will find a way of warming the northern waters sufficiently to make them suitable for habitation (105), a comment which foregrounds the role of scientific progress in bringing forward the next stage in humanity's evolution.

It must be noted that the Colymbians, in a very modern manner, make an ecological use of natural resources. They take advantage of renewable energy sources such as sea tides to power the facilities pumping air into their tube system. They also have a sewage system for purifying the water (Dudgeon 62), using large beds of living bivalves which consume every little impurity from the environment (63). The submarine waste is used later as fertilizer of cereal fields (or stored in special dumps on land) (63). Moreover, the Colymbians have found a way to light and thus make habitable their "watery depths," as they produce electricity by tapping into Earth itself (65–66). This is a common practice in late-Victorian utopias, which often show electricity as a master power, obtained by taking advantage of the natural forces of the planet—seismic activity, tides, or tapping the planet's core, as in, for example, Rev. W. S. Lach-Szyrma's *Aleriel* (1883) and "Letters from the Planets" (1887), and Joseph Fraser's *Melbourne and Mars* (1889) (see Pisarska 101–02). Electricity, therefore, figures as a more advanced technological alternative to combustion and

steam produced from coal, which were at the center of the British Industrial Revolution and contributed to the country's economic domination. Simultaneously, such advancements are indispensable for making Colymbian aquatic existence not only easier and more efficient, but at all possible, and therefore, they can be read as facets of the scientifically controlled social order, in which technology interferes with biology, changing habitats, and population traits.

Biopower, eugenics, and utopia

Over the course of the narrative, the reader learns that it is not only the more favorable submarine environment that is responsible for the Colymbians' alleged superiority, but careful social and biological engineering, "conducted on the most perfect scientific principles" (Dudgeon 169). Parental emotions are regarded as an atavism, an animal trait in a human being, which often interferes with the future welfare of the child and the state, and it is therefore "sternly repressed from the sense of patriotic duty" (169). Few parents would risk giving a child "a defective education . . . neglect[ing] the cultivation of [their] natural talents" out of some atavistic reluctance to part with them. It would also be bad for the state to "have any of its citizens growing up incapable of rightly fulfilling their duties of citizenship" (170). Before they activate parental feelings common to all animals, says a Colymbian scientist, parents first think about "what is best for the state and what is best for the child" (170).

Children are therefore raised in public nurseries, under the supervision of qualified and efficient staff, who "bring them up by hand in the most careful and tender manner" (Dudgeon 171). They receive better education than those taught by private teachers in family homes. At a very early age, the children are divided into classes corresponding to their intellectual abilities, and receive suitable teaching: "Those whose mental capacity suits them for it are educated for the higher scientific employments; others are brought up to be skilled artisans; others again, to follow the more mechanical trades; and those with the lowest capacities are trained for the position of unskilled labourers" (172). As can be seen, the "hereditary genius," using Francis Galton's famous phrase, is a medium of professional discrimination and unbridgeable social divisions, preventing social mobility on the basis of predetermined capabilities. As such, the practices mentioned above link *Colymbia* to the tradition of the scientific utopia that in the following century will produce works like Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), but they have also been recurring motifs in the

utopian imagination since Thomas More, in whose *Utopia* the state is entitled to shift surplus children between households, thereby showing that families bow to greater authorities.

The measures described call to mind Michel Foucault's concept of biopower, a "power over life," which is "situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of population," being tied to the latter's "biological existence" (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 137). According to Foucault, biopower is constituted by two forms: discipline and regulation (see B. E. Stone 361). The former is "centered on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls," the "procedures of power that characterized the *disciplines: an anatomo-politics of the human body*" (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 139). The latter is concerned with "the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary," the supervision of which is ensured by "an entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population*" (139). The disciplinary and regulatory powers are shown by Foucault as complementary and indeed informing each other in different contexts (see, for example, Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 145–46, and *"Society Must be Defended,"* 249–51). Similarly, in Dudgeon's ideal society, the two forms of biopower work in tandem, effecting the Foucauldian "administration of bodies and the calculated management of life" (*History of Sexuality* 140).

Whereas the state nurseries and education system are geared towards the generation of docile and productive individuals, disciplining them intellectually, emotionally, and physically for the purpose of maintaining an obedient, normalized, and efficient society, on a different level they are part of the biopolitical mechanisms in which science teams with state policy to ensure a healthy and robust social body.[2] The Colymbian regulators use, as phrased by Foucault,

> a technology which brings together the mass effects characteristic of a population, which tries to control the series of random events that can occur in a living mass, a technology which tries to predict the probability of those events (by modifying it, if necessary), or at least to compensate for their effects. This is a technology which aims to establish a sort of

> homeostasis, not by training individuals, but by achieving an overall equilibrium that protects the security of the whole from internal dangers. (*"Society Must be Defended"* 249)

The "internal danger" is represented by those groups which are identified as deviating from the physical and intellectual standards characterizing the master race. The supreme law of Colymbia is society's health ("salus populi suprema lex est") (Dudgeon 174), which makes the state resort to negative eugenics and eliminate weak and deformed babies soon after birth. Every newborn is examined by a committee of learned anatomists and physiologists, and if the child is not pronounced "viable," "it is not reared" (173), a practice which continues the long "utopian" tradition going back to Plato's *Republic* (Plato 157–58) and Lycurgus's Sparta (Coverley 25). As noted by Sargent, health has always featured prominently in utopian writing. It was, however, in the nineteenth century "perhaps in response to the health problems produced by industrialization and the growth of cities, that health became a central focus," as in *Hygeia: A City of Health* (1876) by Benjamin Ward Richardson (Sargent 365). In her essay on eugenics and utopia, Claire P. Curtis argues that although eugenics and utopia share the prefix "eu" ("good"), they differ in the degree of hope they pin on the possibility of attaining the good: "[w]hile utopia has embedded in its very definition a concern or even skepticism about the idea of the good (even if it is simply that the good is not realizable), the term eugenics has no such skepticism. Eugenics is a utopian exercise" (303).

This ambiguity is clearly detectable in Dudgeon's novel, which voices skepticism and doubt about the ethical aspects of Colymbia's utopian practice through the mouth of its protagonist, shocked at the cruelty of the state-sanctioned infanticide. However, his Christian and, indeed, humanist morality, which recognizes the sanctity and value of all human life, is here contrasted with a different, utilitarian morality, according to which "the few must suffer that the many may be happy" (Dudgeon 177). As one Colymbian scientist informs the narrator, the integrity of society is disrupted by the deformity of its members (174); therefore the laws, no matter how cruel and heartless they may seem to De Courcy, have to protect the social organism from degeneration, and not the welfare of its individual members if it conflicts with the welfare of society as a whole. If sentiment interferes with the well-being of society, says the scientist, it is the sentiment that must yield (174).

This attitude can be interpreted in terms of Foucault's concept of modern racism, which he sees as "a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power's control: the break between what must live and what must die" (*"Society Must be Defended"* 254). Commenting on Foucault's understanding of racism, Brad Elliott Stone notes that modern racism is no longer connected with the antagonism between different nations or ethnic groups. Rather it results from the discretionary and anonymous power over life. This power operates directly, for instance, through ethnic cleansing practices, or indirectly, through social policies and disciplinary mechanisms that determine the rates of mortality, crime, and access to healthcare in different sections of the population (Stone 364). Stone further asserts:

> No effort will be made to let those allowed to die to proliferate. This is what eugenics sought to secure: the elimination of those people, traits, genes, blood, etc. that are detrimental to the advancement of a particular group. In short, races will be sorted into those worth preserving and those not worth preserving. This notion of race is not limited to skin color and can include sexual orientation, level of ability, socio-economic status, and even political persuasion. Anything that can threaten the purity of "the race" (the dominant race) must be removed from society. (365)

As argued by Johanna Oksala with respect to Foucault's theory of racism, in this "biological" (rather than "adversarial") relationship between different groups within the same population, the inferior group poses "a biological threat to the population and its improvement" and therefore has to be eliminated. "The objective to improve life for its own sake could thus legitimize killing within the rationality of biopower," Oksala elucidates. "The logic of biological racism was the condition that made killing acceptable in biopolitical societies" (322–23). Accordingly, in the state of Colymbia, which "functions in the biopower mode" (see Foucault, *"Society Must be Defended"* 256), the health and vigor of the entire population are ensured by preventing the birth of or by euthanizing the racially inferior lives ("we quench the evil at its source, and refuse admission into society of any that are likely to deteriorate the race" [Dudgeon 176]), while the state's death-related practices are legitimized by "the regime of power/knowledge" (see Oksala 323), that is, the scientific and pseudo-scientific theories of Dudgeon's own times.

Science in *Colymbia* is shown as correcting and even replacing nature in its evolutionary processes, being seen by its practitioners as far more humane to an individual and the whole society, as it liberates an unfit person from their miserable existence and allows social forces to be focused on the betterment of life and comprehensive development of its fit citizens. The death of the useless few is therefore crucial to the survival of the precious many:

> We merely carry out, in a scientific and merciful manner, the process performed in a clumsy and cruel manner by nature, which your learned men term the 'survival of the fittest.' In England you pursue a diametrically opposite course, for while you make frantic efforts to preserve the lives of your lame, your blind, your deaf, your idiots, and your imbeciles, you allow thousands of sound and perfect children to be annually slaughtered by neglect and starvation, or reared in ignorance and crime, because you insist that parents shall bring up all their children, however numerous and however inadequate their means for doing so. That our system is infinitely more humane than yours you may imagine when I tell you that it is very seldom indeed that any defective or diseased child is born in this country, for the parents are all so well shaped and so healthy that they are most unlikely to produce offspring unlike themselves in these respects. Our system has the same effect as the care you exercise in England has on stock-breeding. The parents are examples of all the good points in the human breed, and their children follow suit or even improve on their parents' qualities. (Dudgeon 175–76)

The speech echoes Socrates' arguments from Book V of Plato's *Republic* concerning the necessity of breeding humans like animals to achieve the best characteristics in the species. However, whereas Socrates advocates that the process, accomplished through specially legislated fertility festivals, should only be known to the guardians to prevent the populace's "dissension" (Plato 156–58), in Colymbia, selective breeding has become an openly practiced law of the land.[3] In England, however, where congenital and contagious diseases afflict the population, people also have an unlimited freedom to marry, regardless of their defects. In this way, they transmit their flaws to their offspring, and thus "deteriorate the race, or at least prevent it attaining perfection with due rapidity" (Dudgeon 176), whereas the first thing to do is to examine the couples for their suitability to produce healthy children.

Similarly to Butler's *Erewhon*, Dudgeon's utopian satire looks back to Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) (see Kumar 65, 106; Bignami 205). Like Lemuel Gulliver, De Courcy Smith is often confronted with the apparent discrepancies between his own country and Colymbia, oscillating between the condition of a moral dwarf and a giant, singing praises of England and its time-honored ways, which are in turn criticized by his "progressively" oriented hosts and interlocutors, convinced of their own superiority.[4] *Colymbia* is a satire on practically every aspect of social life in the Victorian era (many of which lie outside the scope of this article), and the dogmatic belief in science and progress, which underpin Colymbia's biopolitics, is not the least of its targets. The Colymbian Academy of Science, clearly parodying the Royal Society of Dudgeon's times, has something in common with the Academy of Projectors and its eccentric and even outright mad experiments, as it scorns useful discoveries made by external scientists and promotes useless and self-indulgent ones made by its own members (Dudgeon 196–97). However, while Swift's ridicule of Bacon's scientific utopia is overt and light-hearted, Dudgeon's examination of Colymbian scientific practice, in which experiments on non-human material have been extended to the human subject as a collective, is darker in tone and more ambiguous in its anti-utopian intention.

In fact, De Courcy's predicament in Colymbia at the same time mirrors and reverses that of Gulliver in the land of the wise horses. Gulliver faces and eventually embraces the Houyhnhnms' unconflicted belief in pure reason, a belief which admits genocide of the Yahoos as a tool of moral cleansing.[5] De Courcy, by the same token, is confronted with the Colymbians' biopolitical worldview, which admits no error to its Darwinian logic, but the novel continually mediates between its appreciation and condemnation. This double-voiced discourse, which emerges from the rejoinders of De Courcy's dialogic interactions with his various hosts,[6] often produces the effect of self-revealing irony when his arguments ring false or are found wanting. Challenging the Colymbian practice of public child-rearing, for example, he tries "to impress [the] English ideas of the meritoriousness of rearing a large family on very small means" (Dudgeon 169) on his interlocutors, in which he fails miserably. De Courcy thus describes the futility of his attempts to bring the Colymbian regulators round to his way of thinking, assuming (perhaps erroneously) that the reader shares his moral convictions:

> The reader will understand that I employed all the usual stock arguments to refute this revolting sophistry. I need not repeat what I said, as no British parent requires to be reminded of what is to be urged in defence of that purest and most sacred of the affections, parental love. But I might as well have spoken to a stone wall. The arrogant conceit of these Colymbians is so great that they are incapable of appreciating the profoundest wisdom if it clashes with the maxims they have accepted. So after a few polite attempts I gave up the idea of inducing them to come round to our rational English notions on many subjects on which they differ *toto cælo* from us. (170–71)

The contesting discourses of Colymbia and Britain both hold reason/logic and rationality as their supreme yardsticks. The British "rational" notion of children being the responsibility of their parents, which originates in affect and Christian morality, is here juxtaposed with the equally "rational" Colymbian belief in children being the responsibility of the state, whose basis is scientific and empirical objectivity. It is the latter view that seems to carry the day, pointing out flaws in De Courcy's arguments as well as condemning British society for its hypocrisy that leads to the sins of eugenic omission. "[T]he same maxims are freely inculcated in England, only you fear to carry them out to their logical consequences—we don't" (Dudgeon 177), a comment which identifies Britain as Colymbia's counterpart, if not in eugenic practice then in eugenic philosophy, undermining their alleged alienness and highlighting their surprising similarity. It should also be noted that despite the seeming ruthlessness of Colymbian eugenic policies, their allegedly indisputable benefits for both the individual and society are presented clearly and emphatically in the novel. Smith himself cannot help but notice the effectiveness of their child-rearing establishments (171). The system seems to work because the Colymbians are healthy, beautiful, and kind, and they find pleasure in sports, reading, and artistic pursuits. Eventually, Smith's moral and religious arguments against the Colymbian methods of social engineering pale when confronted with Colymbian logic and scientific consistency, the "antidote" of the Bible being no real match for the "poison of secular knowledge" (177) whose supreme goal and dogma is social efficiency. It is therefore open to interpretation who it is that Dudgeon himself sides with in this debate, whether his thoughts are refracted in the words of his often impressionable yet politically and religiously bigoted protagonist, or rather in those of the calm, methodical, and dangerously persuasive Colymbian regulators.

Utopia, race, and empire

At the same time, Dudgeon's novel reflects more general tendencies of the utopian genre of the period. From the first half of the nineteenth century, progress was increasingly seen in the context of Europe's imperial expansion, its cultural and racial superiority manifesting itself in cultural, technological, and scientific domination. Commenting on the connections between Darwinism and colonialism (and the latter's civilizing mission), which filtered into the emerging science fiction genre, a claim which may as well be extended to literary utopias, Patrick B. Sharp notes: "[n]arratives about voyages to exotic lands reflected and reinforced changing notions of biological difference, and assessments of technology became an important part of European accounts of other peoples and their cultures" (476). Moreover, as argued by Dohra Ahmad in *Landscapes of Hope: Anti-Colonial Utopianism in America* (2009), imperial ideologies have informed the utopian genre since its very beginning:

> Two successive waves of utopian activity each relied upon a central apparatus of colonial activity: exploration in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; and developmentalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The early utopian fiction of More, Bacon, and others derived much of its energy from the discovery of new continents and islands, and it flourished as a way to help its readers make sense of the changing world around them. But by the nineteenth century, the blank spaces had been filled in, and the myth of empty land could no longer provide a tenable vehicle for utopia. The myth of progress—the first secular millenarianism—fortuitously took its place. (Ahmad 6)

Ahmad further notes the emergence, under the impact of Marxism and Darwinism, of "a new teleological view of history and biology" in the latter half of the nineteenth-century (6). This "developmentalist" view became fundamental both to the production of utopian literature of the period and to the colonial project, which consigned the former "blank spaces" in the world's geographies to "the temporalized category of primitive and backward" (6; cf. K. Stone 482).

Interestingly, the protagonist of *Colymbia* is regarded by his father, an administrator of an Anglican parish, as "just the kind of person to become a colonist," namely "well grounded in religion and much attached to the Church," "a sworn admirer" of his country's institutions, and eager to co-operate with other colonists to reproduce English manners and

institutions elsewhere, or, as Smith himself phrases it, "dot the world over with little fac-similes of England as far as the circumstances of the case would permit" (Dudgeon 4). He is also an ideal embodiment of what a citizen should be in an early capitalist, laissez-faire-ist society, imagined by social Darwinist thinkers like Herbert Spencer. De Courcy Smith is "at once enterprising and persevering," as well as physically fit, he is also a stalwart political and religious conservative who "hate[s] a radical almost as heartily as [he] abhor[s] an infidel" (4). His patriotic declarations, however, strike an ironic note, which can be noticed in the following passage:

> I was thoroughly persuaded that a limited Monarchy, supported by a hereditary House of Peers, and a House of Commons elected by the free and independent votes of a virtuous people, was the perfection of forms of government. I admired the glorious union of Church and State, fraught with so much benefit to both parties, and I was fervently thankful that I had been born an Englishman. (3)[7]

However, when he sees similar institutions in Colymbia, he finds them ludicrous or downright incomprehensible, because Colymbia, propelled forward by innovative (if controversial) ideas in science and technology (as was Britain at the time), is also bound by ridiculous customs, beliefs, and social hierarchies which are reflections of the same phenomena in Britain. In Colymbia, the British representative monarchy turns into the reign of a dynasty of turtles (literally). The reptilian kings live in luxury, surrounded by well-paid officials, and they are paraded in their richly ornamented shells at state ceremonies. They are, however, stripped of any real political power, even though, as a matter of convention, all laws and policies are said to be established and pursued in their name (Dudgeon 126, 132). The lower chamber of the Colymbian parliament is a site of two warring and self-serving parties, while the upper chamber, before its eventual dissolution, was composed of the eldest aristocratic sons, too stupid and idle to find themselves a useful occupation (126–29). Colymbia has the same caste system as Britain, which underpins the distribution of public posts and determines the nature of education as well as the career path in the state administration (79–81). Finally, Christianity becomes a science called transcendental geography, whose tenets, out of touch with the present times and with practical life issues, are arbitrarily observed by society and publicly denounced by men of science but continue to permeate the country's social and political formations (81–96).

It is no wonder, therefore, that De Courcy, disappointed with his life in Colymbia, remarks on its imitative character with respect to Britain and on the nationalist and racial self-importance of its citizens, predicated on technological and evolutionary progress:

> I was irritated by their arrogant conceit, and by the supercilious contempt with which they treated my mildly-expressed preference for some of the usages of my native country. I disliked being spoken to as if I were a being of inferior race to themselves, when I knew that almost all their literature was borrowed from us, and that when their science excelled ours, it was only because the peculiarity of their conditions of life had forced them to develop special branches to the degree required by their necessities. The clue that led to these developments had been furnished to them by our philosophers and men of science, without which they might never have attained their actual perfection. (Dudgeon 236)

Established by descendants of sea-faring Britons, educated on British scientific works and literature, and replicating the British political system and other elements of British culture, Colymbia—an insular nation—is ultimately De Courcy's intended "little fac-simile of England," including the evolutionary propositions of the period regarding human society, which have passed from the sphere of intentions into the sphere of social practice. Inhabiting the waters around a tropical archipelago, Colymbia is the imperial center rolled into one with the periphery, the latter functioning as a productive colony supplying raw materials for the imperial industries—De Courcy relates that iron, copper, lead, and tin exist on the islands, as well as gold and silver, that there are "great iron-smelting establishments and foundries" as well as glassworks on the surface, while charcoal provided abundantly by vast forests "is used for all the furnaces" (123). As such, Colymbia at once embodies and throws in sharp relief the role of insular locations in English and then British imperial cartographies, as both imaginative assertions of power and as sources of wealth, validating the colonial project. Commenting on the legacy of Thomas More's *Utopia* in making insular locations part of the imperial imagination and practice, Bill Ashcroft notes that

> [w]hile *Utopia* emerges at the beginning of the period of "historical space," it is arguable that it performed a crucial role in the growing imperial imagination because it established the importance of islands, both imaginatively and strategically. At the very moment capitalism was

> producing historical space, with islands as nodes for territorializing the sea, a flood of imaginary utopias, mostly located on islands, began to emerge in the eighteenth century. It is arguable that, as distant and ambivalently historicized spaces, islands are by their very nature objects of desire, and although not all utopias are located on islands, their distance coincides with the imperial spread of European influence. (22)

The very name of the country, Colymbia, a distorted version of Columbus or Columbia, goes back to the early Age of Discovery, which saw the beginnings of European colonialism, the formation of modern empires, and the onset of economic relations which would transform the social and political fabric of Europe in the following centuries. At the same time, the country's name probably originates in the Greek verb *kolymbáō*, meaning "to swim" or "to dive." As such, the country's name, like its people, is a notional amalgam, a hybrid, bringing together its adaptation to an aquatic life and its imperial legacy.

Moreover, like all empires, Colymbia has its ideological basis in the idea of superior and inferior races, which in the nineteenth century found a scientific underpinning in Darwinism corroborated by technological and military power characterizing the fit, that is, the conquerors, as opposed to the unfit, the conquered (see Claeys, "Social Darwinism" 171–73).[8] Ironically, a superior race bred from Britons, themselves an ethnic mixture resulting from prehistoric settlements and later invasions, the Colymbians are also a product of miscegenation with an older race of cannibals, which, in the light of their cherished evolutionary theories, means regression rather than progress. Horrified by the ancient custom of the indigenous inhabitants of the island, an atavism they fear and abhor, the Colymbians cremate their dead in the fires of the volcano instead of burying them. In this way, they prevent them from becoming a fertilizer for the grass and plants eaten by domestic animals, and thus also from being ingested by humans (Dudgeon 228). Seen in this light, *Colymbia* gives a new, Darwinist expression to a perennial paradox ingrained in colonial utopias, namely "the possibility of spiritual redemption through nature but a deep fear of uncivilized 'savages' who inhabit nature" (Ashcroft 32), which translates into the Colymbians' fear of the savage within, which can only be redeemed by their observance of law and eugenic science.

Finally, the protagonist's journey to a utopia, home to a superior race, which marks his movement in the novel is also worth noting. De Courcy goes from the north, historically developed, civilized, and dominant,

to the south, historically exploited, subjected, and colonized. His journey, moreover, takes him from earth into water, downward in space and backward in humanity's evolutionary destiny. Its vector, therefore, suggests not rise but fall, which adds to the levels of irony in the novel.

Conclusion

Being a response to *Erewhon*, *Colymbia* shares clear thematic preoccupations with its more famous predecessor. In the society of Erewhonians, Butler satirizes his contemporaries' shallow religiosity and pecuniary mind-set, as well as their susceptibility to new-fangled ideas promoted by formidable scientific and philosophical figures, levying a particularly sharp criticism at Darwinism, which was becoming an increasingly accepted scientific theory, even if one with perhaps unpalatable implications. *Colymbia*, by the same token, offers a satirical vision of an underwater, south-Pacific society, like and unlike Britain, in which the tenets of Darwinism have come to determine many areas of social life to the point of unreason and inhumanity, in which religion remains a respectable mystification, and monarchy, an obsolete institution, is kept for the sake of tradition and eye-catching pageantry. Similarly to Butler's protagonist, De Courcy Smith is depicted as a middle-class colonial settler, a clergyman's son, perhaps less intent on exploiting sheep, gold, or human labor (see Mudford 10), but carrying within him and wanting to spread a distinctive nationalist ethos of superiority and exceptionality.

Colymbia has been mentioned as part of "Australian utopian writing" (Blackford et al. 20) and even claimed to be the first Australian utopian SF novel (see Milner 116; Milner and Burgmann 202), a proposition which, though understandable in the context of the national/local canon-making, is contestable. Except for the protagonist's destination and his brief stay in Australia before journeying back to England, there is nothing specifically Australian about *Colymbia* or its author. One might as well ask how Scottish this utopia is, considering the fact that its author was a Scot. When taken at face value, it seems to be so to a negligible degree. The central consciousness in this text is oriented around England and its political, religious and educational institutions, expressing the long-standing yet misguided practice of conflating Britain and England due to the latter's cultural and political hegemony with respect to the other constituent parts of the United Kingdom (Brown 36–37). The reader learns that upon his return to England, De Courcy Smith duly settles in his job as a telegraph operator, using his knowledge of "the Colymbian language of signs and

taps" (Dudgeon 252) to improve telegraphy, a prime means of imperial communication. Both his initial intention to make a living through emigration and his final accommodation in the service of the nation may be assumed to corroborate opinions expressed by historians that the majority of Scots in the nineteenth century were loyal citizens of the Union and of the empire, taking advantage of and contributing to territorial and economic expansion (see Darwin 294; Pittock 249–305; Devine xxvi-vii). And yet, if England functions as the major point of reference in the novel, the barb of satire cuts particularly sharp as regards the self-proclaimed superiority of its people, its political institutions, and its scientific leaders and theories. Written by a Scot and ridiculing England in disguise, located in the Pacific Ocean, on the margins of the British Empire, *Colymbia* may amount to a powerful critique of the English cultural and political imperialism deployed from a doubly peripheral and anti-hegemonic geographical perspective.

Katarzyna Pisarska is Assistant Professor at the University of Minho, and a researcher at CEHUM (Centro de Estudos Humanísticos da Universidade do Minho), and at CETAPS (Center for English, Translation, and Anglo-Portuguese Studies) at the University of Porto, Portugal. She is the author of *Mediating the World in the Novels of Iain Banks: The Paradigms of Fiction* (Peter Lang, 2013) and *Reversed Food Chains: Humanity, Monstrosity and an Evolutionary Utopia in Colin Wilson's* Spider World *Novels* (U. Porto Press, 2019). She has published articles and book chapters on British and American literature, and utopian cinema and fiction. Her main research interests include Scottish fiction, Utopian Studies, the Gothic, and myth in literature and culture.

Notes

1. *Colymbia* appeared within a year after *Erewhon*, and their common publisher, Trübner, trying to capitalize on *Erewhon*'s success, made Dudgeon's book look as similar as possible to its predecessor. Dudgeon apparently kept the book secret from Butler but he had no part in Trübner's ploy, which, however, did deceive many readers into attributing *Colymbia* to the author of *Erewhon* (see Jones 185). The subject of imitation in *Colymbia* crops up in the letters written to Butler by his closest female friend and faithful correspondent Eliza Savage. Not entirely certain of the novel's authorship, Savage regards *Colymbia* as inferior to *Erewhon*, criticizing it for its lack of imagination, "careless sentences," and non-distinctive style. "It drags a little here and there—a good deal I mean," she writes. "I don't know whether it is meant to be an imitation of *Erewhon,* but it appears to be a very close one. How absurd of people to fancy that you would be imitating yourself" (Butler 44). In a note to Savage's letter from 31 March 1873, Butler sheds light on the circumstances of *Colymbia*'s publication as well as on his attitude towards Dudgeon's work:

"*Colymbia* was an imitation of *Erewhon*, by my old friend Dr. Dudgeon, who, however, said nothing to me about it. Trübner got it up as like *Erewhon* as he could—the page and type being identical—evidently in order to make people think that the book was written by me; Dudgeon had nothing to do with this. Perhaps I was jealous, but *Colymbia* did not please me. S. B., July 31, 1901" (43).

2. Similarly, punishments for crimes combine discipline and biopolitics, as they involve banishment to the land for a certain period, banning the person from their natural element and thus imposing restrictions on their biological well-being (Dudgeon 172–73).

3. In addition to the science-based practice of bringing up only select children, science has also eliminated almost all known diseases: thanks to advanced technologies maintaining the purity of water, epidemics and infections such as those that decimate European population are non-existent (Dudgeon 225).

4. In the case of Swift's work, this tendency is particularly evident in Gulliver's conversations with the king of Brobdingnag in Part II and during his stay with the Houyhnhnms in Part IV.

5. See Claire Colebrook's discussion of irony in *Gulliver's Travels* 79–88.

6. My understanding of double-voiced discourse follows Mikhail Bakhtin's model expounded in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. For details, see 185–200.

7. Passages like the one quoted above expose and ridicule the protagonist's affectation, which is best communicated through his name combining an aristocratic Norman (De Courcy) and a common English (Smith) element. Interestingly, George Orwell does the same with the name Winston (as in Winston Churchill) Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

8. It is also worth mentioning that in the past the castaways and sailors were prevented from leaving the island, and thus they were forced to become citizens, which calls to mind all the peoples and ethnicities that were incorporated into the British Empire under duress.

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