Samuel Butler and the Rhetoric of Development: A Study of the Contribution Butler's Literary Imagination Made towards the Writing of his Prose Works

Andrew Kerrigan

Department of English Studies,
University of Strathclyde

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This thesis is the result of the author's original research. It has been composed by the author and has not been previously submitted for examination which has led to the award of a degree.

Signed:  Date: December, 2011.

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ABSTRACT

The abundance of literary devices Butler employs in his prose works has often been interpreted as evidence of satirical intent. This thesis challenges this position by illustrating how sophisticated assumptions about language and rhetoric often lie behind the form in which Butler cast his thought.

Centrally important is Butler's realisation, aged 23, that his intellectual development had been arrested by an education in which vested interests had disguised themselves as rational argument. This crisis, it is argued, left Butler with an awareness that language is always open to manipulation; that multiple competing interpretations can coexist; and that behind every interpretation there is always an intention.

Taking a chronological approach, the thesis considers the evolutionary writings and *The Fair Haven* to show how the formal qualities of these texts both embody and develop these preoccupations. Central are the following aims:

- To expose the inadequacy of existing classifications of Butler as 'satirist'.
- To provide a thorough account of the origin and development of Butler's later stated belief in the metaphorical basis of language.
- To argue that any analysis of *Life and Habit* which does not consider how it developed from the early, more imaginative machine sketches is necessarily limited.
- To suggest that the value of *Life and Habit* might better be understood with reference to William James' pragmatic philosophy rather than a natural theology framework.
- To address a long-standing critical problem with a new reading of 'The Christ Ideal' chapter of *The Fair Haven*.
- To provide a sustained critical analysis of Butler's close-reading strategy in the later evolutionary essays and show this to be a consistent expression of his pseudo-Lamarckian beliefs in the primacy of authorial intention.

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INTRODUCTION

Review of Previous Criticism and Statement of Approach

Classification

> There can be no perfect way, for classification presupposes that a thing has absolute limits whereas there is nothing that does not partake of the universal infinity -- nothing whose boundaries do not vary. Everything is one thing at one time and in some respects, and another at other times and in other respects. We want a new mode of measurement altogether; at present we take what gaps we can find, set up milestones, and declare them irremovable. We want a measure which shall express, or at any rate recognise, the harmonics of resemblance that lurk even in the most absolute differences and vice versa.[1]

At the outset of a study devoted to the works of a single author it is customary to classify the object of study into one or more of a number of pre-existing genres. With Samuel Butler, this is a perilous task. Although best known for his posthumously published novel, *The Way of All Flesh,* during his lifetime, Butler's published output consisted of fantastic Swiftian satires, theological tracts, an alternative evolutionary theory to rival Darwin's theory of natural selection, a history of the idea of evolution itself, travel books on his favourite Italian haunts, and literary and art criticism. Moreover, when he wasn't occupying his usual position in section B of the British Museum's reading room, Butler might well have been found labouring at his oil painting, experimenting with photography or perhaps composing a cantata in the style of Handel. Add to this a successful stint as a sheep farmer in New Zealand and less successful ones as company director and trainee clergyman, and one can get some kind of handle on his perplexing versatility. However, for the critic of his work, the real problems of classification begin when we attempt to grasp the intention behind the stylistic devices which characterise so much of Butler's output. In his prose works as well as his fiction, Butler often systematically exploits analogy, metaphor, defamiliarisation, aphorism, dramatic masks, multiple perspectives and irony in ways that threaten to obfuscate his message and generally thwart our ability to extract a single coherent position from the text. To borrow language from Butler's own explanation of the problem of classification, there is often the sense on reading his works of hearing more than one voice – alternatives which can, at times, even

[1] *The Notebooks of Samuel Butler*, ed. by Henry Festing Jones (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1917), p. 303.

flatly contradict each other.

To begin this introductory chapter, I wish to clarify the focus of this study in terms of which works I intend to deal with, the basic problems they pose and how they were received by Butler's contemporaries. In a shorter second section, I consider Butler's reputation after his death with regard to his reception among the Moderns. Moving on, I evaluate the work of a number of scholars writing around the middle of the twentieth century who were interested in Butler's work to the extent that it reflected the concerns of a culture struggling against the rise of scientific naturalism whilst simultaneously searching for a valid set of spiritual values to replace those of traditional Christianity. To conclude my review, I discuss how the work of contemporary scholars has thrown new light on the problems raised by Butler's prose works before outlining the approach that will inform the rest of this work.

A man of his time: Butler's main prose works and their reception among his contemporaries

Despite its status as Butler's first major work of fiction, *Erewhon* (1871) is of relevance to this study insofar as it provides us with one of Butler's earliest treatments of evolutionary theory. On the title page of the original manuscript, Butler saw fit to advertise his work as one of 'satire and imagination', and certainly this Swiftian traveller's tale set in the far off land of the title was as near to a straightforward satire as Butler ever came. In the 'nowhere' land of the title, Butler had created a hall of mirrors which only required a slight shift in perspective from his Victorian readership to reflect a mocking portrait of those institutions so beloved of the age. We are introduced to 'Musical Banks' resembling the Anglican Church at which worshippers deposit worthless tokens with an air of gravitas; 'Colleges of Unreason' resembling English public schools at which a useless hypothetical language is repeatedly drilled; and, in 'The Book of the Machines' chapters, the classic Swiftian device of the argument *ad absurdum* as Butler has his Erewhonian professors meticulously develop the analogies existing between machines and organic life in order to make the 'modest proposal' that unless machines are destroyed, they will wipe out the human race.

Published anonymously, *Erewhon* sold well at first, clearing its first print run

of a thousand copies within a year, though sales slumped with the second edition when Butler announced his authorship.[2] Contemporary reviews seem to reflect a certain amount of confusion over Butler's method. Both the *Academy* and the *Athenaeum* complained that the trick of reversing English names and customs to make a satirical point was inconsistent since not all names or customs were so treated. The *Academy* also criticised certain passages presenting Erewhon as a utopia rather than as a vehicle to satirise Victorian foibles. And the *British Quarterly Review* while expressing a similar argument, went so far as to claim that the 'effect on the whole is disappointing, where it is not unintelligible'.[3]

That *Erewhon* attracted such criticism on the grounds of its inconsistency can partly be explained with regard to the complex development of the work. In the early to mid-1860s, Butler composed a series of brief sketches each of which developed the consequences of taking a familiar concept and 'standing it on its head'. In 1865, for instance, Butler's biographer Henry Jones tells us how he composed the original sketches of what would become three of the most famous chapters of *Erewhon*: 'The World of the Unborn', 'The Musical Banks' and 'An Erewhonian Trial'.[4] Though these sketches were never published and have apparently since been lost, it seems clear from a consideration of *Erewhon* itself that as they were originally composed, these sketches stood alone as separate studies linked only by a more or less shared technique. The same can be said of the remaining sketches from this period, the so called 'germs of *Erewhon*'. Consisting of a series of three sketches entitled 'Darwin Among the Machines' (1863), 'Lucubratio Ebria' (1865) and 'The Mechanical Creation' (1865), these were published variously in either the Christchurch newspaper the *Press* or the London based journal the *Reasoner* and together constitute the material which Butler puts into the mouth of his Erewhonian professor in 'The Book of the Machines'. In a letter written shortly after its publication, Butler refers to *Erewhon* as 'a mere peg' on which he hung anything that he had a mind to say.[5] Composed of disparate fragments, it is little wonder that the work should have presented itself as inconsistent. However, this still does not address the outstanding issue of just what was the satirical point of 'The Book of the Machines'. At the time, it was evidently suggested that the work was a

[2] Henry Festing Jones, *Samuel Butler: A Memoir*, 2 vols (London: MacMillan, 1919), I, p. 159.
[3] Cited in Lee H. Holt, *Samuel Butler* (New York: Twayne, 1964), p. 46.
[4] *Memoir*, I, p. 133.
[5] Letter to Miss Savage, Jun. 16 1872, in *Memoir*, I, pp.159-60 (p. 160).

satire on evolutionary theory as Butler went out of his way to defend himself against this accusation both by writing to Darwin in person and by including a new preface to the second edition in which he responds to accusations that he had attempted to 'reduce Mr. Darwin's theory to an absurdity'. 'Nothing could be further from my intention,', Butler replies, 'and few things would be more distasteful to me than any attempt to laugh at Mr. Darwin'.[6] Given that Butler was at this point a self-confessed 'enthusiastic admirer' of Darwin and had even attempted to court his favour by sending him a copy of *Erewhon*, it seems unlikely indeed that Butler intended 'The Book of the Machines' to be satirical of evolutionary theory.[7] However, the charge keeps resurfacing among Butler's critics and the question of just what Butler intended by his ludic treatment of machines in these early works has continued to attract speculation.

Erewhon established Butler's reputation as a paradoxical and satirical writer. However, no sooner was this precedent set than it was tested by *The Fair Haven* (1873). Advertising itself as 'a work in defence of the Miraculous Element in our Lord's Ministry upon Earth both as against Rationalistic Impugners and certain Orthodox Defenders', *The Fair Haven* signaled Butler's entry into the debates surrounding the life of Christ which were such a hallmark of the second half of the nineteenth century. The Higher Criticism with its aim of investigating the historical basis for the books of the Old and New Testament had been in full swing in Germany since the late eighteenth century. In the early nineteenth century, Coleridge had attempted to popularise the methods of the school in England before George Eliot translated and published David Strauss' major work *Life of Jesus* in 1846. More recently in terms of Butler's text was the publication in 1860 of *Essays and Reviews,* a collection of studies by Anglican clergy adopting the methods of the new theology which consequently gave rise to much controversy including a charge of heresy.[8] In its preoccupation with the validity of the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection, Butler's text dealt with one of the great religious issues of the age: how far could theologians persist in appealing to the authoritative status of the scriptures in the light of mounting historical research which suggested that, like any other historical text, they were written by humans with questionable motives and

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[6] *Erewhon: or Over the Range,* rev. edn (London: A. C. Fifield, 1920), p. viii.

[7] In *Unconscious Memory* (1880). Butler reflects upon his first reading of the *Origin of Species* recalling how he became 'one of Mr. Darwin's many enthusiastic admirers'. See chapter 2, n. 13.

[8] See Ieuan Ellis, *Seven Against Christ: A Study of 'Essays and Reviews'* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980).

limited points of view?[9]

Regarding this question, the text presented itself as a defence of the miracle of the Resurrection against those 'rationalistic impugners' who would demythologise its significance, albeit one which would simultaneously expose the 'disingenuousness' of existing partisan defences. Following a candid consideration of the arguments on both sides, the author affirms the miraculous truth of Christ's story in an upbeat and hopeful conclusion in which the spirit of candour is praised as the 'pilot that has taken us safely into the Fair Haven'.[10] But once again, all was not as it seemed. Like *Erewhon,* the text was clearly 'inconsistent'. Not only did it contain many arguments detrimental to the stated aim of the work under the pretence of candour, but among these arguments were substantial sections from an 'anonymous pamphlet' attacking the central miracle of the Resurrection which Butler had privately published in 1865.[11] Once again Butler was reluctant to divulge his authorship, adopting a number of masks to distance himself from the argument. While the theological tract itself is purportedly written by the recently deceased John Pickard Owen, a highly stylised and vivid memoir of the author prefacing the argument is to be attributed to the deceased's brother, William Bickersteth Owen. And perhaps most damaging of all, the very idea of the text as a conduit to 'a fair haven' is deftly undercut by William's admission in this memoir that shortly after completing the manuscript his brother lapsed into 'a religious melancholy which nothing could disturb' and died 'in a state little better than idiocy' (pp. 59-60).

In the preface to the second edition published later in 1873 Butler reveals his authorship and discusses some of his reviews. From these it is clear that despite the lengths to which he had gone, many of his contemporaries had taken *The Fair Haven* at face value to be a work of orthodoxy. The conservative ecclesiastical publication the *Rock* for example was so impressed with the work that it set aside two issues to a discussion of its merits, noting that the author's 'exhibition of the certain proofs furnished of the Resurrection of our Lord is certainly masterly and convincing', and praising its 'many beautiful passages on the discomfort of unbelief,

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[9] For details of the Higher Criticism and its impact on Victorian culture see Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church,* 2nd edn, 2 vols (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1972), II, esp. pp. 60-111; and Bernard M. G. Reardon*, Religious Thought in the Victorian Age: A Survey from Coleridge to Gore*, 2nd edn (London: Longman, 1980), esp. pp. 321-59.

[10] Samuel Butler, *The Fair Haven, A Work in Defence of the Miraculous Element in our Lord's Ministry upon the Earth, both as Against Rationalistic Impugners and Certain Orthodox Defenders,* new edn (London: A. C. Fifield, 1913), p. 271.

[11] The title of this pamphlet was 'The Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, as Given by the Four Evangelists, Critically Examined'.

and the holy pleasure of a settled faith' (p. xviii). We also learn from a letter written to Butler from his long term friend and confidant Miss Savage that a certain Canon Ainger had recommended it to a friend of his whom he hoped to convert.[12] Indeed, it wasn't only conservative clergymen that could be taken in. As with *Erewhon,* Butler also sent a copy to Charles Darwin who wrote back to him with the telling comment that had he not known otherwise, he would not have suspected that the author was not orthodox 'within the wide stated limits' and that he was sometimes confused over who was speaking.[13] However, if Butler's original attempt at satire had backfired, the tone of studied ambiguity which he adopted in the preface to the second edition could hardly have helped in clarifying the purpose of the work. After reading the preface, Miss Savage, who throughout her friendship with Butler remained his most insightful critic, remarked that though she had read it carefully two or three times she 'couldn't lay her finger on anything'.[14]

Once again, Butler had succeeded in placing before the public a work which in its formal and stylistic innovations left the readership without a clear idea of just what his point had been. Although undoubtedly satirical to some extent, the text *does* appear to offer the possibility of a reconstructed faith the like of which was commonly held by liberal writers of the period. Not only this, but as we shall shortly see, in his later work, Butler also seems unambiguously to express sympathy for such a position. Given its complex structure and puzzling balance of irony and earnestness, *The Fair Haven* fell flat with a readership which was probably expecting another *Erewhon*. Little did they know that something very much resembling the ludic speculations of Butler's first work was about to come their way, though not in a form which they would find easy to swallow.

Soon after finishing *The Fair Haven,* Butler dropped the subject of the Higher Criticism and set about re-fashioning himself, this time in the image of a writer of popular science. In 1878, after years of speculation, Butler published *Life and Habit*. In this work, Butler carefully develops the analogies between heredity and memory to arrive at the conclusion that heredity *is* memory. On the face of it, the essential identity that Butler felt these two mechanisms shared allowed him to advocate the standard Lamarckian position that characteristics acquired, or 'memorised', during a creature's lifetime could be inherited by its offspring. However, this central metaphor also guided Butler's argument to some highly unorthodox conclusions which would

[12] Letter to Butler, Jun. 1873, in *Memoir*, I, pp. 198-99 (p. 199).
[13] Letter to Butler, Apr. 1 1873, in *Memoir*, I pp. 186-87 (p. 187).
[14] Letter to Butler, Aug. 30 1873, in *Memoir*, I, pp. 203-04 (p. 203).

not have been out of place in *Erewhon*. The unborn child, Butler argues, acts on knowledge acquired by his or her ancestors to develop limbs with as much purpose as an artisan fashions a tool. Moreover, as all life has descended from the 'primordial cell' we carry within us the collective memory of all life. Personal identity, Butler concludes, is an illusion.

Such immoderate speculations might have been enough in themselves to alienate Butler from a serious audience, but, there was also good reason to suppose that the text was a front for another satire. For instance, Butler also used the text to launch a direct attack on the newly established profession of science, drawing on his concept of 'unconscious knowledge' to call into question both the reliability of its methods and the morality of its practitioners. By a leap of Erewhonian logic, Butler maintains that it is the layperson possessed of the unquestionable truths of common sense who has more of a claim to the designation 'scientist'.[15]

Further complications arise when we acknowledge that Butler only came to a full knowledge of Darwin's theory during the final preparations for publishing *Life and Habit*.[16] Following an eleventh hour conversation with an acquaintance, Butler discovered that theories of evolution expressed in terms of the theory of descent with modification had been common since the work of Buffon in eighteenth century France. Darwin's distinctive contribution in the *Origin of Species* was not in fact the general doctrine of descent but a mechanism accounting for the emergence of new species in terms of existing natural laws. Beginning with the simple observation that variations exist between individuals of the same species, Darwin had argued that every so often an individual would be born with a variation giving it an advantage in the struggle for life. Possessed of an edge over its competitors, such an individual would stand an increased chance of successfully passing on this variation to its offspring. Over time this process would be repeated leading to a change in the composition of the population as a whole as the new variation predominated and the older one lost out in the struggle for limited resources. This mechanism, the principle of natural selection, was revolutionary because it held out the promise of an explanation for the emergence of new forms of life in terms of existing natural laws and processes. But it was also highly controversial even among those who accepted the general theory of descent with modification. For many, Darwin's principle was unworkable in practice without the existence of an active cause giving rise to and

[15] *Life and Habit,* rev. edn (London: A. C. Fifield, 1910), pp. 30-31.
[16] The biographical details that follow are based on Butler's own account of how he wrote the text. See *Unconscious Memory*, new edn (London: A. C. Fifield, 1910), pp. 12-25.

accumulating the variations on which his model vitally depended. In so arguing, such writers were often drawn to the work of the earlier evolutionist Lamarck and his emphasis on the needs of the organism itself to change. For Lamarck, needs determined how an organism used its body and through use and disuse some parts would develop while others would waste away. With a change in environment, an organism would be forced to adapt and new needs would be created. Moreover, it was not simply a matter of which hypothesis suited best the observed phenomena; as with so many of the post-*Origin* debates, the stakes were much higher and for many amounted to the question: what kind of universe do we inhabit? An indifferent mechanistic one, or one where intention and human agency matters? For Butler, the answer was clear.[17]

Already blending the fantastic with the caustic, Butler now dashed off additional chapters to *Life and Habit*, attacking the principle of natural selection whilst passionately upholding 'the more living faith' of his own purposeful model of evolutionary development. Gathering together an array of scientific studies in support of his argument, Butler evidently felt he was making a valuable contribution in these chapters, positioning himself alongside the man Darwin considered to be one of his greatest critics, the Christian scientist St Georg Jackson Mivart. But despite such efforts, few commentators could accept Butler's claim at the conclusion to the work to have been 'in very serious earnest from the first page to the last' (p. 305). In terms of contemporary reactions, opinion was divided even in the context of a single review. *The Athenaeum,* for example, conceded that the book contained 'serious and important scientific truth' but also suspected a hoax. Similarly, ambivalent was the *Westminster Review* which commented of the work that 'the incisive touches of the satirist are combined with the more sober suggestions of the scientific critic'. The *Contemporary Review* observed that the book contained 'much shrewd sense' though in 'whimsical form' and criticised Butler for emphasising his earnestness.[18] Once again Butler had succeeded in provoking a mixed, even polarised, response from his reviewers. Commenting on the reception of his work, Georg Roppen has written that the question of 'sincerity' or 'seriousness' has indeed

[17] For more on the debates between Darwinists and neo-Lamarckians see Alvar Ellegard, *Darwin and the General Reader: the Reception of Darwin's Theory of Evolution in the British Periodical Press, 1859–1872* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 242-79; and James R. Moore, *The Post-Darwinian Controversies: A Study of the Protestant Struggle to Come to Terms with Darwin in Great Britain and America 1870-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
[18] Cited in Holt, pp. 70-71.

been a touchstone in Butler criticism since his own day, and of his evolutionary speculations more generally:

> The spirit and form in which they are presented make it necessary to ask: is this a confession of faith or a clever joke? Is Butler really in earnest when he preaches his theory of heredity as memory?[19]

However, Butler was indeed in earnest and in fact would prove it by writing and publishing a further three extended essays on evolutionary theory all at his own expense in order to popularise his unorthodox theory and continue his attack against Darwin's attempts to 'pitchfork mind out of the universe'.[20]

Butler's final contributions to the evolutionary debates, *Evolution, Old and New* (1879)*, Unconscious Memory* (1880) and *Luck, or Cunning?* (1887), distinguish themselves from most of the other texts I consider in this study in that they do not immediately present themselves as the products of a literary imagination. In *Evolution, Old and New* (1879), Butler's main aim is to lay before the public the work of the three older evolutionists in order to demonstrate that the model of evolution which these writers proposed not only predated that of Charles Darwin's, but also constituted a far simpler and more effective explanation of the mechanism underlying evolutionary change. *Unconscious Memory* (1880)*,* Butler devotes in part to a discussion of two German writers, Ewald Hering and Eduard von Hartmann, whose work he is keen to relate to his own theories. However, by far the most characteristic aspect of the work is Butler's accusation that Darwin had deliberately attempted to create the impression with the *Origin of Species* that no major work on evolution had been done before. With *Luck, or Cunning*, Butler keeps up the attack on Darwin and extends his critique of the professional men of science, particularly with regard to the secular, financial forces which motivate them.

In terms of the contemporary reaction to these works, the general consensus seemed to be that Butler had become a Don Quixote figure, vainly and indiscriminately tilting at Darwin, Huxley, and the entire establishment of Victorian science. Reviewing *Evolution, Old and New* for the *Academy,* the scientific author and novelist Grant Allen questioned Butler's purpose in continuing to publish such unorthodox and divisive works while professing to find no satisfying answer.

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[19] Georg Roppen, *Evolution and Poetic Belief* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956), p. 317.
[20] Samuel Butler, *Luck, or Cunning as the Main Means of Organic Modification? An Attempt to Throw Additional Light upon Darwin's Theory of Natural Selection,* new edn (London: A. C. Fifield, 1920), p. 8.

According to Allen, Butler was a 'mystifier' who did his best to 'leave one utterly in the dark with regard to his system of juggling', though he too could not rule out the possibility that one reason why Butler continued writing his books was to poke fun at people like him:

> Is he a teleological theologian making fun of evolution? Is he an evolutionist making fun of teleology? Is he a man of letters making fun of science? Or is he a master of pure irony, making fun of all three and his audience as well?[21]

The Athenaeum reviewing *Luck, or Cunning?* lamented that a mind of 'considerable power' should be 'frittered away in ephemeral conflict'.[22] Unsurprisingly, it was *Unconscious Memory,* in which Butler had launched what amounted to an *ad hominem* attack on Charles Darwin's reputation, which provoked the harshest reviews. Of these, that of the pro-Darwin biologist George Romanes stood out as particularly scathing. 'A certain nobody', Romanes scoffs, 'writes a book accusing the most illustrious man in his generation of burying the claims of certain illustrious predecessors out of sight of all men'. Butler had made a mistake by leaving the 'suitable sphere of literature' and entering into the 'arena of philosophical discussion', particularly in that his 'mental stature' and 'mental equipment' left him 'in no way adapted' to participate in such debates.[23] Those less inclined to a mechanistic view of nature were more sympathetic. Alfred Russell Wallace, co-discoverer with Darwin of the principle of natural selection, was one such individual, who, though remaining a supporter of the principle throughout his life, began increasingly to argue against a purely material origin for the higher mental faculties of humans. In a leading article in *Nature,* Wallace commented of *Evolution, Old and New* that Butler's hypothesis formed 'an important and even necessary supplement' to Darwin's theory. And eight years after his review of this work, Grant Allen could now call *Luck, or Cunning?* 'a most valuable, original, and suggestive contribution to current evolutionary thought', adding that

> here is a work of consummate ingenuity, rare literary skill, and a certain happy vein of sardonic humor - a work pregnant with epigram, sparkling with wit, and instinct throughout with a powerful original fancy - flung out upon the world in the unconventional guise of a scientific treatise. [24]

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[21] Grant Allen, review of *Evolution, Old and New*, *Academy,* 15 (1879), 426-27.
[22] Cited in Holt, p. 91.
[23] G. J. Romanes, review of *Unconscious Memory, Nature,* 23 (1881), 285-87.
[24] Cited in Holt, pp. 77, 91.

As Allen's comments here suggest, although Butler's final evolutionary essays are polemic in focus, they still bear adequate testimony to the presence of a literary imagination.

Throughout these later essays, Butler often close reads his opponents' language in order to focus on confused or mystifying formulations, omissions or possible alternative significations. The results then serve as evidence enabling him to undermine an opponent's position, uncover ulterior motives or subvert the original meaning altogether. In one such instance from *Luck, or Cunning?*, Butler seizes on Darwin's continual re-wording of a key passage dealing with natural selection through successive editions of *Origin of Species* in order to claim that such vacillations inadvertently signal the real doubts Darwin had over what was, after all, 'the keystone' of Darwinism:

> It may perhaps make the workings of Mr. Darwin's mind clearer to the reader if I give the various readings of this passage as taken from the three most important editions of the 'Origin of Species.'
>
> In 1859 it stood, 'Further, we must suppose that there is a power always intently watching each slight accidental alteration,' &c.
>
> In 1861 it stood, 'Further, we must suppose that there is a power (natural selection) always intently watching each slight accidental alteration,' &c.
>
> And in 1869, 'Further, we must suppose that there is a power represented by natural selection or the survival of the fittest always intently watching each slight alteration,' &c.[25]

According to Butler, by directing close attention to the language of the *Origin,* 'an idea can be formed of the difficulty in which Darwin found himself involved by his initial blunder of thinking that he had got a distinctive feature'. Of course, we could see this technique as simply a particularly ingenious and scheming manifestation of Butler's questionable attack on Darwin, an attack which Gertrude Himmelfarb describes in terms of the persecution mania and rampant suspicion of the paranoiac. Indeed the fact that very few critics have passed remark on this technique is indicative of just how damaging these final essays continue to be in terms of Butler's credibility.[26] However, accusations of wanton criticism notwithstanding, there are good reasons to suppose that by exposing the slippages to which even scientific discourse is prone, Butler's aims were consistent with his

[25] *Luck, or Cunning?*, pp. 101.

[26] Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), p. 414; Roppen's comments at the outset of his chapter on the evolutionary writings are typical of the critical response as a whole. He explains his study's exclusive focus upon *Erewhon* and *Life and Habit* by the somewhat euphemistic claim that these works constitute the 'freshest and least polemical profession of Butler's own evolutionary faith' (p. 318).

belief that a secular agenda of self-interest lay behind the special claims of the scientist. As we shall see in the course of this study, throughout Butler's writing there is a growing awareness that like species, language is also always prone to modification. Additionally, from the time of at least *Erewhon,* there is a pronounced preoccupation in Butler's writings with a certain kind of professional who exploits his privileged position in order to further their own interests. Seen against this background, Butler's close reading technique takes on a meaning very different from that of a blunt weapon wielded in the service of *ad hominem* attacks.

One further aspect of these later works ought to be mentioned before we move on, that is the account which Butler gives of how he wrote *Life and Habit* in the chapter from *Unconscious Memory* of the same name. From this account, we learn that it was not just 'The Book of the Machines' which had its origin in the series of three fictional machine sketches which Butler composed in the early 1860s, but that these same sketches also functioned as the preliminary 'thought experiments' out of which Butler developed his Life and Habit theory. As we shall see, a surprisingly small number of Butler's later critics acknowledge this connection and fewer still have sought to explore how the specific circumstances in which Butler worked out his puzzling theory can influence our understanding of the work.

The year after he published *Luck or Cunning?,* Butler's father died, leaving him the substantial inheritance he so desperately desired. Freed from all financial worries, Butler seems to have lost his appetite for the fight. Apart from the odd journal article, the drive to champion a teleological universe and tilt against Darwin was replaced by other interests. However, some things did not change and despite writing and publishing similarly irreverent and revisionary works on Homer and Shakespeare, Butler remained more or less unread during his lifetime. One paradoxical book was intriguing; but when he persisted in applying his literary imagination to every subject he touched, Butler alienated himself from an audience that could never fully dismiss the possibility that they too were part of the joke. The document 'An Analysis of the Sales of my Books', Butler's meticulous account of his earnings and expenditure, records the pitiful amount of sales and revenue which each of his books generated against his original outlay, revealing thereby a more or less consistently decreasing readership from *Erewhon* on.[27] In his private notebooks, however, Butler was always convinced of the prospect of posthumous fame and popularity:

[27] *Notebooks*, p. 368.

> I don't expect to get on in a commercial sense at present, I do not go the right way to work for this; but I am going the right way to secure a lasting reputation and this is what I do care for. A man cannot have both, he must make up his mind which he means going in for. I have gone in for posthumous fame and I see no step in my literary career which I do not think calculated to promote my being held in esteem when the heat of passion has subsided.[28]

Although smacking slightly of sour grapes and delusion, Butler's confession proved to be surprisingly prescient. Within a few years of his death, his book sales took off and he was being lionised as a prophet of Modernism by a coterie of young writers eager to sweep away the remnants of the Victorian world.

Ahead of his time: the reception of Butler's work in the Modern period

The key to Butler's success was of course the publication of *The Way of All Flesh* in 1903. In the story of how his fictional counterpart Ernest Pontifex shook off repression to rise to self-awareness and autonomy, Butler was able to mete out some kind of justice for the injuries he felt he had suffered at the hands of his cruel and over-bearing parents, his hypocritical school masters and his narrow and bigoted faith. Like Ernest, Butler spent long periods of his life estranged from a father whom he felt neither cared for him nor had his best interests at heart; he too felt he had been steered blindly toward the life of a clergyman by those who had insulated him from the real threats that beset the Christian faith during the middle decades of the century. Although the novel was effectively completed by the 1880s, Butler's scruples over offending certain surviving members of his family by his scathing portrait of the hypocrisy and oppression of Victorian family life persuaded him against publishing in his lifetime. When it was finally unleashed, it needed several years to register, but according to Lee H. Holt the period around 1907 to 1908 signalled the beginning of the Butler revival. It was during these years that the first reissues of Butler's books began to appear and the preliminary 'Erewhon dinner' took place, being an informal meeting of Butler's admirers.[29] In 1907, George

[28] Ibid., p. 155.
[29] For the details of Butler's revival in this section I have drawn upon Holt, pp. 149-55; and James G. Paradis, 'Butler after Butler: The Man of Letters as Outsider' in *Against the Grain*, pp. 363-65. According to Jones, around thirty-two people took part in this inaugural dinner with substantially greater numbers in the following years. Among the guests at these early

Bernard Shaw, a participant at these early dinners and one of Butler's most enthusiastic admirers, wrote in his preface to *Major Barbara* that Butler was, 'in his own department the greatest English writer of the latter half of the XIX Century'. In 1908, articles by Arthur Clutton-Brock, Holbrook Jackson and Ford Maddox Hueffer praised Butler's iconoclastic novel and assessed the phenomenon of his posthumous renaissance.[30] Less than a decade after his death, Butler's prediction had come true and his novel was now being hailed as a landmark of literary Modernism by writers as diverse as E. M. Forster, H. G. Wells and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

It wasn't simply in the literary world that Butler was making his mark. In this post-Freudian world in which Lamarck's star was rising again at the expense of Darwin's, Butler's rebellion against his father, his emphasis on unconscious desires and the primacy of the will struck a resonant chord. In 1910, the geneticist William Bateson could call Butler 'the most brilliant' of all Darwin's opponents, and this in the context of a volume of essays published on the occasion of the centenary of Darwin's birth.[31] In the world of philosophy too, Butler's ideas were making an impact, with several academics taking his ideas seriously in publications during the Great War.[32] Later in the century, C. E. M. Joad devotes more than half of his study of Butler to a serious analysis of the evolutionary theories and their influence upon the Moderns, as well as what Joad terms his 'practical philosophy'. Indeed, so seriously did critics now appear to take Butler's theories as *biology* that Joad could consider Butler's influence upon modern science with reference to recent biological research into mutations, chromosomes and Mendelism.[33] Most characteristic of this period is perhaps Clara F Stillman's *Samuel Butler, A Mid-Victorian Modern* (1932),

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dinners were George Bernard Shaw, Edmund Gosse and Gilbert Cannan (*Memoir,* II, pp. 417-30).

[30] Writing in the *Daily News,* Hueffer could now call Butler a 'rare and inestimable writer' (Ford Maddox [Ford], 'A Book of the Day,' review of *The Way of All Flesh*, *Daily News*, May 15 1908, p. 4.

[31] William Bateson, 'Heredity and Variation in Modern Lights', in *Darwin and Modern Science: Essays in Commemoration of the Centenary of the Birth of Charles Darwin and the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Publication of the Origin of Species,* ed. by A. C. Seward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909), pp. 85-101 (p. 88); for details of Lamarck's ascendancy in this period see Peter J. Bowler, *The Eclipse of Darwinism: Anti-Darwinian Evolution Theories in the Decades Around 1900* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1983), pp. 58-106.

[32] See Holt, p. 150. Among the philosophers who showed an interest in Butler was Robert F. Rattray, who in his paper on Butler in *Mind* compares the substance of his thought in *Life and Habit* to Freud's and Bergson's (Robert F. Rattray, 'The Philosophy of Samuel Butler', *Mind*, 23 (1914), 371-85.

[33] *Samuel Butler (1835-1902)* (London: Leonard Parsons, 1924) pp. 53-79.

in which Stillman attempts to connect strands of Butler's thought to a whole host of Modern thinkers. One by one, quantum relativism, psychoanalysis, Nietzsche, Henri Bergson, William James, and a whole host of Neo-Lamarckians are cited as part of an argument that paints Butler as a thinker ahead of his time. On the recent discoveries in the field of quantum theory, Stillman notes that 'the most advanced modern physicists too have discovered the value of the pictorial method which Butler applied to biology'.[34] While there remain reasonable grounds for some of these comparisons, not least of all, as we shall see, that of Butler's similarities to James, Stillman's argument obviously suffered from the limited perspectives of her age. This is particularly the case in relation to her championing of the neo-Lamarckian strain of Butler's thought which quickly lost any ground it had gained on Darwinism in the post-war years. But more than this, by dragging Butler out of the nineteenth century, an opportunity is lost to examine the development of his thought in its original context. Outside of his main preoccupations, basically evolution and religion, Butler prided himself on reading very little, preferring to conduct his education on a more independent and practical basis by worrying through his favourite ideas in notebooks or perhaps through one of the many articles and letters he submitted to publications such as the *Reasoner,* the *Athenaeum,* the *Examiner* or the *Press*.[35] For this reason it is well that we exercise caution when attempting to explain his thought by appealing to the work of his contemporaries -- and even more so when citing those who outlived him. A much more fitting and, as we shall see, fertile route of inquiry results from the analysis of these brief, often intensely personal and self-reflexive speculations.

It is perhaps inevitable that having reached a high point after his re-discovery in the early decades of the century, the tide should turn again against Butler. Signs of his going out of fashion were already noticeable in 1919 when Butler's biographer and close friend, Henry Festing Jones, published his two volume memoir of his life. Although the work was published with the best of intentions, the sheer weight of detail which Jones had brought to bear upon life and letters of a fairly idiosyncratic individual inevitably resulted in the inclusion of some of the less flattering details.

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[34] Clara G. Stillman, *Samuel Butler, a Mid-Victorian Modern* (New York: The Viking Press 1932), pp. 10, 6.

[35] In the later essay 'Ramblings in Cheapside', Butler discusses his reading practices: 'I do not like books. I believe I have the smallest library of any literary man in London and I have no wish to increase it. I keep my books at the British Museum and at Mudie's […] Webster's Dictionary, Whitaker's Almanack, and Bradshaw's Railway Guide should be sufficient for any ordinary library' (*Essays on Life, Art and Science* (London: A. C. Fifield, 1908), pp. 18-44 (pp. 30-31)).

Chief among these we could cite the smouldering resentment and ill-will which Butler harboured against his father and which flared up every now and again in his personal correspondence.[36] And perhaps most in evidence, a pervasive love of money and status manifesting itself in everything from meticulous double entry book-keeping on household matters to Butler's pathetic adulation for 'the swell'. With all the foibles of his psychology pinned upon its pages for all to examine, it wasn't long before the backlash began. James G. Paradis summarises the episode best:

> Jones tell-all memoir was widely reviewed, and left a negative impression on former enthusiasts like Shaw, John Middleton Murry, Walter de la Mare, and Philip Gosse, who all expressed new reservations about his personality. Contrariety was increasingly taken to be bigotry, as personality began to trump content. Shaw's enthusiasm faded noticeably, and Butler became the cautionary exemplar, the genius ruined by the parsonage.[37]

Butler's reputation reached perhaps its nadir with the publication in 1936 of Malcolm Muggeridge's partly fictionalised biography *The Ernest Atheist*. The scathing portrait herein of a bloodless, narrow minded, money-loving, misanthrope is unforgiving and so completely lacking in proportion that, as critics have subsequently pointed out, it perhaps casts more light on Muggeridge's psychology than Butler's.[38]

A more balanced tone characterises the criticism of the post-war years. P. N. Furbank, writing in 1948, begins by noting the disservice which the *Memoir* has done to Butler's reputation, adding that Muggeridge was writing at a time of nascent nostalgia for the Victorian age and the concept of duty. Like Muggeridge, Furbank acknowledges the pivotal importance of Butler's loss of faith and consequent battle with his father over the direction that his life would take in order to develop his own species of psychological criticism. For Furbank, Butler is a stoic living a 'doctrine of rejection, of avoidance of hurt rather than the courting of pleasure, of sitting quiet and not asking much, at least of this present life' (p. 37). Much space is given over to biographical details, but there is an insightful if all too brief analysis of some of the main themes of Butler's writing. These include a more sympathetic account of his

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[36] Butler's response to the news that his mother was critically ill was recorded in a letter to his long term correspondent and personal friend Miss Eliza Savage. His sentiments expressed as a couplet read: 'I had rather | it had been my father' (*Memoir*, I, pp. 184-85 (p. 185)).

[37] James G. Paradis, introduction to *Against the Grain*, p. 6.

[38] See P. N. Furbank, *Samuel Butler (1835-1902)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948); and Philip Henderson, *Samuel Butler, The Incarnate Bachelor* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954).

attitudes towards money as well as a glimpse at the recurring themes of ownership and 'the other'. For Furbank, Butler's preoccupation with money was not simply an expression of petty avarice but rather representative of a worldview encompassing questions of social power and status (p. 20). On the related theme of ownership, Furbank observes how Butler could apply a similar kind of thinking to his opinions, reifying them as property and jealously guarding them against the threat of others:

> To have made up his mind upon the subject of a liking or its opposite had a special value for Butler. Everywhere the insistence is that one's opinion shall be one's own, and 'one's own' begins to take on the colour of a valuable possession, another kind of prize or trophy carried off from the world. (p. 21)

'What is not Butler's own', Furbank concludes, 'is somebody else's, and the "somebody else" is bound to be an enemy' (p. 23). Stylistic observations are also made, notably how Butler's use of a pocket book throughout his life in order to jot down and collect his impressions goes hand in hand with a 'faculty for the delicate small action', 'the small find, 'the undiscovered trifle just beneath the surface of everyday life' (p. 43). In this way, whether he was aware of it or not, Furbank's work builds on a minor chapter in Joad's study. Although primarily concerned with his evolutionary writings as system, Joad devotes a chapter of his work to an absorbing analysis of Butler's critique of professionalism, which, with his emphasis on lofty and noble aims as a front for the exercise of power, suggests the possibility of a more sophisticated approach to Butler's polemic. Such analyses stray from the well-trodden path of Butler as iconoclast, as evolutionary or theological thinker and represent a relatively untapped vein in Butler criticism.

With regard to the evolutionary speculations, Furbank also adopts a refreshing approach in comparison to most of Butler's other critics, paying relatively little attention to the themes of Butler's 'system'. Instead, he deals with the thorny issue of 'sincerity or seriousness' with the initial observation that pleasure is 'the best key' to Butler's writings of evolution:

> Butler's theories of the identity of instinct and memory, of cunning as the means of organic modification, of the continuity of memory between parents and offspring, are all so delicately balanced, and tremble so continually on the brink of nonsense, that there comes always the moment when he cannot resist going the one step too far […] And on the whole, it is these moments, or the expectation of these moments, which really makes the virtue of this part of his writing. (p. 51)

However, Furbank goes on to suggest that this is not altogether an innocent pleasure, as 'in taking a plausible hypothesis and running it as far as it can possibly be made to go', Butler's 'apparently watertight' yet 'improbable theories' undermine 'the whole business of scientific theorizing itself'-- a result that holds true regardless of Butler's intentions (p. 56).

One last aspect of Furbank's study of Butler is worthy of comment before we move on, that is his comments on Butler's close reading technique in his later essays. Commenting on the passage from *Luck, or Cunning?* that I have included above, Furbank makes the following observation:

> Allowing for the fact that the imputation of deliberate disingenuity is pretty certainly unjustified, there still seems to me a great value in the sort of attention that Butler gives to the language of scientific writing, and the possibilities of mystification of which it is apt to make use […] This is the sort of criticism he is able to enforce with no other competence than that of a man of letters and his analysis of the passage in question is unmistakably useful. There is a constant need for someone who will make use of his literary position to expose the vicious tendencies in the style of non-literary writings. What is required is the Arnoldian ear for *tone of voice*; and it is in something of Arnold's manner that Butler displays how the tone of a defensive paragraph or over-qualified sentence may be made to reveal a dishonest intention in an argument. (p. 73)

In spite of Furbank's analysis of the constructive contribution which this technique makes to Butler's project, this aspect of Butler's writing, like his critique of professionalism and emphasis on ownership and the other, has been surprisingly neglected. The only other exception to Furbank's brief account of the role of the close reading strategy comes in the form of Lee H. Holt's useful summary of Butler's work, life and contemporary reception *Samuel Butler* (1964).[39] However, Holt's work is predominately a summary of Butler's publications and to date, no thorough analysis of this strategy has yet been undertaken.

Between two ages: Butler's thought as system

Moving on from Furbank, we enter a period in which critics were interested in Butler's work to the extent that it reflected the concerns of a culture struggling against the rise of scientific naturalism whilst simultaneously searching for a valid set of spiritual values to replace those of traditional Christianity. In his dual role as

[39] See for example chapter 6 (pp. 83-91).

both amateur scientist and biblical critic, Butler is well placed to illustrate the forces at work during this period. In general, these critics take a biographical approach, drawing on the details of Butler's apostasy to inform their analysis of his theological and evolutionary speculations. The assumption throughout these works is that like a number of his contemporaries, Butler was involved in constructing an alternative belief system from the cultural material of evolutionary theory, one which would affirm those values which he felt to be lacking in the narrow faith of his upbringing. Insofar as this is the case, these critics place Butler's criticism of natural selection and promotion of a purposeful model of evolution at the heart of their analysis.

In his *Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel: George Eliot, Walter Pater and Samuel Butler* (1965), U. C. Knoepflmacher argues that Butler's 'alienation from his parents, his rejection of Christianity, and his gradual emergence as an evolutionary thinker' are intimately related and 'must be considered in conjunction with each other'. 'Writers who are interested in Butler's role as a renegade usually minimize the import of his evolutionary doctrines;', he argues, whereas 'those who examine Butler as a vitalist thinker are too quick in dismissing the role played by his loss of faith in shaping these doctrines.'[40] Knoepflmacher's point here seems to be that writers such as Furbank who give full weight to the events of Butler's early personal crisis tend to downplay the constructive import of his evolutionary writings, preferring to view them simply as good comedy or satire; whereas other writers, who are more sympathetic to the evolutionary writings as theoretical system, such as Stillman or Joad, are often reluctant to limit the range of their relevance by considering just how subjective the world view contained therein may be. In his study, Knoepflmacher attempts to fill this critical gap by interpreting Butler's apostasy as a *bona fide* loss of faith rather than a reaction against authority. He then proceeds through a brief reading of *Erewhon, The Fair Haven* and *Life and Habit* to show the ways in which the thematics of Butler's published output can be thought of as the 'creation and consolidation of a faith'. In this sense, Knoepflmacher sees a more conservative tendency in Butler, grouping him with Matthew Arnold, George Eliot, and Walter Pater as a collection of writers who sought to salvage alternative 'humanist creeds' in the wake of their religious crises. What gives Butler's creed its particular flavour, according to Knoepflmacher, is that

[40] *Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel: George Eliot, Walter Pater and Samuel Butler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 232.

> while Arnold, Pater and Eliot appeal to conscience as a guide for morality, Butler stresses the power of the unconscious. [He] refuses to see any great merit in 'a notoriously Hebrew contribution to our moral and intellectual well-being' or to ascribe any significance to the example of Christ. By paring down Arnold's 'power not ourselves' into a 'power within ourselves', the instinctive wisdom or cunning he venerated as a life-force, he provided a transition to the vitalism of George Bernard Shaw or D. H. Lawrence. (p. 255)

The study then concludes with a comprehensive reading of *The Way of All Flesh* based on this revisionist understanding of Butler's intentions. Here Knoepflmacher challenges the dominant critical assumption of the work as iconoclastic of Victorian idols, noting that it may equally be read as 'a religious novel' investigating the workings of a faith which allows for 'change as well as permanence, death as well as immortality' (p. 257).

In another major study of this period, *Darwin and Butler: Two Versions of Evolution* (1960), Basil Willey provides an overview of the main points of convergence between the theories of Darwin and Butler before referring to Butler's works and private correspondence to show how his religious thought played an increasingly important role in his writing as he aged. After 'fourteen years of tilting against the satanic mills of Darwinism,' he observes, Butler came to realise that 'his deepest loyalties were on the side of the angels'.[41] In evidence, he cites a letter written to St. Georg Jackson Mivart in 1884 in which Butler argues that religion cannot be kept out of evolution. Paley's argument from design only required to be adapted to take into account the Lamarckian interpretation of design as immanent within the evolutionary process itself in the form of the individual's will to develop. 'I imagine you see God as something apart from the universe which he has taken and moulded', Butler begins, alluding to Mivart's catholic beliefs '[whereas] I see him as animating the universe he in us, and we in him; so that the union between God and his creatures seems closer, more indissoluble'.[42] Further evidence is cited in the form of the preface to *Erewhon Revisited* in which Butler claims: 'No two people think absolutely alike on any subject, but when I converse with advanced Broad Churchmen I find myself in substantial harmony'.[43] However, the most intriguing piece of evidence which Willey cites as part of his argument to point up the conservative in Butler's thought concerns his reading of *The Fair Haven*.

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[41] *Darwin and Butler: Two Versions of Evolution* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960), pp. 106-07.
[42] Letter to St. Georg Jackson Mivart, Feb. 2 1884, in *Memoir*, I, p. 407.
[43] *Erewhon Revisited Twenty Years Later Both by the Original Discoverer of the Country and by his Son* (London: A. C. Fifield, 1908; repr.1910), pp. vi-vii.

Like some of Butler's contemporaries, Willey casts doubt on the assumption that the work is a straightforward satire on scriptural authority. According to him, there are passages where Butler 'seems to be a serious apologist, not indeed for traditional Christianity, but for modernist Christianity' (p. 100). In evidence, Willey points to Butler's method of 'apologetics by concession' or the rhetorical strategy of conceding that certain positions are untenable in order the better to defend a core, reconstructed faith. This particularly Modernist approach, Willey especially identifies with the substance of Butler's argument in a chapter entitled 'The Christ Ideal'. Briefly, the thrust of Butler's argument until this point in the book has been almost entirely destructive, namely to present under the pretence of candour the position of the Higher Criticism that the inconsistencies between the four Gospels' accounts of Christ's life are so insurmountable as to force upon one the conclusion that the miracle of the Resurrection is simply a myth. There then follows a rejoinder in the form of 'The Christ Ideal' chapter which appears to express the liberal theological position of the time that the value of the scriptures lies not in their literal worth as factual accounts of real events, but in their power to present us with an idealised image of the Christian subject in the account of the life of Christ. As Willey observes, such arguments were common currency at the time, having met with popular expression in *Essays and Reviews.* Not only this, but Willey also goes on to cite Butler's oblique reference to the mythical basis of Christianity at the close of *Erewhon Revisited* as further evidence that he came to sympathise with the new theology in late life. In the scene in question, the narrator Higgs returns to the fictional land of the title to discover that he has become the subject of a new religion, complete with holy relics, rituals and an elaborate mythology. When it becomes clear that Higgs is no more divine that the average Erewhonian citizen, the authorities are faced with the question of whether or not to discontinue the practice of 'Sundchildism'. Higg's advice on this matter is similar to Butler's approach to the writing of *Erewhon*: the authorities should not scrap Sundchildism but quietly set about making of Higgs 'a peg on which to hang all of their best ethical and spiritual conceptions'. They are to drop the 'wretched relics' and 'cock and bull stories' and simply make him out 'much better and abler than he was'. If they succeed in doing this, Sunchildism may serve 'for many a long year to come' (pp. 278-90). In effect, the Butler of 1901 now seemed to be advocating the very position which he claimed to be satirising back in 1873. According to Willey, then, Butler's contemporary readers were justified in sensing that he had only gone so far with his satire, that

despite all its rationalist arguments the text still offers the possibility of some form of reconstructed faith. Ultimately, Willey asks more questions than he answers in this part of his study; but for any study of *The Fair Haven*, these remain pressing questions to which no satisfactory answer has yet been offered.

Perhaps the most important study from this period in terms of this current work is Frank Miller Turner's treatment of Butler in *Between Science and Religion: The Reaction to Scientific Naturalism in Late Victorian England* (1974). In this study, Turner considers a range of eminent Victorians who rejected the narrow orthodox faith of their upbringing only to find that the prevailing scientific ideology of the day was equally restrictive. In this sense, the ideology which Turner terms 'scientific naturalism' is key to his study. According to Turner, in the 1860s and 70s in particular, there was a drive from within the newly established profession of science to apply rigorous scientific methods not just to the material world of physics and chemistry, but to biology and the emerging discipline of psychology. Pointing to figures such as Thomas Henry Huxley and John Tyndall, Turner describes how these men attempted a highly reductionist explanation of nature in terms of just three theories of the natural world: Dalton's atomic theory, the theory of the conservation of energy and Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection. Moreover, their secularising agenda brought them into direct conflict with the values of religion which they tended to reject wholesale as embodying the primitive, animistic view of nature which the authoritative methods of science had now necessarily to replace.

Focussing on Butler's evolutionary writings and his relations to the scientific community, Turner argues that in the years before he published *Life and Habit,* Butler was enamoured with science, believed it could provide an authoritative interpretation of nature, and wished to make a name for himself as an amateur scientist. However, he soon discovered that while professionals might tolerate an amateur popularising their work, they wouldn't accept one putting forth a novel theory of his own. As a consequence, Butler modified the purpose of *Life and Habit* in mid-composition to include a specific attack on the newly established profession of science.[44] Not only this, but his discovery of the older evolutionists at around the same time, and subsequent sense of having been duped by Darwin, served to illustrate Nietzsche's thesis that 'the untenability of one interpretation of the world,

[44] Frank Miller Turner, B*etween Science and Religion: The Reaction to Scientific Naturalism in Late Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 173.

upon which a tremendous amount of energy has been lavished, awakens the suspicion that *all* interpretations are false'.[45] As Turner explains:

> Through his own encounters with the religious, intellectual, scientific and social norms of the day, Butler came to regard all norms as nothing more than expedient conventions whereby men organized and directed their lives. The conventions and the systems of thought employed to justify them had not counterpart in reality. Conventions were by no means necessarily evil; indeed life required them. However, they became evil and incompatible with the authentic expression of life when confused with reality or when regarded as the unchanging expression of an underlying reality.

Turner thus argues that much of Butler's project can be understood as the drive to expose 'the illicit use of conventions in every stratum of Victorian life', particularly with regard to his aim of challenging the cultural authority of the professional scientist and weakening the foundation of their naturalistic interpretations (pp. 164-65). Interestingly, so comprehensive does Turner perceive Butler's scepticism to have been that even though he too acknowledges Butler's movement toward a more religious interpretation of evolution in later life, he tempers this observation with the claim that 'moral, intellectual, physical and metaphysical essences were absent from his world of thought' and that 'existence itself preceded all conventions whether they were physical laws, moral rules, or intellectual concepts' (p. 188). Such an agenda, Turner argues, qualifies Butler for the status of Kierkegaard's 'ironic subject'. At historical moments of radical change, Kierkegaard argued, there are three possible responses: 'prophets' can suggest the course of future development while 'tragic heroes' can attempt to forge this course; the third way is that of irony. Crucially, by stressing Butler as ironic subject, Turner emphasises the destructive in Butler's project as the attempt 'to destroy and subvert the present conventional reality rather than to create a new one' (p. 167).

The remainder of Turner's study is given over to what he terms Butler's 'attack against intellectualism', but which might better be rendered as an attack on conscious reasoning. I have already mentioned how Butler's assessment of the unreliability of conscious knowledge led him to claim that the lay person possessed of common sense was more worthy of being called 'scientist' than practitioners such as Huxley. On this aspect of Butler's thought Turner claims that Butler

> played the role of the ironic subject seeking to persuade his contemporaries that

[45] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols,* in *The Portable Nietzsche,* ed. by Walter Kaufman (New York: The Viking Press, 1967), pp. 463-564 (p. 515).

> what they claimed to be truth was in reality taste and what they claimed to be reasonable actions were actually fortunate judgements based on illusion. His skepticism was reminiscent of Hume and his relativism foreshadowed later pragmatists and linguistic skeptics. (p. 178)

As Turner goes on to illustrate, Butler's expressions of scepticism over the reliability of conscious knowledge in such passages are often bound up with a linguistic scepticism, or a belief that words are simply products of convention -- 'frail vehicles', as Turner describes them, inadequate to the task of conveying either 'subjective or objective experience' (p. 179).

Turner's is obviously a speculative thesis in part; however, it is well researched, going beyond the standard published sources, and is mostly well corroborated by Butler's own comments in private correspondence and notebooks. Additionally, his basic position with its emphasis on Butler's linguistic scepticism and rejection of authoritative 'interpretations' of nature is one which is very useful in assessing the import of his literary imagination, particularly as regards the use of his close reading strategy in his later essays. However, there are some notable blind spots in Turner's analysis as well as some problems with the fine details of his biographical analysis. To begin with the former, Turner's is predominately a study of the history of ideas and as such, lacks the necessary textual analysis to support and develop his main findings. This is particularly the case with the treatment of Butler's linguistic scepticism where he focuses on the philosophical side of Butler's writings as system rather than directing his attention to the form in which these ideas are presented. Additionally, by choosing to regard Butler principally as an ironist, Turner neglects the constructive side to Butler's project, a particularly substantial oversight when we acknowledge that Butler's attack on the principle of natural selection and the profession of science in *Life and Habit* makes up less than half of the text. There would therefore appear to be two pressing questions left unaddressed by Turner's analysis, namely just what was Butler's main aim before he altered the plan of the work? and what role did his literary imagination play, if any, in contributing to the fulfilment of this aim? Indeed, these questions become more pressing when we take into consideration the late date at which Butler altered his plan and the progress which he had already made toward completing his text by this point. As I intend to argue, biographical details strongly suggest that Butler's text was more or less complete when he made his discoveries. As a result, those sections attacking scientific professionalism and natural selection merely constitute additions to a theory and a text that was more or less already completed. It seems then that once

more we need to take a fresh look at the literary texture of *Life and Habit* rather than falling back on an increasingly unconvincing assessment of 'Butler as satirist'.

Focusing almost exclusively on Butler's thought as *system*, all the works that I consider in this section have little new to say about the literary qualities of works such as *The Fair Haven* or *Life and Habit*. In fact, it would seem generally true in Butler studies that in challenging his reputation as renegade and reclaiming the evolutionary writings as *system* one must necessarily divorce them from the form in which they are presented. However, such critics cannot completely escape the necessity of dealing with the literary devices employed in the prose works, as certain key passages in their works reveal. For example, as part of his analysis of Butler's treatment of the relationship between conscious knowledge and instinct, Willey makes the following comment in passing:

> The things we know best are those that we know without knowing that we know them. In this context, Butler characteristically adopts for his own purposes the Christian distinction between Grace and Law: unconscious knowers and believers are under Grace, conscious knowers under Law. The carefree natural man who has 'good health, good looks, good temper, common sense, and energy' - that is, who loves God - is under Grace; he is master of a better science than the earnest scientific discoverers, the professors and the theologians, who are under Law. (p. 95)

Earlier I described how Butler reclassifies heredity as a form of memory and common sense as the true science. Here we have another of Butler's 'characteristic' reclassifications. To Butler's mind at least, there was a sufficiently strong metaphorical connection between the theological concepts *Law* and *Grace* and those characteristics of instinct and conscious knowledge that he wished to emphasise. Thus he simply adopted the terms wholesale in his analysis. Such reclassifications on the basis of the apparent similarity between unrelated terms are a hallmark of Butler's writing on evolution. Time and again we come across familiar terms pressed into service in a new context, linguistic conscripts such as *cunning* for the Lamarckian corollary of natural selection, or *tool* meaning limb or organ; or, as is the case here for example, terms selected from other discourses with great care we sense for the depth and shades of meaning that Butler wishes to exploit. In another work from this period, *Evolution and Poetic Belief* (1956), Georg Roppen cites a further example, this time in connection with Butler's reclassification of memory as heredity. As a result of this reclassification, Butler sees human memory as having

extremely deep roots, extending beyond the individual far into the past through the ancestral line:

> Butler arrives now at one of the main obstacles to his thesis: the problem of how to reconcile 'personal identity' with this idea of unbroken memory. His approach is characteristic, for in one bold sweep - in the name of common sense - he reduces the term to a *façon de parler,* and hence deceptive, since 'the least reflection will show that personal identity in any sort of strictness is an impossibility'. (p. 331)

Butler's 'characteristic' strategy here of exposing the conventions on which our fundamental concepts of the world are based is clearly connected with the 'reclassification strategy' just described: both approaches involve an understanding not only of the power words have to construct our experience of the world, but also of their limitations as always open to further modification. For Butler, our current understanding of *identity* was a mere convention, useful for everyday relations but ultimately a hindrance when it came to conceptualising our role in the bigger picture of evolution. Its arbitrariness ought therefore to be acknowledged as the first step toward extending its significance to encompass our entire ancestral line. Although Roppen tends to emphasise the satirical nature of the evolutionary writings, the fact that he too acknowledges such reclassifications to be 'characteristic' is significant. It would therefore seem overdue that we also engage with this hitherto neglected aspect of the evolutionary writings.

Contemporary criticism

In the last decades, Butler criticism has attracted scholars from a wide variety of academic backgrounds. Most obviously, there is the recently published and long overdue collection of critical essays *Samuel Butler, Victorian Against the Grain* (2007). In addition, Elinor Shaffer's study of Butler as painter, photographer and art critic *Erewhons of the Eye* (1988) as well as Ralf Norrman's structuralist study of the figure of chiasmus with Butler's work as his source represent new and refreshing approaches to his work.[46] Finally, Peter Raby's 1991 biography completes the picture. However, it is with the more familiar characterisation of Butler as evolutionary writer that I wish to begin.

In this area, there have been a number of recent studies pointing out the

[46] Ralf Norrman, *Samuel Butler and the Meaning of Chiasmus* (London: MacMillan, 1986).

constructive contribution which Butler's scientific writings made to the post-*Origin* debates about whether natural section was the main means whereby species became differentiated. These authors see Butler's work as belonging to a collection of individuals who sought to check the more extreme proponents of scientific naturalism by popularising a Lamarckian model of evolutionary change.[47] The exception to this trend has been Peter Morton's *The Vital Science Biology and the Literary Imagination, 1860-1900* (1984) in which we find a portrayal of Butler as a failed scientist. According to Morton,

> even by the undemanding standards of the day […] Butler's argumentative strategy is slack. Often he relies on metaphor and even in places on the pun. We are told solemnly that a baby 'knows' hydrodynamics as it pumps blood in its body; that a sodium atom 'knows' how to combine with chlorine to form salt; that a pianist 'knows' a work by heart. Butler makes no distinction (seems indeed unaware that there is any to be made) between these different senses of know.[48]

The later evolutionary works in which Butler sets out his case for cunning versus natural selection and employs his intriguing close reading strategy, Morton rejects out of hand as 'a single extended essay in controversy'. Generally speaking, Morton claims, Butler's greatest failing was his 'profound lack of comprehension' of

> the hypotheticodeductive system which is the core of science itself: the amassing of facts, the disinterested testing of potentially disprovable hypotheses, and the expunging of personal beliefs. No piece of hard evidence cited anywhere in Butler's work is first-hand, and his examples of the genetic transmission of habits are dubious indeed.[49]

In a work advertising itself as a study of the *literary* imagination, to dismiss the evolutionary works by dint of their fantastic texture and lack of grasp of the hypothetico-deductive method would seem to miss the point. As I have argued throughout this introduction, the workings of a literary imagination are all too evident throughout Butler's writings and we do the critical tradition an injustice by either ignoring or condemning the form in which Butler chose to cast his thought.

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[47] See Philip J. Pauly, 'Samuel Butler and his Victorian Critics', *Victorian Studies,* 25 (1982), pp. 161-80; and Bowler, p. 72.
[48] Peter Morton, 'Nemesis Without Her Mask: Heredity Before Mendel' in *The Vital Science: Biology and the Literary Imagination 1860-1900* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984) <http://www.mega.nu/ampp/PeterMorton/vs6_heredity.htm> [accessed Jun. 8 2010] (section 'Butlerism and Mainstream Biology', para. 3 of 4).
[49] Ibid., (para. 2 of 4).

Of far more relevance to this study is the recent edition of critical essays. Roger Robinson opens the collection with an essay on Butler's early New Zealand writings. Paying close attention to the language of Butler's first substantial publication, the biographical *First Year in a Canterbury Settlement* (1863), Robinson makes the case that the writing of *First Year* provides 'a fascinating opportunity to watch a writer in the process of developing the style and strategies to articulate previously unknown experience'. In illustration of his thesis, he refers to the substance of Butler's initial impressions of life in the antipodean settlement, arguing that these were often of the form of 'surprises, contrasts, incongruities, encounters with the incomprehensible and inexpressible'.[50] Such influences, Robinson argues, come together in the New Zealand writings in Butler's use of a range of contrasting styles and perspectives and a tendency to preoccupy himself with the appearance / reality distinction. With regard to the former, Robinson points out that already in *First Year,* Butler was possessed of those tendencies which would meet with their full expression in his mature work:

> Tongue-in-cheek comedy, double levels of reference, serious explication, self-mockery, mock-solemnity – those devices, moving from one to the other in just that kind of rapid prose kaleidoscope, would become characteristic of Butler's satiric writing in *Erewhon* and beyond. (p. 30)

Moving on to the early evolutionary sketches, Robinson suggests that the satiric reversals of *Erewhon* more generally 'provide a strange, intense, comically surrealist version of the antipodean settler's experience', a window onto a world 'that could be made superficially to look like England, yet in reality was disturbingly different'. Thus interpreted, the suggestion is made that Butler's aim in the sketches as with *Erewhon* as a whole is to ask his reader to 'make the same effort he had made in Canterbury, examining at the most fundamental level the values by which he and his society had been living' (pp. 36, 37).

Robinson's essay is a refreshing, if sadly rare treatment of the importance of Butler's style. Although I will have cause to differ from him in my assessment of the early evolutionary sketches, it will be my intention during my own treatment of *First Year* to develop his readings of Butler's use of multiple perspectives in the light of my own approach. As we shall see, despite Turner's claim that a significant influence on Butler's ironic style was his departure from Darwinism, there is

[50] 'From Canterbury Settlement to Erewhon: Butler and Antipodean Counterpoint', in *Against the Grain,* pp. 21-44 (pp. 27, 23).

persuasive evidence from Butler's writings even prior to New Zealand to suggest a certain tendency to play with and warp linguistic conventions.

Similarly focused on a classification of Butler which gives full recognition to his literary imagination is Bernard Lightman's essay on Butler as scientific populariser. Working on the premise that 'our perception of an intellectual figure is often influenced by how they are categorized', Lightman's essay builds on Turner's claim that Butler wished to establish himself as an amateur scientist in the years leading up to *Life and Habit.*[51] According to Lightman, Butler's aim in the four extended essays on evolution is to exploit his literary abilities in order to gain a hearing for his theories among a mass readership. As evidence, he points to Butler's characteristic tendency in these works of addressing his audience directly as a body of non-professionals, often either declaring that he is sacrificing accuracy for a broader sketch or stating his express purpose to entertain rather than educate. The argument also benefits from comparisons with contemporary popularisers, many of whom 'moved effortlessly between the genre of fiction and the discourse of science' and indulged the reader by taking them on a 'dramatic journey' (p. 118). Changing tack slightly, Lightman then deals with the details of Butler's quarrel with Darwin and ever more passionate avocation of 'cunning' before echoing Knoepflmacher and Willey's working definition of the evolutionary writings as the 'creation and consolidation of a faith'. With reference to *Evolution, Old and New* in particular, Lightman argues that Butler reappropriated certain arguments of Paley's *Natural Theology* (1802) in support of his own teleological model of evolution. 'In effect', Lightman explains, 'Butler offered a secularised version of Paley's design argument'. Indeed, it is a reflection of the degree of success with which Lightman believes Butler achieved this that he rests in an additional classification of Butler as one of the 'last great natural theologians of the nineteenth century' (p. 128).

Lightman's essay is a key work for this study. In his initial identification of Butler as scientific populariser, he adjusts our perception of the evolutionary works, showing how they can incorporate both fantastic elements and appeal to a mass audience while still making a serious point. However, one cannot help sensing that the idiosyncratic nature of Butler's engagement with evolution requires a more specific approach, particularly with regard to his strategic and characteristic use of reclassifications. What's more, the argument that Butler can be thought of as a

[51] Bernard Lightman, '"A Conspiracy of One": Butler, Natural Theology, and Victorian Popularization', in *Against the Grain*, pp. 113-142 (p. 114).

'great natural theologian', is highly debatable, since throughout his life Butler's relationship with theologians was distinctly fraught. Besides this, it is also plainly at odds with Turner's more secular account of Butler's thought as devoid of 'metaphysical essences'. Ultimately, this is another open question in Butler criticism and one which has a significant influence on our understanding of his work.

Perhaps of most relevance to this study is David Amigoni's consideration of Butler's language in the context of his evolutionary thought '"The Written Symbol Extends Infinitely": Samuel Butler and the Writing of Evolutionary Theory'. In the first half of his study, Amigoni concerns himself with certain passages in the later essay 'Thought and Language' to bring to light the central role which metaphor played in Butler's view of language development. The argument in this section focuses on Butler's claim in this essay: 'scratch the simplest expressions and you will find the metaphor […] it is what we read between the lines that the profounder meaning of any letter is conveyed'.[52] Acknowledging the import of this remark in terms of Butler's conception of language, Amigoni suggests that

> Butler was particularly alert to the 'extended' workings of writing as an advanced human symbolic practice in theology and science in which conventions were open to literary modification or a 'sleight of mind' that invites an understanding of 'a new covenant as to the meaning of symbols' -- a formulation that echoes with biblical, theistic connotations.[53]

This is a highly significant observation in the light of those elements of Butler's writing that I have mentioned above, namely the characteristic use Butler makes of reclassification and his habit of close reading his opponents. It is an insight which, if extended, could provide a means of drawing together these two disparate characteristics of Butler's work as common expressions of an underlying assumption that language is always 'prone to modification'. As presented, the scope of Amigoni's essay does not allow for extended textual analysis; and as yet, no thorough and sustained attempt has been made to account for how Butler both originated and developed such a model of language, or indeed how it influenced the

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[52] *Essays on Life, Art and Science*, p. 195. It should be noted that this is only one of many passages in which Butler displays awareness of the metaphorical basis of language. See for example the following: *Life and Habit*, pp. 83-84; 'Life and Habit, Volume 2', in *The Shrewsbury Edition of the Works of Samuel Butler*, 20 vols (London: Jonathan Cape, 1923-26), xx, pp. 103-83 (p. 156); *Evolution, Old and New; or, the theories of Buffon, Dr. Erasmus Darwin, and Lamarck, as compared with that of Charles Darwin*, new edn (London: A.C. Fifield, 1911), p. 365.

[53] *Against the Grain*, pp. 91-112 (p. 95).

form in which he presented his thought. Ultimately, it is one of the main aims of this work to follow up these suggestions for further research.

Finally, with regard to *The Fair Haven,* Elinor Shaffer submits her essay 'The Ironies of Biblical Criticism: From Samuel Butler's "Resurrection" Essay and *The Fair Haven* to *Erewhon Revisited*'. According to Shaffer, Butler's dual aim with *The Fair Haven* was not only to impress upon the reader the impossibility of reconciling the four accounts of the Resurrection, but also to satirise the intellectual dishonesty of those who would avoid the full consequences of such a conclusion by falling back on a reconstructed faith. Referring to the historical context, Shaffer shows that by Butler's time, many theological writers and thinkers were making a virtue of a necessity and *affirming* a mythological interpretation of the scriptures as the means whereby of a reconstructed faith could be defended. As Shaffer states: 'it is against what Butler took to be the forms of self-deception peculiar to the nineteenth century that he directed his attack'.[54] (p. 74). In this sense, Shaffer also takes the work to be unproblematically satirical, even to the extent of denying the reader the liberal theological position which I mentioned in connection with Willey's analysis of the text. Although she does mention this study, she regards Willey's doubts over Butler's position in the text as symptomatic only of the exquisite subtlety of Butler's satire (p. 73). For this reason, the question raised by Willey's study are left unaddressed.

Summary of previous criticism and statement of approach

Looking back on the previous criticism, a composite picture of Butler as variously biologist, scientific populariser, theologian, pioneer psychologist, philosopher or crank seems to emerge. Indeed, outside of a handful of essays in *Against the Grain*, there have been surprisingly few publications dealing with Butler as a *literary* figure in this modern age -- an observation made by the editor of this volume himself in his reference to the surprising lack of 'analytical commentary'.[55] Butler was indeed many things. However, it is almost certain that he would have remained an obscure Victorian writer were it not for his critically acclaimed novel. Throughout his published output there is always evidence of a literary imagination at work, and for this reason, any classification of Butler as a failed scientist seems to miss the point.

[54] *Against the Grain*, pp. 58-87 (p. 74).
[55] Paradis, *Against the Grain*, p. 7.

Similarly, those studies which focus too keenly on his status as a proponent of *ideas* are necessarily limited in their analysis in that they fail to address the literary texture of his work – even when making bold statements about Butler's distinctive views on language. For these reasons, it is the first premise of this work that Butler was first and foremost a *creative* writer.

It should also be clear that there is good reason to move beyond any simple classification of Butler as satirist. The destructive element of Butler's project as manifested in his attack on scientific professionalism, the principle of natural selection and Darwin himself has been well documented. However, what has received less attention is that this critique was often motivated by a sophisticated view of the limitations both of language and of conscious reasoning. As Turner has suggested, Butler had good reason to problematise the authority of both the methods and discourse of nineteenth-century science, not to mention the secular agenda of its practitioners. With regard to the later evolutionary works then, our focus will be on Butler's intriguing close reading strategy. Of particular relevance also here is Joad's account of Butler's critique of professionalism as well as Furbank's observation that Butler was intensely preoccupied with the themes of money, ownership and a hostile 'other'. As I intend to argue, in terms of these later works, the close-reading strategy applied is arguably a weapon deployed by Butler in a power struggle with the Darwinists in which fame, status, financial gain and the honour of being the 'discursive founder' of the idea evolution are all at stake. These are arguments which I develop in chapter 7.

In Lightman's work in particular, there is the foundation of a more satisfying approach to the earlier evolutionary writings, one which gives full credit to the contribution which Butler's literary imagination made to these works while simultaneously acknowledging their constructive value. We can therefore marry his classification of Butler as scientific populariser with our working definition of Butler as creative writer to read the earlier evolutionary texts for evidence of how Butler's literary imagination contributed towards his aim of appealing to a mass audience. However, it should also be clear from the characteristic use Butler makes of strategic reclassifications that here too Butler's literary imagination functions more as tool than as ornament. Insofar as this is the case, we can place at the heart of our analysis what I wish to term Butler's 'reclassification strategy', particularly as this is employed in *Life and Habit*. Of central importance here is Amigoni's observation that Butler was keenly aware of the role which metaphor played in giving rise to

linguistic change. What remains to be done, however, is to analyse how this device functions in the context of *Life and Habit* and what relationship it has to the earlier, more overtly imaginative sketches which he subsequently incorporated into 'The Book of the Machines' chapters of *Erewhon*. Although *Erewhon* and 'The Book of the Machines' have attracted a lot of critical comment, surprisingly little work has been done on the connection between *Life and Habit* and these early sketches.[56] For this reason, I would highlight the necessity of adopting a developmental approach to Butler's work. In a very real sense, Butler's early speculations served a purpose which only fully reveals itself when we view them in relation to the author's project of intellectual development. In successive chapters forming the core of this study, I deal with the interdependence of these texts in chapters 3, 4 and 5.

The Fair Haven I treat in chapter 6, where I begin by providing a comprehensive overview of the range and interaction of the voices which together constitute this complex text. I then turn my attention to the decisive 'Christ Ideal' chapter to consider the extent to which Butler viewed the reconstructed faith offered by certain theological writers of his time to be a kind of 'false faith', that is a mask serving only to insulate readers from the full consequences of the 'historical' Christ. By so doing, it will be my intention to address in full those questions raised by Willey during his analysis of the work, namely: How are we supposed to interpret Butler's tone in this chapter? How should the conservative element elsewhere in Butler's thought influence our reading? And quite simply: is the work really unproblematically satirical? Ultimately, the answers to these questions hinge on the extent to which the complex range of competing voices Butler arranges in *The Fair Haven* allows for credible alternative readings of the work.

Finally, I have prefaced the following chapter with a quotation from Butler's notebooks in which, with one eye on posterity, he warns his future readers that no one will understand his work unless they bear in mind that he was an 'unusually slow and late grower'. Already above I have mentioned the necessity of taking a developmental approach to the earlier evolutionary writings, of reading them with

[56] Notable exceptions to this trend are Basil Willey's study of the evolutionary writings and Herbert Sussman's treatment of 'The Book of the Machines' in *Victorians and the Machine: The Literary Response to Technology* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 135-61. However, while Willey notes the role which the early sketches played in leading Butler to the discovery of his Life and Habit theory, he does not consider how these same early sketches informed the literary texture of *Life and Habit* (see pp. 68-71). Sussman by contrast, focuses mainly on the relationship between the early sketches and 'The Book of the Machines' in order to explore the development of the vitalist aspect to Butler's thought.

reference to the author's project of intellectual development. For this reason, I begin this study with two chapters in which I analyse the nature of Butler's early development and apostasy, and what impact these had on his early writings in Cambridge and New Zealand.

What exactly did Butler mean by referring to himself as a late developer? As we have seen, Knoepflmacher has claimed that Butler's 'alienation from his parents, his rejection of Christianity, and his gradual emergence as an evolutionary thinker' are all intimately related. It follows from these foundations that Butler's traumatic early adulthood experiences left him with a set of preoccupations against which he created his 'more living faith', the evolutionary creed which would compensate for the narrow faith of his upbringing. Furbank too has made Butler's early personal crisis central to his inquiry. Beginning with the observation that there are certain entries in Butler's private notebooks which differ qualitatively from the others, Furbank suggests that they 'seem to refer to a concealed *idée fixe,* of which the note is a tiny and partial rendering' (pp. 14-15). For Furbank, such an impression should force upon us the fact that 'the stimulus for writing must have been fairly intimate in nature', so intimate in fact as to bring with it the 'necessity for examining the evidence as to Butler's personal experience' (p. 17). Ultimately, Furbank views Butler's conflict with his father over the route his life would take as the primary source of his trauma, a conflict which he describes as a 'violent, devastating and comparatively short battle in early manhood, from which he emerged in some ways immensely strengthened, though in others irretrievably scarred crippled and benumbed' (p. 10). Although such analyses are useful in drawing general critical attention to this episode as a formative experience, I wish to argue that both Furbank and Knoepflmacher's assessment of Butler's crisis have misled us insofar as they suggests that this episode was primarily emotional in nature. As we shall see in the following chapter, Butler's alienation from both family and Church was set in motion by his refusal to accede to an *argument* and further, necessarily involved his jettisoning all the *intellectual* baggage he had too credulously accepted.

CHAPTER ONE

Butler's Arrested Development and his Preoccupations as a Writer

> No one will understand me or my work unless they bear in mind that I was an unusually slow and late grower. I have not developed into much, but I have developed into much more than as a young or middle aged man I seemed likely to do.[1]

In that other story of escape from restrictive ideologies *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), Stephen Dedalus wishes to fly the triple nets of language, nationhood and religion. Like Joyce, Butler too could not serve the too narrow faith of his upbringing, though his other nets were those of his family and his education. What made Butler's rebellion specific to him was that it resulted in a particular way of seeing the world as composed of conventions which could be manipulated to conceal the true nature of reality. This is what Turner has called Butler's awareness of the 'illicit use of conventions'. It is therefore necessary that we spend some time clarifying the nature of these conventions and how Butler felt that his early intellectual development had been thwarted by their misuse.

The details of Butler's childhood and how he felt he suffered at the hands of his overbearing father and scheming mother have been well documented, not least by Butler himself.[2] We need not here go into details save to acknowledge that Butler felt his father was able to exercise so much power over him by calling upon the authority of his religion. So much is evident in the classic scenes of confrontation in *The Way of All Flesh.* Describing the childhood education of his hero in his pseudo-autobiography Butler recounts how

> before Ernest could well crawl he was taught to kneel; before he could well speak he was taught to lisp the Lord's prayer, and the general confession. How was it possible that these things could be taught too early? If his attention flagged or his memory failed him, here was an ill weed which would grow apace unless it were plucked out immediately, and the only way to pluck it out was to whip him, or shut him up in a

[1] *Further Extracts From the Notebooks of Samuel Butler*, ed. by A. T. Bartholomew (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934), p. 139.

[2] In addition to Butler's account in *The Way of All Flesh,* and the *Memoir,* three biographies deal with this period: Martha Roscoe Garnett, *Samuel Butler and His Family Relations* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1926); Philip Henderson, *Samuel Butler: The Incarnate Bachelor*, op. cit.; and Peter Raby, *Samuel Butler: A Biography* (London: Hogarth Press, 1991).

> cupboard, or dock him of some of the small pleasures of childhood.[3]

The metaphor here of the 'ill weed' arguably alludes to the doctrine of infant depravity, and although the canon was not exactly Low Church, and Butler's mother had in fact converted to the Church of England from Unitarianism, willfulness was a trait which Butler clearly felt his father would not tolerate. Such is demonstrated by the infamous passage in which Theobald attempts to wean Ernest off of his childhood speech impediment of saying 'tum' instead of 'come'. After much coaxing followed by threats, Theobald eventually gives up: 'I have done my best to save you, but if you will have it so, you will', and lugs Ernest off to be beaten. And lest we as readers be in any doubt as to the biblical justification for the punishment he has just meted out to his wilful son, Butler hammers home his message:

> 'I have sent him up to bed,' said Theobald, as he returned to the drawing-room, 'and now, Christina, I think we will have the servants in to prayers,' and he rang the bell for them, red-handed as he was. (p. 97)

Finally, we can say a word about the young Butler's feelings toward his father and family life more generally with respect to one of Butler's most famous paintings, *Family Prayers* (1864). The work, completed when Butler was twenty-eight, depicts a family of the time assembled in the dining room of a middle-class house with their servants in order to listen to the patriarch intoning family prayers. What is striking about the image is the dark and oppressive atmosphere of the interior and the singular sense of total isolation which the figures lined up on chairs against the grey wall seem to be subject to. Although painted in Butler's default naive style, the work remains his most convincing piece of fine art in view of the fact that the expressionless doll-like figures portray an unmistakable sense of emptiness. In his biography of Butler, Peter Raby compares this picture to a scene in *The Way of All Flesh* in which Theobald, fulfilling his duty as shepherd to his flock, makes the long and wearisome journey out 'through muddy lanes and over long sweeps of plover haunted pastures' to visit a dying cottager's wife. Bringing her a few victuals and such consolation as befits his role, he takes his leave with the sense of having fulfilled his duty, though plagued by a deep sense of dissatisfaction.[4] The comparison of these two ostensibly different scenes, I would argue, is fitting: both point up a hollowness or sense of revulsion which is barely concealed by the thin

[3] Samuel Butler, *The Way of All Flesh,* 2nd edn (London: A. C. Fifield, 1908), p. 89.
[4] *Way of All Flesh*, p. 65.

veil of convention.

In 1848 at age twelve, Butler continued his education by entering the prestigious Shrewsbury public school, a Victorian institution made great by his paternal grandfather and where his father before him had also served on the staff. Now however he was in the hands of his grandfather's star pupil, Dr Kennedy, depicted in Butler's novel as the infamous Dr Skinner. For the next six years, Butler was on the public school treadmill where up to three-quarters of the school day could be spent studying, reading, translating, parsing, and imitating Greek and Latin texts. His aversion to the public school emphasis on the classics was strong and stayed with him throughout his life, meeting with its most sustained and ironic formulation in the chapter from *Erewhon* entitled 'The Colleges of Unreason'. Like the hypothetical language taught at these fictional institutions, Butler felt such a narrow and impractical approach to education to be 'a wanton waste of good human energy'.[5] And then there was the manner in which certain public men associated with the school could exploit their professional positions.

In Butler's novel, we are first introduced to Dr Skinner when Ernest is taken up to 'Roughbourgh' for the first time. In the following scene, Butler describes Skinner's library through the young Ernest's eyes:

> the walls were covered with book shelves from floor to ceiling, and on every shelf the books stood in double rows. It was horrible. Prominent among the most prominent upon the most prominent shelf were a series of splendidly bound volumes entitled 'Skinner's Works'.
>
> Boys are sadly apt to rush to conclusions, and Ernest believed that Dr Skinner knew all the books in this terrible library, and that he, if he were to be any good, should have to learn them too. His heart fainted within him. (p. 119)

The third person narrative's focalisation through Ernest's point of view at this point allows us to understand how he is being deceived. Skinner's library looks impressive, and a young boy in particular might easily make the assumption here that we are dealing with a powerful and erudite man; however, the narrator relieves us of this misconception by allowing us to share in his gentle criticism of Ernest's credulity. Besides this, the focus on Skinner's own prominently placed volumes augments the idea of deceit by gesturing toward the notion that Skinner is a dubious self-publicist whose public persona is a contrivance. Later the narrator draws our attention to Skinner's private chemistry lab to send out a similar message: 'the free chattery and smattery use of words such as "carbonate", "hyposulphite",

[5] *Erewhon,* p. 219.

"phosphate" and "affinity"' which are enough to convince 'the most sceptical that Dr Skinner had a profound knowledge of chemistry' (p. 118). With such examples the narrative builds up an image of Skinner which meets with its most complete expression in the following passage:

> Could it be expected to enter into the head of such a man as this that in reality he was making his money by corrupting youth; that it was his paid profession to make the worse appear the better reason in the eyes of those who were too young and inexperienced to be able to find him out; […] that his 'Meditations on St Jude,' such as they were, were cribbed without acknowledgment, and would have been beneath contempt if so many people did not believe them to have been written honestly? (p. 116)

Here there can be no doubt of the extent to which Skinner is engaged in deception. So deeply enmeshed is he in a system which is justified by dint of its professional status that even he is taken in by it, unaware of the real conditions under which he plays out his role. In the world of the public school where appearance passes for substance and reputation and status hold sway even to the extent of trumping original thought, intellectual dishonesty can thrive unchecked.

The Cambridge pieces

Cambridge was like a breath of fresh air for Butler. During term time at least, he was free from the direct influence of his father and, most importantly, had a room and key of his own. It was here too that the first signs of his literary talent revealed themselves. Butler's early Cambridge pieces consist of about a dozen short texts, two of which were published in the Saint John's college magazine the *Eagle,* a publication of which Butler was one of the founding editors. The rest were written as brief skits to amuse himself and his fellow students and were preserved, only by chance it would seem, by one of Butler's contemporaries at Saint John's.[6] Given the circumstances of their writing, it is perhaps understandable that they have attracted little critical interest. Notable exceptions to this are the more polished pieces submitted for publication, namely an essay on the art of writing entitled 'On English Composition and Other Matters' and an account of a continental walking tour undertaken by Butler and a fellow undergraduate in June of 1857. In addition, the

[6] See Samuel Butler, *A First Year in a Canterbury Settlement With Other Early Essays* (London: A. C. Fifield, 1914), p. 234.

mock evangelical tract 'Samuel Butler and the Simeonites' has also attracted interest, mainly due to its religious subject matter and the reference which Butler makes to it in *The Way of All Flesh.* Nevertheless, the collection's status as undergraduate writing notwithstanding, most of these texts are still worthy of serious critical comment, particularly in the context of my current aim to shed light on the nature and consequences of Butler's early intellectual development. Besides this, I will also be interested in identifying various themes and techniques which, though first introduced here, meet with their fullest expression in those later works that I consider in this study.

What impresses most about the collection is the wide range of genres and conventions which Butler employs. In addition to an essay and travel writing, there is poetry, a brief dramatic scene in blank verse and attempts at parodies variously of Herodotus, an obituary, a club prospectus and an examination paper. Indeed, it is one of the defining characteristics of Butler's writing in these pieces that it is preoccupied with the effects that can be engendered through the exploitation of form. Most fundamental among these effects is of course humour, especially in cases when there is a perceived mismatch between form and content. And on a basic level, many of these texts generate humour when an elevated register or set of assumptions is brought to bear upon run-of-the-mill subject matter. A subtle and seldom cited example of this strategy is observed in the brief skit 'A Translation from an Unpublished Work of Herodotus'. In this curious text, Butler describes the way in which the students of St. John's train their rowing, or 'their tub'. However, this he does from the point of view of an outsider from an alien culture whom, we can presume from the title, Butler intends to be the classical historian Herodotus:

> And the Johnians practise their tub in the following manner: They select eight of the most serviceable freshmen and put these into a boat, and to each one of them they give an oar; and having told them to look at the backs of the men before them they make them bend forward as far as they can and at the same moment, and having put the end of the oar into the water pull it back again in to them about the bottom of the ribs; and if any of them does not do this or looks about him away from the back of the man before him they curse him in the most terrible manner, but if he does what he is bidden they immediately cry out:
>
> 'Well pulled, number so-and-so.'
>
> For they do not call them by their names but by certain numbers.[7]

[7] *First Year*, p. 235. Further references from this edition are given after quotations in the text.

The text runs on in this way for another twenty or so lines, with only the odd moment of unrestrained fantasy erupting through to challenge the objective tone, such as when students are reported as 'dying' during particularly vigorous training sessions and races are said to be arranged with 'surrounding islanders'. However, in its essence, what we are presented with is simply a brief description of a common Oxbridge custom presented to us through an unfamiliar point of view. On the face of it, this method of *defamiliarising* the conventional by presenting it from the perspective of an observer from an alien culture seems to form the basis of the technique of *Erewhon*. Indeed, what narrative elements of *Erewhon* there are function simply to connect up the main focus of the novel, being a traveller's description of the customs of this land.[8] In chapter 3, I will return to Butler's use of defamiliarisation as part of my analysis of the early evolutionary writings. For the moment however, we can consider the significance of another text from the collection in which Butler preoccupies himself with the freshness and novelty which characterises the traveller's perspective.

If Butler's recollections and impressions of his early life are almost entirely negative, the two exceptions to this would be his time in residence at Cambridge and his holiday trips to the continent. In the text 'Our Tour' from the Cambridge pieces, Butler describes a tour initially by rail down through France to the Alps where he and his companion walk across the range into Italy before heading back into the Swiss Alps for some more walking on the homeward stretch. Here too Butler exercises his keen eye for the unfamiliar. On first arriving in France he urges his readers to take a stroll around Dieppe, an experience which will

> fill you with pleasure on account of the novelty and freshness of everything you meet; whether it is the old bonnet-less, short-petticoated women walking arm and arm with their grandsons, whether the church with its quaint sculpture of the Entombment of our Lord, and the sad votive candles ever guttering in front of it, or whether the plain evidence that meets one at every touch and turn, that one is among people who live out of doors very much more than ourselves, or what not -- all will be charming. (p. 213)

In their effect, such passages recall the defamiliarised descriptions of Butler's Herodotus tract: here too it is insofar as the experience is novel and fresh that it is valued. Similarly, Butler's eye for an unfamiliar custom is also in evidence some lines later as he describes the alternative mealtime preparations at Parisian restaurants: 'If he asks leave to wash his hands before dining', Butler addresses the

[8] See introduction, n. 5.

general reader, ‘he will observe a little astonishment among the waiters at the barbarian cleanliness of the English’ and be shown ‘into a little room, where a diminutive bowl will be proffered’ in order that the diner may ‘sprinkle his face as best he can’ (p. 214). Indeed, closer attention to the language of the text reveals just how central the making of keen observations is to Butler’s experience of travelling. On his way south from Paris by train, for example, he mentions the subtle change in the landscape that those initiated into a certain way of seeing may notice: ‘The vineyards are still scrubby, but the practised eye readily detects with each hour some slight token that we are nearer the sun than we were’; or again when nearing the Alps: ‘After this tunnel on clear days Mont Blanc may be seen. True, it is only very rarely seen, but I have known those who have seen it’ (p. 216). Such asides give the weight to Furbank’s observation included above that Butler possesses a certain eye for ‘the small find’ or ‘the undiscovered trifle just beneath the surface of everyday life’.

The most significant pieces in the collection in terms of this study are the two texts ‘Powers’ and ‘Prospectus of the Great Split Society’. These texts share much in common: both are humorous in nature, both run to about a half dozen pages, and both take a wry look at the means by which dysfunctional relations with one’s peers might be achieved: either by enhancing your own status at the expense of others, or by engendering strife and quarreling. Moreover, in both texts, Butler preoccupies himself directly with the artifice of social conventions. In ‘Powers’, this theme is introduced in the opening lines of the text:

> But, my son, think not that it is necessary for thee to be excellent if thou wouldst be powerful. Observe how the lighter substance in nature riseth by its own levity and overtoppeth that which is the more grave. Even so, my son, mayest thou be light and worthless, and yet make a goodly show above those who are of a more intrinsic value than thyself. (p. 244)

The text then exists to provide practical advice to the would-be ‘power’ explaining how they might compensate for an intrinsic lack of talent by exploiting every opportunity to cultivate a good impression on others and ultimately enhance their social status. Again there is a mismatch between form and subject matter as Butler adopts a mock biblical register in order to give his comical proclamations a gloss of authority. In addition to upholding the value of the ‘show’ of the social mask over the substance of one’s ‘intrinsic’ character, a number of other unconventional values are upheld to flesh out the opposition: ‘levity’ is upheld over ‘gravity’; and ‘worthless’ is

extolled over ‘valuable’. The six required qualities of ‘a power’, which will subsequently meet with a fuller explanation in the remainder of the text, are then introduced, namely ‘love of self, love of show, love of sound, reserve, openness [and] distrust’. However, on closer examination these resolve themselves into various methods by which one might manipulate public understanding for the purpose of furthering one’s interests. Under love of self, Butler provides the example of the breakfast table and the necessity of expressing a great and vocal liking for the most popular dish on the table in order not only to procure it for yourself, but also to create a powerful impression on your host and other guests:

> Suppose that many are congregated to a breakfast and there is a dish of kidneys on the table, but not so many but what the greater number must go without them, cry out with a loud voice, immediately that thou hast perceived them: ‘Kidneys! Oh, ah! I say, G., old fellow, give us some kidneys.’ Then will the master of the house be pleased that he hath provided something to thy liking, and as others from false shame will fear to do the like thou wilt both obtain what thy soul desireth, and be looked upon by thy fellows as a bold fellow and one who knoweth how to make his way in the world.

On the other hand, Butler continues, elaborating upon his theme, should ‘thine appetite be small and dainty see thou express contempt for a large eater as one inferior to thyself’ (pp. 244-45). Of course, this is all great fun, and a sure means of winning the praise and favour of his fellow undergraduates, but is there really anything more to Butler’s sketch than a wry chuckle? I would argue that there is something about the depth and scope with which Butler engages with his theme that sets it apart from most undergraduate humour. Later in the text he acknowledges the need to keep one’s more aggressive impulses in check ‘lest men turn upon thee if thy rule is too oppressive to be borne’. However, far from involving a reigning in of one’s public performance, this is an opportunity to develop an ever more elaborate mask, this time with respect to one’s charitable duties. The sick, Butler claims, not only have many delicacies in which you can share, but also, being in an enfeebled state, can be exploited with greater ease and effect. Not only this, ‘when they are well (whether thou didst really comfort them or not) they will fear to say aught against thee, lest men shall accuse them of ingratitude’. And one final turn of the screw:

> But above all see thou do this openly and in the sight of men, who thinking in consequence that thy heart is very soft and amiable notwithstanding a few outward defects, will not fail to commend thee and submit to thee the more readily, and so on all counts thou art the gainer. (pp. 245-46)

Here again Butler returns to his main theme, that of cultivating the artifice in order to exploit public opinion. But on doing so, as if aware that he has worried this particular example past a point where he can hold onto his audience's admiration for his imaginative powers, he immediately issues the qualification: 'but all this is the work of an exceedingly refined and clever power and not absolutely necessary'. There is a clear sense here that the sheer cunning Butler has expended on such a dubious model of behaviour may impress to such an extent as to backfire, to cause the reader to disengage and take a step back from the depths to which the author is leading. As Furbank has argued, this tendency of Butler's to worry a favourite idea a little too far is a key characteristic of certain entries in the notebooks. Such passages therefore go some way toward illustrating how this stylistic habit too was already in evidence with the Cambridge pieces. But beyond this, if we are fully to follow Furbank in our assessment of such passages, they should also impress upon us the necessity of reverting to the author's personal experience for an explanation.

As with the depth of any individual conceit, the scope of Butler's desire to exploit all aspects of human relations in the pursuit of his thesis is also worthy of comment, particularly with regard to his closing examples of reserve, openness and distrust. On the face of it, reserve and openness would seem to be two mutually exclusive categories. However, this does not prevent Butler from bending them to the trajectory of his argument:

> be reserved in the particular, open in the general; talk of debts, of women, of money, but say not what debts, what women, or what money; be most open when thou doest a shabby thing, which thou knowest will not escape detection. If thy coat is bad, laugh and boast concerning it, call attention to it and say thou hast had it for ten years, which will be a lie, but men will nevertheless think thee frank, but run not the risk of wearing a bad coat, save only in vacation time or in the country. But when thou doest a shabby thing which will not reach the general light, breathe not a word of it, but bury it deeply in some corner of thine own knowledge only; if it come out, glory in it; if not, let it sleep, for it is an unprofitable thing to turn over bad ground. (p. 250)

For the ruthless opportunist who is a power, every situation can be exploited for benefit. Having abandoned the static categories of conventional morality as incompatible with secular power, the power is essentially a shape-shifter whose weapon in social advancement is the 'spin' they give to their personal circumstances. In addition to outright deceit, the development of the rhetorical skills of omission, allusion and false modesty are just some of the means required to rise

to a position of power. In the form and spirit in which it is presented, 'Powers' is quite obviously a humorous piece; but in such passages, we can already sense an awareness of the power of rhetoric, of language as a tool which can be employed to generate specific effects quite separate from its representative function. As I have noted in my introduction, it is this awareness which lies behind Butler's use of a close-reading strategy in his later evolutionary essays; and as we shall see in the following section, the circumstances of Butler's personal crisis did much to sharpen his critical faculties in this area.

At the close of the piece, Butler comments on the final quality a power must develop, that of distrust:

> And of distrust, distrust all men, most of all thine own friends; they will know thee best, and thou them; thy real worth cannot escape them, think not then that thou wilt get service out of them in thy need, think not that they will deny themselves that thou mayest be saved from want, that they will in after life put out a finger to save thee, when thou canst be of no more use to them, the clique having been broken up by time. Nay, but be in thyself sufficient; distrust, and lean not so much as an ounce-weight upon another. (p. 250)

It is perhaps unsurprising to find Butler urging the necessity of distrust after he has taken great pains to illustrate how one can cultivate a lying artifice in order to take advantage of your peers. But what is unexpected here is the meaning of distrust which falls out of this passage. It is not distrust of other powers, nor is it in fact a distrust born out of scepticism or suspicion; it is insofar as one's own friends are *true* that one must learn to distrust them. What then passes for distrust of all men for Butler is actually the importance of not relying on them lest they find out that you have been taking advantage of them all along. On negotiating this passage, I would argue that most readers would find themselves momentarily slowed by the need to adjust their expectations as to what *distrust* means to the rather more convoluted sense which Butler here brings out. In his analysis of the means by which Butler's texts generate humour, Joad focuses on Butler's fondness for word play. Butler is 'never so happy', he claims, as when he is taking a current cliché or even a text 'and by the alteration of no more than a word or two, completely reversing its meaning'.[9] Although Joad's subsequent examples reveal how he views this to be a phenomenon of Butler's fondness for the more compressed forms of the Wildean paradox and the startling aphorism, where the potential for parallelism is far greater, there is arguably something very similar happening in this extract.

[9] Joad, p. 175.

The related text ‘Prospectus of the Great Split Society’ affords an opportunity to examine Butler’s early appreciation for wordplay in greater detail. Although this text too concerns itself at times with the theme of the artifice, Butler’s main aim is to lay down a set of guidelines for engendering strife among peers. Being a humorous piece, we also have the testimony of the owner and preserver of the original copy of the work that Butler intended it to be ‘an attack on those who wished to form narrow or domineering parties in the College’ (p. 234). While this may be the case, there is no evidence on the strength of a reading of the work alone to suggest that Butler harboured a satirical intent. Rather, it seems more likely that the piece is simply an intellectual *jeu d’espirit*; for as with ‘Powers’, the same sense of anarchic glee at pursuing so thoroughly such an unconventional thesis is also in evidence.

Taking the form of a mock club constitution, the text begins with the statement of purpose that it is ‘the object of this society to promote parties and splits in general’ before continuing with the wry comment:

> and since of late we have perceived disunion among friends to be not nearly so ripe as in the Bible it is plainly commanded to be, we the members of this club have investigated the means of producing, fostering, and invigorating strife of all kinds, whereby the society of man will be profited much. For in a few hours we can by the means we have discovered create so beautiful a dissension between two who have lately been friends, that they shall never speak of one another again, and their spirit is to be greatly admired and praised for this. (p. 239)

As with the opening lines of ‘Powers’, here too there is a clear challenge to conventional values. From the opening lines in which discord gains a dubious measure of validity through its association with the warring and conflict of the Old Testament, there is a clear statement of purpose from the outset of this piece to stand conventional morality on its head. In contrast to ‘Powers’, there is no hidden agenda; instead, this topsy-turvy morality has been codified as the basis upon which ‘good’ community relations will follow, much as might be the case with a putative Erewhonian constitution. As such, ‘Prospectus’ provides us with the earliest and most direct example of a technique which Butler would later exploit and develop at length.

As far as the theme of the artifice of convention is concerned, Butler first addresses this in passing in the context of the society ruling that members should convene for monthly suppers at which ‘each man must take at least two tablespoonfuls of vinegar, which shall make the wit sharp, or in default thereof one teaspoonful of pepper and mustard’. As Butler goes on to inform us, this preparation

is required for the next stage of the proceedings during which the diners take it in turns to 'acquaint their fellow diners with their faults'. 'But', advises Butler 'let all this be done with an air of great politeness, sincerity, and goodwill, at least at the commencement, for this, when evidently fictitious, is a two-edged sword of irritation' (pp. 240-41). Thus here, it is sincerity itself that is being burlesqued: it is the whole purpose of such dinners that the artifice of friendly and supportive social relations should be exposed as a fiction masking the underlying petty jealousies and backbiting that are always boiling under the surface. Later in the text we are introduced to another caricature of sincerity in connection with a ruling dealing with those wishing to gain re-admittance to the society following a lapse in their resolve. In the event that he is genuinely penitent, Butler proclaims,

> he shall be permitted to do so on condition of repeating the words, 'Oh, ah!' 'Lor!' 'Such is life,' 'That's cheerful,' 'He's a lively man, is Mr. So-and-so' ten times over. For these are refreshing and beautiful words and mean much (!), they are the emblems of such talent. (p. 241)

Butler's inclusion of a parenthetical exclamation mark here is arguably the orthographical equivalent of a knowing wink to his fellow undergraduates. Evidently, such exclamations were widely considered to be either damning with faint praise or simply vacuous clichés. Either way, they are useful to Butler here as a clear joke which he could rely on everyone to 'get'. In fact, so useful were they in consolidating an interpretative community who were all on the same plain that they also crop up in 'Powers' where Butler advises: 'with regard to all men except thine own favoured and pre-eminent clique, designate them as "cheerful", "lively", or use some other ironical term with regard to them'. Such examples indicate Butler's awareness of how the nuance of certain words render them particularly suitable to his purpose. The same can be said of his comments on the conditions for entering the society. As Butler explains, potential members must first be willing to accept a new name:

> for this is one of its happiest hits, to give a name to each of its members arising from some mental peculiarity (which the gods and peacemakers call 'foible'), whereby each being perpetually kept in mind of this defect and being always willing to justify it shall raise a clamour and cause much delight to the assembly. (pp. 239-40)

Here it is insofar as the word *foible* suggests a sympathetic or euphemistic failing of character that it belongs to the terminology of those with opposing aims. Such close attention to the role which language plays in colouring our attitude is arguably a

corollary to Butler's warping of the meaning of *distrust* in 'Powers': both instances suggest an awareness of the role language plays in colluding to construct our experience of the world as much as to reveal it.

Later still Butler develops his burlesqued caricature of sincerity more fully in the context of a separate society ruling that 'it is also strictly forbidden by this society's laws to form a firm friendship grounded upon esteem and a perception of great and good qualities in the object of one's liking'. Instead,

> each member must have a furious and passionate running after his friend for the time being, insomuch that he could never part for an instant from him. And when the society sees this it feels comfortable, for it is quite certain that its objects are being promoted, for this cannot be brought about by any but unnatural means and is the foundation and very soul of quarrelling. (p. 242)

Like so many other instances in which Butler expends time and energy developing a basic theme, it is difficult at first to perceive his meaning here and again the reading process is slowed. Again, we are not helped by the claim leading into this passage that displays of admiration or affection are anathema. Taken at face value, such a statement would suggest that what we are about to read is a ruling to the effect that one must apply one's self 'furiously' and 'passionately' to criticising one's friends' shortcomings. But in contrast, what we actually get is another burlesque on sincerity where displays of admiration and affection are to be magnified grotesquely to such a 'furious' and 'passionate' extreme that they can only be grounds for further antagonism. After all, if discord is to be valued as the ultimate good, then *sincerity*, as conventionally understood, is of little use and ought therefore to be manipulated to purpose. Such playful attempts to play fast and loose with the concepts that constitute the foundations of our moral understanding would seem to be a characteristic of the Cambridge pieces. In addition to reassessments of *distrust* and *sincerity*, Butler also gives *charity* the same treatment. Whereas in 'Powers' charitable works are viewed as a means to the end of procuring all manner of 'delicacies', not to mention an opportunity to cultivate the mask of compassion, at the close of 'Prospectus', Butler expresses the wish that his society constitution will 'restore strife and dissension to the world, now alas! so fatally subjugated to a mean-spirited thing called Charity, which during the last month has been perfectly rampant in the college' (p. 243). Again, with discord the highest good, the carrying out of charitable acts can only be seen as a 'mean-spirited' impoverishment of community life.

Butler's essay on the art of writing 'On English Composition and Other Matters', written in his final year at Cambridge for publication in the college magazine, differs markedly from the rest of the Cambridge pieces I consider by virtue of its treatment of a serious subject in an appropriately serious tone. As far as Butler's model of good writing is concerned, his basic position follows from his admiration of the style of seventeenth-century writers, a style he considers to be 'more terse and masculine than that of those of the present day, possessing both more of the graphic element, and more vigour, straightforwardness, and conciseness'. Self-conscious adherence to conventions are only of use to less experienced writers: 'as irons support the rickety child, whilst they impede the healthy one, so rules, for the most part, are but useful to the weaker among us'. The best of all rules for serious writing, Butler concludes, are simple: 'forgetfulness of self, and carefulness of the matter in hand' (pp. 206-07). Although Butler's fondness for paradox and irony often mean that he is not always the most straightforward writer to follow, it is nevertheless true that his writing always distinguishes itself by its lack of affectation and superfluous ornament; and in this sense, the maxims which Butler laid down in this early essay remained the cornerstone of his style throughout his life. But aside from providing us with Butler's thoughts on the merits of a plain style, 'On English Composition', like many of the Cambridge pieces, also illustrates his awareness of how conventions exert a subtle yet powerful influence over our inner life.

In the latter half of his essay, Butler moves beyond a discussion of style to consider writing as a process, concerning himself with how topics should be selected and opinions formed. When it comes to clarifying one's own opinion, he is particularly keen to stress that one must guard against the danger of being unduly influenced by the prevailing fashions and prejudices of one's age:

> We are all too apt when we sit down to study a subject to have already formed our opinion, and to weave all matter to the warp of our preconceived judgment, to fall in with the received idea, and, with biased minds, unconsciously to follow in the wake of public opinion, while professing to lead it. To the best of my belief half the dogmatism of those we daily meet is in consequence of the unwitting practices of this self-deception. (pp. 208-09)

Here Butler points to the subtlety of dogma by claiming that we can be influenced by the fashions of our age to such an extent that the origin of our opinions as the product of conventions is effaced. Self-deception, albeit by a more obviously illicit use of conventions, is also at the heart of Butler's novel's depiction of Skinner, a

man so deeply enmeshed in the value system of his profession that he can justify cruelty and oppression against those who have been turned over to his care. For Butler, this kind of unexamined life was so reprehensible for when an opinion is no longer recognised as a convention it becomes an unquestionable truth, unanswerable even to morality. It is therefore telling that Butler should raise this matter in an essay published in the same year that he would first raise doubts about his suitability for the life of a clergyman. As we shall now see, it was insofar as Butler felt that he was living the unexamined life that his personal crisis was first set in motion.

Butler's personal crisis

It had been taken for granted by the Butler family that after graduating, Butler would follow in the footsteps of his father and grandfather before him by becoming ordained. In preparation for the Cambridge Voluntary Theological examination, Butler went down to London for six months to gain some experience of parish work. According to Jones, up until this point, Butler's religious opinions had been decidedly average.[10] It was now however that he received the impression that his education and upbringing, 'privileged, sheltered and narrow', gave him no qualifications whatsoever for the job he had undertaken.[11] Here for the first time he was confronted with the unbeliever, or more accurately, those who were supremely indifferent to religion. When he was called upon to interpret the faith, his glib and simplistic explanations betrayed the reality that his religious education was wholly inadequate to deal with the reality that now confronted him.[12] In such an environment, the weaknesses of Butler's arguments could only have served to alienate him from his parishioners and chip away at the foundation of a faith he himself had never examined. Moreover, the best documented event from this time reveals how the question of his religious opinions had become so pressing a matter as to require decisive and independent action. In the *Memoir*, we learn how Butler accidentally discovered that some of the boys in his evening class had not been baptised. Whilst shocked, he was also curious to explore just how the moral character of the two groups of boys compared. Taking the initiative, he discovered

[10] *Memoir*, I, p. 58.
[11] Raby, pp. 54-55.
[12] *Memoir*, I, p. 60.

that baptism had no discernable effect on either the conduct or the character of the groups. According to Jones, the immediate effect of this was that 'his faith in the efficacy of infant baptism was shaken -- if he can be said to have had any faith in a matter which he had not till then considered'.[13]

Butler suddenly had the impression that his opinions had been accepted too credulously and that before he could commit himself to ordination he should, as a matter of conscience, shed all his preconceived ideas and approach the subject of his faith afresh. He began with the question of the Gospels' account of the Resurrection and the difficulties involved in reconciling the four narratives. The conclusions he arrived at on completing his examination he would eventually present in a pamphlet published in 1865 which he thereafter incorporated into *The Fair Haven*. However, at this early stage, he made two important discoveries. The first came as a result of his reading Dean Henry Alford's commentary on the New Testament. Alford was the authority of the day on New Testament matters and had studied the methods of the Higher Criticism in Bonn. In keeping with the critical spirit of this movement, Alford's opinion of the Gospels was that *in their present state*, the discrepancies between them were so overwhelming that all attempts to reconcile them 'in minute particulars must be full of arbitrary assumptions, and carry no certainty'. Such a conclusion, however, came with a caveat insulating Alford and his readers from the full consequences, namely that it allowed for the possibility of full reconcilement in full possession of the evidence.[14] Whether or not Butler disapproved of Alford's conclusions on his first reading is open to speculation, but later in his 1865 pamphlet, *The Fair Haven* and *The Way of All Flesh,* Alford is represented as just as intellectually dishonest as Skinner was when he cribbed passages for his meditations on Saint Jude. For Butler, Alford was attempting to pull the wool over his readers' eyes by insulating them from a conclusion that all reason beckoned to. Having rejected Alford, Butler turned himself to the original Greek text in order to conduct his own investigation of the Gospels. It was here that he convinced himself that the discrepancies were indeed irreconcilable. It was Butler's first major independent discovery, an opinion of his own made possible by his taking

[13] Ibid., p. 61.

[14] Alford's argument runs thus: 'Supposing us to be acquainted with every thing said and done in its order and exactness, we should doubtless be able to reconcile, or account for, the present forms of the narratives' (Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament: With a Critically Revised Text: A Digest of Various Readings: Marginal References to Verbal and Idiomatic use: Prolegomena: and Critical and Exegetical Commentary,* 2 vols (London: Francis & John Rivington, 1849) I, p. 212). For further details of Butler's treatment of Alford, see *The Fair Haven* chapters 5 and 6 and *The Way of All Flesh* chapters 60 and 65.

the initiative and carefully sifting the evidence for himself.

Butler's insights into infant baptism and the Gospels took him to the brink of his new life and he now knew that he could not be ordained. It only remained for him to confront his father. At this time, he was back in residence at Cambridge, trying to attract coaching and the infamous 'long and painful correspondence' ensued.[15] However, what is often overlooked in the commentaries upon this exchange is the extent to which Butler refers to his crisis in terms of its consequences for his intellectual life. In one letter on the subject of emigration he writes: 'a person when once he adopts ideas out of the common way, whether he be right or whether he be wrong he is done for here. I see that very plainly'.[16] In another exchange, the Canon bids Butler to cite the portion of the thirty nine Articles to which he cannot assent. Butler writes back expressing serious doubts over the doctrine of original sin, however the letter is more revealing in suggesting that like his experiment into infant baptism or his inquiry into the Gospels, his opinion on this matter of dogma has been formed after careful consideration of the evidence; yet for this very reason, it is open to question from competing interpretations:

> the opinion I have formed is one which I am ready to resign if fairly beaten. At the same time I must fairly confess that I believe the mass of evidence would make far more strongly with me than against me.[17]

Things came to a head in May of 1859 when Butler spelled out his position to his father: 'You would with the best intention in the world make me a bed that I know very well will not fit me', he rails before alluding to the personal duties he must perform which are 'even more binding' than those he owes to his parents.[18] In these, the strongest words Butler exchanged with his father, he felt they had reached an impasse which could only be overcome by relinquishing any claim to his father's financial support. As his language suggests, he had already well outgrown the narrow scope of his father's designs and hints here at the project of intellectual development which he felt compelled to embark upon as a matter of conscience. Eventually, the canon came round to the idea of emigration, no doubt appeased by the choice of the model Church of England settlement Christchurch; but Butler also stressed his belief in his capacity to learn the necessary skills in application: 'If I am

[15] *Memoir,* I, p. 61.
[16] Letter to his father, Mar, 10 1859, in *Memoir*, I, p. 62.
[17] Letter to his father, May 9 1859, in *Memoir*, I, pp. 64-65 (p. 64).
[18] Letter to his mother, May 10 1859, in *Memoir*, I, pp. 65-68 (p. 66).

sufficient fool to choose a profession which is contrary to my powers the only way for me to get wisdom is by experience'.[19] The life of a sheep farmer was therefore decided upon with the canon advancing the necessary capital, and on the thirtieth of September 1859, Butler set sail for the New World.

Butler's preoccupations as a writer

In this chapter, I have attempted to argue that Butler's claim to have been a late developer should be understood in terms of his need to develop his own opinions. It therefore follows that his early adulthood crisis was primarily intellectual in focus, resulting from his keen sense of having too credulously imbibed the dogma of his family, the educational establishment and the Church. In this section, I would like to point up certain tendencies which I see as following from this crisis and which consequently served to inform Butler's preoccupations as a writer throughout his career.

Butler's account of Ernest's early education at the hands of his father points up how his father justified his overbearing approach to child-rearing with appeals to religious authority and the doctrine of original sin in particular. Similarly, with Ernest's experiences at public school, the interplay between the more worldly narrator and Ernest's naive point of view serves to raise awareness of a critique of Dr Skinner, and, by extension, the public school system. Against this background, the formal properties and thematic preoccupations of the Cambridge pieces suggest a certain awareness on the young Butler's part of the conditions he describes in his later novel. In terms of their experimenting with the various effects that can be generated by the clash between literary form and subject matter, these pieces seem to point to the author's perception of a mismatch between mere conventions and the underlying reality of social relations. Similarly, their preoccupation with such themes as the social act as contrivance, exploiting one's peers through the manipulation of image, and a burlesqued form of sincerity, would also tend to reinforce this message. Finally, though it contrasts markedly with the rest of the collection in terms of its serious tone, 'On English Composition' also contains clear evidence of the author's preoccupation with the same themes, not least of all in the observation that

[19] Letter to his father, Jul. 28 1859, in *The Family Letters of Samuel Butler, 1841-1886*, ed. by Arnold Silver (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), pp. 86-87 (p. 86).

the conventions of one's age are often, at bottom, mystifying dogma.

According to Furbank, the intensity with which Butler preoccupies himself with these themes and his constant return to them across a range of texts in the Cambridge pieces should impress upon us the necessity of referring to the author's personal experience for an explanation. It is the thesis of this study that the personal crisis Butler suffered as a young man continued to influence his approach to intellectual development as well as the subject matter and form of much of his subsequent writings. The first point I wish to make then is that Butler's sense that his development had been arrested by the practice of deception resulted in a lifelong commitment to *a process of independent intellectual development characterised by its impartiality and pragmatism.* Such, as we have seen, was the method both of Butler's experiment into the efficacy of infant baptism and his inquiry into the discrepancies between the Gospels. Years later, when Butler came to describe the formative experience of Ernest's inquiry into the Gospels, he goes out of his way to emphasise the kind of attitude that it required. On two separate occasions we hear first of how Ernest approached the Gospels not wishing to find out 'that they were all accurate, but whether they were all accurate or no'; while later Butler reinforces his message: 'that is to say, as one who wished neither to believe nor disbelieve, but cared only about finding out whether he ought to believe or no'.[20] During his early years in New Zealand, Butler's conviction that he would learn best by doing proved to be well-founded. He developed his own run on remote but fine grazing land, learned quickly, expanded often and gradually developed his interests over four and a half years until he had doubled his father's original outlay. But from family letters written during this time, the impression is often gained that he was more interested in developing ideas and opinions rather than capital. In a letter written just over a year after arriving in New Zealand to his cousin Philip Worsely, Butler is keen to recant the religious opinions he held during their last meeting: 'a wider circle of ideas has resulted from travel, and an entire uprooting of all past habits has been accompanied with a hardly less entire change of opinions upon many subjects'.[21] With the publication of his notebooks in 1912, he would confess that on the night he set sail, he left off saying his prayers for the first time in his life: 'the sense of change

[20] *Way of All Flesh,* pp. 269, 284.
[21] Letter to Philip Worsley, Jan. 10 1861, in *Memoir,* I, pp. 96-97 (p. 96). Worlsey and his mother were Unitarians and from other parts of the letter we can surmise that Butler and he had at one time debated the difference between their faiths.

was so great', he explained, 'that it shook them quietly off'.[22] There is mention too of his new habit of recording his impressions in a notebook such that he can keep chart of his inquiries and intellectual growth: 'My commonplace book is full of notes upon religious subjects', Butler confides, 'and in them I can trace the gradual change from my old narrow bigoted tenets to my far happier present latitudinarianism'. And it wasn't simply religious opinions that Butler was cultivating; mention too is made of Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-89) from which Butler fancied he was imbibing the 'calm and philosophic spirit of impartial and critical investigation'.

In this same letter Butler explains how he has come to the conclusion that there are certain matters, such as the divinity of Christ, in which 'human intelligence simply cannot tread'. Such knowledge is simply impossible within the empirical tradition he has now accepted: 'that is if I follow the enquiry as I should investigate a scientific subject, and do not content myself with a refuge behind formulae and cant phrases of whose meaning, if meaning they really have, I am entirely ignorant'. It is unclear whether Butler had already begun his studies of *Origin of Species* at this point or whether his reference here to scientific methods is solely the influence of Gibbon. However, what does seem clear is that he felt he had found an alternative method of inquiry to the obfuscating rhetoric which theologians such as Alford often had to resort to in order to advance their argument. On this point, we can note another tendency which followed from the events of Butler's personal crisis. As Frank Miller Turner has noted, Butler's apostasy and subsequent scepticism gives the substance to Nietzsche's thesis that the realisation that one interpretation of the world is false awakens the suspicion that *all* are false. On the one hand, Alford's ability to defend the status quo whilst purportedly taking on the difficulties was simply another instance in which a professional had tried to pull the wool over his eyes. However, Alford's 'deceit' also went beyond those of the others that Butler had encountered in that it specifically took place in language. In this sense it pointed up the specific relevance of these lessons in the light of the role which language plays in providing the medium through which interests can operate and intentions can remain concealed. It may seem convincing to argue that 'full reconciliation of the Gospels would be possible in full possession of the evidence' but this begs the question: what status do the scriptures actually have now that they have been proved to be incongruous? Butler believed that Alford had ducked the issue, aided

[22] *Notebooks*, p. 213.

by the smokescreen of respectability which his text as *argument* provided; but only by closely-reading the text could this be revealed.[23] In a previous section, I commented on various passages from the Cambridge pieces to suggest that already as an undergraduate, Butler had a relatively sophisticated understanding of the rhetorical force of language. At a basic level, the mock proclamations and absurd arguments of the Cambridge pieces gain a measure of respectability purely on the basis of their adopting a privileged form or register, be it society prospectus or sermon. Besides this, in 'Powers' there is a portrait of manipulation and spin in which language can be employed to generate specific effects quite separate from its representative function. Obviously, the spirit in which these texts were written suggests Butler's intention was simply to please or puzzle his undergraduate friends. However, in his reading of Alford, much more was at stake. Therefore, the fact that Butler here had to grapple with a text also taught him the necessity of scepticism over claims to neutrality and the related suspicion that *behind every interpretation there is always an intention*.

The spectre of Alford looms large over Butler's early years in New Zealand. On his return to London in 1865 Butler would be able to publish the conclusions of his biblical studies in his Resurrection pamphlet. However, during his early years in New Zealand, he was still very much preoccupied with working the whole problem out to his own satisfaction. So much we can gather from a letter which Butler wrote to his Aunt Worsley, some nine months after his correspondence with her son. Again the focus is on his intellectual development with references to the 'immense intellectual growth' that he felt shortly after leaving England, a growth which has left him 'a much happier and more liberal-minded man'. Later he bemoans his lack of progress on the piano; he was at that time still hard at work on the scriptures, a study which he evidently found compelling:

> The subject has such intense and absorbing interest for me that it is no use. I must go on. I am at work now on St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. I find so much in it that is entirely unsuited to the present age, and much that must have been wrong in theory (as far as I can test it alone, but such are the times when I want a sound-headed companion) even at the time that it was written, that I wonder more and more at the blind deference that is usually paid to the letter of Scripture. [24]

[23] In *The Fair Haven*, Butler applies a similar close reading strategy to Alford as he does to Darwin in the later evolutionary essays in an attempt to expose his deceit (see chapter 6 below).
[24] Letter to Mrs Philip Worsley, Sep. 19 1861, in *Family Letters* ed. by Arnold Silver, pp. 104-05 (p. 104).

This is one of several references Butler makes to serious biblical study in his New Zealand letters. Although we lack conclusive proof, Butler's reference here to the possibility that the moral truths revealed by the books of the New Testament were historically conditioned strongly suggests that he was fully engaging with the methods of the Higher Criticism. If Butler did consult just one work on the Higher Criticism in English it may well have been Benjamin Jowett's contribution to *Essays and Reviews* 'On the Interpretation of Scripture'. In this landmark work on the Higher Criticism in English, Jowett provides an overview of what the historical method involved. As he described it, it was a method which involved an appreciation of how the meaning of certain words in the scriptures depends very much on custom; a method also in which one had to develop an understanding for the distinction between figurative and literal usage.[25] In general, we can argue that any young man with a background in classical exegesis such as Butler would be well placed to appreciate these points. However, such a young man as could also indulge in the clever word play of 'Powers' and 'Prospectus' in which the meaning of *distrust, sincerity* and *charity* are all warped to purpose would be developing an already fairly advanced awareness of the limits of representational language. It is at this point that I wish to introduce one other tendency related to language which I see as following from the events of Butler's coming of age, a tendency which we could identify as an awareness of how the meaning of words depends very much on custom and use; or, to paraphrase Amigoni, *how linguistic conventions are always open to a 'sleight of mind'*.

Shortly after arriving in New Zealand, Butler could write back home to friends and family in his own voice, holding ideas and opinions that he had developed independently. But it is important to understand that despite investing so personally in the process of developing his own ideas, Butler also knew that he could not expect others to assent automatically to his conclusions. In fact, at this time, he was

[25] In his essay, Jowett was so impressed with the problems associated with recovering the original meaning of the scriptures that he could pose the rhetorical question: 'How is religion possible when modes of thought are shifting? and words changing their meaning, and statements of doctrine though "starched" with philosophy, are in perpetual danger of dissolution from metaphysical analysis?'. Ultimately, he solves the question by asserting that 'Christian truth is not dependent on the fixedness of modes of thought.' Again, with regard to figurative language, Jowett proceeds by questioning: '"What division can we make between the figure and the reality?" And the answer seems to be of the same kind, that "We cannot precisely draw the line between them" Language, and especially the language of Scripture, does not admit of any sharp distinction. The simple expressions of one age become the allegories or figures of another.' ('On the Interpretation of Scripture', in *Essays and Reviews* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1860), pp. 330-433 (pp. 402, 03)).

having difficulty reaching solid ground himself:

> in the total wreck of my own past orthodoxy I fear I may be as much too sceptical as then too orthodox [...] The total change that my opinions have undergone during the last two years has made me very cautious in believing myself to be right now. Indeed, I have very few positive opinions at all. I don't know why I write this. I am confident that you would think me as wicked now were you to know the whole ferment in my mind as the most zealous high-churchman does Wesleyan or Methodist, or worse. For my own part, I can never feel the slightest sectarianism, or desire to convert any man any more. I feel equally brotherhood with every man's creed, provided he holds it honestly and sincerely.[26]

There are various passages in Butler's notebooks to suggest that at one time during his early intellectual development, he reached a kind of mental dead end; a point at which his scepticism had loosened the firm ground so totally as to reveal the absolute contradiction in terms which Butler felt to be 'the bedrock on which all our thoughts and deeds are founded'.[27] Butler's homestead, isolated even by today's standards in the foothills of the Southern Alps, in a spot he often described as depressingly bereft of human activity, would certainly seem to lend itself to such conclusions -- not least of all if its inhabitant were absorbed in speculations upon the truth value of the New Testament or on the possibilities offered by Darwin's *Origin of Species.* But regardless of how far Butler had gone at this point, his respect for individual conscience as it is expressed here chimes well with his own experience of deceit. After all, it was insofar as they masqueraded as *authoritative* that his father's interpretation of Christianity or Victorian middle-class society's views on education were able to impose themselves on the conscience of others. Moreover, it is not only in this one letter that we can find evidence of a growing conviction in relativism. In his earlier letter to his cousin, there can be no doubting the extent to which Butler holds this belief:

> I have lost all desire of making other people think the same as myself. If any one wishes to know my opinions upon a subject I can now content myself with stating them as clearly as I can, but I have ceased to regard it as a matter of personal consideration to myself whether he agrees with me or no; for I consider no man has a right to demand from another that what appears satisfactory to himself should also appear so to that other. This is a very simple thing to have come so far to learn; but it is one of the many simple things that I have never learnt before. There are many no less simple things that I have yet to learn.[28]

[26] Letter to Mrs Philip Worsley, op. cit.
[27] *Notebooks,* p. 319.
[28] Letter to Philip Worsley, op. cit.

For Butler then, one further lesson followed from his ability to resist the conventional interpretations of Victorian society in order to arrive at his own, namely the relativist view *that multiple competing interpretations with equal claims to validity can coexist*. It is this final point that forms the basis of Butler's comments in a later letter in August of 1862, this time to a Cambridge friend. In this letter, Butler seems to have brought his speculations upon the scriptures to some tentative conclusion, declaring that 'for the present, I renounce Christianity altogether'. Although he would need three more years and the environment of London finally to publish his Resurrection pamphlet, he had come a long way since the initial doubts of his evening class experiment and could now confess to being able to 'leave off believing in what does not appear to be supported by sufficient evidence' without 'impeding his digestion'. There then follow these lines which are revealing in illustrating the extent to which his coming into possession of this knowledge had left its mark on his intellectual habits: 'I feel strongly and write as I feel; but I am open to conviction, and that I can take in more sides of a question than one is proved by the many changes my opinions have undergone'.[29] It is interesting to compare Butler's comments here to the delight he takes in 'Prospectus' in laying down the rules of engagement whereby all manner of competing factions are engendered and pitted against each other. However, of far more interest is the examination of how this conviction, along with the others that I have summarised here, impact upon Butler's writings after his personal crisis. Ultimately, it is with this question that I will concern myself in the rest of this study.

[29] Letter to Marriot, Aug. 14 1862, in *Memoir,* I, p. 98.

CHAPTER TWO

New World, New Perspectives

In January of 1860 when Butler arrived in New Zealand, the Canterbury settlement which he would make his home for the next four and a half years was just nine years old. Unlike most other colonial settlements of the time, Canterbury had a well defined Anglican heritage and a somewhat utopian spirit. As Joseph Jones points out, emigrants were expected to invest sizable amounts of capital such that

> roads might be built and in time other benefits secured: bridges, harbor facilities, places of assembly and – later – railroads, public parks, libraries, museums, and all the rest of both the necessities and luxuries it would take to reconstitute a 'brighter Britain' as a present haven and an ultimate new nation. New Zealand might prove England's phoenix: the utopian note was fairly strong, strong enough to interest a good many intellectuals.[1]

Picking up on Jones' description of Canterbury in the 1860s, Roger Robinson has noted how the settlement quickly fostered what he terms 'critical rigour and satiric irreverence'.[2] Indeed, there is an account of a rite of passage enjoyed by young male emigrants on their first evening ashore which neatly illustrates the attitude of those who sought their new life there:

> They were all so delighted with the prospect of the untrammelled life before them that they felt it necessary to make some gesture of contempt for the conventions that they had left behind, so the first evening ashore they built a huge bonfire, piled on it their top hats, and tail coats, and danced in a ring round the blazing fire.[3]

It is unclear whether Butler himself ever took part in such a ritual, but it seems more than probable that he would have enjoyed the topsy-turviness of young middle-class men indulging in such ritualistic displays of contempt for the mores of Victorian Britain. What is clear is that he was very much impressed with the liberal and pragmatic values of the settlement and evidently found the atmosphere to be conducive to an alternative, practical education:

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[1] Joseph Jones, *The Cradle of Erewhon: Samuel Butler in New Zealand* (Austin: University of Texas, 1959), p. 18.
[2] *Against the Grain*, p. 31.
[3] Letter of Mrs M. E. Orr, daughter of Professor Sale, quoted in W. D. Stewart, *William Rolleston: A New Zealand Statesman* (Christchurch: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1940), p. 10.

> it may be questioned whether the intellect is not as well schooled here as at home, though in a very different manner. Men are as shrewd and sensible, as alive to the humorous, and as hard-headed. Moreover, there is much nonsense in the old country from which people here are free. There is little conventionalism, little formality, and much liberality of sentiment; very little sectarianism, and, as a general rule, a healthy, sensible tone in conversation, which I like much.[4]

Here it would seem was fertile ground for a young man already enamoured with the foreign way of ordering things and who dearly wished to adopt ideas 'out of the common way'.

As a potential sheep farmer, Butler first had to secure himself a run. However, by as early as 1855, all the Canterbury plains and surrounding foothills had been applied for forcing any would be sheep farmer further out into the mountainous country of the Southern Alps. Butler therefore set to work immediately to prospect for land in the mountainous back country, buying a horse and riding up the numerous broad river valleys. Within two months he landed upon an area of unclaimed land about 120 miles to the west of Christchurch at the head waters of the Rangitata river. After building a temporary shelter on the site, Butler took the opportunity to acquire an even more suitable run on an adjacent piece of land which, owing to its geographical situation between two rivers, he christened Mesopotamia, a name it still bears to this day. A few months later, in early 1861, he expanded on two further occasions, stocked these runs too and began work on a more permanent dwelling for himself and his team of men. For the next year, Butler seems to have consolidated his gains and made good on his investments to such an extent that in March of 1862 he was able to pass responsibility for managing the run to two other hands.[5]

Butler's account of these events are given in *A First Year in a Canterbury Settlement*, a text published by Canon Thomas Butler in 1863 from his son's letters home and a series of three articles entitled 'Our Emigrant' which Butler had submitted in 1861 to the same Saint John's college magazine he had written for as an undergraduate. Throughout his life, Butler went out of his way to distance himself from this work. In a letter written in 1889 in reply to a friend who had recently come

[4] 'First Year in a Canterbury Settlement', in *First Year,* pp. 3-142 (p. 50). Further references from this edition are given after quotations in the text.
[5] See Peter Bromley Maling, *Samuel Butler at Mesopotamia together with Butler's 'Forest Creek' Manuscript and his Letters to Tripp and Acland* (Wellington: R. E. Owen, 1960), pp. 13-29.

across the book and was curious to find out whether Butler was indeed the author, Butler explains himself:

> I am afraid the little book you have referred to in yours of Feb. 13 was written by me. My people edited my letters home. I did not write freely to them, of course, because they were my people; if I was at all freer anywhere they cut it out before printing it -- besides I had not yet shed my Cambridge skin, and its trail is everywhere I am afraid perceptible. I have never read the book myself. I dipped into a few pages when they sent it to me in New Zealand, but saw 'prig' written upon them so plainly that I read no more and never have and never mean to.[6]

Given the importance which Butler attached to his intellectual independence, it is perhaps understandable that he should have resented his father's having a hand in his first publication. Besides this, Butler also evidently felt that he had not yet sufficiently developed his own authentic voice during these early years in New Zealand. However, Joseph Jones has queried Butler's out-of-hand repudiation of the work, pointing to the fact that not only is there no 'internal evidence to damn it as Butler did', but that the canon had also sent Butler the manuscript for his final approval before going to press (p.109). Similarly, we can also compare the writing in *First Year* with that of the so-called 'Forest Creek manuscript', the original draft of the second article which Butler submitted to his college magazine and which was preserved by chance it would seem having been found at a London market in 1935. To do so reveals many passages in *First Year* appear much as they do in the original manuscript, Butler's rather erratic punctuation notwithstanding. On those occasions when the text has been more significantly modified the aim seems to have been to spare readers the more savoury details of colonial life.[7]

Whatever Butler's reasons were for rejecting the work, it has been warmly received by those interested in the social history of the early Canterbury settlers. Beyond this, Roger Robinson's contribution to *Against the Grain* presents us with the most sustained piece of critical commentary upon the text. It will be recalled that Robinson's reading of the text is based on the observation that Butler's early years in New Zealand were characterised by 'surprises, contrasts, incongruities, encounters with the incomprehensible and inexpressible'. In addition to those differences resulting from his antipodean location – cold winds arriving from the

[6] *Memoir*, II, p. 70.
[7] In his essay, Robinson justly advises caution when drawing critical conclusions from *First Year*, noting how Butler's father apparently took exception to the more graphic descriptions of 'maggot infested blankets' and how 'sheep convey grass seed in their dung' (*Against the Grain*, p. 43).

south and the 'winter months' being the summer – there were also marked surprises and incongruities arising from the clash between the Old World and the new, such as the Oxford and Cambridge gentlemen who could be found living like a 'mixture of that of a dog and that of an emperor' in primitive huts with fly blown blankets yet with a copy of Tennyson's *Idyll of the Kings* under the bed; or indeed the local dialect which was already characterising itself by its idiosyncratic use of stress and intonation is such phrases as: 'Don't *you* believe it' and 'It is *so*'.[8] In addition to these examples we can also refer to the following striking passage from the Forest Creek manuscript:

> A person would understand the almost oppressive feeling of newness about everything were he to enter into a colonial slab hut and see an old carved oak chest in the corner marked with a date early in the eighteenth century -- the effect is about as incongruous and as startling as it would be to a geologist to discover the backbone of an ichthyosaurus in the cone of Vesuvius or to an antiquary to find a beadle's cocked hat and staff in the ruins of Paestum.[9]

The prevalence of encounters such as these evidently made quite an impression on Butler, creating tensions for which the only solution was an imaginative response.

Robinson argues that in his attempts to make sense of the 'jumble of colonial experience', Butler was driven to develop a 'multi-perspective, contrapuntal mode of writing'. In evidence, he cites the following passage in which Butler describes his first sight of Mount Cook. Initially, the tone of the passage is dominated by Butler's enthusiasm over its sublime aspect and the 'undying laurels' that await he who first conquers the peak. However, with an abrupt change of paragraph, the perspective shifts from that of Romantic European to hard-nosed land prospector and sheep farmer:

> I am forgetting myself into admiring a mountain which is of no use for sheep. This is wrong. A mountain here is only beautiful if it has good grass on it. Scenery is not scenery -- it is 'country,' *subaudita voce* 'sheep.' If it is good for sheep, it is beautiful, magnificent, and all the rest of it; if not, it is not worth looking at. I am cultivating this tone of mind with considerable success, but you must pardon me for an occasional outbreak of the old Adam.[10]

For Robinson, such shifts of perspective demonstrate the 'incongruity between inherited expectations and the necessities of the new context' (p. 28). What was necessary in this environment where the successful settlers distinguished

[8] *First Year*, pp. 49-50, 34.
[9] 'Forest Creek manuscript', in Maling, pp. 36-55 (p. 43).
[10] *First Year,* p. 66.

themselves by their ‘shrewd, sensible and hard-headed tone’ was a far more pragmatic approach.

Clearly, Robinson’s analysis neatly ties in with my argument that Butler’s personal crisis was instrumental in confirming him in the belief that multiple competing interpretations of the same experience could coexist. The abrupt shifts of perspective between aesthetic contemplation and pragmatic concerns, often accompanied by a self-conscious remark, would seem sufficient to testify to this. However, where I would differ from Robinson is in the too exclusive emphasis that he places on the ‘surprises, contrasts and incongruities’ of colonial life as those forces alone responsible for giving shape to this aspect of Butler’s writing. According to Robinson, ‘it is in *First Year* that Butler first begins to place variant perspectives alongside each other’ (p. 28). However, my analysis of the Cambridge pieces clearly suggests a precedent. At the very least, the fine observations which so characterise Butler’s travel writing seem to involve a certain way of seeing in which the ‘practised eye’ may gain access to an alternative perspective. Besides this, there is Butler’s preoccupation with the appearance / reality distinction in ‘Powers’ and his ludic appreciation in ‘Propectus’ for the conflict engendered by competing points of view. Indeed, we need only recall Butler’s preference for the term *defect* over *foible* to realise how attuned he already was as an undergraduate to the fact that different interests and intentions are served by appropriate modifications of our language. Ultimately, Robinson follows most other critics in characterising the Cambridge pieces as lacking in the ‘versatility, agility, and ingenuity that would make *Erewhon* a great satire’. However, he does at least admit that Butler only ‘learned to use’ these qualities in New Zealand (p. 23).

Pointing up these similarities to the Cambridge pieces reveals what grounds there are for pushing Robinson’s analysis further, for along with a shift in perspective, Butler’s comments in the Mount Cook passage clearly suggest the necessity of modifying one’s *language* accordingly. For the sheep farmer in particular, *scenery* means *country* which in turn only exists as a means to the end of sustaining and breeding sheep. Similarly, our familiar understanding of *beauty* must also be adapted to practical, economic purposes and thus lose its aesthetic connotations. Other passages from the text provide us with further instances of Butler re-evaluating familiar terms on the basis of practical concerns. In a passage dealing with his early days ashore in New Zealand, Butler describes returning from an excursion to put up at an inn where, no one seeming inclined to talk to him, he

silently soaks up the wisdom of the more experienced settlers. It is here that he relates his keen observations on the distinctive Canterbury dialect, including the following passage in which he seizes upon a linguistic quirk of the local sheep farmers:

> I was rather startled at hearing one gentleman ask another whether he meant to wash this year, and receive the answer 'No.' I soon discovered that a person's sheep are himself. If his sheep are clean, he is clean. He does not wash his *sheep* before shearing, but *he* washes; and, most marvellous of all, it is not his sheep which lamb, but he 'lambs down' himself. (pp. 33-34)

Butler's glee at such an unexpected turn of phrase and the connotations it suggests is evident. What is merely a *façon de parler* has struck him with its full literal force with the result that he seems to enjoy this moment as much as the ludic directives of 'Powers' or 'Prospectus'. However, much later in *First Year,* at the other end in fact when Butler himself could confidently offer counsel to the would-be sheep farmer, Butler also sees fit to refer to his flock in terms which suggest a certain amount of confusion over the relationship between farmer and livestock. Once the prospective sheep farmer has got himself and his supplies settled on a run, Butler informs us, the first question is:

> Where shall you place your homestead? You must put it in such a situation as will be most convenient for working the sheep. These are the real masters of the place -- the run is theirs, not yours: you cannot bear this in mind too diligently. All considerations of pleasantness of site must succumb to this.

As if not content that he has made this point sufficiently clear, Butler returns to re-emphasise it half a page later: 'Sheep cannot be too closely watched, or too much left to themselves. You must remember they are your masters, and not you theirs; you exist for them not they for you' (pp. 131-32). As with the original settlers, Butler's re-evaluations suggest a relationship of interdependence between farmer and sheep, an intimate relationship which is no doubt felt to exist as a result of the farmer's having invested so heavily in his livestock. We might also consider another passage from this section in which Butler discusses the practice of burning off dead grass from the pasture in order to encourage new growth. Though necessary to make a long term success of the run, Butler evidently felt this to be a painful practice when he reflected on the short term consequences of destroying the very land that you had acquired to make your fortune:

> It is certainly a mortification to see volumes of smoke rising into the air, and to know that all that smoke might have been wool, and might have been sold by you for 2s. a pound in England. You will think it great waste, and regret that you have not more sheep to eat it. However, that will come to pass in time; and meanwhile, if you have not mouths enough upon your run to make wool of it, you must burn it off and make smoke of it instead. (p. 134)

In a world where *scenery* is *country* and *country* is *sheep*, *sheep* are *money*, which for Butler is the ultimate means of extending one's sphere of influence. In my introductory chapter, I noted that money is a theme which keeps resurfacing in Butler's writing and that it has been treated by various critics, some more sympathetically than others. It is in *First Year* that we start to get a sense of Butler's mood toward the significance of private assets.[11] In the evolutionary sketches, Butler would return to consider the intimate relationship between individual and material possessions in order to develop it into a philosophical position. In the process, he would also develop to maturity that certain tendency to 'rearrange conceptual boundaries' which these passages suggest.[12] For the moment, however, it is sufficient to acknowledge how these passages provide further illustration of that set of preoccupations that I outlined in the previous chapter. As with the Cambridge pieces, behind these re-evaluations lies a keen awareness of how the meaning of words depends very much on custom and use.

'Dialogue on Species': One of Mr Darwin's enthusiastic yet cautious admirers

Although it is unknown exactly when Butler first encountered the *Origin of Species*, his first published contribution to the post-*Origin* debates appeared in the Christchurch newspaper the *Press* late in December of 1862. It therefore predates the publication of *First Year* if not the bulk of its writing. Years later, Butler would reflect upon this pivotal moment in his intellectual development:

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[11] During his time in New Zealand, Butler made good on his father's original outlay of four thousand four hundred pounds such that by the time he left for England in 1864, he had amassed a personal fortune of over eight thousand pounds. Despite this success, however, he continued to participate in a battle of wills with his father over the question of his inheritance (*Memoir*, I, p. 107).

[12] David Amigoni has also noted how Butler's treatment of the farmer / livestock relationship in *First Year* sets a precedent for the method of 'The Book of the Machines'. See 'Samuel Butler's Symbolic Offensives: Colonies and Mechanical Devices in the Margins of Evolutionary Writing', in *Colonies, Cults and Evolution: Literature, Science and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 142-163 (p. 145).

> As a member of the general public, at that time residing eighteen miles from the nearest human habitation, and three days' journey on horse back from the bookseller's shop, I became one of Mr. Darwin's many enthusiastic admirers, and wrote a philosophical dialogue (the most offensive form, except poetry and books of travel into supposed unknown countries, that even literature can assume) upon the 'Origin of Species.' This production appeared in *The Press*, Canterbury, New Zealand, in 1861 or 1862, but I have long lost the only copy I had.[13]

Unlike some of his contemporaries, Butler's reading of the *Origin* did not occasion a crisis of faith. On first reading the *Origin* on his sheep station 'three days journey on horseback from the nearest bookseller's shop', Butler's faith had already been tested and found wanting. Nevertheless, we should not underestimate the impact which Darwin had upon Butler at this time. As Knoepflmacher observes, Darwin's thesis went some way toward justifying Butler's decision to emigrate to the wilds of the New World in order to develop himself on his own terms:

> To the practical young sheep-farmer at work in a new environment, Darwin's theories came as a deliverance. They confirmed his break with the past, extricated him from his sense of guilt, and sanctioned the literalistic bent which had led him to dismiss a supernaturalism he could accept neither as truth nor as symbol. Butler found that the *Origin* supported his own failure to follow the ecclesiastical footsteps of his father and grandfather, and that it provided him with a clear-cut and logical system which would do away once and for all with inconsistencies of his upbringing. (p. 233)

The pristine environment of the Southern Alps, in which the geological evidence of the earth's immense age lay all around in glacial valleys, wide river beds and steep gorges, had sufficiently impressed Butler for his analysis of such features to make up a substantial portion of his letters home.[14] More to the point, with the introduction of European varieties of flora and fauna into this environment, Butler could also observe the basic premises of Darwin's theory at first hand, in 'the competition between individuals for limited resources and the subsequent preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life'. Particularly poignant on this score would have been the commonplace experience of coming across remains of the moa, the giant flightless bird once widespread in New Zealand but which had been hunted to

[13] *Unconscious Memory*, p. 11.

[14] The content of these letters as they were subsequently incorporated into *First Year* clearly illustrate a growing interest in scientific matters. Not only do meteorological issues receive objective analysis, the geology of mountains, gorges, glaciers, rivers and peninsulas are also treated, as are mineral deposits and plant and animal life, this latter subdivided into quadrupeds, birds, birds of prey, fish, reptiles and insects.

extinction by the 1860s.[15] And it was not simply his environment that seemed to be playing out the truth of Darwin's theory. As Knoepflmacher points out, the circumstances of Butler's personal crisis were such that he must have felt a personal connection to the *Origin*. At the heart of evolutionary theory was the promise of change from one generation to the next, the provision that the offspring need not follow in the footsteps of its ancestors but evolve and improve upon their lot. On this point Darwin had argued that the environment, and specifically a change of environment, was paramount in encouraging this change. It is little wonder then that Butler, having left his oppressive surroundings back in Victorian England in order to embark upon a process of independent self-development, should have become 'one of Mr. Darwin's many enthusiastic admirers'.

However, if Butler saw his own image reflected in the pages of the *Origin*, this was all the more reason to impress himself upon it. After all, if his personal crisis had taught him anything, it was the necessity of developing his *own* ideas through a pragmatic negotiation of the evidence at first hand. Although Butler did not begin to develop his own interpretation of evolution until the first of his three imaginative sketches, in his initial 'Dialogue on Species' it is clear that despite a thorough appreciation for the basic argument of the *Origin*, Butler deviated from Darwin on the crucial question of the origin of variations. Most basically, Butler's position was Lamarckian from the beginning. From his reflections upon his early reading of the *Origin* as well as a reading of the dialogue itself, it is clear that Butler believed that the will of the organism to change, to adapt itself to the demands of the environment, was the active cause of variation. To be fair, Butler's misunderstanding was a common one; but like many misreadings, it was nevertheless telling in suggesting how Butler needed this new 'clear cut and logical system' to affirm the primacy of the individual's intentions.[16] As I have argued, Butler's alternative model of education with its emphasis on actively negotiating the evidence, not to mention

[15] In *First Year,* Butler's account of the falling numbers of indigenous quail seems clearly to illustrate Darwin's influence: 'Some say the fires have destroyed them; some say the sheep have trod on their eggs; some that they have all been hunted down: my own opinion is that the wild cats, which have increased so as to be very numerous, have driven the little creatures nearly off the face of the earth' (*First Year,* p. 119); for Butler's encounters with moa remains, see *First Year,* p. 122.

[16] For an account of how Darwin's readers often confused the ideas of descent with modification and natural selection, see Philip G. Fothergill, *Historical Aspects of Organic Evolution* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1952), pp. 116-22. It was only during the final preparations for publishing *Life and Habit* at the end of 1877 that Butler discovered the true import of Darwin's principle of natural selection (see below, chapter 5).

the role which practical concerns plays in the re-evaluations of *First Year*, both point to the central and defining role of purpose.

In the *Origin,* Butler found both a system that he could enthusiastically embrace and one that he felt compelled to resist, adapt and develop for his own purposes such that he could truly make it his own. It is against this background, I intend to argue, that we ought to approach Butler's early 'Dialogue on Species' in order to arrive at a more thorough understanding of the work. The dialogue itself takes the form of a conversation between two characters identified as 'F' and 'C'. On the face of it, 'F' is the enthusiastic admirer of Darwin who, having lent his copy of the *Origin* to 'C', now wishes to discuss the argument of the book at length. 'C', on the other hand, comes across as, if not the sceptic, then the simple, pragmatic settler. He seems uncomfortable with the abstractions of scientific argument, or indeed with negotiating any other means of conceiving man's relationship to nature other than the standard Anglican line and those practical concerns befitting of his station as a farmer. As a result, the dialogue progresses mostly through 'F' summarising Darwin's argument using examples from the surrounding environment of the Canterbury settlement to illustrate the main points. 'C', by contrast, has far fewer lines and is limited to confirming that he has understood what he has just been told, providing brief comic relief, or objecting wholesale to the theory on the grounds that it is variously 'too dry' or simply 'horrid'.

One further aspect of the text is worthy of consideration, namely the extent of the reaction that it provoked. Roughly one month after its appearance in the *Press,* the editor of this newspaper published a response from another reader entitled 'Barrel Organs' in which the anonymous contributor, who only refers to Butler's dialogue incidentally, takes issue with the *Origin* on the grounds that it is simply a 'reheating' of the theory of 'descent with modification' which had already been put forward by earlier thinkers such as Lamarck, Buffon or Darwin's own grandfather, Erasmus Darwin. This letter then in turn called forth a reaction from another contributor, signing himself A. M., who attempts to defend Darwin against these charges, before a contributor by the name of 'The Savoyard' steps in to uphold the original criticism. The ensuing debate between A. M and the Savoyard then plays out for a further three letters lasting until June of 1863. In 1865 when Butler returned to England, he made an attempt to court Darwin's favour, sending him his recently

published Resurrection pamphlet.[17] On receiving an encouraging reply inquiring after more details of his time in New Zealand, Butler took the opportunity to relate his early impressions of the *Origin* and send Darwin a copy of the dialogue. In his accompanying letter, Butler reveals that the third correspondent A. M. was none other than himself and further identifies the Savoyard as the Bishop of Wellington:

> The first dialogue on the *Origin* which I wrote in *The Press* called forth a contemptuous rejoinder from (I believe) the Bishop of Wellington (please do not mention the name, though I think that at this distance of space and time I might mention it to yourself) -- I answered it with the enclosed, which may amuse you. I assumed another character because my dialogue was, in my hearing, very severely criticised by two or three whose opinion I thought worth having, and I deferred to their judgement in my next. I do not think I should do so now. I fear you will be shocked at an appeal to the periodicals mentioned in my letter, but they form a very staple article of bush diet, and we used to get a good deal of superficial knowledge out of them. I feared to go in too heavy on the side of the *Origin* because I thought that, having said my say as well as I could, I had better now take a less impassioned tone: but I was really exceedingly angry.[18]

The series of letters to the *Press* which followed the publication of the dialogue can therefore be thought of as an extension of the original dialogue in which Butler assumes yet another mask in addition to the two original personae of 'C' and 'F'. It would also seem that in assuming this third character, Butler's aim was partly to provide a more balanced assessment of the *Origin* than he had thought fit when composing the original dialogue.

With regard to the previous criticism, Basil Willey has described 'C' as a 'man of straw' and 'F' as a straightforward mouthpiece for Butler's position (p. 64). More recently, Roger Robinson has pointed out that in the character of 'C', Butler has projected his imagined reader, the average reader of the *Press* who would no doubt have been less fulsome in their praise of the *Origin* than Butler and more inclined toward practical matters. Reference is also made to the form of the piece, with the observation that the choice of a dialogue represents a 'development from the contrapuntal processes of *First Year'*.[19] While it is very likely that we can identify Butler with much of what 'F' says, there are a number of elements to the work which suggest a certain degree of caution on Butler's part toward Darwin's position, not least of all some of the objections made by 'C' which Butler would later

[17] Butler had a tenuous connection to the Darwin family through his grandfather, Samuel Butler senior, who was headmaster at Shrewsbury School during the period when Charles Darwin was in attendance. Up until he went public with his attack on Darwin with *Evolution, Old and New*, Butler had sent Darwin a copy of every work he had published.
[18] Letter to Charles Darwin, Oct. 1 1865, in *Memoir,* I, pp. 123-24 (p. 124).
[19] *Against the Grain*, p. 32.

unambiguously assent to. Additionally, closer reading of 'F's position reveals a certain awareness that it is Darwin's explicit purpose in the *Origin* to persuade the reader with an accomplished display of rhetoric.

The dialogue begins with 'F' inquiring as to 'C's thoughts on Darwin now that he has finished reading the *Origin*. 'C's reply then sets in motion an initial discussion of Darwin's style:

> C. You cannot expect me to like him. He is so hard and logical, and he treats his subject with such an intensity of dry reasoning without giving himself the loose rein for a single moment from one end of the book to the other, that I must confess I have found it a great effort to read him through.[20]

On the face of it, here we have Butler's imagined reader, the simple, practically-minded settler with little experience of scientific texts, a reader who already knows what kind of books he likes and finds the experience of negotiating the *Origin* an arduous one. In replying to 'C's criticism, 'F's appeals to candour and challenges 'C' to acknowledge the role that ignorance, impatience or prejudice has played in forming his attitude toward the text:

> F. But I fancy that, if you are to be candid, you will admit that the fault lies rather with yourself than with the book. Your knowledge of natural history is so superficial that you are constantly baffled by terms of which you do not understand the meaning, and in which you consequently lose all interest. I admit, however, that the book is hard and laborious reading; and, moreover, that the writer appears to have predetermined from the commencement to reject all ornament, and simply to argue from beginning to end, from point to point, till he conceived that he had made his case sufficiently clear. (pp. 155-56)

But despite 'F's gentle prodding, there is still the concession frankly offered that the style of the *Origin is* in some way 'difficult' or 'disagreeable', particularly in its relentless appeal to logic. Indeed, Butler's characters were not alone in finding the *Origin* dull and difficult read. George Eliot had also criticised the *Origin* judging it to be 'ill written and sadly wanting in illustrative facts', a short-falling of the work which she predicted would prevent it from becoming as popular as the earlier work on the doctrine of development, the publishing sensation *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844).[21] However, in many ways, it was precisely to avoid the kind of reception received by *Vestiges* that Darwin took such pains to ensure his argument

[20] 'Darwin on Species', in *First Year*, pp. 149-178 (pp. 155-56). Further references from this edition are given after quotations in the text.
[21] Quoted in Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, p. 146.

was both comprehensive and consistent. In his essay on the rhetoric of the *Origin* David D. Depew explains:

> George Eliot apparently expected her evolutionary reading to spin out grand narratives stretching from the nebular formation of the universe to the imminent reduction of psychology to brain science, as popular-science audiences often still do. She expected the *Origin* to be as satisfying to the imagination as the sensational *Vestiges of Creation*, which had appeared anonymously in 1844 and was later shown to have been written by the skilled journalist Robert Chambers […] She did not know that the trashing of *Vestiges* by people whose opinions he valued had led Darwin to search for arguments that would not be vulnerable to the criticisms leveled against Chambers and, when at last he made these arguments public, to couch them in a decidedly unsensational way.[22]

There were therefore good reasons for Darwin to adopt an impersonal tone in his text and to rely so heavily on deductive reasoning and the piling up of evidence. In his reply to 'F', 'C' complains that Darwin 'seems to have no eye but for the single point at which he is aiming', a virtue which, though laudable, he ultimately views as 'cold and hard'. There then follows the following reply from 'F':

> F. In my opinion it is a grave and wise one. Moreover, I conceive that the judicial calmness which so strongly characterises the whole book, the absence of all passion, the air of extreme and anxious caution which pervades it throughout, are rather the result of training and artificially acquired self-restraint than symptoms of a cold and unimpassioned nature; at any rate, whether the lawyer-like faculty of swearing both sides of a question and attaching the full value to both is acquired or natural in Darwin's case, you will admit that such a habit of mind is essential for any really valuable and scientific investigation. (p. 156)

Here 'F' counters 'C's argument by regarding Darwin's appeal to reason not as evidence of the author's lack of humanity or indifference to the moral dimension of his argument, but rather of his admirable impartiality. We might also pause to consider the significance of 'F's reference here to Darwin's 'lawyer-like faculty' of arguing both sides of a question. Again, Depew has noted that advancing the argument through 'anticipating and allaying an audience's objections' is another characteristic feature of the *Origin*:

> From start to finish the speaker interrupts his exposition to put himself in the reader's place. He not only raises important objections but puts the case for each so strongly that he seems to take his readers' worries on himself. He does this in the expectation that the reader, having been painted as intelligent and dispassionate enough to raise such intelligent objections, will reciprocate by treating his answers to

[22] David J. Depew, 'The Rhetoric of the *Origin of Species*', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Origin of Species*, ed. by Michael Ruse and Robert J. Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 239.

> these objections as no less intelligent and, by this route, will eventually come around to his own painfully acquired view that the burden of proof should be shifted onto the 'ordinary doctrine'. (pp. 243-44)

Throughout the dialogue, 'F' makes repeated appeals to candour with Butler using this word in one form or another on three separate occasions and once more in the correspondence which follows it. As we have noted, in his early years in New Zealand, Butler's opinions seem to have undergone such profound changes as to leave him especially sensitive to the fact that alternative interpretations of the evidence always exist. Against this background, it can only be supposed that Darwin's style of argumentation would have appealed to Butler, not least of all for revealing a model of writing which was, in Butler's view, the apparent antithesis to that of wily theologians whose aim it often was to conceal difficulties from the reader.

While there is much to suggest that 'F' is simply a mouthpiece for Butler's enthusiastic support for the *Origin,* and the character of 'C' a rhetorical device enabling him better to address his imagined reader, we ought to exercise caution in the extent to which we subscribe to this interpretation. After his brief introductory discussion of Darwin's style, Butler moves on to summarise the basic argument of the *Origin* in a virtual monologue in which 'F's flow is interrupted only by 'C' voicing his assent in the briefest of terms. For the critic familiar with Butler's work, it is a somewhat anomalous passage, lacking those engaging figures, lively asides or the suggestion of ambiguity or paradox which so characterise the early evolutionary writings. This observation alone might be enough to suggest that in creating his text as a dramatic dialogue, Butler was somehow rehearsing the role of 'F' rather than identifying himself wholesale as a disciple of Darwinism. Additionally, Butler's experience of having been misled so thoroughly by other professionals, as well as 'F's reference to the necessity of attaching full value to both sides of the question, would also tend to dissuade us against aligning Butler too exclusively with the character of 'F'. In the course of his consideration of the dialogue, Knoepflmacher picks up on this point, arguing that Butler's dialogue 'impressed upon him the value (and the potential fun) of "swearing both sides of a question," and thus led him to employ the dramatic self-division that was to become a hallmark of his writings'. Moreover, Knoepflmacher also refers to Butler's later commitment to reconciling the religious with the scientific world view in his later evolutionary essays to claim that the dualism between 'C' and 'F' 'was to plague Butler for the rest of his life'; and that

"C" 's voice could never be fully be silenced'. For these reasons, Knoepflmacher concludes that 'Butler is represented by "C", the Christian conservative, almost as much as he is by "F", the radical evolutionist' in this early dialogue (pp. 234-35).

Further reason to resist identifying Butler too exclusively with the character of 'F' comes when we consider Butler's evaluation of style. Although 'F' presents a strong case for Darwin's impersonal style as the necessary consequence of candour and discipline, it should be noted that in the notebooks, Butler often equates style with a certain subjective element. In one such entry, Butler comments of a writer: 'if the work does not attract us to the workman, neither does it attract us to itself', adding that 'if he has made it clear that he was trying to do what we like, and meant what we should like him to have meant, it is enough'.[23] On the face of it, Butler's comments here represent an extension of that more humanist world view put forth by the character of 'C', a world where human values and intentions take precedence. However, insofar as they relate specifically to the act of writing, they also provide us with a statement of Butler's belief in the centrality of authorial intention. As we have already seen, a consequence of Butler's personal crisis was that he was left with a deep scepticism over claims to neutrality and the conviction that behind every interpretation there is always an intention. In the years following 1877, when Butler came into a full knowledge of the principle of natural selection, he would return to read the *Origin* more sceptically, applying the close reading technique of the later essays to reveal what he believed to be the author's very secular desire for fame and credit. Is there any evidence in Butler's early dialogue to suggest a suspicion at this point that vested interests were at work?

For one thing, 'F's choice of language in the section in which he summarises the argument of the *Origin* seems at times calculated to control and pressure 'C' into acceptance of the idea. For instance, 'F' begins his discussion of the theory itself by inquiring of 'C' whether he may 'catechise' him on the content of the book. He then moves on to an exposition of each proposition of Darwin's argument in turn, typically either beginning with the presumptuous statement that 'C' 'will grant' or 'admit' its truth as self-evident or by concluding with the 'demand' that 'C' 'admit' or 'assent' for this same reason. But most significantly, in the follow up debate to the dialogue with the figure of the Savoyard, Butler, posing as A. M., openly criticises 'F' for his too credulous and hasty acceptance of Darwin's theory, casting aspersions on his

[23] *Notebooks,* p. 107.

candour with the observation that he is an evident 'warm adherent of the theory in question' who

> overlooks all the real difficulties in the way of accepting it, and, caught by the obvious truth of much that Darwin says, has rushed to the conclusion that all is equally true. He writes with the tone of a partisan, of one deficient in scientific caution. (p. 167)

After this initial criticism, Butler appears to reverse his judgement slightly, pointing out that in spite of his misguided enthusiasm, the writer of the original text 'may fairly claim the merit of having written in earnest. He has treated a serious subject seriously according to his lights'. However, any impression that he has only made a concession in order the better to defend his original position is swept aside by his concluding comments:

> He is rash, evidently well satisfied with himself, very possibly mistaken, and just one of those persons who (without intending it) are more apt to mislead than to lead the few people that put their trust in them. A few will always follow them, for a strong faith is always more or less impressive upon persons who are too weak to have any definite and original faith of their own. (pp. 167-68)

In the light of Butler's intellectual history, the accusation here that 'F' may be guilty of deceiving his readers, albeit unwittingly, is significant. As we have seen in the course of our reading of 'On English Composition', even prior to his personal crisis, Butler was well aware of the mischief which could be caused by writers who 'weave all matter to the warp of a preconceived judgment'. Could Butler be subtly undermining 'F's appeals to candour and by extension Darwin himself's neutrality? One last example from the text itself should suffice to illustrate that this may very well have been Butler's intent. It comes in the form of 'F's opening shot during his 'catechism' of 'C':

> F. Firstly, then, I will ask you what is the one great impression that you have derived from reading it; or, rather, what do you think to be the main impression that Darwin wanted you to derive? (p. 157)

Butler's reformulation here, almost as an aside, is telling in suggesting his awareness that for the naturalist as well as for the theologian, behind every interpretation, there is always an intention. It follows then that any impression derived from negotiating a text is incomplete without a consideration also of the motives of the writer. Although it would take the revelation of finally understanding

the principle of natural selection to turn Butler into a hostile reader of Darwin, at this early stage, there is good reason to believe that even as a self-confessed enthusiastic admirer, Butler could still be cautious.

On the completion of 'F's summary, the dialogue then climaxes with 'C's claim that the *Origin* 'is utterly subversive of Christianity' on the grounds that if the theory is true 'the fall of man is entirely fabulous and if the fall, then the redemption, these two being inseparably bound together'. There then follows 'F's reply:

> F. My dear friend, there I am not bound to follow you. I believe in Christianity, and I believe in Darwin. The two appear irreconcilable. My answer to those who accuse me of inconsistency is, that both being undoubtedly true, the one must be reconcilable with the other, and that the impossibility of reconciling them must be only apparent and temporary, not real. The reconciliation will never be effected by planing a little off the one and a little off the other and then gluing them together with glue. People will not stand this sort of dealing, and the rejection of the one truth or of the other is sure to follow upon any such attempt being persisted in. The true course is to use the freest candour in the acknowledgment of the difficulty; to estimate precisely its real value, and obtain a correct knowledge of its precise form. Then and then only is there a chance of any satisfactory result being obtained. (p. 162)

Much has been made of 'F's declaration here that both Christianity and evolution are true. Knoepflmacher, for example, considers the possibility that it is a ploy to throw the reader into the Darwin camp whereas Willey suspects that it is merely an attitude 'lightly assumed' for the purpose of the dialogue.[24] Robinson, on the other hand, appreciates the paradox itself, seeing in it a 'glimpse of the elusive flickering between logic and near-nonsensical self-contradiction that would be characteristic of the later Butler'. 'There is a dash of pepper too', Robinson continues, 'in the eyes of his father, whose boyhood essay on "consistency" was such a source of pride to him and became such a recurrent target for his satirical son'.[25] From the point of view of this study, I wish to argue that the alternate perspectives and shifting tones of Butler's first contribution to the evolutionary debates foregrounds the author's preoccupation with relativism, a relativism in which multiple competing interpretations with equal claims to validity can coexist. Although by late 1862, Butler had given up his faith in the miraculous aspect of Christianity, he nevertheless had sufficient caution and respect for individual conscience not to force this opinion on others. 'If any one wishes to know my opinions upon a subject', Butler had written as early as 1861, 'I can now content myself with stating them as clearly as I can, [but] I consider no man has a right to demand from another that what appears satisfactory

[24] Knoepflmacher, p. 235; Willey, p. 64.
[25] *Against the Grain*, p. 32.

to himself should also appear so to that other'.[26] Moreover, in 'F's references to 'planing' and 'gluing' there is the ghost of Alford and the intellectual dishonesty of fudging the argument with sophisticated appeals to rhetoric. As Butler points out, the true course is to approach the matter with a spirit of candour, an open-mind free of prejudices and capable of taking in both sides of the argument in order to arrive at one's own independent interpretation of the evidence; the method, in short, of Butler's own project of self-development.

[26] See chapter 1, n. 28.

CHAPTER THREE

'Joining and Disjoining': The Early Evolutionary Sketches

Joining and Disjoining

> These are the essence of change.
> One of the earliest notes I made, when I began to make notes at all, I found not long ago in an old book, since destroyed, which I had in New Zealand. It was to the effect that all things are of the nature of a piece of string or a knife. That is, they are either for bringing and keeping things together, or for sending and keeping them apart […]
> A piece of string is a thing that, in the main, makes for togetherness; whereas a knife is, in the main, a thing that makes for splitty-uppiness; still, there is an odour of togetherness hanging about a knife also, for it tends to bring potatoes into a man's stomach.
> In high philosophy one should never look at a knife without considering it also as a piece of string, nor a piece of string without considering it also as a knife.[1]

In this chapter, I turn my attention to Butler's own evolutionary speculations and the series of three sketches which he created between 1863 and 1865. In my introductory chapter, I have already mentioned the key role which these sketches played in Butler's development as a writer. Not only were they later reworked into the 'Book of the Machines' chapters from *Erewhon,* but, as we learn from Butler's reflections in *Unconscious Memory*, they also functioned as the preliminary thought experiments which eventually led to the discovery of the Life and Habit theory.[2] Of these two possible frameworks within which to place the sketches, by far the most popular in terms of the critical tradition has been to view them through the lens of *Erewhon*, Butler's self-proclaimed work of 'satire and imagination'. Although he used the publication of the second edition of *Erewhon* to deny the accusation that he sought to satirise Darwin's theory, Butler's critics have persisted in reading his imaginative appropriation of evolutionary paradigms as somehow symptomatic of his desire to discredit the 'whole business of scientific theorising'. As Breuer and Howard point out in the preface to a recent edition of *Erewhon*: 'when Butler applied the theory of evolution, by way of analogy, to the unrelated topic of mechanical development, he at least seemed to show that the famous theory was more

[1] *Notebooks*, p. 21.
[2] Jones acknowledges this dual role by giving the title 'The Germs of *Erewhon* and of *Life and Habit*' to that section of the *Notebooks* containing 'Darwin Among the Machines' and 'Lucubratio Ebria' (pp. 39-55).

metaphor than a satisfactory explanation of complex and unobserved events'.[3] Whilst I do not doubt that Butler's immoderate speculations can be read as incidentally satirical of evolutionary theory, the attempt to do so has arguably drawn attention away from the actual conditions under which these texts were composed. In a letter to Darwin written shortly after the publication of *Erewhon*, Butler not only clarifies his intentions on composing the 'Book of the Machines', but also his original motivation for drafting the early sketches:

> When I first got hold of the idea, I developed it for mere fun and because it amused me and I thought would amuse others, but without a particle of serious meaning; but I developed it and introduced it into *Erewhon* with the intention of implying: 'See how easy it is to be plausible, and what absurd propositions can be defended by a little ingenuity and distortion and departure from strictly scientific methods,' and I had Butler's *Analogy* in my head as the book at which it should be aimed, but preferred to conceal my aim for many reasons.[4]

From these comments it is clear that the satirical target of the 'Book of the Machines' was in fact the theologian and Christian apologist Joseph Butler, and in particular his method of reasoning in *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed* (1736). Moreover, as Butler suggests, the decision to exploit the satirical potential of his early sketches was only made when he was casting around for material for his work of 'satire and imagination', the 'peg' on which he hung anything he had a mind to say. In their original format as the evolutionary sketches, it would seem that Butler's decision to engage imaginatively with the paradigms of Darwin's theory was motivated by nothing other than amusement. But if this is the case, how are we to assess Butler's parallel claim that these same sketches also functioned as the preliminary thought experiments which eventually led him to the discovery of his Life and Habit theory?

Butler's reflections in *Unconscious Memory* on how he came to write *Life and Habit* have attracted surprisingly little critical attention. Where they have, there has been a general reluctance to consider what impact these early sketches have on our understanding of the literary elements of *Life and Habit*. In part, this may be explained by Butler's own confession at the outset of his reflections to having got

[3] Furbank, p. 56; preface to *Erewhon, or Over the Range*, ed. by Hans-Peter Breuer and Daniel F. Howard (London: Associated University Press, 1981), p. 19. See also Leo J. Henkin, *Darwinism and the English Novel, 1860-1910: The Impact of Evolution on Victorian Fiction* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), pp. 94-104.
[4] Letter to Charles Darwin, May 11 1871, in *Memoir*, I, pp. 156-57 (p. 156).

'plenty of amusement' out of his preliminary lines of inquiry.[5] However, as I will argue throughout this chapter, Butler's play was always exploratory, and quickly took on a more definite and purposeful quality with each subsequent sketch. It will therefore be the main aim of this chapter to approach the evolutionary sketches from Butler's own description of the peculiar circumstances under which they were composed. By doing so, I will be attempting to emphasise the constructive contribution which Butler's literary imagination played in the exploration of his hypotheses.

It followed from the vast scope of the *Origin*, ranging over millions of years to account for the entire range of organic life, that in those cases where there was a lack of physical evidence, such as a gap in the fossil record, Darwin's argument had to make use of imaginative thought experiments. In *Darwin's Plots* (2000), Gillian Beer refers to what is perhaps the most famous of these speculations to point out just how heavily Darwin relied on the reader's imagination at times to advance his argument. In the passage in question, Darwin is attempting to describe the stages that would have been involved in the evolution of the eye by means of natural selection. This was a key stage in the argument as for years natural theologians such as William Paley in his *Natural Theology* had cited the eye as the *par excellence* example of a natural feature so complex that only God could have created it. Beginning the task in characteristic style, Darwin freely admits that it seems 'absurd in the highest possible degree' to suppose that an eye created by natural selection could possess those 'inimitable contrivances for adjusting the focus to different distances, for admitting different amounts of light, and for the correction of spherical and chromatic aberration'. 'Yet', he continues,

> reason tells me, that if numerous gradations from a perfect and complex eye to one very imperfect and simple, each grade being useful to its possessor, can be shown to exist; if further, the eye does vary ever so slightly, and the variations be inherited, which is certainly the case; and if any variation or modification in the organ be ever useful to an animal under changing conditions of life, then the difficulty of believing that a perfect and complex eye could be formed by natural selection, though insuperable by our imagination, can hardly be considered real.[6]

Commenting on this passage, Beer points out:

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[5] *Unconscious Memory*, p. 15. For those writers who have given due consideration to Butler's comments on how he wrote *Life and Habit*, see introduction, n. 56.

[6] Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (London: John Murray, 1859), pp. 186-87.

> 'Reason' here must traverse the bounds of imagination, and the 'difficulty' of believing is not a 'real' one, but one consequent upon the trammelled quality of our imagination. The sentence uses accumulated speculation to reach a point of release. This appeal to reason as an authority which can take us beyond our imaginative limits blurs the distinction between reason and imagination even while it appears to enforce it. Darwin might equally have reversed the two terms, except that imagination is a less authoritative word than reason in scientific argumentation.[7]

I will have cause to return to Darwin's strategy in this passage a little later. For the moment, David Amigoni in his contribution to *Against the Grain* has made a related point concerning the ways in which Darwin's theory could go beyond the here and now to explain a whole range of phenomena -- biological or otherwise:

> It is the element of obscurity, of metaphors whose peripheries remain undescribed, which made *The Origin of Species* so incendiary – and which allowed it to be appropriated by thinkers of so many diverse political persuasions. It encouraged onward thought: it offered itself for metaphorical application and its multiple discourses encouraged further acts of interpretation. The presence of latent meaning made *The Origin* suggestive, even unstoppable in its action upon minds.[8]

It is this sense of Darwin's work as a source of felicitous methods, ripe with latent potential that most comes across on reading Butler's reflections of first encountering the *Origin*. In the 1865 correspondence with Darwin which I referred to in my previous chapter, Butler, already 'one of Mr. Darwin's many enthusiastic admirers', further confesses:

> I always delighted in your *Origin of Species* as soon as I saw it out in N. Z. -- not as knowing anything whatsoever of natural history, but it enters into so many deeply interesting questions, or rather it suggests so many, that it thoroughly fascinated me.[9]

Thus 'enthused' and 'fascinated', and now armed with the necessary tools, Butler set to work to explore one of the greatest mysteries suggested by the *Origin*.

At the outset of his reflections in *Unconscious Memory,* Butler declares that it was impossible for Darwin's readers to leave the matter as he had left it: 'we wanted to know whence came that germ or those germs of life which, if Mr. Darwin was right, were once the world's only inhabitants' (p. 12). Having read and for the most part understood the argument of the *Origin,* Butler now wanted to know how organic

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[7] Beer, Gillian, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 67.
[8] *Against the Grain*, pp. 91-92.
[9] See chapter 2, n. 18.

life had come into being. In his attempts to answer this question, he began to fascinate upon the fundamental classification organic / inorganic. At the beginning of my introductory chapter, I include an extract from Butler's notebooks in which he meditates at length on the problem of classification. Where does one class start and the next begin when 'everything is one thing at one time and in some respects, and another at other times and in other respects'? How can we set up milestones when there are 'harmonics of resemblance which lurk even in the most absolute differences and vice versa'? This is only one of many references to the problem of classification which Butler makes throughout his published works and private notebooks. At the beginning of this section, I have included one other from the notebooks entitled 'joining and disjoining' which illustrates that Butler first began to fascinate on the problem of classification, and of the various ways that one might 'slice' and 'string up' the world, during his early years in New Zealand. How are we to account for this habit of mind? One way of bringing Butler's fascination with boundaries into sharper focus is by considering a section of Darwin's argument in the *Origin* in which he critiques the term *species*. In his early work at least, Darwin was convinced that *natura non facit saltum*, evolution progressed not by leaps and bounds but by infinitely small graduations in which the demarcations between species were fluid. According to Darwin, this observation brought with it the necessity of redefining the term *species*:

> It will be seen that I look at the term species, as one arbitrarily given for sake of convenience to a set of individuals closely resembling each other, and that it does not essentially differ from the term variety, which is given to less distinct and more fluctuating forms.[10]

It would seem then that Darwin's critique of species exerted a particularly strong influence on Butler's imagination, providing a fillip to the author's already established preoccupation with relativism and multiple competing interpretations. As 'terms arbitrarily given out of convenience to a set of individuals resembling each other', Darwin's classifications seemed little more than human constructs. In effect then, what Darwin was offering Butler in his critique of species was both 'a knife' and 'a piece of string'. Not only could it be used to 'disjoin' existing, familiar classifications, it could also be used to 'join up' new ones, new ways of looking at the world.

[10] *Origin of Species,* p. 52.

Dissatisfied with the artificial nature of the boundary between the organic and the inorganic Butler recollects how he first asked himself 'whether life might not, after all, resolve itself into the complexity of arrangement of an inconceivably intricate mechanism'. There then follows an account of his initial exploration of this theme which, as Butler recalls it, demonstrates the extent to which the possibilities offered by evolution fired his imagination:

> Kittens think our shoe-strings are alive when they see us lacing them, because they see the tag at the end jump about without understanding all the ins and outs of how it comes to do so […] Cats are above this; yet give the cat something which presents a few more of those appearances which she is accustomed to see whenever she sees life, and she will fall as easy a prey to the power which association exercises over all that lives as the kitten itself. Show her a toy-mouse that can run a few yards after being wound up; the form, colour, and action of a mouse being here, there is no good cat which will not conclude that so many of the appearances of mousehood could not be present at the same time without the presence of the remainder […]
>
> Suppose the toy more complex still, so that it might run a few yards, stop, and run on again without an additional winding up; and suppose it so constructed that it could imitate eating and drinking, and could make as though the mouse were cleaning its face with its paws. Should we not at first be taken in ourselves, and assume the presence of the remaining facts of life, though in reality they were not there?[11]

This is undoubtedly an amusing passage. However, it is amusing because the obvious fascination which the author has for his topic spurs him on to ever more imaginative heights. In one sense this is apparent in the attention to detail. Butler, as a creative writer and artist, chose to explore the problem of classification in terms of the deception of appearances. But in many ways, this choice was dictated by the terms of Darwin's critique of species. As Darwin had argued, it is insofar as a set of individuals 'closely resemble each other' that they may be classified together. This then was the method which Butler took from Darwin to create his early speculative sketches, a method whereby one could re-classify the world at the level of appearances simply by describing one thing in terms of another. I will return to consider the characteristics of this 'reclassification strategy' shortly when we turn our attention to the first of Butler's sketches. At the moment, however, I wish to suggest that there is another influence from Darwin at work in the style of such speculations. In principle, what we have in such brief sketches, their ludic qualities notwithstanding, is a thought experiment, a hypothesis fleshed out with increasing layers of detail and presented to the imagination of the reader whereby its success or otherwise as a tenable hypothesis is dependent on its ability to persuade.

[11] *Unconscious Memory,* p. 13.

Consider, as a further example, the following passage from a little later in Butler's argument in which he explores a variation on his original theme:

> If, then, men were not really alive after all, but were only machines of so complicated a make that it was less trouble to us to cut the difficulty and say that that kind of mechanism was 'being alive,' why should not machines ultimately become as complicated as we are, or at any rate complicated enough to be called living, and to be indeed as living as it was in the nature of anything at all to be? If it was only a case of their becoming more complicated, we were certainly doing our best to make them so. (p. 14)

In offering such scenarios for the contemplation of the reader, Butler's language, with its conditional constructions and request that the reader engage in suppositions, seems to echo that of Darwin's during his thought experiments, particularly his famous passage on the eye. And like Darwin, Butler also deals with the problem of sameness in difference by insisting that each form merely partakes of a different level of complexity.

Reflecting upon these early meditations on the boundary between the inorganic and the organic, Butler confesses that even at the time of writing *Unconscious Memory* in 1880 he still experiences great confusion over which arrangement seems the more plausible: 'When I think of life, I find it so difficult, that I take refuge in death and mechanism', he confesses, 'and when I think of death and mechanism, I find it so inconceivable, that it is easier to call it life again'. The only thing of which he is sure, Butler adds, in terms that reveal the lingering influence of Darwin, is that 'the distinction between the organic and inorganic is arbitrary'. In the context of his speculating on clockwork mice, this may sound like affected confusion. However, Butler's confusion was real enough for him to refer to his initial sketch, written to explore more fully the consequences of the clockwork mouse episode, as his 'hypothesis':

> One must start with a hypothesis, no matter how much one distrusts it; so I started with man as mechanism, this being the strand of the knot that I could then pick at most easily. Having worked upon it a certain time, I drew the inference about machines becoming animate, and in 1862 or 1863 wrote the sketch of the chapter on machines which I afterwards re-wrote in 'Erewhon'. (p. 15)

In this way, Butler accounts for the writing of his first evolutionary sketch. 'Darwin Among the Machines', far from constituting a satire, was in fact a light-hearted thought experiment written up to test the plausibility of the hypothesis that machines

were actually a form of organic life. Taking the form of an open letter to the editor of the *Press*, the sketch begins:

> SIR -- There are few things of which the present generation is more justly proud than of the wonderful improvements which are daily taking place in all sorts of mechanical appliances. And indeed it is matter for great congratulation on many grounds. It is unnecessary to mention these here, for they are sufficiently obvious; our present business lies with considerations which may somewhat tend to humble our pride and to make us think seriously of the future prospects of the human race.[12]

Butler's audience would have understood the improvements to which he was alluding. By 1863, the Canterbury settlement had reached a particularly rapid phase in its development. Only the year before, the telegraph line between Christchurch and the port of Lyttleton had been completed, and as early as 1860, work had begun on a railway tunnel through the hills which separated the two settlements. In December of 1863, the first section of track between Christchurch and Ferrymead was opened, with Butler one of the passengers on board the first locomotive ever to travel in New Zealand.[13] All this progress must have impressed itself upon Butler, not least since it appeared to recapitulate within a very short time period the technological progress of virtually the whole past century. It should therefore come as little surprise that Butler should use this first sketch to speculate upon the 'evolution' of machinery, both past and future. In fact, in view of this additional diachronic element, it could be suggested that Butler's hypothesis might better be termed his 'modification' and the sketch itself an evolutionary experiment in which the 'fitness' of this modification is put to the test of time. But regardless of which terms we use, the diachronic element introduces a sense of drama to the text which Butler later fully exploits in his dramatic conclusion. Initially though, Butler concerns himself with the early evolution of 'mechanical life':

> If we revert to the earliest primordial types of mechanical life, to the lever, the wedge, the inclined plane, the screw and the pulley, or (for analogy would lead us one step further) to that primordial type from which all the mechanical kingdom has been developed, we mean to the lever itself, and if we then examine the machinery of the *Great Eastern*, we find ourselves almost awestruck at the vast development of the mechanical world, at the gigantic strides with which it has advanced in comparison with the slow progress of the animal and vegetable kingdom. (pp. 179-80)

[12] *First Year,* pp. 179-85 (p. 179). Further references from this edition are given after quotations in the text.
[13] For the details of Canterbury's rapid technologisation see Joseph Jones, pp. 67-73.

Dissatisfied with the boundary between the organic and the inorganic, Butler wanted to know what the result would be if he applied biological paradigms to the story of human mechanical inventiveness. As biology had identified animal and vegetable kingdoms, so could one extend the analogy to propose a 'mechanical kingdom' whose artefacts revealed an evolutionary journey that was yet more breathtaking. With a little more imagination, the analogy could be extended further to argue that there was a shared tendency for both machines and vertebrae to diminish in size the further they evolved, a tendency which even allowed for the possibility of extinction within the 'mechanical world':

> As some of the lowest of the vertebrata attained a far greater size than has descended to their more highly organised living representatives, so a diminution in the size of machines has often attended their development and progress. Take the watch for instance. Examine the beautiful structure of the little animal, watch the intelligent play of the minute members which compose it; yet this little creature is but a development of the cumbrous clocks of the thirteenth century -- it is no deterioration from them. The day may come when clocks, which certainly at the present day are not diminishing in bulk, may be entirely superseded by the universal use of watches, in which case clocks will become extinct like the earlier saurians, while the watch (whose tendency has for some years been rather to decrease in size than the contrary) will remain the only existing type of an extinct race. (pp. 181-82)

As this passage illustrates, Butler's appeal to his reader's visual imagination was central to his construction of analogies whose depth and ingenuity gave them considerable persuasive power. As Darwin had suggested, to classify one need only perceive a resemblance. Indeed, it is worth pausing here to recall once more Furbank's assessment of Butler as possessed of a certain eye for 'the small find' or 'the undiscovered trifle just beneath the surface of everyday life'. In this evolutionary sketch too, Butler exercises his 'practised', keen eye for detail to flesh out ever more intricate analogies:

> We were asked by a learned brother philosopher who saw this article in MS. what we meant by alluding to rudimentary organs in machines. Could we, he asked, give any example of such organs? We pointed to the little protuberance at the bottom of the bowl of our tobacco pipe. This organ was originally designed for the same purpose as the rim at the bottom of a tea-cup, which is but another form of the same function. Its purpose was to keep the heat of the pipe from marking the table on which it rested. Originally, as we have seen in very early tobacco pipes, this protuberance was of a very different shape to what it is now. It was broad at the bottom and flat, so that while the pipe was being smoked the bowl might rest upon the table. Use and disuse have here come into play and served to reduce the function to its present rudimentary condition. That these rudimentary organs are rarer in machinery than in animal life is owing to the more prompt action of the human selection as compared with the slower but even surer operation of natural selection. (pp. 180-81)

Despite his unorthodox thesis, Butler's use of analogy in 'Darwin Among the Machines' placed him within a long tradition of thinkers who had sought to exploit the rhetorical power of the device. In addition to Bishop Butler, the natural theologian William Paley had also referred to the numerous analogies that could be drawn between machines and organic life as part of his argument from design.[14] As we shall see in the following chapter, there has been much speculation about what writers may have influenced Butler's use of the device in these early sketches. However, for the moment, I would like to make two points. The first is that regardless of which writer we may cite as influencing his style of argumentation, the fact remains that Butler had a quite specific aim in mind in composing his sketch. Analogy, with its ability to give rise to elaborate descriptions of the sameness that exists in difference, was quite simply one of the best means Butler had at his disposal to explore the permeability of the boundary between the organic and the inorganic. In this sense, the attempt to ascertain a satirical target for the 'Darwin Among the Machines' amongst other writers who have relied heavily upon analogy would seem to be missing the point. Secondly, it is also clear that Butler's use of the device in such passages differs from the philosophical use of analogy as a mode of argumentation in that it is impressed with the workings of a literary imagination. In addition to appealing to the reader's visual imagination, witness Butler's startling use of such terms as 'mechanical life', 'mechanical world' or again when he refers to the watch as a little 'animal' or 'creature'. It has been noted that analogy forms a perplexing phenomenon in the philosophy of language in that it 'butts upon literal meaning, but also upon metaphor'.[15] In such instances, Butler's analogy is compressed and immediate, shifting in effect from extended description to the use of striking metaphors which violate our familiar understanding of the world.

Later in the text, Butler speculates upon a future in which machines have achieved evolutionary supremacy, enslaving humans in the process. In so doing, he coins an implicit metaphor between machines and organic life which is particularly interesting in revealing a level of self-consciousness to his use of this stylistic device:

[14] See chapter 4, n. 4.
[15] Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 14.

> If they want 'feeding' (by the use of which very word we betray our recognition of them as living organism) they will be attended by patient slaves whose business and interest it will be to see that they shall want for nothing. (p. 183)

Butler's parenthetical comment here reveals he knew he was playing a language game in so describing his machines. However, again we ought to be careful of the extent to which we view this strategy simply as play. As I mentioned in my introduction, in his published works and private notebooks, Butler often has cause to reflect on the origin of certain words or phrases as rooted in just such a metaphorical transportation of characteristics from one object to another.[16] In the following extract from his notebooks, for example, Butler draws upon the metaphorical origins of words in order to support his argument that man is a

> perambulating tool-box and workshop, or office, fashioned for itself by a piece of very clever slime, as the result of long experience; and truth is but its own most enlarged, general and enduring sense of the coming togetherness or con-venience of the various conventional arrangements which, for some reason or other, it has been led to sanction. Hence we speak of man's body as his 'trunk'.

Similarly, in the section of *Erewhon* dealing with how the Erewhonians view misfortune as a moral crime, Butler points up the shadowy logic to this aspect of Erewhonian culture by reminding his reader that Italians 'use the same word for "disgrace" and "misfortune"'.[17] In my analysis both of the Cambridge pieces and of *First Yea*r, I have drawn attention to how Butler's word play demonstrates a certain awareness of how language is always prone to modification. Ultimately, it is the argument of this chapter that the evolutionary sketches, and the reclassification strategy in particular, played a significant role in bringing to maturation this awareness in the form of a systematic technique based upon analogy and metaphor. I will return to develop this line of argument when considering Butler's follow up sketch. For the moment, however, we can consider the significance of Butler's conclusion to 'Darwin Among the Machines'.

In order to prevent human enslavement to machines, Butler urges that 'war to the death should be instantly proclaimed against them' with 'no exceptions made' (p. 185). From our modern perspective, it is tempting to view Butler's conclusion here as an early example of a genre of literature which preoccupies itself with the threats posed by technology. Indeed, Herbert Sussman has considered the case for

[16] See introduction, n. 52.
[17] *Notebooks,* p. 18; *Erewhon,* p. 96.

'Darwin Among the Machines' as an instance of mid-Victorian anti-machine propaganda.[18] However, there is nothing in the rest of Butler's oeuvre to suggest that he harboured such sentiments. Far more likely given Butler's own comments on the work is that with 'Darwin Among the Machines' Butler 'was merely playing an intellectual game; trying how high he could build a card-castle of ideas before it toppled over'.[19]

If Butler's first sketch was predominately a light hearted *jeu d'esprit,* his attitude was about to change. Continuing his reflections in *Unconscious Memory*, Butler writes that although there was 'plenty of amusement' to be got out of 'Darwin Among the Machines', he knew he should have to leave his initial hypothesis behind sooner or later:

> I therefore left it at once for the view that machines were limbs which we had made, and carried outside our bodies instead of incorporating them with ourselves. A few days or weeks later than June 13, 1863, I published a second letter in the *Press* putting this view forward. Of this letter I have lost the only copy I had; I have not seen it for years. The first was certainly not good; the second, if I remember rightly, was a good deal worse, though I believed more in the views it put forward than in those of the first letter. I had lost my copy before I wrote 'Erewhon,' and therefore only gave a couple of pages to it in that book; besides, there was more amusement in the other view. (pp. 15-16)

Writing in 1880 with the benefit of hindsight, Butler could see more clearly the constructive value of his game. He may have initially got 'plenty of amusement' out of the ludic proposition at the close of 'Darwin Among the Machines', but the fact that he decided to leave this hypothesis 'at once' suggests that he had discovered a purpose in his method. Moreover, his reference to believing more in the hypothesis of his second sketch suggests that humour was no longer the primary standard by which Butler judged these experiments. Rather, it was the extent to which they seemed 'credible' hypotheses which now constituted the standard by which Butler would judge his results. With this new insight into the constructive value of his hypotheses, Butler could gift the more amusing line of his first sketch to his Erewhonian professor as a curious but ultimately fruitless experiment, an evolutionary dead end which had since been superseded.

Butler's second sketch was written some time after his return to England in the autumn of 1864, though he sent it to the offices of the Christchurch Press where it was published in late July of 1865. The title, 'Lucubratio Ebria' or 'drunken

[18] See introduction, n. 56.
[19] Willey, p. 68.

meditation', should not be taken lightly; not only do Butler's comments on the work point up how he took this sketch more seriously than the first, but as we shall see, the idea of a deranged or twisted perspective is also central to our understanding of the text. In his second hypothesis, Butler concerned himself with the question: what would follow if we classified mechanical devices and even simple tools as extra-corporeal limbs with as much a connection to their owners as their arms, legs and hands? On the face of it, this hypothesis touched on the question of human evolution and tool use. In the years following the publication of the *Origin of Species*, there was a great deal of public debate over what set man apart in evolutionary terms from the lower animals. In 1871, with *The Descent of Man*, Darwin came out in favour of tool use as one of these defining characteristics. However, although he is silent on this issue in the *Origin,* there *is* a passage in this earlier work in which Darwin draws an explicit comparison between bodily organs and tools. On discussing the complexity in the structure of different organs, Darwin writes that such differences may be explained with reference to a process analogous to that in which 'a knife which has to cut all sorts of things may be of almost any shape; whilst a tool for some particular object had better be of some particular shape' (p. 167). Whilst we can suggest that such an analogy would have appealed to Butler's evident glee in creating new connections between familiar concepts, Joseph Jones has proposed that the hypothesis of 'Lucubratio Ebria' may also have been influenced by the primitive conditions which applied during Butler's early years as a sheep farmer:

> It might be argued that in primitive situations, where so much depends upon the simple tools used continually through life, a feeling for the tool as an extension of the man is quite natural and strong. Workmen become attached to a particular tool and will grieve over its loss almost as if it were part of them. (p. 166)

Jones' suggestion here is all the more convincing when we take into account the substance of Butler thoughts on the relationship between farmer and livestock in *First Year*. At the close of my argument in the previous chapter, I included a passage from this text which, in its topsy-turvy view of who was in control on the sheep run, might be considered a precursor to the hypothesis which Butler explores in this sketch.

As with 'Darwin Among the Machines', Butler begins by considering the early evolution of his hypothesis, focusing on the moment at which 'human intelligence stole like a late spring upon the mimicry of our semi-simious ancestry', a moment

marked by man's ability to 'add extra-corporaneous limbs to the members of his own body, and become not only a vertebrate mammal, but a vertebrate machinate mammal into the bargain'. Elaborating, Butler explains what he intends by the use of such puzzling terms:

> So when the human race was in its gorilla-hood it generally carried a stick; from carrying a stick for many million years it became accustomed and modified to an upright position. The stick wherewith it had learned to walk would now serve to beat its younger brothers, and then it found out its service as a lever. Man would thus learn that the limbs of his body were not the only limbs that he could command.[20]

At the heart of this explanation is the sense that it is based upon a genuine piece of science, an argument, perhaps, which Butler had encountered in his early months back in London. However, as presented here, with its unorthodox images and neologisms, it reads more like a parody of scientific explanation. Moreover, the final sentence, with its metaphorical reference to the original primitive tool as a 'limb', gives us the first instance in this text of Butler's reclassification strategy. Continuing, Butler develops his argument further, linking the development of tools to the evolutionary development of species. Taking the example of the bee, he argues that though it 'has a high civilisation', it is one whose 'equilibrium appears to have been already attained', an observation which Butler accounts for by the fact that

> she is poorly off for hands, and has never fairly grasped the notion of tacking on other limbs to the limbs of her own body, and so being short lived to boot she remains from century to century to human eyes *in statu quo*. Her body never becomes machinate. (p. 189)

By contrast, when it comes to man, Butler observes that 'we are unable to point to any example of a race absolutely devoid of extra-corporaneous limbs', citing the case of the 'lowest Australian savages' who have their elementary tools for hunting and cooking. According to Butler then the constant change which our 'mechanical limbs' have brought about renders man 'a shifting basis on which no equilibrium of habit and civilisation can be established' (p. 190). All this leads Butler to a clear statement of his hypothesis:

> It is a mistake, then, to take the view adopted by a previous correspondent of this paper, to consider the machines as identities, to animalise them and to anticipate their final triumph over mankind. They are to be regarded as the mode of

[20] 'Lucubratio Ebria', in *First Year*, pp. 186-94 (pp. 188-89). Further references from this edition are given after quotations in the text.

> development by which human organism is most especially advancing, and every fresh invention is to be considered as an additional member of the resources of the human body. Herein lies the fundamental difference between man and his inferiors. As regard his flesh and blood, his senses, appetites, and affections, the difference is one of degree rather than of kind, but in the deliberate invention of such unity of limbs as is exemplified by the railway train - that seven-leagued foot which five hundred may own at once - he stands quite alone. (pp. 191-92)

Although he was now just about as far from the offices of the *Press* as he could possibly get, this apparently wasn't going to stop Butler from debating with himself in public again, perhaps for the pleasure of the newspaper's editors and readers; definitely, I would suggest, for the sheer delight that he took in pitching multiple competing interpretations against each other. I mentioned above that in its earlier stages, Butler's argument could be taken as an outright parody of scientific explanation. However, on closer inspection there is much here to indicate that Butler was indeed taking this hypothesis more seriously than his first. Unlike 'Darwin Among the Machines', there is more of an attempt to include the work of what Butler would later call 'the fact collectors', the professional men of science writing for the journals which were such a feature of this age.[21] Witness for example his use of the term 'evolutionary equilibrium', and the references variously to the complex civilisation and short life span of the bee as well as the tools used by native Australians. Touches such as these contribute much to the overall impression that the argument of this sketch is more complex and focused than his previous contribution to the *Press*. Indeed, further proof that Butler's attitude to his speculations had shifted comes in the form of the explanatory letter which Butler sent to the offices of *The Press* along with the sketch. Although it is unknown exactly who Butler is writing to, the correspondent was evidently an associate of the editor, and perhaps a fellow member of staff. In it, he explains that he is not addressing his letter to the editor himself by reason of the 'undue lenience' which he attaches to his performances. By contrast, Butler considered his current addressee to be 'the sterner critic of the two'. 'There is hardly a sentence in it written without deliberation', he adds before clarifying that 'it was done upon tea, not upon whiskey'.[22] However, if this 'drunken meditation' was actually a more sober hypothesis than 'Darwin Among the Machines', the form in which Butler chose to cast his vision persisted in deranging our familiar perception of the world. More specifically, in his references to

[21] *Luck, or Cunning?,* p. 17.
[22] Quoted in prefatory note to 'The Germs of *Erewhon* and of *Life and Habit',* in *Notebooks*, pp. 39-42 (p. 42).

bees being ‘poorly off for hands’ or ‘tacking on extra limbs’ to their body, and, in particular, the railway train being that ‘seven-leagued foot which five hundred may own at once’, Butler provides us with further instances of his reclassification strategy. I should also be noted that as with his former reference to a watch as a ‘little creature’, all these instances take the form of compressed and striking metaphors rather than extended analogies. More to the point, they are delivered unselfconsciously without the knowing awareness of taking part in a language game that we observed in ‘Darwin Among the Machines’. As such, they constitute a more direct ‘assault’ on our familiar understanding, ‘forcing’ us to view the world as if through a lens which warps our perception. Although these developments in Butler’s use of the technique may be explained with reference to the degree of familiarity he now had with his methods, I wish to cite some further examples of the technique in order to suggest an alternative explanation.

Fleshing out his hypothesis, Butler draws out its consequences for our view of the world’s races. ‘Men are not merely the children of their parents’, he begins, but are ‘begotten of the institutions of the state of the mechanical sciences under which they are born and bred’. His readers therefore are ‘children of the plough, the spade, and the ship […] children of the extended liberty and knowledge which the printing press has diffused’ as much as they are the products of their parents. Ultimately, this line of argument leads Butler to claim that the nineteenth-century Englishman is evolving away from the Australian ‘savage’ by virtue of his more organised ‘physique’:

> By the institutions and state of science under which a man is born it is determined whether he shall have the limbs of an Australian savage or those of a nineteenth-century Englishman. The former is supplemented with little save a rug and a javelin; the latter varies his physique with the changes of the season, with age and with advancing or decreasing wealth. *If it is wet he is furnished with an organ which is called an umbrella and which seems designed for the purpose of protecting either his clothes or his lungs from the injurious effects of rain. His watch is of more importance to him than a good deal of his hair, at any rate than of his whiskers; besides this he carries a knife and generally a pencil case. His memory goes in a pocket-book. He grows more complex as he becomes older and he will then be seen with a pair of spectacles, perhaps also with false teeth and a wig; but, if he be a really well developed specimen of the race, he will be furnished with a large box upon wheels, two horses, and a coachman.* (pp. 191-92) [my emphasis]

It is worthwhile pausing to consider how this passage generates its effects. During my discussion of ‘Darwin Among the Machines’ I noted that as it is applied therein, the reclassification strategy consisted of a process of analogical reasoning which, at its most blunt, could consist of using striking metaphors which force the reader to

view the one class in terms of the other. As we have already seen, in 'Lucubratio Ebria' it is this more direct assault on our familiar understanding which Butler seems overwhelmingly to favour. In this passage we have two such examples in the reference Butler makes to an umbrella as an 'organ' and a man's 'memory' going in a pocket book. However, for the most part, Butler's descriptions here rely upon a different device, that of a *defamiliarising* point of view.[23]

During my analysis of the Cambridge pieces, I briefly examined a text from this collection entitled 'A Translation from an Unpublished Work of Herodotus' in which Butler adopts the point of view of a traveller from a distant land and time who finds himself confronted with the 'unfamiliar' ritual of a St John's rowing team's training routine. At the time, I mentioned how Butler's manipulation of point of view defamiliarised the scene, resulting in a sense of peculiarity and novelty. With the passage I have just quoted, Butler revisits this technique with similar results, describing these everyday devices as if seen for the first time. As a result, it is initially difficult for us to recognise that 'the box' of which he speaks is actually a carriage; and even when the names of familiar objects such as *spectacles, false teeth* or *wig* are included, the objective tone and third person singular *he*, sufficiently distances us from them as to make us consider them afresh. Indeed, it is precisely this effect which makes a defamiliarising point of view so suitable to Butler's project in 'Lucubratio Ebria': if he is to present to us a *convincing* reclassification of 'devices' as 'limbs' then he must first loosen the grip of our habitualised, automatised responses to them as merely objects with no 'real' connection to our bodies. What's more, it is not only insofar as Butler manipulates point of view that he achieves the end of defamiliarising our conventional understanding of the world; for as Terry Eagleton explains in his treatment of defamiliarisation, the whole stock of formal

[23] As a literary device, defamiliarisation was first described by the Russian formalist critic Victor Shklovsky in his 1917 essay 'Art as Technique'. In this essay, Shklovsky advances a view of art as functioning to combat our jaded perceptions of the world. According to Shklovsky, the process of 'habitualisation', in which we know too well the objects, concepts and emotions that we experience on a daily basis, leads to a gradual blunting of our perceptive faculties and a corresponding tendency to adopt a set of conventionalised responses to the phenomena of everyday life. The object of the work of art then is to defamiliarise experience in order to recover the original sensation of life: 'Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war [...] Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life, it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known' (Extracts from 'Art as Technique', in *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas,* ed. by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 274-78 (p. 277)).

literary elements can function to refresh our perception of familiar objects.[24] Indeed when we look back at Butler's use of analogy and metaphor in these sketches, it seems clear that with their ability to twist and turn on its head our familiar perception of objects, these devices also loosen the grip of our habitualised, learned responses to machines as simply 'complex objects', presenting them anew in the form of a novel hypothesis.[25] I therefore wish to suggest that the end result of defamiliarising our conventional understanding of the world is key to Butler's technique in these early sketches. Not only this, but there is also evidence in the form of his preamble to 'Lucubratio Ebria' to suggest that this was an effect Butler was consciously trying to cultivate.

As it appears both in Butler's notebooks and in *First Year,* 'Lucubratio Ebria' is supplemented with what appears to be a separately written preamble. Unlike the discursive style of the thought experiment itself, this preamble is dramatic in tone, functioning presumably to prime the reader into a state of mind in which they are more likely to engage with the unorthodox nature of Butler's hypothesis. Given that it relies on extended metaphors and the gradual building up of a sense of drama for its effect, I quote it here in full:

> THERE is a period in the evening, or more generally towards the still small hours of the morning, in which we so far unbend as to take a single glass of hot whisky and water. We will neither defend the practice nor excuse it. We state it as a fact which must be borne in mind by the readers of this article; for we know not how, whether it be the inspiration of the drink or the relief from the harassing work with which the day has been occupied or from whatever other cause, yet we are certainly liable about this time to such a prophetic influence as we seldom else experience. We are rapt in a dream such as we ourselves know to be a dream, and which, like other dreams, we can hardly embody in a distinct utterance. We know that what we see is but a sort of intellectual Siamese twins, of which one is substance and the other shadow, but we cannot set either free without killing both. We are unable to rudely tear away the veil of phantasy in which the truth is shrouded, so we present the reader with a draped figure, and his own judgment must discriminate between the clothes and the body. A truth's prosperity is like a jest's, it lies in the ear of him that hears it. Some may see our lucubration as we saw it, and others may see nothing but a drunken dream or the nightmare of a distempered imagination. To ourselves it is the speaking with unknown tongues to the early Corinthians; we cannot fully understand our own speech, and we fear lest there be not a sufficient number of interpreters present to make our utterance edify. But there! (Go on straight to the body of the article.).[26]

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[24] *Literary Theory: An Introduction,* 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 3.
[25] It is interesting to compare Butler's method in the passage in question to Craig Raine's poem 'A Martian Sends a Postcard Home' (1979). In Raine's poem, everyday objects are also transformed via a similar process of defamiliarisation. Thus a telephone is described: 'In homes a haunted apparatus sleeps, | which snores when you pick it up.' (quoted in Allan Rodway, *The Craft of Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 114).
[26] *First Year,* pp. 186-87.

Although it is not clear whether this preamble prefaced the original publication of 'Lucubratio Ebria' in the *Press*, it seems from the editorial comment Butler makes at the close that he clearly had an audience very much in mind while writing it. As I have mentioned, one way to regard this preamble is as a means of convincing the reader how subtle the distinction is between illusion and reality. By rendering familiar as a shared experience the sensation of other-worldliness that can accompany a particularly absorbing daydream brought on by exhaustion or inebriation, Butler is able gradually to open the reader's mind to the possibility that alternative outlooks on the world may, in some cases, be considered 'normal'. However, I would argue that there is something in the metaphors that Butler uses in the latter half of the passage which goes beyond this simple interpretation. By referring to the illusion of 'Siamese twins' of which one is 'substantial' while the other is 'shadowy', there is a sense that Butler is referring to the text of 'Lucubratio Ebria' itself. As I have mentioned, the experience of negotiating the defamiliarising perspectives of the text forces the reader out of their habitualised understanding of a mechanical device as merely an object and into the novel awareness of how it might actually constitute a kind of external limb. Of these two means of conceiving mechanical devices, one is indeed more substantial, belonging to the familiar world that persists when we raise our head from the page; however, by entering into the spirit of the illusion and encouraging the alternative understanding, an imaginative reader can lay hold of a shadow of the world transformed. Or again, and with reference to Butler's other metaphor of a draped figure, it would be simple enough to interpret this metaphor as referring to our familiar understanding of machines and the 'veil of phantasy', the (ad)dress that Butler's defamiliarising descriptions inscribe upon it. But just how realistic is it to expect the reader to engage to such an imaginative extent with the unorthodox hypotheses of these early sketches? I would argue that Butler's preamble also touches upon this point with its reference to a 'truth's prosperity being similar to that of a jest's'. Elsewhere it has been noted that it takes only a 'slight shift to a metaphoric understanding' to find yourself convinced by the professor's reasoning in 'The Book of the Machines'.[27] Like a gestalt image or 'magic eye picture', an imaginative reader may be able to share the same illusion as Butler did; but for other less imaginative, less motivated or more sceptical readers, 'Lucubratio Ebria' may remain nothing but a 'drunken dream', a text impressed by the mark of a

[27] Breuer and Howard, p. 19.

'mischievous clever schoolboy' whose 'metal frivolity' makes him play with 'revered things'.[28]

I have mentioned the term *illusion*, though it does not appear in the preamble. When one is familiar with Butler's published works and private notebooks, one is impressed by the frequency with which he makes reference to the nature and functioning of illusions. It would seem that along with money and the problem of classification, illusion also took its place among Butler's favourite ideas. Indeed, in his later book of travel writing and art criticism, *Alps and Sanctuaries* (1881), Butler connects illusion, drunkenness, imagination and evolutionary progress in ways which seem relevant to our present discussion:

> No one can hate drunkenness more than I do, but I am confident the human intellect owes its superiority over that of the lower animals in great measure to the stimulus which alcohol has given to imagination -- imagination being little else than another name for illusion.[29]

In this pregnant passage, there would seem to be evidence that in including references to drunkenness and a deranged perspective in the preamble to 'Lucubratio Ebria' Butler was indeed attempting to stimulate the reader into an imaginative engagement with his defamiliarised world. However, there is also the suggestion here that the imagination can contribute in some way to evolutionary development. What can Butler mean by this? In another more extensive passage from *Alps and Sanctuaries* he explains:

> We do not sufficiently realise the part which illusion has played in our development. One of the prime requisites for evolution is a certain power for adaptation to varying circumstances, that is to say, of plasticity, bodily and mental. But the power of adaptation is mainly dependent on the power of thinking certain new things sufficiently like certain others to which we have been accustomed for us not to be too much incommoded by the change -- upon the power, in fact, of mistaking the new for the old. The power of fusing ideas (and through ideas, structures) depends upon the power of confusing them; the power to confuse ideas that are not very unlike, and that are presented to us in immediate sequence, is mainly due to the fact of the impetus, so to speak, which the mind has upon it. We always, I believe, make an effort to see every new object as a repetition of the object last before us. Objects are so varied, and present themselves so rapidly, that as a general rule we renounce this effort too promptly to notice it, but it is always there, and it is because of it that we are able to mistake, and hence to evolve new mental and bodily developments. Where the effort is successful, there is illusion; where nearly successful but not quite, there is a shock and a sense of being puzzled -- more or less, as the case

[28] Joad, p. 318.
[29] *Alps and Sanctuaries of Piedmont and the Canton Ticino,* new edn (London: A. C. Fifield, 1913), p. 46.

> may be; where it is so obviously impossible as not to be pursued, there is no perception of the effort at all. (pp. 43-44)

During my analysis of 'Darwin Among the Machines' I noted the way in which Butler's use of analogy and metaphor in the service of transforming his machines into organic 'creatures' went some way toward accounting for his statement in 'Thought and Language' that 'scratch the simplest expressions and you will find the metaphor'. In the substance of Butler's comments in this passage, we have a model of how the reclassification strategy, with its reliance on the juxtaposing devices of metaphor and extended analogy, can lead to linguistic and thereby conceptual change. As Butler explains, the conditions for cognitive development depend on a certain power for 'adaptation' that the mind possesses, the ability, in effect, to mistake one thing for another. Thus when two objects are juxtaposed there is always the possibility of viewing one in terms of the other, a possibility that increases the more points of similarity the objects share. This, it would seem, is the basic cognitive principle on which analogy and metaphor depend for their effects. A vehicle and a tenor are juxtaposed in a figure and on the strength of whether or not the reader perceives sufficient grounds for a comparison, the figure stands or falls. As Butler elaborates, where this effort is successful, the reader experiences an illusion and an umbrella is suddenly and unexpectedly taken to be part of the owner's body; but where the power of adaptation is insufficient to see the conceptual similarity between this common, everyday device and a limb, the reader is instead shocked and puzzled, and, we might add, merely amused. But this is not only entertainment for Butler; it is clear from this passage that he believed this process played a central role in both our cognitive and our *biological* development. We will leave comment on the latter till our reading of *Life and Habit*. However, it seems clear that in giving rise to new ways of conceiving the world, analogy and metaphor play a central role in the development of new ideas. Indeed, we need only refer to the metaphor of *natural selection* itself, to understand how revolutionary these devices can be in giving rise to new terms and concepts and advancing our understanding. I therefore wish to propose that these early sketches played a central role in shaping Butler's later belief that metaphor played a significant role in linguistic and conceptual change. As an undergraduate, Butler was already predisposed to playing language games. Moreover, the formative experience of negotiating Alford's rhetoric had impressed upon him an intense scepticism over the possibility that words could ever be wholly innocent. In *First Year*, we can already

see signs of a growing awareness of how an expression such as *beautiful landscape* could be open to a sleight of mind when interpreted with reference to the purposes and material interests of a practical young sheep farmer. However, it took Darwin's critique of classification and the laboratory of these early sketches to crystallise these hitherto disparate influences into a coherent method. 'Illusion, mistake, action taken in the dark', writes Butler in a notebook entry, 'these are among the main sources of our progress.'[30] As his comments in *Unconscious Memory* suggest, Butler did not see clearly when he placed Darwin among the machines, but by the time he had written 'Lucubratio Ebria' he had discovered that his reclassification strategy was not so much a toy as a powerful and valuable tool.

In the conclusion to 'Lucubratio Ebria' Butler develops the idea that one set of humans is slowly evolving away from the other by virtue of their possessing a wider variety 'limbs'. By doing so, he gives us the earliest example of what would be a lifetime's obsession with material wealth:

> The difference in physical organisation between these two species of man is far greater than that between the so-called types of humanity. The rich man can go from here to England whenever he feels inclined, the legs of the other are by an invisible fatality prevented from carrying him beyond certain narrow limits. Neither rich nor poor as yet see the philosophy of the thing, or admit that he who can tack a portion of one of the P. and O. boats on to his identity is a much more highly organised being than one who cannot. Yet the fact is patent enough, if we once think it over, from the mere consideration of the respect with which we so often treat those who are richer than ourselves. We observe men for the most part (admitting, however, some few abnormal exceptions) to be deeply impressed by the superior organisation of those who have money. It is wrong to attribute this respect to any unworthy motive, for the feeling is strictly legitimate and springs from some of the very highest impulses of our nature. It is the same sort of affectionate reverence which a dog feels for man, and is not infrequently manifested in a similar manner. (pp. 192-93)

Here is the development to maturity of the brief comments Butler makes about the intimate relationship between self and assets in *First Year*. If we break down the barrier between these two classifications by viewing one as an extension of the other, and if we apply evolutionary theory in turn, the result is that those who have the resources to accumulate more possessions and consume more services are seen as the more highly evolved race. It would therefore seem that according to the hypothesis of 'Lucubratio Ebria', it is in an individual's own interests, in keeping with the concepts of struggle and competition outlined by evolutionary theory, to accumulate wealth. As Butler argues, with wealth comes power and influence and increased opportunities to make one's mark upon the world as surely as one would

[30] *Notebooks,* pp. 229-30.

were one to be provided with larger and stronger limbs. In thus laying bare the reasoning behind Butler's obsession with material wealth, one could argue that in being so evidently grounded upon such a philosophical and rational basis, Butler's obsession distinguishes itself from common avarice and the narrow-minded pursuit of self-interest. However, there is still something uncomfortable about Butler's claim at the close of this passage that it is only natural that we should admire the superior organisation of the wealthy 'as a dog looks up to his master'. Indeed, Butler himself acknowledges that he may have pushed his argument too far at this stage as he immediately issues the qualification:

> We admit that these last sentences are open to question, and we should hardly like to commit ourselves irrecoverably to the sentiments they express; but we will say this much for certain, namely, that the rich man is the true hundred-handed Gyges of the poets. (p. 193)

Similarly, the same ambivalence is in evidence a moment later in Butler's assertion that an individual 'may be reckoned by his horse-power, by the number of foot-pounds which he has money enough to set in motion' while simultaneously claiming that a 'man's will, truth, endurance, are part of him also' and may 'have in themselves a power equivalent to all the horse-power which they can influence'. Ultimately, Butler found that the means of resolving this ambiguity were beyond the scope of his essay. 'Were we to go into this part of the question we should never have done', Butler confesses, 'and we are compelled reluctantly to leave our dream in its present fragmentary condition' (pp. 193-94).

Butler would continue to obsess over an individual's relationship to his assets throughout his life. However, he did not stray far from the basic position outlined in the conclusion of 'Lucubratio Ebria'. Moreover, it was not only through his material wealth that Butler considered an individual could extend their power and influence. As we shall see when we come to consider his later evolutionary essays, Butler also considered 'bodies' of writing to be extra-corporeal limbs capable of influencing others. As with 'Lucubratio Ebria', this hypothesis too brings with it certain contradictions, not least of all those contingent on the attempt to reconcile such an invasive understanding of authorial intention with respect for the reader's conscience. For the moment, however, we turn our attention to the third and last of Butler's early evolutionary sketches.

In his reflections in *Unconscious Memory,* Butler mentions that after 'Lucubratio Ebria', 'there was an intermediate extension of the first letter which

appeared in the *Reasoner*, July 1, 1865' (p. 16). This text, entitled 'The Mechanical Creation', is therefore a reworking of the hypothesis of 'Darwin Among the Machines' rather than a new hypothesis in its own right. Moreover, it would seem from the comments which Butler makes in the introduction to the piece that it was his plan to take advantage of the new audience he could now reach in his home country by redrafting and representing both hypotheses for a London audience. After a brief introductory paragraph acquainting his reader with the basic premises of Darwin's theory, he comments that it is not at first easy to decide 'whether we should regard the mechanical kingdom as the commencement of a new phase of life', as distinct from the animal kingdom as this kingdom is from the vegetable, or as 'the process by which man's body is at present undergoing modification and improvement'. In order to contribute to this debate, Butler explains how he intends in this current text 'and another that will follow it', to point out the 'inferences that suggest themselves' for each hypothesis.[31] As it turned out, Butler never got round to re-presenting the hypothesis of 'Lucubratio Ebria', and it could be argued that even with 'The Mechanical Creation', he was simply going over old ground. However, if there is one characteristic which distinguishes this second attempt at the hypothesis of 'Darwin Among the Machines' from the original it is the tone of the piece. Most obviously, Butler reworks the conclusion, rejecting the apocalyptic tones of 'Darwin Among the Machines' for the more sober prediction that despite the inevitability of evolutionary supremacy passing to the 'mechanical kingdom', man's interests will continue to be served. Additionally, and as Joseph Jones has pointed out, although not significantly longer than 'Darwin Among the Machines', 'The Mechanical Creation' distinguishes itself by 'closer and more compacted reasoning'. 'There are six paragraphs, for example, as against an earlier nine;', he explains, and 'the Darwinian basis of the argument is developed at considerably greater length.' Such observations ultimately lead Jones to the conclusion that with 'The Mechanical Creation', 'Butler is more seriously interested in the key idea' (p. 107). In terms of Butler's comments in *Unconscious Memory*, the more considered tone of 'The Mechanical Creation' was in keeping with the growing earnestness with which Butler was now applying himself to his speculations.

In terms of style, Butler again makes reference to the status of his text as an illusion, alluding to the Siamese twins of 'Lucubratio Ebria' in the opening paragraph:

[31] 'The Mechanical Creation', in *Works,* I, pp. 231-37 (p. 231). Further references from this edition are given after quotations in the text.

‘The last thing which we should wish to do, would be to throw ridicule on Darwin’s great work’, Butler clarifies, ‘yet we feel that we are warranted in expressing the half-shadow, half-substance, of our own views, and in leaving the intelligent reader to draw his own inferences’ (p. 231). In keeping with this statement, analogy and metaphor are once again used to animate his machines. In perhaps the most elaborate instance, Butler observes that we cannot conceive of life without the notions of consciousness, a reproductive system, ‘the consumption of some sort of food’ and the ‘appearance of spontaneity’. He then defamiliarises a steam engine to illustrate how it can be regarded as possessing these qualities:

> It eats its own food for itself; it consumes it by inhaling the very air which we ourselves breathe; it rejects what it cannot digest as man rejects it; it has a very considerable power of self-regulation and adaptability to contingency. It cannot be said to be conscious but the strides which it has made are made in the direction of consciousness. It is employed in the manufacture of machinery, and though steam engines are as the angels of heaven, with respect to matrimony, yet in their reproduction of machinery we seem to catch a glimpse of the extraordinary vicarious arrangement whereby it is not impossible that the reproductive system of the mechanical world will be always carried on. (p. 233)

Developing the analogy still further, Butler also reconceives the principle of natural selection as it applies to the mechanical world with the claim that the ‘interests of man do for the machines what natural selection and the struggle for existence has done for plants and animals’. According to this logic, the ‘sharp contention’ between competing inventions is ‘as though the machines fought among themselves and ate each other up’ (p. 234). Elaborating, Butler considers the case of weapons in which the idea of mechanical appliances fighting among themselves has a curiously literal interpretation. Taking the case of two particular models of gun, he writes:

> They have at last come to a stand up fight, such as has hardly yet been known in all machinery […] We grant that this is an exceptional case; steam engines do not fight with individual steam engines, they are liable to the struggle of race with race, by the competitive examination of champion specimens, and with the fall of the champion the race falls also. They never fight individual to individual; but guns delight to bark and bite naturally, and it is no wonder that they should refuse to fight according to the accepted canons of mechanical warfare. (pp. 235-36)

With this passage, the tone of Butler’s argument slides into comedy, a transformation which he appears to register with a pun on the word *canon*. Nevertheless, it is worth acknowledging the editor’s footnote to this passage: ‘Our correspondent, who has long resided at the Antipodes, is unaware that in the days of George Stephenson, steam engines did run races. The Rocket won £500 in a

race.' Thus even in the midst of comedy, there still remain grounds for accepting the legitimacy of Butler's analogy.

Concluding comments

At the outset of this chapter, I included a quotation from Butler's notebooks in which he discusses the essence of change in terms of 'joining' and 'disjoining'. Written in his early years in New Zealand, this note might not be such a bad description of Butler's aim in these early sketches to dissolve our conventional understanding of the world by fusing together two hitherto separate classifications. Also useful is Furbank's general observation that the distrust which Butler felt for all 'accepted reputations' led him to 'make his own conquests, or acquisitions, in literature', to work over ideas 'minutely and repeatedly' in his effort to 'rub them clean of all vestiges of previous ownership' (p. 25). These early sketches provide us with a clear example of Butler developing his own ideas at first hand through a method of independent inquiry. As a set of paradigms, Darwin's suggestive text, 'unstoppable in its action upon minds', offered itself for metaphorical application to a wide range of phenomena. In accepting this challenge, Butler developed to maturity that view of language as 'always prone to modification' that we first noted as early as his undergraduate writings in his subtle manipulation of the meaning of *distrust, sincerity, charity*. 'Scratch the simplest expressions and you will find the metaphor', Butler writes in his later essay. These early sketches, with their ever more credible ways of classifying the world based on analogy and metaphor, would seem to have played a key role in shaping this belief.

Darwin's critique of species with its claim that classifications can only be based on arbitrary conventions, temporary 'milestones' that we set up over irreducible 'harmonies', clearly provided a fillip to Butler's existing preoccupation with relativism. However, even though he was building these constructions on the shifting sand of his imagination, there is clear evidence in the form of his own reflections on the sketches, private correspondence, and notebook entries to suggest that for Butler, these defamiliarised counter worlds had the potential to be *valid* alternatives. 'Are not the realities of the world based on and do not they grow out of its illusions?' Butler asks in his notebooks, 'If so, a reality is only an illusion so

strong and so universal no one can resist it.'[32] As we shall see in the following chapter, by the time he came to write *Life and Habit,* Butler had developed a profound and sophisticated relativist epistemology.

[32] *Further Extracts*, pp. 30-31.

CHAPTER FOUR

'A Strange and Interesting Transformation': *Life and Habit* as the Third Hypothesis

At this stage in my analysis of the evolutionary writings, we are clearly faced with the problem: just how could Butler use the raw material of the early evolutionary sketches for two radically different projects, namely the ludic speculations of the 'Book of the Machines' and the 'very serious earnest' of his Life and Habit theory? Addressing this question will be the first aim of this chapter. As I intend to illustrate, the satirical force of 'The Book of the Machines' depends for the most part on the role this text plays in the greater scheme of Butler's novel rather than on the method of argumentation which the professor employs. Not only this, but biographical details also reveal that for Butler, the writing of *Erewhon* was simply a task to be carried out with the material that was then available. As we will see, on completing this task with the material of his rejected hypotheses, Butler set about transforming his third and final hypothesis into the theory of *Life and Habit* with renewed conviction.

Erewhon and *Life and Habit* as the third hypothesis

After 'The Mechanical Creation' in 1865, Butler turned more or less exclusively to painting for the rest of the decade in an attempt to establish himself as an artist. The only notable exceptions to this were the three sketches which later resurfaced in changed guise as three of the most famous chapters of *Erewhon*.[1] Then, in 1869 while visiting art collections in Venice, Butler describes a chance meeting with an elderly Russian baroness who apparently pricked his conscience with the observation that it was high time he created something of real value. In the end, it was literature that Butler found to be the most fitting outlet for his talents: 'So I began tinkering up the old magazine articles I had written in New Zealand, and they strung themselves together into *Erewhon*.'[2]

As we have seen, for Butler, *Erewhon* was the 'peg' on which he could hang

[1] See introduction, n. 4.
[2] *Memoir*, I, pp. 132-33.

the diverse collection of paradoxical and puzzling speculations he had created since his early years in New Zealand. Of course, the over-arching idea of the novel was that it was 'a work of satire and imagination', as Butler's subtitling of his manuscript makes clear. However, as I have pointed out, if anyone was the butt of the joke in 'The Book of the Machines' it was not Darwin, but Bishop Joseph Butler, and in particular his defence of revealed religion, *The Analogy of Religion.* In this work, the bishop concerned himself with defending revealed religion against Deist criticism. Key to this defence was his use of analogical reasoning to show that counterparts of the same inconsistencies as those which plague revealed religion can be observed in Deist theories of the natural world. *Analogy* was a hugely popular text during it time, but by the second half of the nineteenth century, its star was waning. And for Butler writing *Erewhon* in 1871, the Bishop was merely another sophist Christian apologist.[3]

Besides Joseph Butler's *Analogy*, another great work of eighteenth-century English theology, William Paley's *Natural Theology,* has also been cited as a further possible influence on 'The Book of the Machines'.[4] In the previous chapter, I mentioned in passing how Paley's argument from design was one of the obstacles Darwin had to overcome in the *Origin,* particularly with regard to the claim that natural selection alone could account for the complex means to ends adaption of the human eye. In the famous opening passage from *Natural Theology,* Paley introduces the basic premise of the argument from design by conducting a famous thought experiment himself:

> In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a stone, and were asked how the stone came to be there: I might possibly answer, that for any thing I know to the contrary, it had lain there for ever: nor would it perhaps be very easy to show the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I had found a watch upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place; I should hardly think of the answer which I had before given.

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[3] During the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, Deism had grown in popularity among intellectuals attracted by its emphasis upon reason and observation. According to Deists, the problem with revealed religion was that its emphasis on scripture rendered it inconsistent and unjust as the natural world could never be. How are we to square the New Testament message of forgiveness, for example, with the Old Testament idea that 'the sins of the fathers shall be visited on their children'? It was this argument and others that Bishop Butler sought to counter in his work. For more details see Ernest C. Mossner, *Bishop Butler and the Age of Reason* (New York: Macmillan, 1936).

[4] In addition to Lightman's essay in *Against the Grain*, Hans-Peter Breuer has discussed Paley's influence on Butler in 'Samuel Butler's "The Book of the Machines" and the Argument from Design', *Modern Philology*, 72 (1975), 365-83.

Whereas in the former situation we simply assume that the stone has always been there, Paley argues, in the latter, this assumption is unsatisfactory. As he goes on to explain: 'when we come to inspect the watch, we perceive (what we could not discover in the stone) that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose' and that therefore 'there must have existed at some time and at some place or another an artifice or artificers for the purpose which we find it fit to answer'.[5] By a process of analogical reasoning, Paley extends this insight to the intricate adaption to purpose that we perceive in the natural world, the example of the eye being the most famous, to force the conclusion that like the watch, the natural world must have had a divine creator. It is this famous passage which Butler gently satirises in an early episode of *Erewhon*. When the Erewhonian magistrate first finds a watch in the possession of the protagonist, far from being drawn to conceive of its maker, he is overcome by a look of horror which conveys to the narrator 'the impression that he regarded my watch as the designer of himself and of the universe'. Reflecting upon this reaction, the narrator makes the shrewd observation that this notion 'was quite as likely to be taken as the other by a people who had no experience of European civilisation', and goes so far as to admit to being 'a little piqued with Paley' for having led him 'so much astray'.[6]

For Bernard Lightman, Butler's presenting Paley's argument to be the product of cultural conditioning suggests that he was not 'overly impressed with the design argument as it is articulated in *Natural Theology*'.[7] As Butler was still an enthusiastic admirer of Darwin at this point, this claim seems reasonable enough. However, unlike the case with Joseph Butler's *Analogy*, there is no hard evidence in the form of comments on his work to support the claim that Butler intended Paley to be a secondary target of 'The Book of the Machines'. Of course, this is not to say that the professor's argument cannot be read as *broadly* satirical of Paley; but if this is so, I would argue that 'The Book of the Machines' can equally be read as a broad satirical attack on *any* theologian, academic or professional who relies on the force of rhetoric to defend ridiculous or otherwise unsupportable conclusions. It is this secondary, broader understanding of the satirical force of 'The Book of the Machines' that seems the more satisfying given the history of its composition. After all, Butler wrote at length on his original motivation for composing 'Darwin Among the Machines', explaining how it resulted from the detached curiosity of idle play,

[5] Willam Paley, *Natural Theology*, 2 vols (London: Charles Knight, 1836) , I, pp. 1-4.
[6] *Erewhon*, p. 64.
[7] *Against the Grain*, p. 140.

one possible answer to the question: What if..? It was only when he gave it a place within the landscape of *Erewhon* that he could tease out its latent satirical power, exploiting the drama of its conclusion by giving it the form of a proclamation, uttered by a 'professional', unquestioned by the majority, and put into practice with consequences which were literally destructive. I would therefore argue that it is the most economic hypothesis to accept that in its broadest terms, 'The Book of the Machines', as with so many other targets in *Erewhon*, was simply an attack on the self-satisfied rhetoric of institutional authority.

One further observation may be made in order to clarify that it is the absurd conclusions which the professor reaches rather than the method or argumentation that Butler has in his sights. Of the three chapters which Butler devotes to this section of the novel, the bulk is given over to the professor's radical argument. However, at the end of the third chapter Butler mentions how one serious attempt was made to counter the professor before his proposal was finally accepted. There then follows five pages providing extracts from the relatively more sober hypothesis of 'Lucubratio Ebria'. In the context of the professor's wild conclusions, this second author's hypothesis seems to constitute the 'voice of reason', one last opportunity for sanity in the face of an argument which threatens to turn Erewhonian society back to the Dark Ages. As the author points out: 'A machine is merely a supplementary limb; this is the be all and end all of machinery.' (p. 270). Moreover, the argument of 'Lucubratio Ebria' that tool use actually leads to the development of human civilisation rather than its downfall, is again repeated in ways which contrast starkly with the professor's apocalyptic tones: 'civilisation began to dawn upon the race, the social good offices, the genial companionship of friends, the art of unreason, and all those habits of mind which most elevate man above the lower animals, in the course of time ensued' (p. 271). But most significantly, Butler makes no attempt to alter the style of argumentation, providing us with exactly that form of reasoning by immoderate use of analogy which characterises the first author's argument. Indeed, even that passage in which Butler describes 'a man's memory going into his pocket book', arguably the most striking and stylised of all passages anywhere in the early sketches, is included almost verbatim (p. 272).

Ultimately, this second author is unsuccessful: 'but the other writer was considered to have the best of it, and in the end succeeded in destroying all the inventions that had been discovered for the preceding 271 years' (p. 274). However, the fact that the same method of analogical reasoning is applied by both authors

would strongly suggest that Butler's primary concern was not with these authors' means of argumentation but with the wild conclusions which could thereby be reached. In terms then of the development of Butler's evolutionary speculations, 'The Book of the Machines' presents us with a separate line of inquiry, an offshoot leading to an imaginary land where Butler could entertain his readership with the playful and puzzling potential of his reclassification strategy. Consequently, when he took up his speculations again after *Erewhon,* it was to continue along the path of increasing curiosity in the constructive value of his illusions.

In the chapter 'How I Wrote Life and Habit' from *Unconscious Memory,* Butler looks back on the crossroads of *Erewhon,* revealing that at the time of writing, his sympathies still lay with the hypothesis of 'Lucubratio Ebria':

> In 1870 and 1871, when I was writing 'Erewhon,' I thought the best way of looking at machines was to see them as limbs which we had made and carried about with us or left at home at pleasure. I was not, however, satisfied, and should have gone on with the subject at once if I had not been anxious to write 'The Fair Haven,' […] As soon as I had finished this, I returned to the old subject, on which I had already been engaged for nearly a dozen years as continuously as other business would allow, and proposed to myself to see not only machines as limbs, but also limbs as machines. I felt immediately that I was upon firmer ground. The use of the word 'organ' for a limb told its own story; the word could not have become so current under this meaning unless the idea of a limb as a tool or machine had been agreeable to common sense. What would follow, then, if we regarded our limbs and organs as things that we had ourselves manufactured for our convenience?[8]

This hypothesis, once sufficiently explored and written up, became *Life and Habit*. We will follow the interim steps that this involved in a moment, but it is important here to acknowledge that like the sketches that came before it, the Life and Habit theory was based upon a hypothesis which Butler found convincing to the extent that he perceived an analogical relationship between the two classes he sought to merge. As Butler's language in this passage suggests, one reason why he felt to be on 'firmer ground' with this hypothesis was that the 'address' he had stumbled upon seemed to fit well the familiar form of the world. After all, etymologically speaking, was there not already sufficient grounds for reclassifying organs as tools? How else could one account for the biological use of the term *organ* other than as a dead metaphor? Butler's final hypothesis was proving to be his most convincing yet. Besides this, his initial efforts at exploring just how far he could extend the analogy brought with them some startling and paradoxical results, as well as a characteristic drive to fuse disparate phenomena:

[8] *Unconscious Memory*, p. 16.

> The first question that suggested itself was, how did we come to make them without knowing anything about it? And this raised another, namely, how comes anybody to do anything unconsciously? The answer 'habit' was not far to seek. But can a person be said to do a thing by force of habit or routine when it is his ancestors, and not he, that has done it hitherto? Not unless he and his ancestors are one and the same person. Perhaps, then, they are the same person after all. What is sameness? (pp. 16-17)

As I have argued, it was one of the consequences of Darwin's critique of species that it so problematised our every day notion of boundaries. For Butler, the irreducible mystery of classification was one that he never tired of exploring. From the basic analogy 'bodily organs and limbs as tools', Butler evidently found that the analogy would hold sufficiently well as a means of explaining the production of these organs too. As an experienced artisan might fashion a tool such as a knife with the unconscious facility of motor memory, so might we be said to 'make' our own organs and limbs. Or again, as the force of habit and routine over a lifetime had given rise to the artisan's unconscious motor memory, so had the countless cycles of embryonic growth throughout our hereditary line led to the formation of our 'unconscious growth habits'. All the phenomenon of heredity was at bottom, Butler argued, was habit based on memory (p. 18).

Here we have two of the pillars on which the Life and Habit theory rests, namely the identification of the phenomena of heredity with habit and memory; and the oneness of personality between ancestor and offspring. Despite the naivety of his methods, Butler evidently felt his conclusions ought to be taken seriously in the light of what was then known about the phenomena of heredity and embryonic growth. In the case of the former, the question of just what mechanism underpinned inheritance was one of the greatest biological mysteries of his age, and one which Darwinists in particular desperately needed to solve in order to complete their evolutionary picture. Of course, what we now refer to as 'genetic inheritance' only began to be understood with the rediscovery of the work of Gregor Mendel in the early twentieth century. However, it must be said that Butler was not the only writer of his age to point to memory as playing some kind of role in inheritance.[9] By the

[9] In the *Origin*, Darwin confessed: 'The laws governing inheritance are quite unknown; no one can say why a peculiarity in different individuals of the same species, or in individuals of different species, is sometimes inherited and sometimes not so' (p. 13). Later, in 1868, Darwin proposed the speculative theory of Pangenesis to account for the phenomena of heredity, though this was refuted by his half cousin Francis Galton who continued to investigate the problem after his death. For more information, see John Bulmer, *Francis Galton: Pioneer of Heredity and Biometry* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003).

same token, Butler didn't have to look hard to find intriguing evidence in support of his claim that a oneness of personality exists between ancestor and offspring. Continuing his reflections in *Unconscious Memory*, Butler cites the fact that the human embryo developing in the womb appears to recapitulate humankind's evolutionary journey from a 'fish' stage through 'reptilian' to 'lower mammal' before finally taking on an unambiguously human form. This phenomenon, popularised by the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel under the slogan 'ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny', has since been discredited, but was frequently referred to by leading scientific figures in the debates of the period, including Darwin himself. According to Butler, this is exactly the kind of observation we would expect to make if the Life and Habit theory were true.[10]

With this his third hypothesis, Butler's speculations took a final decisive swing toward the biological. Significantly, his feeling that this hypothesis might well shed light on some of the great biological questions of his day provides further illustration of the extent to which his attitude to his speculations had shifted since the days of 'Darwin Among the Machines'. However, we ought to be on guard against placing too much emphasis on the scientific import of the Life and Habit theory. As Lee H. Holt has pointed out, in his evolutionary writings Butler often resembles

> an ancient Greek thinker speculating about atoms, about whether the world is one or many, fire or water. In an age when the inductive method, which he did not revere, reigned supreme, Butler relied on the power of the mind to settle the questions he raised. (p. 72)

More specifically, Butler's account of how he stumbled upon the foundations of his theory reveals how he made use of the same method as his early thought experiments, using analogy and metaphor to transport the qualities associated with tool construction – intentionality, repetition, motor memory and habit formation – to

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For more on the popularity of memory/heredity theories during this period, see 'Organic Memory, Lamarckian Heresy and Semon's Mneme', in Daniel L. Schacter, *Forgotten Ideas, Neglected Pioneers: Richard Semon and the Story of Memory* (Philadelphia: Psychology Press, 2001), pp. 97–135.

[10] Interestingly, in this section Butler advances his argument by taking issue with Huxley's critique of the hypothesis that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. 'I am aware that Professor Huxley maintains otherwise.', Butler begins, 'He writes: "It is not true, for example, ... that a reptile was ever a fish, but it is true that the reptile embryo" (and what is said here of the reptile holds good also for the human embryo), "at one stage of its development, is an organism, which, if it had an independent existence, must be classified among fishes.". According to Butler, Huxley's reservations regarding how the observation ought properly to be worded amount merely to hair-splitting (*Unconscious Memory*, p. 17). For more on the 'ontogeny-phylogeny hypothesis', see Stephen Jay Gould's, *Ontogeny and Phylogeny* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977).

biological growth. Nevertheless, it would also appear that Butler felt the processes involved in biological growth to be not simply *similar* to those involved in tool construction, but that this latter paradigm could somehow provide a valid and convincing explanation for the underlying biological mechanisms. Like the illusion that was 'Lucubratio Ebria', there was a curiously literal interpretation to limbs that we could 'make' and 'individuals' that could consist of an entire hereditary line. In my previous chapter, I went some way toward explaining the contribution which Butler's literary imagination played to his sense that there was a reality to the illusions he had constructed in his early machine sketches. In this chapter, it will be my intention to explore how the argument of *Life and Habit* both draws on and develops this same insight.

Butler as scientific populariser and the writing of *Life and Habit*

At this point, it should be clear that Butler worked out his Life and Habit theory under highly unorthodox circumstances. As Henry Festing Jones has put it, *Life and Habit* 'descended with modifications' from the machines of *Erewhon,* and as with the organic world, a thorough understanding of the work is incomplete without acknowledging how it has been shaped by a larger set of processes.[11] Indeed, even during the process of composition itself, Butler experienced a series of setbacks and discoveries each of which influenced the content of the work. In my introduction, I have already referred to Frank Miller Turner's claim that Butler modified the purpose of *Life and Habit* in mid-composition to include a specific attack on the newly established profession of science. Yet more radical in terms of the influence it had on the content of the work was Butler's discovery of the true import of Darwin's principle of natural selection during the final preparations for publication. In a move which may be described as Butler's second apostasy, Butler describes in *Unconscious Memory* how this discovery prompted him to dash off an additional five chapters contrasting his teleological model of evolution with Darwin's world of chance. In fact, on closer analysis, *both* these modifications resulted in Butler only adding to the original plan of the work rather than altering to a significant extent the original theory. In a long letter to a New Zealand correspondent written in February of 1876, Butler provides a comprehensive outline of the main points of the Life and

[11] *Memoir*, I, p. 232.

Habit theory illustrating that he had the theory worked out in full almost two years prior to publication. This observation, coupled with the fact that these additional elements are effectively bracketed off from the rest of the text, lie behind my decision to defer their consideration until chapter 5.[12] Far more significant in terms of the influence it exerted over the writing of the text was a financial crisis Butler suffered in 1874 at a time when he had just begun the process of composition.

In 1873 Butler's finances were dwindling and he made the decision to call in his New Zealand capital, a total of around eight thousand pounds. Following enquiries about using his father's brokers, he was persuaded by an old Cambridge friend and banker, Henry Hoare, to invest his capital in a range of high risk, high income enterprises. In the spring of 1874, Butler got the news that all was not well. Unknown to him, Hoare had been indulging in the 'wildest speculation' and had now 'come to grief'.[13] To make matters worse, it was not only Butler who had lost out. In the excitement of financial speculation, he had also persuaded some of his own friends to part with their savings too. After a long struggle to save the tanning company in Montreal of which he was director, Butler accepted that he was powerless to prevent it from sliding into bankruptcy too. After the dust had settled, it became clear that he had lost three-quarters of his New Zealand capital leaving him with a total of two thousand pounds worth of savings to live on. Already predisposed to worrying over money, Butler was forced to find an alternative source of income.

At this stage, it seems clear that Butler turned to literature, and to the anticipated success of *Life and Habit* as the means whereby he could begin to build on the modest success of *Erewhon* to establish himself as a popular writer. Consequently, his references to the forthcoming book in private letters during this period reveal a growing tendency to take his speculations more seriously. In a letter to Miss Savage of January 1876 he begins: 'I have got a very dry but exceedingly interesting (to me) subject - something like the machines in *Erewhon* on which I am now working steadily'. In terms of his attitude, although he does admit to the possibility that it could be taken as 'incidentally satirical', he also stresses that he has never been so taken with a subject since *The Fair Haven*.[14] In another letter to Miss Savage in August, the tone shifts dramatically as Butler declares: 'The theory

[12] Letter to Thomas William, Feb. 18 1876, in *Notebooks*, pp. 53-55.
[13] Letter to Miss Savage, Mar. 15 1874, in *Letters Between Samuel Butler and Miss E.M.A. Savage, 1871–1885*, ed. by Geoffrey Keynes and Brian Hill (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935), pp. 85-86.
[14] Letter to Miss Savage, Jan. 1876, in *Memoir*, I, p. 233.

frightens me - it is so far-reaching and subversive - it oppresses me and I take panics that there cannot really be any solid truth in it'. Nevertheless, on taking on the role of his own critic and posing as an objector he professes: 'I really cannot see that I have a leg to stand upon'.[15] Despite this, the nerves persisted into 1877, though by this point he was now more focused on material concerns: 'I am very well - seldom better in health - but getting more and more anxious about the future', he confesses, 'If *Life and Habit* fails as *The Fair Haven* did, I do not know what will happen'.[16] Then in September of 1877 his mood finally lifts: 'I believe the book will succeed', he announces, 'and am now thoroughly absorbed in it.' Obviously, Butler looked back on this moment as something of a watershed in which he finally accepted literature as his true calling since later he appended the note: 'Here my life as an art-student, for I never was more, may be said to end.'[17] Finally, in October, he repeats his confident prediction of success, leaving us in no doubt by which standards it might thereby be called: '*I* have no doubt whatever about its success. Success is cumulative. *Erewhon* would make this successful even if it were not successful on its own account -- I mean, of course, commercially successful.' In another note written later in his life and appended to this letter, Butler looks back on this period remarking that at the time, commercial success was of 'the highest importance' to him.[18] These passages obviously complete the picture as to how Butler's attitude to his speculations gradually changed throughout the years such that by the time he came to write *Life and Habit* he had a strong belief in its worth. However, with regard to the material circumstances under which Butler actually wrote his book, and his single-minded focus on commercial success in particular, the question ought to be asked as to what impact this had on the form in which Butler chose to present his theory.

In my introduction, I mention how Bernard Lightman's classification of Butler as scientific populariser is a useful means of approaching *Life and Habit*. By regarding the fantastic elements of the work in terms of Lightman's 'appeal to the cosmological' we can move beyond any overly-simplistic classification of *Life and Habit* as satire to consider the constructive contribution which Butler's literary imagination made to the text. Although Lightman makes no mention of Butler's financial crisis, it seems clear from the comments Butler makes in the above

[15] Letter to Miss Savage, Aug. 1876, in *Memoir*, I, pp. 242-43.
[16] Letter to Miss Savage, Feb. 1877, in *Memoir*, I, pp. 247-48 (p. 248).
[17] Letter to Miss Savage, Sep. 20 1877, in *Memoir*, I, p. 254.
[18] Letter to Miss Savage, Oct. 6 1877, in *Memoir*, I, pp. 255-56 (p. 256).

exchange that his desire to achieve success with *Life and Habit* was bound up with his aim to establish himself as a *popular* writer. For this reason, it is useful to refer to Lightman's work on the popular science scene of the 1870s in order to establish some kind of historical context.

Having followed his idiosyncratic speculations to the brink of publishing *Life and Habit,* it is easy to lose track of the wider cultural context in which Butler was writing. In the introductory chapter to his *Victorian Popularizers of Science* (2007), Lightman has described the background against which the scientific populariser rose, making reference to how science captivated the imagination of the Victorian public in the post-*Origin* period. During the 1860s, transatlantic communications made possible by the advent of undersea cables reduced communication to the New World to a matter of minutes rather than days; elsewhere, the widespread use of the spectroscope was enabling the astronomer of that decade to flaunt Comte's declaration that for all his progress, mankind would never know the composition of the stars. In the face of such exhilarating new possibilities, science became fashionable and respectable with a broad spectrum of the Victorian populace who by mid-century had more money to spend on leisure activities.[19] At the same time, advances in education and printing technology had by the 1870s resulted in a situation whereby a popular writer might make a living by writing for this growing audience alone.[20] The professional scientist then was not always the first choice of publishers wishing to take advantage of this new market. In fact, as science became more specialised during the period there arose a need for 'non-professionals who could convey the broader significance of many of the new discoveries to a rapidly growing Victorian reading public'. Success as a populariser was therefore dependent in part on the style and tone adopted, the ability, as Lightman puts it, to 'present the huge mass of scientific fact in the form of compelling stories, parables, and lessons, fraught with cosmic significance', to inspire awe in one's readership of everything from the 'infinite space of the heavens' to the 'structure of the tiniest organism'.[21]

In his contribution to *Against the Grain*, Lightman considers the specific case of Butler as scientific populariser. As he points out, Butler was an expert in taking on

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[19] *Victorian Popularizers of Science: Designing Nature for New Audiences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 2-3.
[20] Ibid., pp. 34-35.
[21] 'The Voices of Nature: Popularizing Victorian Science', in *Victorian Science in Context*, ed. by Bernard Lightman (London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 187-211 (p. 188).

roles for which he had little or no formal training, be it sheep farmer, journalist or company director. More to the point, his was a society in which there were already a large number of popularisers churning out books and essays who had no more scientific training than he.[22] With regard to *Life and Habit*,` Lightman's basic position is that it constitutes Butler's take on the 'evolutionary epic', a genre of scientific writing to which he devotes a whole chapter in *Victorian Popularizers of Science.* First emerging with the publication of Chambers' *Vestiges,* Lightman describes the evolutionary epic as 'one of the most important narrative formats in the second half of the nineteenth century':

> It assumed epic status by moving through vast expanses of time, by ranging across a series of scientific disciplines, or even by presenting heroes who performed deeds of great valor. The evolutionary epic proved to be a versatile genre for popularizers. Not only did it offer a gripping story to readers, it could also provide a grand synthesis of scientific knowledge.

Though its main focus was on biology and geology, the idea of evolution, became 'the key to finding the connections between various branches of scientific knowledge'. Taking Butler's speculations on personal identity as a case in point, Lightman argues that the scope of Butler's conclusions during these chapters place this work among those other examples of the genre, albeit as an 'interesting adaptation'.[23] For example, not only does Butler propose that an individual may claim identity with all the members of its hereditary line all the way back to the primordial cell, but he also draws upon Darwin's observation that an organic being is a 'microcosm, a little universe, formed of a host of self-propagating organisms, inconceivably minute, and numerous as the stars in heaven', to suggest that we are composed of 'myriad component souls', living in territories which are to them 'vast continents, and rivers, and seas, but which are yet only the bodies of our other component souls; coral reefs and sponge-beds within us'.[24] Such a hypothesis ultimately leads Butler to the genuinely epic statement that

> they are we and we are they; and when we die it is but a redistribution of the balance of power among them or a change of dynasty, the result, it may be, of heroic struggle, with more epics and love romances than we could read from now to the Millennium. (p. 112)

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[22] *Against the Grain*, p. 117.
[23] *Victorian Popularizers of Science*, p. 220; *Against the Grain*, p. 118.
[24] *Life and Habit*, pp. 124, 110. Darwin's original statement can be found in *The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1868), II, p. 404.

Additionally, in *Unconscious Memory* Butler recalls one of the first passages of *Life and Habit* that he composed. A piece of fine prose written while he was in Canada, the idea of heroic struggle again recurs, though this time in connection with the disparate drives relating to the unconscious memories of our ancestors:

> His past selves are living in him at this moment with the accumulated life of centuries. 'Do this, this, this, which we too have done, and found our profit in it,' cry the souls of his forefathers within him. Faint are the far ones, coming and going as the sound of bells wafted on to a high mountain; loud and clear are the near ones, urgent as an alarm of fire. (p. 52)

Although Lightman does not carry out a reading in support of his classification of *Life and Habit* as evolutionary epic, his analysis is useful in allowing us to assess the constructive contribution which Butler's literary imagination made to the writing of the work. By placing Butler amongst the other popularisers, what has traditionally appeared fantastic in his work might equally be taken as Butler's attempt to inspire awe in his readership by telling them an epic tale 'fraught with cosmic significance'. However, while certain elements of *Life and Habit* do bear comparison to those other instances of the evolutionary epic Lightman considers, the comparison breaks down when we realise that Butler's is the only contribution which presents itself as an independent theory. That this is the case is supported not only by Butler's comments in his letter to Miss Savage, but also by his reflections on how he wrote *Life and Habit* in *Unconscious Memory.* In these, Butler recalls how in October of 1877, during the final preparations for publication, he was still making inquiries into whether anyone had already advanced such a theory, going so far as to add that it 'seemed an idea so new as to be almost preposterous' (p. 20). In his study of the evolutionary epic, Lightman touches on the issue of Butler's independent stand by illustrating how his outright and vocal rejection of Darwinism beginning with *Life and Habit* resulted in his being effectively excluded from the scientific debates of the period.[25] However, it is not simply in his taking a stand against Darwinism that Butler distinguished himself. As I intend to illustrate, there is a real drive at the heart of *Life and Habit* not so much to communicate meaning but to create it anew; to write, in Butler's words, free from the influence of 'other men's words'.[26]

In my previous chapter, I illustrated how Butler's use of analogy and metaphor was not simply incidental to the construction of his sketches, but

[25] *Victorian Popularizers of Science*, pp. 289-94.
[26] *Life and Habit*, p. 84.

fundamental to his attempt to challenge our familiar understanding of the world. Similarly, Butler's reflections on how he discovered and developed his Life and Habit theory illustrate how these same devices gave rise to his revised definition of limbs, organs and heredity itself. In the following section, I want to show how there is a similarly systematic element to *Life and Habit,* a routine and purpose to the reclassifications Butler effects which goes beyond any simple evaluation of the literary style as ornament. For this reason, although Lightman's classification of *Life and Habit* as evolutionary epic is useful in accounting for the overall tone of the work, we must move beyond it if we are to arrive at a fuller understanding of the text.

'A Strange and Interesting Transformation': Beyond the Evolutionary Epic

As we have seen, the process of speculation that would eventually lead Butler to the discovery of the Life and Habit theory began when he proposed to view our limbs and organs as tools which we ourselves had constructed. For Butler, it followed from this central hypothesis that the processes underpinning biological development were analogous if not identical to those involved in habit formation. In the opening chapter of *Life and Habit,* Butler gives an account of these processes with reference to the development of a fine motor skill such as playing the piano. According to Butler, though initially requiring considerable conscious effort on our behalf, these actions become unconscious habits with long and frequent practice. Not only this, but when we suddenly become aware of performing such actions, this element of consciousness tends rather to lead to a decrease in the level of performance, as, for example, when a pianist's self-awareness while performing a piece leads to distraction and error. On considering a range of such phenomena, Butler draws the inference that our knowledge of how to perform a motor act is only perfected when it is unconscious, for conscious knowledge of this kind must always partake of an element of doubt:

> It would, therefore, appear as though perfect knowledge and perfect ignorance were extremes which meet and become indistinguishable from one another; so also perfect volition and perfect absence of volition, perfect memory and utter forgetfulness; for we are unconscious of knowing, willing, or remembering, either from not yet having known or willed, or from knowing and willing so well and so intensely as to be no longer conscious of either. Conscious knowledge and volition are of attention; attention is of suspense; suspense is of doubt; doubt is of

> uncertainty; uncertainty is of ignorance; so that the mere fact of conscious knowing or willing implies the presence of more or less novelty and doubt. (p. 18)

Such topsy-turvy reasoning puts us in mind of certain passages from the Cambridge pieces in which Butler playfully warps the meaning of *distrust* and *sincerity*. Indeed, we might pause here to consider the extent to which this critique of conscious knowledge has its roots in Butler's experience of uncovering the inconsistencies and paradox that seemed to haunt the most disingenuous of propositions. In the New Zealand pieces as well as his university writing, Butler often shows us that the closer one looks at an issue, the more attention, in effect, that one pays, the more one becomes aware of the 'harmonics of resemblance that lurk even in the most absolute differences and vice-versa'. The question of whether Butler's preoccupations as an imaginative writer influenced his theory of knowledge, is an intriguing one, and one which I will return to in the conclusion to this work. For the moment however, we can note an additional, related consequence of this redefinition of what it is to know. Besides the example of playing the piano, Butler also considers the relative levels of ease with which we carry out the behaviours of writing, walking and speaking. According to Butler, when taken together, these instances demonstrate that 'the older the habit the longer the practice, the longer the practice the more knowledge -- or, the less uncertainty; the less uncertainty the less power of conscious self-analysis and control' (p. 13).

Having delineated the characteristics of his central paradigm, Butler then turns to illustrate how the processes involved in biological development can be considered analogous to those of habit formation. To this end, the argument of *Life and Habit* differs from Butler's previous hypotheses inasmuch as the central paradigm is an abstract process rather than an object or organism that can adequately be described in terms of its physical appearance and attributes. Unable to appeal to the reader's visual imagination to the extent that he did in the evolutionary sketches, Butler therefore has to resort to other techniques in order to persuade his readership that there are sufficiently convincing conceptual grounds for his analogy to hold. Particularly useful to this end is his observation that the older the habit, the less consciousness and control we have over it. In effect, what this observation allows Butler to do is open the back door to doubt. If indeed there is a scale on which we can place habits from the newest to the oldest with a corresponding decrease in the level of consciousness, who is to say that the insentient phenomena of bodily instincts do not occupy a particularly extreme

position upon this scale? As Butler himself puts it:

> Why should a baby be able to swallow - which one would have said was the more complicated process of the two - with so much less practice than it takes him to learn to eat? How comes it that he exhibits in the case of the more difficult operation all the phenomena which ordinarily accompany a more complete mastery and longer practice? Analogy would certainly seem to point in the direction of thinking that the necessary experience cannot have been wanting.

Butler's aim at this point is to convince the reader that actions arising from habit 'gradate away imperceptibly' into those commonly attributed to biological causes (pp. 45-46). In this sense, along with his use of analogy in this section, there is a corresponding tendency for Butler to view the difference between these two kinds of action as one of degree rather than kind. By comparing the unconscious facility with which we swallow to that with which we eat, he can therefore force the conclusion that these two processes ought to be classified alike as actions arising from habit and training. As we have already seen, in his famous passage on the eye, Darwin also saw fit to emphasise the 'numerous intermediary gradations' between an 'imperfect and simple eye' and one 'perfect and complex' as part of his explanation of how natural selection could ever have functioned to bridge this seemingly 'insuperable' gap.[27] In a sense, both writers were driven to apply such rhetorical strategies in response to the central paradigm of evolution, that *everything flows*. However, whereas Darwin could bridge his gap with a chain of deductive logic, Butler as creative writer had to rely upon the rhetorical question in order to stimulate his readers' imagination and advance his thesis by implication. Later, Butler considers the processes of digestion, the action of the heart and the oxygenisation of the blood, posing the questions:

> Is it possible that our unconsciousness concerning our own performance of all these processes arises from over-experience?
>
> Is there anything in digestion, or the oxygenisation of the blood, different in kind to the rapid unconscious action of a man playing a difficult piece of music on the piano? There may be in degree, but as a man who sits down to play what he well knows, plays on, when once started, almost, as we say, mechanically, so, having eaten his dinner, he digests it as a matter of course, unless it has been in some way unfamiliar to him, or he to it, owing to some derangement or occurrence with which he is unfamiliar, and under which therefore he is at a loss how to comport himself, as a player would be at a loss how to play with gloves on, or with gout in his fingers, or if set to play music upside down. (pp. 47-48)

[27] See chapter 3, n. 6.

Despite the difficulties involved in transforming our understanding of an abstract process, Butler still manages to come up with a number of concrete instances in support of his analogy. In perhaps the most striking of these, he is at pains to justify his original hypothesis, that our limbs and bodily organs are in fact tools which we ourselves have constructed. To this end, Butler makes reference to the phenomenon of the chick's 'egg-tooth', a horny cap on the chick's beak used to pierce the shell during the process of hatching but which subsequently falls off within the first few days of the chick's life. Countering the arguments of those who claim that the chick does not peck with purpose but 'promiscuously', Butler draws the analogy:

> Curious, such a uniformity of promiscuous action among so many eggs for so many generations. If we see a man knock a hole in a wall on finding that he cannot get out of a place by any other means, and if we see him knock this hole in a very workmanlike way, with an implement with which he has been at great pains to make for a long time past, but which he throws away as soon as he has no longer use for it, thus showing that he had made it expressly for the purpose of escape, do we say that this person made the implement and broke the wall of his prison promiscuously? No jury would acquit a burglar on these grounds (p. 62)

In the previous chapter, I proposed a definition of the evolutionary sketches in terms of Butler's aim to defamiliarise our everyday perception of mechanical devices. By inviting us to notice the sameness that exists in difference, analogy breaks the spell of our habitualised perceptions and creates the illusion of an alternative perspective. What's more, if one were to coin a striking metaphor, the effect could be still more powerful. 'Is it reasonable to suppose that it would have grown it at all unless it had known that it would want something with which to break the eggshell?', Butler asks again of the chick: 'And again, is it in the least agreeable to our experience that such elaborate machinery should be made without endeavour, failure, perseverance, intelligent contrivance, experience and practice?' (p. 61). Here, as with his description of a watch as a 'tiny creature' or the Great Eastern as a 'seven leagued foot', Butler's use of metaphor warps our familiar understanding of the world. No longer are we simply being asked to appreciate the extent of the analogy between limbs and tools, but are now forced to view the one in terms of the other, with all the consequences that this instrumental metaphor brings to biology.

These examples show that although it presented itself as a work of popular science, the writing of *Life and Habit* relied upon the same ingredients of analogical reasoning, defamiliarisation and striking metaphors as the early fictional sketches. As the latest in Butler's series of thought experiments, the theory was his most

serious attempt yet at reclassifying the phenomena and concepts of everyday experience using analogy and metaphor as his tools. For the most part, this is a task Butler carries out with little ceremony: for all their unorthodox nature, those passages I have included reveal rather the insidious nature of his analogical reasoning; the matter-of-fact tone that often accompanied his use of metaphor. However, elsewhere in *Life and Habit*, Butler squarely addresses the question of what impact his paradoxical speculations should have on our use of language.

Prior to his treatment of biological processes, Butler pauses in chapter 2 of *Life and Habit* to consider how far his redefinition of unconscious knowledge as perfect knowledge holds for mental processes other than habits. Central to Butler's argument here is the everyday observation that 'we know best what we are least conscious of knowing, or at any rate least able to prove' (p. 20). Taking the example of our knowledge of our own existence, Butler notes how in the normal course of events, this fundamental fact takes the form of a silent conviction rather than a consciously held proposition. Similarly, as with our performance of motor acts, conscious scrutiny of the matter tends rather to trip us up. 'When we have once become articulately conscious of existing, it is an easy matter to begin doubting whether we exist at all', Butler observes (p. 22). On referring to other such instances of fundamental beliefs on which conscious analysis exerts a dissolving influence, Butler is so impressed with the fit between the phenomena of motor habits and those of cognition as to suggest that a common mechanism underlies both. As a musician's self-consciousness while performing a piece leads to a breakdown in performance, so Butler argues that 'reasoning must be so rapid as to defy conscious reference to first principles, and even at times to be apparently subversive of them altogether, or the action will halt'. In effect, Butler was proposing a revised epistemology, one in which our common sense convictions and intuitions were acknowledged to be developmentally more superior than the fruits of discursive knowledge:

> Knowledge is in an inchoate state as long as it is capable of logical treatment; it must be transmuted into that sense or instinct which rises altogether above the sphere in which words can have being at all, otherwise it is not yet vital. (p. 29)

Clearly, like his reclassification of limbs and bodily organs as machines, Butler's revised epistemology also has its roots in a metaphorical transportation of the qualities of habit formation, this time to cognition. However, my focus here is on

Butler's follow up comments. 'If there is any truth in the above,' he begins, 'it should follow that our conception of the word "science" and "scientific" should undergo some modification':

> Not that we should speak slightingly of science, but that we should recognise more than we do, that there are two distinct classes of scientific people, corresponding not inaptly with the two main parties into which the political world is divided. The one class is deeply versed in those sciences which have already become the common property of mankind; enjoying, enforcing, perpetuating, and engraining still more deeply into the mind of man acquisitions already approved by common experience, but somewhat careless about extension of empire, or at any rate disinclined, for the most part, to active effort on their own part for the sake of such extension - neither progressive, in fact, nor aggressive - but quiet, peaceable people, who wish to live and let live, as their fathers before them; while the other class is chiefly intent upon pushing forward the boundaries of science, and is comparatively indifferent to what is known already save in so far as necessary for purposes of extension. These last are called pioneers of science, and to them alone is the title 'scientific' commonly accorded; but pioneers, important to an army as they are, are still not the army itself, which can get on better without the pioneers than the pioneers without the army. Surely the class which knows thoroughly well what it knows, and which adjudicates upon the value of the discoveries made by the pioneers -- surely this class has as good a right or better to be called scientific than the pioneers themselves. (pp. 30-31)

The distinction Butler makes between scientists and pioneers is one of the characteristic features of the argument of *Life and Habit.* However, what is seldom remarked upon is the way in which Butler clearly viewed this matter to require, not simply a change of attitude, but a modification of our language. As I have argued, the paradoxical speculations of Butler's early evolutionary writings conceal a real purpose to bring about conceptual change by manipulating the meaning of certain terms. Time and again in *Life and Habit* Butler draws attention to how the meaning of words depends very much on custom and use. As a further example, we could cite the related distinction Butler makes in this chapter between 'law' and 'grace' and which I first referred to in my introduction. According to Butler, in consciously striving after new knowledge, the pioneer is subject to law whereas the scientist, acting on the perfected unconscious knowledge of common sense, is in a state of grace. Significantly, in making use of these theological terms, Butler sees his role as stealing back the word *grace* from the use to which it has been put by the Pauline Christian tradition, bringing out, thereby, its older, pagan meaning:

> And grace is best, for where grace is, love is not distant. Grace! the old Pagan ideal whose charm even unlovely Paul could not withstand, but, as the legend tells us, his soul fainted within him, his heart misgave him, and, standing alone on the seashore

> at dusk, he 'troubled deaf heaven with his bootless cries,' his thin voice pleading for grace after the flesh.
>
> The waves came in one after another, the sea-gulls cried together after their kind, the wind rustled among the dried canes upon the sandbanks, and there came a voice from heaven saying, 'Let My grace be sufficient for thee.' Whereon, failing of the thing itself, he stole the word and strove to crush its meaning to the measure of his own limitations. But the true grace, with her groves and high places, and troups of young men and maidens crowned with flowers, and singing of love and youth and wine - the true grace he drove out into the wilderness - high up, it may be, into Piora, and into such-like places. Happy they who harboured her in her ill report. (pp. 38-39)

Clearly, Butler felt there to be a sufficiently convincing conceptual similarity between the kind of pagan grace which he fancied he saw in the appearance and behaviour of the mountain villagers of his beloved Italy and the smooth, unconscious facility of habitual actions or the unquestionable certainty of common sense. And in providing a context of use more in keeping with the original pagan meaning of the word, he could challenge a usage that he felt had stripped the word of all its associations with beauty and charm.

In passages such as these, the subject of linguistic and conceptual change itself seems to take central stage in *Life and Habit*. In the previous chapter, I showed how the preface to 'Lucubratio Ebria' can be interpreted as Butler self-consciously reflecting upon the status of his text as a valid alternative to our familiar understanding of the world. Similarly, the account Butler gives of the role illusion plays in human intellectual development was central to my discussion of how the sketches shaped his later held belief in the role metaphor played in bringing about linguistic and conceptual change. Later in *Life and Habit,* as Butler seeks to find justification for our familiar understanding of personal identity, he has cause to reflect on the nature of language in ways which again seem relevant to our argument.

In effect, Butler's argument for a more profound understanding of personal identity is based upon a metaphorical extension of Darwin's critique of species, as he himself explains:

> Personal identity, then, is much like species itself. It is now, thanks to Mr. Darwin, generally held that species blend or have blended into one another; so that any possibility of arrangement and apparent subdivision into definite groups, is due to the suppression by death both of individuals and whole genera, which, had they been now existing, would have linked all living beings by a series of gradations so subtle that little classification could have been attempted. (p. 102)

In the same manner in which species gradually blend into each other with infinitesimal graduations, so Butler sees continuity between offspring, embryo, ovum

and ancestor, as far back as the 'primordial cell'. In preoccupying himself with personal identity then, Butler is on familiar territory, revisiting in fact the provocative argument from *Origin of Species* which originally set him speculating on the problem of classification some dozen years before. It is therefore significant in terms of my argument in the last two chapters that he should pause here to reflect upon what consequences this critique of identity has for our understanding of language. According to Butler, when we seek rational grounds for our understanding of identity as 'a simple definite whole', we are immediately impressed with what a 'nebulous and indefinable aggregation of many component parts' our perception of existence actually is (p. 78). Like Hume before him, Butler points to our fleeting moods, changing fortunes and developing opinions, as well as the phenomena of digestion and amputation, to argue that 'as soon as we leave common parlance on one side, and try for a scientific definition of personality, we find that there is none possible'. Drawing on his revised theory of knowledge, Butler simply felt logical analysis was not up to the task of pinning down this crucial concept 'any more than there can be a demonstration of the fact that we exist at all' (p. 81). But if logic was not responsible for our commonplace understanding of identity, what was? For Butler, the answer involved a lengthy reference to his evolutionary beliefs:

> Assuming, then, that every one knows what is meant by the word 'person' (and such superstitious bases as this are the foundations upon which all action, whether of man, beast, or plant, is constructed and rendered possible; for even the corn in the fields grows upon a superstitious basis as to its own existence, and only turns the earth and moisture into wheat through the conceit of its own ability to do so, without which faith it were powerless; and the lichen only grows upon the granite rock by first saying to itself, 'I think I can do it'; so that it would not be able to grow unless it thought it could grow, and would not think it could grow unless it found itself able to grow, and thus spends its life arguing in a most vicious circle, basing its action upon a hypothesis, which hypothesis is in turn based upon its action) -- assuming that we know what is meant by the word 'person,' we say that we are one and the same from the moment of our birth to the moment of our death, so that whatever is done by or happens to any one between birth and death, is said to happen to or be done by one individual. This in practice is found to be sufficient for the law courts and the purposes of daily life, which, being full of hurry and the pressure of business, can only tolerate compromise, or conventional rendering of intricate phenomena. (p. 82)

This is a long and complex passage, indicative of Butler's tendency to conflate evolutionary with intellectual development. Most basically, Butler's use of *superstition* here can be linked to another coinage of his in this passage, the concept of *faith*. For Butler, a leap of faith is any act of will which takes us beyond the paradoxes and contradiction in terms occasioned by the free play of conscious reasoning and onto the solid ground of an unjustifiable conviction without which no

practical activity would be possible. In terms of organic evolution, Butler sees this as the very basis of the Lamarckian *nisus*, the conviction that functions as the precondition for growth and which he would later term *cunning*. However, in this passage, *superstition* also appears to function as a metaphor to describe the 'working definition' of a word, or that meaning which has come into being through the exigencies of every day practical activity. As Butler later states:

> When facts of extreme complexity have to be daily and hourly dealt with by people whose time is money, they must be simplified, and treated much as a painter treats them, drawing them in squarely, seizing the more important features, and neglecting all that does not assert itself as too essential to be passed over -- hence the slang and cant words of every profession, and indeed all language. (pp. 82-83)

What came first, Butler seems to be saying, was the human need to act, to fulfil some purpose for which a rough heuristic was required as a necessary precondition. Born out of the need to act then, it is little wonder our concepts do not find rational justification under the scrutiny of logical analysis. For Butler, they were analogous to his machine-like limbs insofar as they owed their existence to a similarly pragmatic process, that is one in which form follows function. Elaborating on this definition, Butler draws out the consequences for our understanding of language:

> for language at best is but a kind of 'patter,' the only way, it is true, in many cases, of expressing our ideas to one another, but still a very bad way, and not for one moment comparable to the unspoken speech which we may sometimes have recourse to. The metaphors and *façon de parler* to which even in the plainest speech we are perpetually recurring (as, for example, in this last two lines, 'plain,' 'perpetually,' and 'recurring,' are all words based on metaphor, and hence more or less liable to mislead) often deceive us, as though there were nothing more than what we see and say, and as though words, instead of being, as they are, the creatures of our convenience, had some claim to be the actual ideas themselves concerning which we are conversing. (p. 83)

It seems clear that Butler's main aim in this passage is to propose a pragmatic view of language as a tool which can be manipulated and adapted to purpose. As this passage implies, instances of slippage in texts often lead us to an awareness of the metaphorical basis of language, and, by extension, metaphor itself as the means by which linguistic change may be brought about. Concluding these reflections, Butler pauses to inform us that he has recently received a letter from a friend in New Zealand which adequately expresses these very ideas. As Jones has explained, this is not Butler donning a mask for once but an actual excerpt from a letter received

from one of his correspondents[28]:

> 'Words, words, words,' he writes, 'are the stumbling-blocks in the way of truth. Until you think of things as they are, and not of the words that misrepresent them, you cannot think rightly. Words produce the appearance of hard and fast lines where there are none. Words divide; thus we call this a man, that an ape, that a monkey, while they are all only differentiations of the same thing. To think of a thing they must be got rid of: they are the clothes that thoughts wear -- only the clothes. I say this over and over again, for there is nothing of more importance. Other men's words will stop you at the beginning of an investigation. A man may play with words all his life, arranging them and rearranging them like dominoes. If I could *think* to you without words you would understand me better.' (pp. 83-84)

In the substance of this passage there is, I would argue, a clear and urgent message Butler wishes to relate to his reader. In view of his previous comments on the pragmatic origins of linguistic conventions, and in the context of a work in which time and time again Butler attempts to manipulate the meaning of words to purpose by exploiting their metaphorical connections, such comments function to provoke the reader into the frame of mind necessary to give Butler's defamiliarised descriptions a fair hearing. Later Butler augments the observations of this correspondent, admitting that 'it is not easy at first to break the spell which words have cast around us, and to feel that one person may become many persons' (p. 94). There is a sense then that the ideal reader of *Life and Habit* is one who can enter fully into the metaphorical logic of Butler's investigation by acknowledging that our familiar understanding of the world is a 'superstition' based on 'other men's words'. As Butler's correspondent suggests, this is no mean feat as these conventional meanings create the illusion of hard and fast lines preventing us from conceiving alternative arrangements with just as much claim to legitimacy. And in an ideal world we could resort to some alternative form of communication that doesn't rely on a medium that always brings with it a history of use. However, if the reader is able to effect that 'slight shift to a metaphorical understanding', which Breuer and Howard describe, Butler's method of resorting to defamiliarised descriptions, extended analogies, and blunt metaphors also has the potential to convince.[29]

Butler's comments in *Alps and Sanctuaries* on the role that illusions have played in our intellectual development illustrates just how seriously he took the possibility that one could evolve different ways of seeing the world. Not only this, but the rhetoric of the preamble to 'Lucubratio Ebria', with its references to shadowy

[28] See Jones' reference to letter from Thomas William Gale Butler in the prefatory note to 'The Germs of Erewhon and of Life and Habit', in *Notebooks*, pp. 39-42 (p. 42).
[29] See chapter 3, n. 27.

duplicity, ambiguity and draped figures also suggests that it was with this sketch in particular that Butler's attitude began to shift away from viewing his reclassification strategy as a toy to understanding its potential as a valuable tool. By this stage in my argument it should be clear that in 1877 when Butler wrote *Life and Habit*, he was 'in very serious earnest' about the alternative world he had created. However, would his readers join him in this defamiliarised dimension? Butler might find himself in an interpretative community of one. He therefore required his readers to share in his discovery by telling them how he came to recreate the world. *Life and Habit* closes with the address:

> I admit that when I began to write on my subject I did not seriously believe in it. I saw, as it were, a pebble on the ground, with a sheen that pleased me; taking it up, I turned it over and over for my amusement, and found it always grow brighter and brighter the more I examined it. At length I became fascinated, and gave loose rein to self-illusion. The aspect of the world seemed changed; the trifle which I had picked up idly had proved to be a talisman of inestimable value, and had opened a door through which I caught glimpses of a strange and interesting transformation […]
>
> What am I to think or say? That I tried to deceive others till I have fallen a victim to my own falsehood? […]
>
> Will the reader bid me wake with him to a world of chance and blindness? Or can I persuade him to dream with me of a more living faith than either he or I had as yet conceived as possible? As I have said, reason points remorselessly to an awakening, but faith and hope still beckon to the dream. (pp. 306-07)

The faint echoes of Newton here notwithstanding, in terms of the argument that I have developed over the last two chapters, this would seem to be a reasonably accurate description of how Butler came to write *Life and Habit*, containing reference to the idle amusement of 'Darwin Among the Machines', the fascination and self-illusion of 'Lucubratio Ebria' to the growing awareness that the reclassification strategy was actually a valuable charm capable of re-creating the world. As his tone in these closing comments suggests, Butler was keenly aware of the moral value of his theory. After all, as creator rather than conduit of meaning, Butler evidently had a specific purpose in mind in so re-classifying the objects of experience. In the following chapter, I give full consideration to the question of just what value Butler felt his Life and Habit theory possessed. However, in our closing comments here, we might touch upon this discussion as far as it pertains to Butler's obvious belief that his reclassifications had the potential to bring about conceptual change. To this end, I suggest here one possible framework.

In his *A Cognitive Theory of Metaphor* (1985) Earl R. Mac Cormac theorises the relationship between metaphors, communities and cognitive change with

reference to the same generative model that I have argued is suggested by Butler's comments on the role which illusion has played in human development. According to this framework, metaphor functions creatively to envisage new possibilities for meaning:

> Metaphor is the creative cognitive process of activating widely separated areas of the long-term memory and of combining normally unassociated concepts. These concepts are juxtaposed in a meaningful manner because at least some of the semantic features of each concept are similar to one another. The metaphoric conceptual process produces new hypotheses and new expressions of experience and suggests new possibilities for perceiving the world. Often the motivation for this process arises from deeply felt emotions; desiring to express a passionate feeling about life, the poet consciously or unconsciously invents new language. The scientist struggling to understand a strange phenomenon finds the normal theories unable to account for it so creates a new metaphoric concept by taking the categories of one theory and applying them to another.[30]

Obviously, this basic statement of Mac Cormac's position is highly suggestive in pointing up a possible means by which we might read from Butler's side of the story. There is, as I have said, a real drive at the heart of *Life and Habit* to make something new. But how could Butler expect his strange and interesting transformation to take hold? Developing his basic position, Mac Cormac then turns to consider the evolutionary value of the metaphoric concept:

> As an expression of the cognitive activity of the brain, metaphor interacts with culture not only because it depends on society's stock of language acquired by the individual and stored in the long term memory but also because new metaphors change the language. New metaphors change the stock of language used by society, which in turn becomes stored in long-term memory, thereby changing human conceptual activity. Changes in culture can cause changes in environment, thereby affecting the biological adaptability of the human organism. Thus through conceptual metaphoric changes in language, biological evolution may be influenced. (p. 150)

As Mac Cormac explains, the transformation through metaphor of human conceptual understanding is only the beginning. Once this modification has been affected, we can then consider its effect on human performance. For example, does any one particular conceptual arrangement of the world, or viewing the world this way instead of that way, lead to behaviour with significant advantages for the possessor? If the answer is yes, then modifications of human conceptual activity can, through participating in the evolutionary process, impact upon biological

[30] Earl R. Mac Cormac, *A Cognitive Theory of Metaphor* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), p. 148.

evolution. In this chapter and in the last, we have seen how Butler often blurs the distinction between cognitive and biological development, whether it be in the context of his discussion of illusions or in the leap of faith that is necessary before action or communication can take place. There would therefore appear to be a similar component to Butler's thought, one that also considers the pragmatic value of the resulting conceptual modification by setting it to work in the evolutionary process. This side of the argument I intend to develop in the following section when we consider the value Butler felt his theory possessed. However insofar as we are here concerned with what this framework can tell us about the pre-conditions for success during the initial stages of conceptual change, Mac Cormac's comments are revealing:

> metaphor forces the hearer to search for a meaning to examine analogies and disanalogies in the belief that the author intended these semantically anomalous words to generate meaning rather than gibberish. Unless a hearer believes an odd juxtaposition of referents to be intentionally meaningful, the semantic anomaly is understood as a mistake in grammar rather than as a metaphor. The background knowledge and the context help the hearer to decide whether odd language should be taken as a mistake or as an intentional metaphor. If one tries hard enough, the imagination can convert almost any combination of words into a meaningful expression. But the hearer must decide whether to engage in the imaginative act of trying to construct suggestive hypotheses out of the unusual juxtaposition of referents. (pp. 175-76)

Philosophers since Plato have pointed out how the poet's role as creator often places him at odds with the real world. However, there is clearly a difference between visionary writing which is meant to be taken 'in very serious earnest' and that in which the challenge to reality is felt to be lacking in motivation; and when it comes to the latter, we tend to call it comedy. As I have already argued, the failure of Butler's metaphors either to break the spell of our habitualised conceptions or to impress upon us sufficient points of similarity between two hitherto disparate classifications can lead to confusion or the puzzlement of paradoxical humour. In such cases, it would seem clear that as readers, we view the resulting metaphors as lacking in motivation; or alternatively, perhaps, created for the sole purpose of entertainment.

In the end, Butler asked too much of his Victorian readers and *Life and Habit* fell flat. Of course, he did his case no practical good at all by deliberately mixing his speculations with moments of levity. However, we can also suggest another reason why *Life and Habit* failed to convince. Long before Butler even read Darwin, he was particularly sensitive to the fact that the meaning of words depended very much on

consensus. As his writings as far back as the Cambridge pieces reveal, it was this awareness, coupled with a fascination for novelty and detail, which enabled him to warp our familiar understanding of terms such as *sincerity* and *distrust*. Given then that Butler's speculations began already from an advanced level of awareness into the lability of meaning, what appeared convincing to Butler might not have appeared likewise to his readers. 'Are not the realities of the world based on and do not they grow out of its illusions?' Butler asks in the notebooks, 'If so, a reality is only an illusion so strong and so universal no one can resist it.'[31] The fact that he could compose such an entry suggests a certain ability to inhabit both sides of the veil. Having entered fully into the metaphorical logic of Darwin's critique of species, Butler knew the power of the illusions which metaphors could create. His biggest mistake with *Life and Habit* was perhaps the assumption that everyone else did too.

[31] See chapter 3, n. 32.

CHAPTER FIVE

Between Science and Religion: the Attack on Science and *Life and Habit* as Expedient Illusion

In the preceding chapter, I attempted to show how Butler's literary imagination played a fundamental role in the development of his Life and Habit theory. However, *Life and Habit* was more than just a vehicle for Butler to present his modified classifications. In this chapter, I wish to address those remaining elements of Butler's project in *Life and Habit,* namely the attack on professional science and the moral value Butler felt his theory possessed. As we shall see, in both cases, Butler's revised epistemology played a central role in shaping his approach.

In my introduction, I refer to Frank Miller Turner's claim that Butler altered the purpose of *Life and Habit* following an exchange with the physician and physiologist W. B. Carpenter. According to Turner, during the process of composition, Butler approached Carpenter for permission to quote from his work. When Carpenter refused on the grounds that amateurs should refrain from making contributions to serious scientific debate, Butler went on the offensive. As Turner describes it, Butler harboured such a deep resentment over this exchange that he decided to use the occasion of the publication of *Life and Habit* to register a very public protest against 'cultural domination by experts'. 'One object of *Life and Habit* was to place the distrust of science upon a scientific basis.', Butler quips in a note.[1] 'For his own self-preservation', Turner argues,

> Butler needed to establish the right of a nonscientifically trained writer to publish a 'scientific' treatise that could receive serious attention. Just as he had believed that by ordinary grace a Christian could avoid sin, Butler now subscribed to the belief that ordinary common sense represented a more perfect form of knowledge that the theories of professionals.[2]

Turner's language here seems to suggest that the revised epistemology Butler presents in *Life and Habit* was somehow a reaction against the assumption of professional scientists such as Carpenter that only they could speak on behalf of nature. Although it is unclear from Turner's study exactly when the exchange with

[1] See *Memoir*, I, p. 266.
[2] *Between Science and Religion*, p. 173.

Carpenter took place, he reports mention of it in a letter from Francis Darwin in October of 1877. However, as we have seen in the previous chapter, Butler's theory was complete in its main propositions by February of 1876, almost two years before it was published. In effect then, Butler's paradoxical epistemology, his critique of conscious reasoning and defence of common sense, all the 'ammunition' in fact that he needed to conduct his attack on science, were already encoded in the Life and Habit theory prior to his conversation with Carpenter, needing only the friction of Butler's resentment to touch them off. To acknowledge this point, I would argue, is to be impressed by the fact that despite all its blustering, the attack on science was at least a consistent expression of a world view which Butler had already arrived at through his series of thought experiments.

In the previous chapter, I have already discussed a passage from the text in which Butler contrasts the graceful common sense of the layperson with the rather awkward self-consciousness of the 'pioneer' professional scientist. In his essay on Butler, Lightman also deals with this distinction, illustrating how in using evolutionary theory to challenge the very notion of who deserves to be called a 'scientist' Butler succeeds in 'hoisting Darwin and his followers upon their own petards'.[3] A little later in *Life and Habit*, Butler develops his criticism of institutional science, though this time motivated by an intensity of feeling which goes beyond any wry attempt at word play. Here, he attacks the profession head on, branding it elitist and untrustworthy, and pretending to a position of privilege for which its methods leave it ill-qualified to fulfil:

> Let us have no more Lo, here, with the professor; he very rarely knows what he says he knows; no sooner has he misled the world for a sufficient time with a great flourish of trumpets than he is toppled over by one more plausible than himself. He is but medicine-man, augur, priest, in its latest development; useful it may be, but requiring to be well watched by those who value freedom. Wait till he has become more powerful, and note the vagaries which his conceit of knowledge will indulge in. The Church did not persecute while she was still weak. (p. 41)

But again despite the intensity of feeling, Butler's accusations draw much of their force from his redefinition of conscious knowledge as unreliable. Unlike common sense and received wisdom, scientific knowledge is constantly subject to revision. New research leads to new insights and developments which cause us to alter, reassess or sometimes abandon our current theories. Taking the temporary nature of scientific knowledge as his starting point, Butler refracts this observation through

[3] '*Against the Grain*, p. 137.

the lens of his revised epistemology to present the scientist as an opportunist, only the latest in a long line of frauds pretending to a position of authority which history clearly shows us is only provisional. However, Butler's revised epistemology is not the only weapon employed here. As Turner has pointed out, Butler's linguistic scepticism also provides him with a stick to beat the professional scientist. '*Qui s'excuse, s'accuse*', Butler writes in *Life and Habit*, 'as long as a demonstration is still felt necessary, and therefore kept ready to hand, the subject of such demonstration is not yet securely known' (p. 30). According to Turner, such passages demonstrate that for Butler, 'discursive proof and discursive knowledge testified to their own inadequacy'.[4] After all, the need to support a proposition was a sure sign that it was not yet self-evident, as all true knowledge ought to be. In the previous chapters, I have argued that Butler's linguistic scepticism was heavily influenced by the insights he gained into the shifting metaphorical basis of language while experimenting in his early sketches. In this sense, it could be suggested that the attack which Butler wages here gains a measure of force from his literary imagination and the insights into the inadequacies of language which it afforded him. As Butler here suggests, unaware of these inadequacies, the scientist was just as misleading as the wily theologian whom, in the eyes of some sections of the Victorian public, he seemed posturing to replace as the authoritative voice of nature.

Butler's strategy of citing the inadequacies of discursive knowledge in his attack on the professional scientist places him in a precarious situation. After all, unable to 'think to his reader without words', Butler had to rely upon the same flawed medium to develop *his* arguments. As we shall see when we come to consider his appeal to the reader at the conclusion of the text, Butler was well aware of the consequences of this paradox. However, we might here consider how his opening statement in the work also illustrates a certain awareness of how the revised epistemology of the Life and Habit theory impacts upon the writing of the text itself:

> In the outset, however, I would wish most distinctly to disclaim for these pages the smallest pretension to scientific value, originality, or even to accuracy of more than a very rough and ready kind -- *for unless a matter be true enough to stand a good deal of misrepresentation, its truth is not of a very robust order, and the blame will rather lie with its own delicacy if it be crushed, than with the carelessness of the crusher.* I have no wish to instruct, and not much to be instructed; my aim is simply to entertain and interest the numerous class of people who, like myself, know nothing of science, but who enjoy speculating and reflecting (not too deeply) upon the phenomena around them. *I have therefore allowed myself a loose rein, to run on with whatever came uppermost, without regard to whether it was new or old; feeling sure that if*

[4] *Between Science and Religion*, p. 174.

> *true, it must be very old or it never could have occurred to one so little versed in science as myself*. (pp. 1-2) [my emphasis]

In his treatment of this passage, Lightman omits the italicised sections, claiming that Butler is here simply positioning himself as a populariser addressing 'a general reading audience rather than the practitioner who offered novel scientific theories based on experiment or field work'.[5] While I agree that Butler's target reader was very much the layperson, I would argue that the unusual word choice in the italicised sections suggests that already on page one of the book that would present his counter-intuitive view of knowledge to an unsuspecting Victorian public, Butler is practising what he preaches. After all, if instinct and common sense really do have more claim to reliability than conscious analysis then one need not necessarily concern oneself with the fine details or even, as Butler suggests, exercise the necessary discipline to keep your thoughts from wandering. Here again then we have a critique of analytical inquiry and a corresponding tendency to appeal to the collective wisdom of his readership, both of which are grounded on the substance of the Life and Habit theory itself.

Such passages as I have quoted show that Butler had a quite specific motivation for appealing to a non-specialist audience. Nevertheless, he was not alone in challenging the self-proclaimed authority of the professional scientist in order to establish the right of a layperson to publish a work on scientific matters. In his essay 'The Voices of Nature', Bernard Lightman builds upon the work of scholars such as Turner to point out that the ideology of scientific naturalism held by professional scientists such as Huxley was not always shared by either the popularist or the middle class Victorian audience that they catered for. In spite of the move toward naturalism in the laboratory, Lightman insists that middle-class audiences remained 'enthralled by the traditional moral, aesthetic, teleological, and divine qualities of the natural world'. For this reason, the successful populariser was often one who, in addition to giving a literary spin to the work of professionals, also repackaged their findings to emphasise their ethical dimension. Beyond this, Lightman argues that there was even a certain amount of resentment in some circles that the professional scientist was transforming science into the exclusive practice of a professional elite. 'The publishing success of popularizers', Lightman maintains, 'indicates that there was resistance to the claim of professional scientists like Huxley to provide the only legitimate voice of nature and to their attempt to

[5] *Against the Grain*, pp. 117-18.

secularize science'.[6]

Pursuing this theme further in *Victorian Popularizers of Science,* Lightman shows how as early as 1845 with Robert Chambers' sequel to *Vestiges*, a popularist could feel the need to go over the heads of the professional scientists and appeal directly to the public for a judgement on their work. In his *Explanations, A Sequel*, Chambers responded to practitioners' criticism of his *Vestiges* by claiming that the professional scientist had become too specialised to appreciate the synthesis he had provided. 'By appealing to the non-scientific public for a judgement on *Vestiges,*', Lightman explains, 'Chambers challenged the right of the practitioner to restrict the scope of conjecture and upheld the right of the layperson to speculate in matters scientific' (p. 26). Later in the century, the case of Richard Anthony Proctor provides another instance of a popularist appealing directly to the public as the final arbiter on scientific matters. In 1881, Proctor, already a well-established populariser of astronomy, launched his own scientific journal. Entitled *Knowledge,* it was designed to challenge *Nature* for control of the popular science market and provide a vehicle for Proctor to proselytise against a professionalizing, hierarchical vision of science. According to Lightman,

> Proctor, like Chambers before him, maintained that scientific controversies were resolved by appealing to the public. Elite scientists had no monopoly over the discovery and determination of scientific truth. At stake in the pages of Proctor's journal was the very meaning of science, the issue of who should participate in the making of knowledge, and the boundaries between practitioner and public.[7]

On considering the case of a number of such figures, Lightman argues that besides maintaining the tradition of natural theology, many popularisers of the period also drew on a 'republican image' of the scientific community, representing a real obstacle to Huxley's attempt to 'establish the ideal of the professional scientist, based on a notion of expertise and special training'.[8]

Lightman's analysis provides an interesting context to Butler's appeal to the

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[6] 'Voices of Nature', pp. 188,191.

[7] *Victorian Popularizers of Science*, pp. 350, 351. During the early 1880s, Proctor conducted a very public quarrel with the then editor of *Nature*, Norman Lockyer over the lack of respect which Lockyer had apparently accorded *Knowledge* in private correspondence between the editors. In his *Victorian Popularizers of Science*, Lightman considers Proctor's strategy of turning a private matter into a public debate to be typical of Proctor's 'republican' credentials (pp. 348-351). See also Lightman's review of Proctor's aims as a populariser in 'Marketing Knowledge for the General Reader: Victorian Popularizers of Science', *Endeavour*, 24 (2000), 100-06 (p. 105).

[8] *Victorian Popularizers of Science*, p. 496.

common sense of his readership. Although this appeal is based upon the warped epistemology of the Life and Habit theory, the position Butler outlines at the beginning of *Life and Habit* seems to map well onto the concerns of a significant number of his contemporaries. In my final chapter, I return to Lightman's arguments to show how Butler's continuing references to the authority of the general public are increasingly contrasted with the questionable motives of an elite class of professional scientists. However, we might look ahead here just briefly to one strand of the argument of this later chapter insofar as it forms a substantial focus of the following section. As I have argued in chapter one, the personal crisis Butler suffered as a young man impressed upon him the belief that behind every author's interpretation of the facts there is always an intention. Indeed, as I will shortly illustrate, so keenly did Butler adhere to this belief that he goes to great lengths at the close of *Life and Habit* to emphasise that his work too ought to be judged on its author's intentions. When taken into consideration with Lightman's analysis of such figures as Chambers and Proctor, Butler's emphasis on authorial intention provides an interesting context to his attack on scientific professionals. It has been suggested that the real force behind the drive to professionalise science during the late nineteenth century lay in the attempts of its practitioners to gain social and political status.[9] 'Men like Huxley and Tyndall', Tess Cosslett observes, 'were "outsiders", self-made men who had not been educated through traditional English establishment channels'.[10] It is therefore not altogether unreasonable to suspect that such writers had vested interests in making such aggressive movements toward professionalisation. In his later essays, this is often the conclusion Butler reaches, distilling out of the arguments of his professional opponents a quest for fame, status and financial gain. Though the sheer devious energy with which he carries out his attack has often detracted from his credibility and invited accusations of paranoia, Lightman's work arguably re-contextualises this attack affording the opportunity for a more meaningful analysis.

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[9] See Frank Miller Turner, 'John Tyndall and Victorian Scientific Naturalism', in *John Tyndall: Essays on a Natural Philosopher*, ed. by W. H. Brock et al. (Dublin: Royal Dublin Society, 1981), pp. 169-180; and Turner's 'Victorian Scientific Naturalism and Thomas Carlyle', in *Contesting Cultural Authority: Essays in Victorian Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993), pp. 131-50.

[10] *Science and Religion in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 10.

Butler's appeal to teleology and *Life and Habit* as expedient Illusion

In his reflections on how he wrote *Life and Habit,* Butler tells us that it was only at the eleventh hour with his book at the printers that he first learned the full consequences of the principle of natural selection and the extent of the difference between himself and Darwin. Reflecting on this time, Butler describes how a chance acquaintance advised him to familiarise himself with St Georg Jackson Mivart's criticism of natural selection in his *On the Genesis of Species* (1871). As a student of Huxley, Mivart's critique of Darwin's theory did not involve his outright rejection of evolution as incompatible with the Genesis Creation. Rather, he accepted the theory of descent with modification but denied that the principle of natural selection could alone account for the process of descent. According to Mivart, to be effective, evolution required a teleological or purposeful element to guide the process of development forward toward the desired and often distant goal. On reading Mivart, Butler finally understood that his model of evolution, in giving a central role to the will of the organism, was at odds with Darwin's and more akin to Lamarck's. After careful reading of Lamarck, he tells us how he went through the earlier part of his book, cutting out the expressions which he had used inadvertently and which were inconsistent with a teleological view. As Butler puts it, this necessitated 'only verbal alterations' for, though he had not known it at the time, 'the spirit of the book was throughout teleological'.[11] Being based upon the metaphor that our limbs and organs were simply devices that we had made for our own convenience, purpose and design were at the heart of *Life and Habit*. For this reason, we ought not to place too much emphasis on the scientific side of Butler's rejection of Darwinism. Although he added five chapters to the work emphasising the teleological nature of his own model of evolution and criticising the principle of natural selection as unworkable in practice, these were literally an afterthought; by this late stage, Butler's theory was very much complete. More to the point, the evangelical tone which Butler adopts at the close of *Life and Habit* illustrates that he was less concerned with which version of evolution constituted 'the better hypothesis' than he was with the moral consequences of holding one or the other to be true. After all, in addition to emphasising a purposeful view of evolution as driven by 'faith', Butler's theory also held out for a revised account of personal identity which provided for the possibility

[11] *Unconscious Memory*, p. 24.

to cheat death itself.[12]

Knoepflmacher, Willey, Turner and Lightman have all viewed Butler's evolutionary project as an expression of his need to construct 'a more living faith', though they differ in the extent to which they see his thought as containing a specifically theological element. On the one hand, Lightman has claimed that Butler's re-appropriation of Paley qualifies him to be one of the last great natural theologians of the nineteenth century; on the other, Turner makes the observation that Butler's world of thought was entirely free of 'moral, intellectual, physical and metaphysical essences'. On the whole, I tend to side more with Turner in my assessment of the evolutionary writings, though my reasons for doing so are based more upon my reading of *Life and Habit* and certain passages therein in which Butler muses on the status of his theory in the light of both his paradoxical epistemology and his linguistic scepticism.

In the chapter in which he sets out his redefinitions of *science, law* and *grace*, Butler makes reference to the paradox in which he finds himself. His is a theory which defines conscious knowledge as unreliable and argument as a sign that the position to be defended is not yet mature enough to stand unsupported; yet he has no alternative but to fall back on argument in presenting this very case. Aware of this inconsistency, Butler maintains once more that the heroism of a system lies not in argument but in those 'deeper sciences which lie far beyond the reach of self-analysis' before cautioning:

> Above all things, let no unwary reader do me the injustice of believing in *me*. In that I write at all I am among the damned. If he must believe in anything, let him believe in the music of Handel, the painting of Giovanni Bellini, and in the thirteenth chapter of St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. (pp. 41-42)

Here, it would appear that Butler deals with this paradox quite simply by squarely acknowledging its existence and offering the contemplation of literature, art and music as more valid sources of truth than discursive knowledge. However, in the conclusion to *Life and Habit*, Butler offers another solution, this time in the context of

[12] During his analysis of personal identity in *Life and Habit*, Butler speculates on the possibility that there is a super-ordinate being which stands in relation to humans as humans do to the blood corpuscles which circulate around their bodies: 'If I were myself a blood corpuscle, I should be amused at making the discovery that I was not only enjoying life in my own sphere, but was *bona fide* part of an animal which would not die with myself, and in which I might thus think of myself as continuing to live to all eternity, or to what, as far as my power of thought would carry me, must seem practically eternal.' (p. 111). Butler would go on to develop the consequences of his collective view of personal identity in a series of articles published in 1879 in the *Examiner* entitled 'God the Known and God the Unknown'.

reflecting upon the status of his text as 'just another interpretation'.

As I have argued, Butler's experience of working out his early evolutionary speculations, the hypothesis of *Life and Habit* included, sharpened his awareness that multiple competing interpretations with equal claims to validity can coexist. Darwin's critique of species may have allowed Butler to reclassify the objects of experience using metaphor and analogy as his tools, but it also brought with it the need to acknowledge that no single classification could achieve a true and lasting interpretation beyond the compromise of an alternative arrangement. In the course of his revealing analysis of personal identity in chapter 5 of *Life and Habit*, Butler's definition of words as 'creatures of our convenience' reveals the extent to which he was aware his definitions rested upon arbitrary foundations. It is therefore significant that he should make reference to this section of his text in the concluding chapter of the work:

> All truth and no error cannot be given by the scientist more than by the artist; each has to sacrifice truth in one way or another; and even if perfect truth could be given, it is doubtful whether it would not resolve itself into unconsciousness pure and simple, consciousness being, as it were, the clash of small conflicting perceptions, without which there is neither intelligence nor recollection possible. It is not, then, what a man has said, nor what he has put down with actual paint upon his canvass, which speaks to us with living language -- *it is what he has thought to us* (as is so well put in the letter quoted on page 83), by which our opinion should be guided. (p. 303)

In the first half of the passage, Butler draws upon his redefinition of conscious knowledge as beset by contradiction in terms to repeat that his theory cannot lay any claim to absolute truth. As itself the product of consciousness and reflection, there will always be an element of inaccuracy and imperfection at the heart of Butler's argument. Indeed, we could equally make use of Butler's thoughts on the shifting metaphorical basis of language in the chapter on personal identity to arrive at a similar conclusion. 'The use of truth is like the use of words;', Butler elsewhere writes, 'both truth and words depend greatly on custom.'[13] Having manipulated the meaning of *tool* and *personal identity* to encompass bodily organs and one's entire ancestral line respectively, Butler understood more than most that the meaning of words depended very much on custom and use. However, it is equally clear from Butler's final comments in this passage that he was not content to rest in scepticism. As his conclusion makes plain, the solution to such pervasive epistemological and

[13] *Notebooks*, p. 301.

linguistic relativism is to accept the author's overall intentions as the guide capable of setting the reader on the right course. But how exactly can this work in practice? Developing his argument, Butler points out the parallels between his work and a work of art in a lengthy metaphor:

> May not what is commonly called a scientific subject have artistic value which it is a pity to neglect? But if a subject is to be treated artistically - that is to say, with a desire to consider not only the facts, but the way in which the reader will feel concerning those facts, and the way in which he will wish to see them rendered, thus making his mind a factor of the intention, over and above the subject itself - then the writer must not be denied a painter's license. If one is painting a hillside at a sufficient distance, and cannot see whether it is covered with chestnut-trees or walnuts, one is not bound to go across the valley to see. If one is painting a city, it is not necessary that one should know the names of the streets. If a house or tree stands inconveniently for one's purpose, it must go without more ado; if two important features, neither of which can be left out, want a little bringing together or separating before the spirit of the place can be well given, they must be brought together, or separated. Which is a more truthful view, of Shrewsbury, for example, from a spot where St. Alkmund's spire is in parallax with St. Mary' -- a view which should give only the one spire which can be seen, or one which should give them both, although the one is hidden? There would be, I take it, more representation in the misrepresentation than in the representation […] Do what one may, and no matter how scientific one may be, one cannot attain absolute truth. The question is rather, how do people like to have their error? than, will they go without any error at all?[14]

By likening the process of writing *Life and Habit* to composing a painting, it seems unlikely that Butler wished to convince us of the aesthetic value of his work; rather, more likely given his previous comments on authorial intention is that he is here exploring the *moral* consequences of the method by which he developed his theory. In effecting his transformations on the logic of Darwin's critique of species, Butler was effectively arranging and re-arranging our conceptual boundaries in much the same manner as an artist has license to manipulate the face of nature for the purpose of a more harmonious composition. However, as Butler's subject matter was the story of life itself, the decisions he made concerning where the boundaries ought to be re-drawn were informed more by his moral sensibility that any aesthetic criteria. The question then of 'how the reader would like to have their error' resolves itself into whether he or she can also see the moral value in Butler's alternative interpretation of a purposeful universe in which all life is interconnected. This then would appear to give the meaning to Butler's reference to a reading strategy which is focused on the author's intentions. However beyond this, I would also argue that

[14] *Life and Habit*, pp. 302-03. In the following chapter, I consider how this passage and the previous have distinct parallels with others from *The Fair Haven*. See chapter 6, section 'The Christ Ideal chapter'.

in explicitly emphasising the status of his text as a construction which is ultimately dependent on the attitude of the reader, these passages challenge the assumption that Butler's appeal to teleology and purpose in *Life and Habit* can be understood with reference to a natural theology framework.

In general, Butler's relationship with theologians was fraught with mistrust and resentment over their unjustifiable claims to authority. His own practical inquiry into the contradictions between the various Gospels had impressed upon him the intellectual dishonesty and deceit of apologists such as Dean Alford, and eventually convinced him that the four accounts were just as fallible as any other historical text. Not only this, but his attitude toward Paley in *Erewhon* was also ambivalent enough to allow Butler to gently poke fun at him. And as we shall see in the following chapter, even as late as 1873 with the publication of *The Fair Haven*, Butler could still subject Paley's arguments to sustained criticism on the grounds that the author had twisted the truth. 'We do with truth much as we do with God.', Butler elsewhere observes, 'We create it according to our own requirements then say that it has created us.'[15] It therefore seems inappropriate to see in Butler's appeals to teleology and purpose the influence of the same essentialist discourse in the face of evidence suggesting that he was aware his theory was simply a construction.

Butler's notebooks are full of entries in which he reduces the question of what constitutes truth in a post-Darwinian world to a question of 'convenience'. For Butler, convenience meant acknowledging the subjective value which ideas, notions and opinions might possess beyond their objective status as demonstrably true or false. At times, Butler's use of the term is bound up with the notion that we should hold true those ideas which fit best with our existing interpretation of the world:

> The search after truth is like the search after perpetual motion or the attempt to square the circle. All we should aim at is the most convenient way of looking at a thing -- the way that most sensible people are likely to find give them least trouble for some time to come. It is not true that the sun used to go round the earth until Copernicus's time, but it is true that until Copernicus's time it was most convenient to us to hold this. Still, we had certain ideas which could only fit in comfortably with our other ideas when we came to consider the sun as the centre of the planetary system.[16]

At others, Butler seems to emphasise more the moral benefits of convenience, that is in adopting ideas which enhance our performance as human beings:

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[15] Ibid., p. 301.
[16] Ibid., p. 302.

> If we arrange our ideas in one way we find them work easily and our action edifying: if in another, they fall in confusion and action is impotent. The convenience of least disturbing vested interests, and at the same time finding room for new articles that are in demand, is the fittest object to strive after, and there is none more difficult; for, hard as truth is to hit, convenience is often just as hard or harder.[17]

On closer inspection, many of these notes have their origin in an unfinished sequel to *Life and Habit* which Butler worked upon in the years following the original publication. In the end, the process of collecting material for the work was so protracted and interrupted by the publication of both *Evolution, Old and New* and *Unconscious Memory* that when it eventually appeared in 1887 under the title *Luck or Cunning?* it was not the work Butler had originally intended. Consequently, there was a great deal of unused material which was eventually published under the title 'Life and Habit, Volume 2' in the *Collected Essays* volume of the Shrewsbury edition of Butler's collected works.[18] From this collection of notes and fragmentary essays, it is clear that in the years following the publication of *Life and Habit,* Butler's epistemological and linguistic scepticism was very much bound up with convenience as the principle which could give form and meaning to experience. In a passage entitled 'The Convenience of Contradiction', Butler reveals how this principle informs his view of his Life and Habit theory itself:

> My contention is that it will in the long run cause least discord with our other ideas to suppose that we grow our limbs and contract our habits mainly as the result of an experience retained and made available through the fact of our being endowed with an intense but unconscious memory of all things that men and animals are generally able to remember.[19]

As his comments here suggest, Butler felt that his theory complemented well the familiar form of the world. No doubt the close metaphorical correspondence between the reclassifications *heredity* as *memory* and *limbs* as *machines* contributed toward the ease with which he felt his new world view could be assimilated. But just how could it lead to the enhancement of human performance?

Butler's response to the destabilising influence of the *Origin* and the radical relativism which followed from playing out Darwin's arguments to their logical conclusions has often been compared to that of his partial contemporary, William James. In his role as psychologist and pragmatist philosopher, James belonged very

[17] '*Life and Habit*, Volume 2', in *Works*, xx, pp. 103-83 (p. 160).
[18] See Henry Festing Jones' preface to the work.
[19] Ibid., p. 114.

much to the same tradition of post-Darwin thinkers as Butler. As Clara F. Stillman, has pointed out, both writers affirmed a view of the world in which 'we are creative in our cognitions as well as in our acts, that the world is malleable to both thought and will' (p. 226). More recently, Ruth Parkin-Gounelas has drawn parallels between the two figures in the context of a study of Butler and late nineteenth-century psychology.[20] In concluding this chapter, I wish to suggest that in the light of the strong pragmatic element to his thought in *Life and Habit* and his thoughts on convenience in particular, a definition of *Life and Habit* as, what William James might call, an expedient interpretation, might be more suitable than one which emphasises too exclusively the influence of natural theology.

In the series of lectures published as *Pragmatism* (1907), James opens by describing the dilemma he felt philosophy faced at the turn of the century. According to James, the great debates of his time are dominated by two distinct and opposing temperaments, tough-minded scientific materialists and tender-minded religious idealists. However, James is not so much concerned with these specialists as with the ordinary member of the general public looking to the academy or laboratory for guidance. For such an individual, the polarised positions they find are unacceptable. 'You find an empirical philosophy that is not religious enough, and a religious philosophy that is not empirical enough', James explains. What is needful is 'a philosophy that will not only exercise your powers of intellectual abstraction, but that will make some positive connexion with this actual world of finite human lives'.[21] For James, this compromise is the method of pragmatism, a method whose aim it is 'to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences'. 'What difference would it practically make to any one if this notion rather than that notion were true?', James urges us to ask (p. 42). If there are echoes of Butler here, then there are many more points of resemblance on dipping further into James' lectures. Both men gave a central role to pluralism and to common sense in their philosophies, and perhaps most significantly, James' account of how pragmatism handles scientific inquiry at the level of language bears many similarities to Butler's manipulation of classifications:

> If you follow the pragmatic method, you cannot look on any such word as closing your quest. You must bring out of each word its practical cash-value, set it at work within the stream of your experience. It appears less as a solution, then, than as a

[20] 'Butler and Late Nineteenth-Century Psychology' in *Against the Grain*, pp. 195-219.
[21] *'Pragmatism' and Four Essays from 'The Meaning of Truth'* (New York: Meridian Books, 1955), pp. 24, 26.

> program for more work, and more particularly as an indication of the ways in which existing realities may be *changed*.
>
> *Theories thus become instruments, not answers to enigmas, in which we can rest*. We don't lie back upon them, we move forward, and, on occasion, make nature over again by their aid. Pragmatism unstiffens all our theories. (p. 46)

In effect, this is a good description of Butler's method in the early sketches, a pragmatic method of setting the classification to work in a fictional hypothesis to see what further questions it raises and how it might change our conception of the world. Similarly, James' claim that a theory is not an end in itself but something whose value lies in its being used is one that we could also apply to Butler's comments at the close of *Life and Habit* to gain a better understanding of the work.

In his earlier series of lectures *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), James applies the pragmatic method to religion in order to investigate what the 'cash value' of a certain variety of religious temperament might be. In so doing, James makes use of another distinction, that which exists between 'the sick soul' and those who enjoy 'healthy-mindedness'. For James, the sick soul is characterised in religious terms by the tendency to view evil as a necessary part of life and therefore to worry about it, harbour feelings of remorse, and repent.[22] However, he also considers how the sick soul may be an expression of a certain lack of religious sensibility, particularly with regard to the sadness that he believes 'lies at the heart of every merely positivistic, agnostic, or naturalistic scheme of philosophy' (p. 140). In a quite remarkable passage, which in its evangelical tone echoes Butler's pleas for his 'more living faith', James makes this point most forcefully, referring to the kind of naturalistic approach made popular by the success of evolutionary theory:

> Let our common experiences be enveloped in an eternal moral order; let our suffering have an immortal significance; let Heaven smile upon the earth, and deities pay their visits; let faith and hope be the atmosphere which man breathes in; -- and his days pass by with zest; they stir with prospects, they thrill with remoter values. Place round them on the contrary the curdling cold and gloom and absence of all permanent meaning which for pure naturalism and the popular science evolutionism of our time are all that is visible ultimately, and the thrill stops short, or turns rather to an anxious trembling. (p. 141)

In contrast to the sick soul, James defines healthy-mindedness variously as a tendency to look on things as good or to adopt an affirmative attitude toward the

[22] *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh* in 1901-1902 (London: Longmans, Green, 1903), p. 127.

world. Once again, the discussion is not strictly limited to religion, with James describing the means by which we can achieve 'healthy mindedness' in terms which often emphasise the pivotal role of the imagination, either in omitting certain criteria or by manipulating them:

> we all do cultivate it more or less, even when our professed theology should in consistency forbid it. We divert our attention from disease and death as much as we can; and the slaughter-houses and indecencies without end on which our life is founded are huddled out of sight and never mentioned, so that the world we recognize officially in literature and in society is a poetic fiction far handsomer and cleaner and better than the world that really is. (p. 90)

By emphasising the role which the imagination plays in promoting healthy mindedness, James brings into sharper focus the value which Butler felt his theory possessed. It may not have been an accurate account of natural processes, but arising from a process in which poetic license had been used to manipulate the face of nature by the blending and re-arranging of conceptual boundaries, *Life and Habit* was, morally speaking at least, a far more attractive and commodious construction than Darwin's.

Like Butler, James too could make the distinction between a moral interpretation of evolution which enfranchised the subject and emphasised elements of purpose, and one which decentred this subject by insisting that natural laws alone could account for the story of life. At this point in his lecture, James mentions the growing popularity in his time of those metaphysical interpretations of evolution of which Henri Bergson's *Creative Evolution* (1907) is perhaps one of the fullest expressions. As his language in the following passage forcefully illustrates, there can be no doubting the extent to which James felt such interpretations of evolution had the necessary 'cash value' to foster a healthy-minded outlook:

> In that 'theory of evolution' which, gathering momentum for a century, has within the past twenty-five years swept so rapidly over Europe and America, we see the ground laid for a new sort of religion of Nature, which has entirely displaced Christianity from the thought of a large part of our generation. The idea of a universal evolution lends itself to a doctrine of general meliorism and progress which fits the religious needs of the healthy-minded so well that it seems almost as if it might have been created for their use. Accordingly we find 'evolutionism' interpreted thus optimistically and embraced as a substitute for the religion they were born in, by a multitude of our contemporaries who have either been trained scientifically, or been fond of reading popular science, and who had already begun to be inwardly dissatisfied with what seemed to them the harshness and irrationality of the orthodox Christian scheme. (pp. 91-92)

Of course, it is the argument of this work that Butler was one such figure. In fact, he

stood at the well head of the flow of ideas James surveyed from the turn of the century as both holder and creator of his own evolutionary faith, having constructed his theory on the shifting sand of metaphorical reasoning some quarter of a century before. Having initially fallen flat with its original Victorian audience, popular taste and understanding had moved on sufficiently in the intervening years for an increasing amount of the public to understand the arguments and sense the moral appeal of Butler's 'optimistic' interpretation of evolution. With the publication of *The Way of All Flesh* the year after *Varieties* appeared, a novel constructed on the gridlines of the Life and Habit theory, Butler could convince his now Edwardian audience that he had been 'in very serious earnest' after all.

However, even though there were those like Shaw who did indeed embrace Butler's creed as a substitute religion, one cannot help thinking that this was not the point of *Life and Habit*. As Butler himself asks: 'How can people set up a new superstition, knowing it to be a superstition?'[23] Although as a younger man he had been thoroughly deceived by the illicit use of conventions, it was not belief itself which Butler objected to, as his references to superstitions, faith, illusions and dreams in *Life and Habit* make clear. Rather, in believing one had always to maintain an awareness of the artificial and conventional nature of one's creed in order to prevent mere constructions from ever again taking the guise of unquestionable dogma. This was a duty Butler felt one owed not only to oneself, but also to others, particularly in the role of author. In spite of all his posturing after posthumous fame, Butler did not offer us a body of dogma, or even a straightforward theory in *Life and Habit*, but an expedient interpretation, a text which went out of its way to present itself as a construction whose value lay in its being 'put to work' like one of Butler's limb-like machines rather than passively held. It is in this then that the cash value of Butler's optimistic interpretation of evolution lies and, applying Mac Cormac's cognitive theory of metaphor, the evolutionary value of his reclassifications.

[23] *Life and Habit*, p. 39.

CHAPTER SIX

'A Many-Voiced Satire': *The Fair Haven*

Butler's fascination for the Gospel accounts of the life of Christ was understandable. After all, it followed from his own study into Gospel authority made during final preparations for ordination that he made the momentous decision to quit Church, family and country and set sail for the New World. In chapter 1, we have already seen how Butler made use of these dramatic events in *The Way of All Flesh,* giving Ernest Pontifex' study of the Gospels a similarly key role in his hero's journey to enlightenment and autonomy. Also in this chapter, I have included excerpts from his correspondence which show how Butler continued his New Testament studies whilst in New Zealand. And although we lack conclusive proof, it seems likely that by the time Butler left the New World he had already worked out his own, rationalised account of the events of the Resurrection centring upon the hypothesis that Christ had in fact been taken down from the cross alive. Arriving back in London in 1865, Butler published this theory in the so called Resurrection pamphlet before turning to painting and his evolutionary speculations for the rest of the decade. But the subject of the Biblical Criticism continued to occupy him. As we have seen in chapter 4, Butler temporarily halted his evolutionary investigations in 1871 following the publication of *Erewhon* when the temptation to develop the conclusions of his pamphlet in the form of *The Fair Haven* was too strong to resist. Even in his final work *Erewhon Revisited,* Butler uses the events of this novel to speculate at length upon the origin and consequences of the 'myth' of Christianity.

Such profound and sustained interest over many decades clearly indicates that the question of the status of scripture in a rationalist age fascinated Butler every bit as much as the imaginative potential of evolutionary theory. Moreover, like the early evolutionary writings, *The Fair Haven* bears adequate testimony to the presence of a literary imagination. More precisely, if the early evolutionary sketches and *Life and Habit* can be said to rely upon analogy, metaphor and defamiliarisation to achieve their effects, even a passing acquaintance with the basic structure of *The Fair Haven* is enough to convince that its meaning is intimately tied up with the process of negotiating the various voices, shifting tones and competing points of view which so characterise the text. Advertised as a defence of the miraculous

element in the story of Christ's life and works, the tract is presented as if authored by the late John Pickard Owen. However, prefacing the tract is a lengthy and highly detailed memoir of the late author's intellectual and spiritual development supposedly penned by his surviving brother, William. Moreover, on closer inspection the reader is made aware of just how much of an influence William has exerted over John's text. Not only does his candid description of some of his brother's former beliefs undermine aspects of John's later defence of miracles, but during the tract itself, William also periodically interrupts his brother's argument both to clarify the difficulties he has had in preparing John's scattered notes for publication and to justify the inclusion of certain isolated documents from John's correspondents. Yet further scope for inconsistency and contradiction are provided by the highly unorthodox plan John has chosen for his work. At the outset of the tract John explains his plan to take 'the most overwhelming of all miracles -- the Resurrection' and substantiate it such that 'no reasonable man should doubt it' (p. 64). However, it is first of all necessary to familiarise the reader with the arguments not only of those 'rationalist impugners' who would deny the miracle of the Resurrection, but also the weakness of existing disingenuous defences of Gospel authority. Only by displaying the candour necessary to appreciate the respective strengths and weaknesses of these arguments can the reader enter the 'fair haven' of a settled and lasting faith. In accordance with this plan, large portions of the text are given over to extensive quotations from other scholars' work, including Butler's own Resurrection pamphlet of 1865 in which of course he argues *against* the miraculous element in Christ's story.

It was Butler's habit in his former years to send copies of work in progress to Miss Savage for critical comment. In a note accompanying one such instalment of *The Fair Haven*, Butler attempts to justify the enigmatic structure of his text, explaining that he was 'obliged to feed his readers a little at first in order to encourage them to swallow the rest'. Writing in the *Memoir,* Jones sheds light on this comment, claiming that Butler's main aim for *The Fair Haven* was to get a second hearing for the Resurrection pamphlet.[1] If so, then the climactic final chapters in which John sets out his defence of Gospel authority might best be described as just another turn of the screw. Indeed, the tone of sanctimonious glibness that accompanies John's claim that the inconsistencies and contradictions existing between the Gospel accounts are in fact designed to enhance the aesthetic

[1] Letter to Miss Savage, early 1873, in *Memoir*, I, p. 172.

and moral appeal of the 'Christ Ideal' would certainly seem to point to such an interpretation. However, as I mentioned in my introduction, the extent to which *The Fair Haven* functions solely to undermine scriptural authority in a rationalist age is still open to debate. On the one hand are those like Elinor Shaffer who view 'The Christ Ideal' in terms of Butler going beyond the soft target of biblical literalism to satirise even those attempts to salvage a reconstructed faith; while on the other, Basil Wiley has argued persuasively against the assumption that Butler is consistently distanced from the character of John, pointing to the fact that certain passages in *Erewhon Revisited* seem unproblematically to advocate elements of 'The Christ Ideal' argument. Lee H. Holt has also expressed doubts over Butler's intentions in 'The Christ Ideal' in language which clearly suggests the necessity of a more refined understanding of Butler's intentions:

> The strange thing about the conclusion to *The Fair Haven*, if viewed as the satire which in many of its details it assuredly is, is that Butler himself through the rest of his life never ceased to explore the possibility of seeing truth in the terms he had set forth here -- not in logical isolation or as a thing in itself, but as a give-and-take of forces and as something which relates to the accumulated wisdom of mankind. So, in spite of the sanctimonious tone of John's argument and in spite of the fact that he never meets the unfaithful on his own grounds – as he had all along promised to do – he speaks in Butler's voice. It is satire, but what a many-voiced satire it is! (p. 56)

The idea of *The Fair Haven* as a 'many-voiced satire' is, I would argue, a useful one. While it acknowledges the obvious fact that the main aim of the text is to re-present the argument of the Butler's 1865 pamphlet whilst subtly undermining the project of the Gospel apologists, it also recognises that the idea of inconsistency itself is somehow at play in the text. In the first section of this chapter, I wish to give the reader a more comprehensive overview of the range and interaction of the voices in *The Fair Haven*. By so doing, I will be making the case for inconsistency as central to our understanding of the text.

The range and interaction of voices in *The Fair Haven*

In the opening chapter of the memoir, William gives us a lengthy and vivid account of John's childhood aversion to any form of paradox and contradiction. At times the tone slips into the comic, such as when we are told of John's discovery that despite 'the mass of petticoats and clothes which envelop the female form', women had legs 'as much as he had'. However, even if the tone is at times comic with regard to the

particular, the concluding comments to this section suggest that there is a more serious point to be made:

> Everything with him was to be exactly in all its parts what it appeared on the face of it, and everything was to go on doing exactly what it had been doing hitherto. If a thing looked solid, it was to be very solid; if hollow, very hollow; nothing was to be half and half, and nothing was to change unless he had himself already become accustomed to its times and manners of changing; there were to be no exceptions and no contradictions; all things were to be perfectly consistent, and all premises to be carried with extremest rigour to their legitimate conclusions. (pp. 7, 8)

Revelations such as these would appear to have considerable impact on our reading of John's tract, for as I explained earlier, fundamental to John's plan for *The Fair Haven* is the appeal to candour. Only by making certain strategic concessions to the rationalist position can a reconstructed yet essential Christian faith be defended. In this sense, underpinning John's argument is precisely the kind of inconsistency which he as a younger man was so vehemently opposed to. Later in the memoir, William describes a period of spiritual wandering which dominated his brother's life as a young adult. In an episode which may well describe the experience behind Butler's 'many changes of opinion' during his early years in New Zealand, we learn how John's initial inquiries into the Low Church religion of his upbringing caused him to drift from Evangelical to Baptist to Catholic, always moving on the moment an inconsistency in each system had been found. Following a period as an unbeliever, John eventually settles in the Broad Church. However, the extent to which he ever fully emancipated himself from his childhood aversion to inconsistency is brought into question when William later tells us that even as John was working out the argument of *The Fair Haven,* he seemed 'alternately under the influence of two conflicting spirits', at one time writing as though there were 'nothing precious under the sun except logic, consistency and precision' and at another 'leading the reader to believe that he disregarded the value of any objective truth' (p. 31). Such candid admissions will naturally have considerable impact on our reading of John's attempt to balance rationalism with his faith, constantly calling into question both his reliability and the validity of his results.

One other means by which Butler uses William's memoir to introduce inconsistency into the text is worthy of mention. In chapter 3 of the memoir, William mentions that following John's death, he came into possession of his notebooks, including some fragmentary notes John had made during his time as an unbeliever. These, William goes on to explain, he has decided to include for the insight they

afford into his brother's spiritual and intellectual progress, while protesting much that they are so 'exaggerated' as to 'carry their own antidote' (p. 40). There then follow a series of isolated extracts crudely juxtaposed without comment or integration, many of which directly contradict key arguments the reader will encounter later in John's tract. Most decisive perhaps, is the following passage in which John launches a powerful attack on the Christ ideal:

> Again, as to the ideal presented by the character of Christ, about which so much has been written; is it one which would meet with all this admiration if it were presented to us now for the first time? Surely it offers but a peevish view of life and things in comparison with that offered by other highest ideals -- the old Roman and Greek ideals, the Italian ideal, and Shakespearian ideal. (p. 43)

Later in 'The Christ Ideal' chapter itself, John directly contradicts this position, praising the 'natural instinct which draws us to the Christ ideal in preference to all others', including those specifically of Italian renaissance art and sculpture (p. 254). By including these entries, Butler can obviously subtly undermine what will be John's most decisive argument: any reader who takes seriously William's observation that his brother was prone to caprices, for example, would have good reason to doubt that the argument of 'The Christ Ideal' chapter was indeed John's final view upon the matter. But beyond this, I would argue that these entries serve a further purpose in the context of a work which is so obviously 'disjointed'. By presenting these extracts as disconnected fragments juxtaposed with minimal comment and interpretation, Butler is able to build upon the earlier account of John's aversion to paradox and contradiction to provide further indication of just how central the theme of inconsistency is to this text. Moreover, as the reader turns to the tract itself, the impression that the text is self-consciously drawing attention to its status as inconsistent becomes hard to resist.

At the outset of the tract, John explains that the greater number of those who have thus far undertaken to defend the miraculous element in Christianity 'have been sadly inclined to avoid a difficulty rather than to face it, unless it is so easy as to be no real difficulty at all' (p. 69). Indeed, so damaging has this sophistry been that it will firstly be necessary to familiarise his readers not only with the weakness of existing defences, but also those arguments against the miraculous element of Christianity. Like Butler's early 'Dialogue on Species', *candour* is a key word in *The Fair Haven,* appearing in one form or another on twenty occasions. And given Butler's personal grievance against his parents and the many professionals whom

he strongly believed ought not to have insulated him against the real difficulties which beset the faith, it is difficult not to hear Butler's voice in spite of the more affected elements of John's rhetorical pose.

In accordance with his plan, much of John's tract consists of references to other writers. The first three chapters for example, John devotes to refuting the arguments of one of the best known exponents of the Higher Criticism, David Strauss. It will be recalled from my introduction that Strauss' major work was translated from the original German into English as *Life of Jesus* in 1846. In it, Strauss argues that the disciples' belief Christ had risen can be rationally explained with reference to hallucinations suffered by a distressed, pious and superstitious people.[2] After careful consideration of the four Gospels as well as the character and testimony of Saint Paul, John rejects this theory on the grounds that it is highly unlikely that mere hallucinations could form the basis of a religion. 'The general belief in the reappearance of our Lord was so strong', John concludes, 'that those who had the best means of judging gave up all else to preach it, with a unanimity and singleness of purpose which is irreconcilable with hallucination' (p.103).

The argument against Strauss is arguably the most consistent of those chapters dealing with the arguments of John's opponents. Unlike later chapters, neither extensive quotations from other authors nor anonymous pamphlets or letters are inserted into the text to break up the development of a reasoned argument. One reason for this is of course that in the context of a work in which it is Butler's main aim to get a second hearing for his 1865 pamphlet, it is in his own interest as much as those of orthodox defenders of Christianity to refute Strauss' arguments. After all, the starting point for the argument of the 1865 pamphlet is that a more likely rationalist explanation for the events of the Resurrection would begin from the premise that Christ had in fact been taken down from the cross alive. Clara F. Stillman also claims that some years after the publication of his pamphlet, Butler read a translation of Strauss' second book on the life of Christ, known as the *New Life of Christ* (trans. 1865), which was not only intended for the laity, but also contained a more extensive treatment of the hypothesis that Christ had survived the Crucifixion.[3] It would therefore seem likely that Butler's purpose in these opening chapters is to present as strong a case against the hallucination theory as he can such that his own theory, to be presented later in the text, should appear all the

[2] For further details of Strauss' position see Alistair E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 5th edn (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 310.
[3] Stillman, p. 74.

more convincing. Here too then John would appear to speak with Butler's voice, blurring the boundaries between Butler and his mask; between satire and earnest polemic.

Having established that Christ did not in fact die upon the cross, John then turns his attention to the lack of candour typifying existing defences of Gospel authority in two chapters named 'A Consideration of Certain Ill-judged Methods of Defence' and 'More Disingenuousness'. In the first of these, Butler's target is his old adversary, Bishop Alford. As we have seen in chapter 1, one consequence of Butler's own inquiry into the Gospels was the discovery that Alford had deliberately downplayed the real difficulties involved in reconciling the inconsistencies between the four accounts.[4] Now in *The Fair Haven,* Butler makes his case. Beginning with an account of the more fantastic and incongruous elements of Matthew's text, John asks the question: 'How far is Matthew's account true, and how far is it exaggerated?'. In pursuit of an answer, John proposes to lay the following sources before the reader:

> Let us see then what Dean Alford - a writer whose professions of candour and talk about the duty of unflinching examination leave nothing to be desired - has to say upon this point. I will first quote the passage in full from Matthew, and then give the Dean's note. I have drawn the greater part of the comments that will follow it from an anonymous pamphlet upon the Resurrection, dated 1865, but without a publisher's name, so that I presume it must have been printed for private circulation only. (pp. 140-41)

There then follow two long quotations, one from the Gospel of Matthew followed by Alford's commentary upon the same section. Finally, John 'paraphrases' the argument of an 'anonymous pamphlet' - in reality that section of Butler's 1865 pamphlet dealing with Alford's treatment of Matthew – juxtaposing, in effect, Alford's commentary upon Matthew with Butler's commentary upon Alford.

On negotiating such a complex and enigmatic scheme, the reader might be forgiven if they fail fully to grasp the author's point. Even so great a mind as Charles Darwin seems to have experienced problems working out just who was speaking in this chapter:

> In the way of small criticisms there seems too much reiteration about the middle of the book. It would, I think, be well when long and many passages are in inverted commas, to repeat who is speaking I got sometimes confused.[5]

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[4] See chapter 1, n. 14.
[5] Charles Darwin, Letter to Butler, Apr. 1 1873, in *Memoir*, I, pp. 186-87 (p. 187).

However, Butler has yet more characters to introduce into this many-voiced satire. The following chapter, 'More Disingenuousness', begins with William exercising his role as editor once more to interrupt the text: 'Here, perhaps, will be the fittest place for introducing a letter to my brother from a gentleman who is well known to the public, but who does not authorise me to give his name.' Again, the document has been found among his brother's literary remains, and, according to William, was 'endorsed with the words 'this must be attended to'. Working on the supposition that his brother meant to include the substance of the contents at this stage in his argument, but not daring to do so himself, William explains how he has decided to give the letter and extract in full in order that the writer should 'speak for himself' (p. 153). There then follows a letter which we can deduce has been written by one of John's acquaintances from his time as an unbeliever. On learning from William that John had returned to the Church and was intending to write *The Fair Haven*, he has written to express his regret and announce that he 'cannot sympathise with the great and unexpected change' in John's opinions. Nevertheless, he commends John on his plan to enter fully into the difficulties experienced by the unbeliever:

> The scheme is a good one *if thoroughly carried out*. *We* imagine that we stand in no danger from any such course as this, and should heartily welcome any book which tried to grapple with us, even though it were to compel us to admit a great deal more than I at present think it likely that even you can extort from us. Much more should we welcome a work which made people understand us better than they do; this would indeed confer a lasting benefit both upon them and us. (p. 154)

Later in his letter, the writer urges John: 'Don't pretend to let us have our say while taking good care that we get no chance of saying it. I know you won't.' (p. 155). On the face of it, by interrupting John's text at this point with such a pressing demand, Butler is inviting the reader to judge John's attempt. Has he really presented the full strength of the case against Alford or is this simply yet another attempt to knock down a straw man? But once again Butler has a more elaborate role for this anonymous correspondent to perform. In order to help John fulfil his task, the anonymous writer suggests that John consider the case of Paley's analysis of the discrepancies between the various Gospels. Furthermore, aware that John is ill at the moment, and knowing that those who are ill 'like being saved from small exertions', he has bought a second-hand copy of Paley and cut out the chapter which he especially wants to call John's attention to. 'Will you kindly read it through from beginning to end?', he requests, 'Is it fair? Is the statement of our objections

anything like what we should put forward ourselves?'. According to the writer, Paley too is guilty of concealing the real difficulties involved in reconciling the four accounts, even as he pretends to confront them. 'I suppose that Paley felt pretty sure that his readers would be aware of no difficulty unless he chose to put them up to it', the writer surmises, 'and wisely declined to do so'. Pointing out that this is just the kind of dishonesty which John ought to be exposing, he urges him to point out Paley's unfairness in carrying the reader's attention away from the real difficulties and fixing them upon something else 'by a *coup de main*' (pp. 154-56). The letter then comes to an end at which point William in his role of editor inserts the whole of chapter 1 'The Discrepancies Between the Several Gospels' from the third part of Paley's *View of the Evidences of Christianity* (1794), in effect juxtaposing the two texts with a complete lack of commentary.

As fragments from the work of other authors inserted into John's text with no knowledge of how John himself meant to deal with them and no critical commentary to integrate them into the overall argument, the results of William's editorship here serve to illustrate better perhaps than any other instance I have included, how the various voices constituting *The Fair Haven* function. By juxtaposing a range of voices and creating a text which is so self-consciously disjointed and inconsistent, if not at times downright confusing, the reader is provoked into actively engaging with these voices in an attempt to provide the coherency and design which the text objectively lacks. Of course, in this instance as in most others encountered in the text, the dice are clearly loaded against John's stated aim to defend the miraculous element in Christianity. Indeed, nowhere is this more the case than in the final section before the climactic 'Christ Ideal' chapter, a double chapter entitled 'Difficulties felt by our Opponents'. In these chapters, John explains how he intends to select arguments from all the sources with which he was familiar in his former years as an unbeliever and 'throw the whole together as if it were his own', sparing no pains 'to make the argument tell with as much force as fairness will allow'. Should his readers 'be swallowed up in overmuch grief' at this prospect, he is at pains to point out that they have nothing to fear for Strauss, their most formidable opponent, has already been refuted. Adopting the persona of a hypothetical unbeliever, John then proceeds to put the case for the opposition:

> Our opponents, therefore, may be supposed to speak somewhat after the following manner:-

> 'Granted,' they will say, 'for the sake of argument, that Jesus Christ did reappear alive after his Crucifixion […]' (pp. 172, 173)

Once again the text is given over to a long quotation, this time running to over fifty pages, and completely lacking in critical commentary or any attempt to integrate it into the main body of the argument. In reality of course this is Butler manipulating his mask to gain a second hearing for his 1865 pamphlet, and it is insofar as this is the case that this particular interruption is perhaps most undermining of the text's central message that the miracle of the Resurrection can be placed beyond doubt. However, we ought not to lose sight of the fact that this still did not prevent a significant number of Butler's original readers from reaching this very conclusion. Moreover, although Butler has his laugh at these gullible reviewers in the preface to the second edition, he also takes care to maintain the intentional gap:

> I am not responsible for the interpretations of my readers. It is only natural that the same work should present a very different aspect according as it is approached from one side or the other. There is only one way out of it -- that the reader should kindly interpret according to his own fancies. If he will do this the book is sure to please him. (p. xx)

Even so sophisticated a reader as Miss Savage was unable decisively to gauge Butler's mood in this preface.[6] It would therefore seem reasonable to suggest that the process of interpretation itself is somehow central to the function of *The Fair Haven*, an evaluation of the text which seems all the more apt when we consider both its subject matter of how one ought to interpret the Gospels, and the many passages in the text which appear actively to fashion the reader's reading strategies.

In the memoir prefacing the tract, William recalls one particular moment when John took exception to the point of indignation to the attempts of Gospel harmonists to reconcile the four accounts into a consistent narrative: '"Harmonies!" he would exclaim, "the sweetest harmonies are those which are most full of discords, and the discords of one generation of musicians become heavenly music in the hands of their successors"' (p. 26). As we shall see, this is just one of a number of passages in *The Fair Haven* where the impression that Butler is alluding to the structure of his text becomes hard to resist. In the following section I wish to take a fresh look at the crucial 'The Christ Ideal' chapter in order to illustrate how certain passages therein seem to make reference to the revised reading strategies

[6] See introduction, n. 14.

promoted by the liberal theologists and religious thinkers of the period. By doing so, I my aim will be to show that when interpreted self-referentially, such passages provide us with an insight into Butler's method in constructing *The Fair Haven* as a 'many-voiced satire'.

'The Christ Ideal' chapter

In terms of his aim for *The Fair Haven,* 'The Christ Ideal' represents the climax of John's argument. Having impressed his reader with the difficulties involved in reconciling the four narratives, John makes a virtue of a necessity and values the inconsistencies and contradictions existing between the accounts in their own right. According to this argument, the fragmentary nature of the Evangelistic writings bring 'the Christ-ideal within the reach and comprehension of an infinitely greater number of minds than it could ever otherwise have appealed to' (p. 238). Both Willey and Shaffer have considered the influence of the liberal theology on John's position in this chapter, though they differ in the extent to which they read Butler's tone as purely satirical. In this section, I begin by considering the evidence for the case that the chapter is a satire upon the liberal theology of writers such as Matthew Arnold and the contributors to *Essays and Reviews.* I have chosen to focus on these texts for not only were they widely read, reviewed and discussed during the period in question, but also, as I have argued in chapter 1, it seems likely that Butler had at least read *Essays and Reviews.*

The origin of what Willey calls the distinctly 'modernist' apologetic within English theology can be traced back to Coleridge and from thence onwards through the Oxford Movement until by Butler's time, its influence could be seen in both the liberal theology of *Essays and Reviews* and Matthew Arnold's essays on religion, *Saint Paul and Protestantism* (1870)*, Literature and Dogma* (1873)*,* and *God and the Bible* (1875). With regard to the cultural conditions which shaped it, Hilary Fraser has noted in the course of her study of Arnold that the combined forces of scientific discovery and an increasing awareness of the results of German Biblical Criticism contributed toward English theology's shift toward a more subjective footing during the second half of the century.[7] In much the same way as Darwin's thesis provided a

[7] *Beauty and Belief: Aesthetics and Religion in Victorian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 109.

secular explanation for design in nature, and squeezed natural theology out of the debates upon the origin of structures in the organic world, the Higher Criticism, in providing a secular account of biblical events, was equally challenging of religion's role in accounting for the phenomena of history. As the century progressed then, there was an increasingly pronounced shift in religious thought toward the subjective and particularly towards valuing the aesthetic and ethical aspects of Christianity as the means by which a reconstructed faith could be consolidated.[8]

In *Literature and Dogma,* Arnold concerns himself with just what form a revised Christianity should take, a religion 'from which the incredible and the irrelevant, supernatural miracles and abstruse dogma, had been pruned away'.[9] According to Arnold, the essence of religion lies in an ethics which is heightened and animated by feeling, what Arnold famously terms 'morality touched by emotion'. As such, the literariness of the language of the Bible is particularly well suited to fulfil religion's ethical function and ought to be valued in its own right rather than contrasted unfavourably with secular histories or works of science:

> The language of the Bible, then, is literary, not scientific language; language *thrown out* at an object of consciousness not fully grasped, which inspired emotion. Evidently, if the object be one not fully to be grasped, and one to inspire emotion, the language of figure and feeling will satisfy us better about it, will cover more of what we seek to express, than the language of literal fact and science. The language of science about it will be *below* what we feel to be the truth.[10]

A similar emphasis on the contrast between science, here to be understood as Christian dogma, and the ethical import of the literary language of the scriptures can be found in the earlier work, *Saint Paul and Protestantism*. In this work, Arnold concerns himself with how the original meaning of Saint Paul's writings have been obscured by generations of mostly Protestant theologians who have treated Paul's teachings as if they encoded some dogmatic system sanctioned by his miraculous conversion experience. According to Arnold, the traditional emphasis on atonement, sacrifice and justification in Pauline theology is at odds with the practical nature of Paul's teachings, which are more broadly concerned with the question of how to lead an ethical life. For Arnold, every 'attentive regarder of the character of Paul' ought to be struck by two things. Firstly, his emphasis on 'meekness, humbleness of

[8] For more on this aspect of nineteenth-century theology, see introduction, n. 9.
[9] Reardon, p. 383.
[10] Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma: An Essay Towards a Better Apprehension of the Bible*, popular edn (London: Smith and Elder, 1889), pp. 16, 30-31.

mind, gentleness, unwearying forbearance' and above all, 'charity'; and secondly, what Arnold calls the 'solidarity of mankind', the joint interest which binds humanity together with 'the duty of respecting every one's part in life, and of doing justice to his efforts to fulfil that part'.[11] On acknowledging this practical, ethical dimension to be the true nature of Paul's teaching, Arnold concludes that it has resulted from the errant reading strategies of certain protestant theologians that Paul's message has been obscured:

> His figures of ransom, redemption, propitiation, blood, offering, all subordinate themselves to his central idea *of identification with Christ through dying with him*, and are strictly subservient to it. The figured speech of Paul has its own beauty and propriety. His language is, much of it, eastern language, imaginative language; there is no need for turning it, as Puritanism has done, into the positive language of the schools.

'Paul's figures our Puritans have taken literally', he concludes (p. 77). For Arnold, it is only by acknowledging the literariness of Paul's language that the true ethical nature of his teaching is revealed.

The contributors to *Essays and Reviews* were similarly concerned with promoting the value of a mytho-poetic interpretation of religion. At the outset of his analysis of *Essays and Reviews* in *The Victorian Church,* Owen Chadwick describes the agenda which the seven contributors shared. Like Arnold, the authors were largely of one voice in insisting that Christianity must not be bound to upholding and maintaining 'the exact truth of a detailed record of events'. Parable as well as myth, legend and poetry were capable of relating religious truth, 'even if the event which the parable describes did not happen' (II, p. 77). We have already touched on elements of Benjamin Jowett's contribution to the volume in chapter 1. However, he was not the only one calling for a re-evaluation of the doctrine of inspiration. Rowland Williams in his contribution on the work of the German scholar Baron von Bunsen also called for a new theory of inspiration in the light of findings which either dated books traditionally ascribed to a single author to radically different historical periods or questioned the authorship of others altogether. In a claim which contributed to his later being tried for heresy in the Court of Arches, Williams deplored that 'dullness which turns symbol and poetry into materialism' and argued that the prevailing interpretation of inspiration as focused on the word ought to be

[11] Matthew Arnold, *Saint Paul and Protestantism, with Other Essays*, popular edn (London: Smith and Elder, 1892), p. 26.

given up for one which acknowledges the 'spirit' of the writings.[12] Frederick Temple in his contribution came to similar conclusions. Working on the assumption that the history of Christianity had gone through similar stages to that of a maturing individual, Temple contrasted the emphasis on the Law characteristic of earlier stages of Christianity, with the present age of toleration. Summing up the contemporary zeitgeist, Temple emphasises the tendency to 'modify the early dogmatism by substituting the spirit for the letter, and practical religion for precise definitions of truth'.[13] As with Arnold's writing, again the mytho-poetic conception of the scriptures is tied up with an ethical or practical element. Henry Bristow Wilson notes in his essay that the conception of the scriptures as inspired is to be traced to 'a gradual hardening and systematising of conflicting views' which 'succeeded the fluid state of Christian opinion in the first century after Christ'. This fixation on the word obscured the true ethical dimension of Christianity as it is rendered in Christ's own words which, he claimed, 'leave no reasonable doubt of the general character of His teaching having been what, for want of a better word, we must perhaps call moral'.[14] Like Williams, he didn't reject the doctrine of inspiration altogether, but called for a subtler re-interpretation. As Wilson expressed it: 'the Word of God is contained in Scripture whence it does not follow that it is co-extensive with it'. Indeed, as he goes on to point out, under the terms of the thirty-nine Articles themselves 'one may accept literally, or allegorically, or as, parable, or poetry, or legend, the story of a serpent tempter' or 'of an ass speaking with a man's voice' (pp.176-77).

Placing the argument of 'The Christ Ideal' within the context of other writers keen to emphasise the aesthetic or subjective nature of scripture enables us better to understand Butler's tone in this chapter. To this end, we can pause at the outset to consider the extent to which these writers in constructing their positions rely on the same elements of sophistry and self-deception as Butler has already drawn attention to in his treatment of Alford and Paley. In his *Ethical Studies* (1876), F. H. Bradley pointed out how Arnold's vacuous terminology resulted in his making statements with little real substance. To define religion as 'morality touched by emotion', he argued, amounts to a tautology, 'for loose phrases of this sort suggest to the reader what he knows already without their help, but, properly speaking, they

[12] 'Bunsen's Biblical Researches', in *Essays and Reviews*, pp. 50-93 (p. 83).
[13] Frederick Temple, 'The Education of the World', in *Essays and Reviews*, pp. 1-49 (p. 43).
[14] Henry Bristow Wilson, 'Seances Historiques de Geneve. The National Church', in *Essays and Reviews*, pp. 145-206 (pp. 161-62).

say nothing. *All* morality is, in one sense or another, "touched by emotion"'.[15] Moreover, we can imagine too that the sleight of mind and want of plain speaking involved in the phraseology: 'the Bible *contains* the word of God' would not have passed Butler by unnoticed. For this reason, when we hear John going beyond his initial statement of the value of the inaccuracies contained in the Gospel accounts to argue that the Gospels were in fact committed to text at the *precise* moment when their degradation through oral transmission had reached its optimum level, we can suspect that Butler's target is precisely those same elements of sophistry and self-deception as I have mentioned above:

> *Precisely at that epoch the Gospels made their appearance.* Not simultaneously, not in concert, and not in perfect harmony with each other, yet with the error distributed skilfully among them, as in a well-tuned instrument wherein each string is purposely something out of tune with every other. Their divergence of aim, and different authorship, secured the necessary breadth of effect when the accounts were viewed together; their universal recognition afforded the necessary permanency, and arrested further decay.[16]

Much too has been made of the contrast Butler draws at the close of the chapter between the idealised image of Christ and the ideals of high art. In the memoir, William has already included certain extracts from his brother's notebooks during his time as an unbeliever in which John judges the Christ ideal to be 'but a peevish view of life' in comparison to the Shakespearian ideal or those embodied by Italian renaissance art. Would we find value in Christ's teachings if they were presented to us today asks John in another such entry? On the contrary, some of these such as 'blessed are those that mourn for they shall be comforted' are downright untruthful (pp. 43-44). However, on reaching 'The Christ Ideal', the reader finds that John's judgement upon this same extract from the now, as we understand it, inauthoritative Gospel of Matthew has gone through radical change. 'Blessed are they that mourn!', John now enthuses, 'Whose sorrow is not assuaged by the mere sound of these words?'. Taken in this wider context, the potential for irony in Butler's parting shot in the chapter is brought to the fore:

> How infinitely nobler and more soul-satisfying is the ideal of the Christian saint with wasted limbs, and clothed in the garb of poverty - his upturned eyes piercing the

[15] F. H. Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, 2nd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 315.
[16] pp. 245-56. As Holt has pointed out, John's strategy here is reminiscent of Philip Gosse's argument in *Omphalos* (1857) that the fossil record was put in place by God with the deliberate aim of testing Christians' faith (p. 51).

> very heavens in the ecstasy of a divine despair - than any of the fleshly ideals of gross human conception such as have already been alluded to. If a man does not feel this instinctively for himself, let him test it thus -- whom does his heart of hearts tell him that his son will be most like God in resembling? The Theseus? The Discobolus? or the St. Peters and St. Pauls of Guido and Domenichino? Who can hesitate for a moment as to which ideal presents the higher development of human nature? (pp. 253, 254)

Here we have another take on the idealised Christian subject than we find in either Arnold's account of Saint Paul or the authors of *Essays and Reviews*. In a shift of perspective which reminds us of the 'slight shift to a metaphorical understanding' required to realise the alternative arrangement of Butler's defamiliarised re-classifications, the reader is made aware of the other side of the coin, the alternatives which these authors in advancing their liberal reconstructed theology have either omitted, ignored or suppressed.

By making John seek heavenly justification for the inaccuracies in the Gospel accounts, Butler certainly invites us to condemn him. But this does not necessarily bring with it the necessity of rejecting John's position in its entirety. Indeed, were it not for John transforming the inaccuracies of the language of the scriptures into a creed, his affirmation of the inadequacy of this language to provide us with an accurate representation of an historical event would seem to fit well with Butler's critique of language and conscious reasoning as I have outlined it in the previous chapters. The question thus remains of whether or not there is the possibility of salvaging something of value from John's conclusions in 'The Christ Ideal', particularly in the light of Butler's thoughts on language and epistemology in *Life and Habit.*

As he is concerned with the aesthetic value of the Gospels' depiction of Christ, Butler's argument in 'The Christ Ideal' relies heavily on comparisons with works of art. Shaffer in her essay on *The Fair Haven* has shown how knowledge of those art works Butler references at the close of 'The Christ Ideal' can enhance our understanding of the text. Comparing the reputation of the *Discobulus* or *Discus Thrower* to the Baroque artists Guido and Domenichino, she notes that while Greek sculpture remained in high esteem at the time, the Italian Baroque artists' reputations were in decline.[17] In an earlier passage from 'The Christ Ideal', Butler once more has cause to reference a work of fine art, this time using Rembrandt to extol the virtues of the idealised yet fragmentary image of Christ revealed by the Gospels:

[17] *Against the Grain*, p. 80.

> It is true that those who are insensible to spiritual influences, and whose materialistic instinct leads them to deny everything which is not as clearly demonstrable by external evidence as a fact in chemistry, geography, or mathematics, will fail to find the hardness, definition, tightness, and, let me add, littleness of outline, in which their souls delight; they will find rather the gloom and gleam of Rembrandt, or the golden twilight of the Venetians, the losing and the finding, and the infinite liberty of shadow; and this they hate, inasmuch as it taxes their imagination, which is no less deficient than their power of sympathy. (p. 238)

All this of course we can take as Butler affecting the tone of mock solemnity which has characterised so much of John's writing to this point; except that Butler did genuinely have the utmost admiration for Rembrandt, and, in fact, owned one of his paintings.[18] On acknowledging this point, we might be led to the conclusion that in addition to the likes of Arnold and the authors of *Essays and Reviews,* Butler is also, to some extent, poking fun at himself. If so, the same might be said of the following passage in which Butler introduces a fifteenth-century painter from the Venetian school who, in his idiosyncratic estimation, he placed higher than any other. It will be recalled that Giovanni Bellini takes his place alongside Handel and Saint Paul in the passage in *Life and Habit* in which Butler urges his reader to believe in the works of these 'artists' rather than himself. In fact, it would not be too great an exaggeration to say that alongside Handel, Bellini was one of Butler's life-long heroes, and in his early attempts at painting in the late 1860s, he even attempted to mimic his style.[19] Again, in this passage, Butler is concerned with accounting for the value of 'inaccuracy':

> Do the works of John Bellini suffer because the hand of the painter was less dexterous than his intention pure? *It is not what a man has actually put upon his canvas, but what he makes us feel that he felt*, which makes the difference between good and bad in painting. Bellini's hand was cunning enough to make us feel what he intended, and did his utmost to realise; but he has not realised it, and the same hallowing effect which has been wrought upon the Theseus by decay (to the enlarging of its spiritual influence), has been wrought upon the work of Bellini by incapacity […]
>
> Do we not detect an analogy to this in the records of the Evangelists? Do we not see the child-like unself-seeking work of earnest and loving hearts, whose innocence and simplicity more than atone for their many shortcomings, their distorted renderings, and their omissions? (pp. 238-39) [my emphasis]

[18] In a notebook entry entitled 'Buying a Rembrandt' Butler takes us through the story of how he acquired his painting, mentioning that he had wanted one all his life: 'I might have travelled all Europe over for no one can say how many years, looking for a good well-preserved, forty-shilling Rembrandt' (*Notebooks*, p. 151).
[19] Raby, p. 104.

With this passage, not only do we face the same problem as with the passage on the merits of Rembrandt, but we also have the additional complication of what would seem to be a line, shown in italics, which Butler would later incorporate almost verbatim into the conclusion of *Life and Habit*.[20] Quite simply, how are we supposed to take all this? What is Butler's tone? As far as Butler's portrait of Bellini's short-fallings as an artist are concerned, evidence from the notebooks again indicates that Butler was fully capable of admiring Bellini for the naivety of his style.[21] In fact, as we have seen in earlier chapters, as far back as his undergraduate essay 'On English Composition', the question of style with Butler had very little to do with technical proficiency, but rather the extent to which it reflected the artist's personality and particularly his or her *intentions*.[22] It is for this reason that the reference to 'what a man has actually put down on canvas' is so significant. As I have argued in chapter 5, in the context of the conclusion to *Life and Habit*, this line also functions to promote a reading strategy in which the author's intentions are regarded as central to any understanding of the work. As I then noted, the evolutionary speculations with their characteristic technique of manipulating our familiar understanding of certain terms, require a reading strategy in which one is encouraged to engage imaginatively with these terms in order to go beyond their literal, conventional meanings. Putting all this together then, we might be led to the conclusion that here in the context of a discussion of the scriptures, Butler's allusion to authorial intention can best be thought of in terms of an alternative means of approaching the scriptures, one in which the author's intentions are acknowledged to be the locus of meaning and stability. If so, then Butler's position here would have much in common with the alternative approach to the doctrine of inspiration proposed by Arnold and the contributors to *Essays and Reviews*, that is one in which the 'spirit' that motivated the Evangelists, their intentions in secular parlance, is emphasised rather than any slavish adherence to the letter of their writings. Indeed, the addition of the second paragraph here in which Butler relates his metaphor back to the Evangelists would appear to do just that. However, here the tone of the passage shifts somewhat, embodying more explicitly that quality of

[20] See chapter 5, n. 14.
[21] Butler discusses how he admires Bellini in spite of these short-fallings in a notebook entry entitled 'The Ansidei Raffaelle': 'When I look at the head of Bellini's Doge, Loredano Loredani, I can see defects, as every one can see defects in every picture, but the more I see it the more I marvel at it, and the more profoundly I respect the painter' (*Notebooks*, p. 149).
[22] See chapter 2, n. 23.

sanctimonious glibness which is so utterly foreign to Butler's true style. For this reason, we ought rather to interpret this passage as Butler ironising the conclusions of the Higher Critics once more. Nevertheless, the inclusion of a line which in *Life and Habit* functions actively to fashion the reader's reading strategy is still significant, particularly in the context of the final metaphor Butler draws between the inaccuracies of the Gospels and the work of a painter.

Having made use of Rembrandt and Bellini to make his point, Butler turns in his final metaphor to the English painter Turner. Again, Turner was a painter whom Butler admired.[23] Here he is concerned with drawing a parallel between Turner's distinctive representational technique and the inaccuracies of the Gospels:

> We ought not therefore to have expected scientific accuracy from the Gospel records -- much less should we be required to believe that such accuracy exists. Does any great artist ever dream of aiming directly at imitation? He aims at representation -- not at imitation. In order to attain true mastery here, he must spend years in learning how to see; and then no less time in learning how not to see. Finally, he learns how to translate. Take Turner for example. Who conveys so living an impression of the face of nature? Yet go up to his canvas and what does one find thereon? Imitation? Nay -- blotches and daubs of paint; the combination of these daubs, each one in itself when taken alone absolutely untrue, forms an impression which is quite truthful. No combination of minute truths in a picture will give so faithful a representation of nature as a wisely arranged tissue of untruths. (p. 241)

Here again there are distinct parallels with another passage from the conclusion of *Life and Habit*, namely that in which Butler considers the artistic value of a scientific theory.[24] In both passages, Butler foregrounds the idea of the process of representation in either art, science or narrative as necessarily involving a departure from the form of one's subject matter. In desiring to place before the audience an idealised, schematised or simplified version of reality, an artist's or writer's intentions take precedence over the faithful recording of nature or history. There is also an impressive degree of similarity in terms of the details cited in support of this central idea: again there is a clear statement of Butler's scepticism over the possibility of achieving 'accuracy' or 'truth' and again an analysis of the basis of our perceptions as founded upon 'a clashing of small conflicting perceptions' or 'a tissue of untruths'. Such close correspondence between the two texts strongly suggests that the conclusions Butler set out in *Life and Habit* had already occurred to him in one form

[23] In *Alps and Sanctuaries*, Butler gives advice to the novice painter, cautioning them against studying the technique of the masters: 'It does a beginner positive harm to look at the masterpieces of the great executionists, such as Rembrandt or Turner' (p. 157).

[24] The passage in question I have included in the previous chapter and in the discussion that follows, the reader will benefit from a comparison of the two. See chapter 5, n. 14.

or another by 1873 when he wrote *The Fair Haven.* Finally, there is again evidence that these metaphors were somehow linked in Butler's mind with a revised doctrine of inspiration in the form of the explicit reference to the 'spirit' of the resulting composition which we find in the *Life and Habit* passage. Indeed, at this stage in the argument of 'The Christ Ideal', Butler proceeds to make explicit reference to the 'spirit' and 'letter' of an art work in ways which strongly suggest the influence of those exponents of the new theology that I have mentioned. Surveying the history of western art, Butler makes the observation that the emphasis which one generation of artists places upon imitation is very often superseded by the next generation's emphasis upon representation, and vice versa. 'It is everywhere the same story;', John concludes,

> a reverend but child-like worship of the letter, followed by a manful apprehension of the spirit, and, alas! in due time by an almost total disregard of the letter; then rant and cant and bombast, till the value of the letter is reasserted. In theology the early men are represented by the Evangelicals, the times of utter decadence by infidelity -- the middle race of giants is yet to come, and will be found in those who, while seeing something far beyond either minute accuracy or minute inaccuracy, are yet fully alive both to the letter and to the spirit of the Gospels. (p. 242)

Though he does not carry out a close-reading of these metaphors himself, Willey has also gained the impression that there is more to Butler's treatment of the liberal theology in 'The Christ Ideal' than simply the will to send it up. However, given the overall tone of the passages I have just quoted as tending to make light of the conclusions of the contributors to *Essays and Reviews*, it is problematic to see in these figures Butler's avocation of a revised doctrine of inspiration, even though we might expect him to have welcomed any departure from the prevailing literalism of his day. Much more tenable is that these figures serve a similar purpose in *The Fair Haven* as they do in *Life and Habit*, that is as self-conscious comments on the technique and purpose of the text. As such, I would argue that these metaphors represent a secular appropriation of the reading strategies promoted by the liberal theology. If so, then what light does this shed upon the conclusions I reached in the previous section?

Holt has also drawn attention to a particular passage from the memoir of *The Fair Haven* in which Butler again appears to be making a self-referential comment. In the passage in question, William recalls that his brother's discovery of the value of inaccuracy amounted to the revelation that

> the true spiritual conception in the mind of man could be indirectly more certainly engendered by a strife, a warring, a clashing, so to speak, of versions, all of them distorting slightly some one or other of the features of the original, than directly by the most absolutely correct impression which human language could convey. (p. 23)

Commenting on this passage, Holt notes that 'satire apart, is this not close to the pragmatic view of truth Butler himself was later to defend so strongly? And is this not also close to the aims of his satiric method?' (p. 50). With his first question, Holt touches upon the pragmatic element which runs through Butler's work and which is perhaps best represented by those excerpts from the planned sequel to *Life and Habit* included in my previous chapter.[25] With his second, he suggests that there is a constructive component to Butler's composing *The Fair Haven* as a 'tissue of untruths'. In the first section of this chapter I have argued that in parallel with Butler's aim to get a second hearing for the argument of his 1865 pamphlet, inconsistency and the process of interpretation itself are somehow central to our understanding of the text. In this section, we have seen how Butler appropriated elements of the liberal theology to arrive at a model of reading in which inaccuracy and inconsistency are valued insofar as they encourage the reader to focus on the author's intentions. In what follows, I wish to build upon these findings to propose a modification of our understanding of this many-voiced satire. In doing so, I will be referring to Butler's own comments on his work and the nature of the debate upon the liberal theology in the years following the publication of *Essays and Reviews.*

Joining and Disjoining Again: The art of propagating an unpopular opinion

In a notebook entry of 1885, Butler reflects on a conversation he had recently had about *The Fair Haven* with an old Cambridge acquaintance. As Butler recalls, his acquaintance was 'a good deal pained' over the possibility that 'The Christ Ideal' concealed a satirical purpose:

> 'And did you really mean none of that part seriously?'
> I said; 'Certainly not; I intended it as an example of the kind of rubbish which would go down with *The Spectator'*.[26]

[25] The question of just what role Butler's biblical studies and *The Fair Haven* in particular played in influencing the shape of his thought in *Life and Habit* is one of considerable interest, and one which I will turn to in the conclusion to this work.
[26] *Memoir*, I, p. 182.

Unlike Butler, his acquaintance had taken holy orders, and we can imagine Butler taking a certain degree of pleasure in relieving him of his doubts over this chapter. However, at other times, Butler could be more equivocal about the purpose of his work. In another exchange with Miss Savage, Butler explains why he chose to restate his argument so obliquely:

> The reason why I did not write *at* the reader (if I have not) was simply because I dared not. It would have been unsafe for me to do so, for whatever I did had to be done with a view to stupid people not seeing through it at all, and even clever people being in a good deal of doubt.[27]

Butler's comments here could suggest that he was driven to adopt an indirect mode of writing out of anxieties over the potentially subversive nature of his subject matter. Indeed, a number of authors have already argued along similar lines, including Jones who claims Butler was anxious to conceal his purpose from his father. However, in summing up Butler's intentions in the work, Jones gives us a slightly different assessment of the text:

> I believe he seriously hoped that *The Fair Haven* would induce people to reconsider the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion and resurrection. He thought that the book would be read by some who would never open a professedly unorthodox book; he hoped that such readers would come to think the matter over for themselves instead of taking their opinions second-hand. He intended it to be a help to all who, like Ernest, wished to find out, not that the Gospel accounts were all accurate or were all inaccurate, but whether they were accurate or not; and *who did not care which result they should arrive at, but were resolved to reach one or the other*.[28] [my emphasis]

Jones' comments here suggest that it was Butler's aim not only to get a second hearing for his 1865 pamphlet, but also to bring certain readers into contact with arguments which they might otherwise have avoided or rejected out of hand. In this sense, it is significant that Jones should allude in the italicised section above to the scene from *The Way of All Flesh* in which Ernest conducts his formative inquiry into the Gospels.[29] As an account drawn largely from Butler's own experience, I have argued that this inquiry played a major role in convincing Butler of the form which his

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[27] Letter to Miss Savage, Mar. 3 1873, in *Memoir*, I, pp. 174-75 (p. 175).
[28] *Memoir*, I, p. 180-81. Shaffer has also noted how *The Fair Haven* draws on an earlier eighteenth-century tradition in which irony was used as a weapon against Church and state and as a major refuge from prosecution, condemnation, censorship and harassment (*Against the Grain*, p. 64); Similarly, Stillman has considered whether Butler might have wanted to conceal his purpose from his family, though ultimately she rejects this in favour of the conclusion that Butler used irony because 'it came naturally to him' (pp. 101-02).
[29] See chapter 1, n. 20.

alternative model of education should take, that is as a process of independent intellectual development characterised by its impartiality and pragmatism. On the face of it, regarding *The Fair Haven* as Butler's attempt at encouraging his readers to undertake a similarly impartial inquiry into the status of the Gospels would seem to fit well with the evidence thus far presented. In the first section of this chapter, I have already clarified how Butler's use of juxtaposition encourages the reader to negotiate the evidence first hand; and in section two, we have seen how the figures employed reveal Butler reflecting upon the status of his text as a 'clash' of perspectives in which the reader is encourage to read beyond the letter to discern that author's intention. Beyond this, Raby has come to similar conclusions as Jones in his statement that in *The Fair Haven,* Butler is 'less concerned to establish a particular point of view than to insist on the importance of the evidence being thoroughly sifted, and to expose the weakness of the orthodox doctrine and its justifications' (p. 136). In the remainder of this chapter, I wish to explore this thesis. To this end, we begin by considering why in 1873 there was a pressing need for members of the general public to abandon their prejudices and enter fully into the arguments of the new theology.

Essays and Reviews stands together with *Origin of Species* and Chambers' *Vestiges* as a publication which challenged orthodox Christianity and gave rise to much controversy. Although the ideas it contained would eventually become widely accepted toward the end of the century, for fully twenty years after its publication, the result was 'controversy, denunciation by authority and legal prosecution'.[30] Again, much has been written about the impact of the collection. However, common to most analyses of this debate is the conclusion that at the time, a liberal position within Anglicanism was untenable. Consequently, it was widely felt that the authors should either recant their 'heresy' and return to the orthodox line, or leave the Church altogether. Two early reviews in particular illustrate how rationalist and orthodox believer alike rejected the concessions proposed by the authors. Writing in the *Westminster Review* in October 1860*,* for example, the positivist Frederic Harrison maintained that 'in object, in spirit, and in method, in details no less than in general design' the book was 'incompatible with the religious belief of the mass of the Christian public.'[31] Later in January of the following year, Samuel Wilberforce then Bishop of Oxford expressed similar sentiments: 'They believe too much not to

[30] Reardon, p. 346.
[31] 'Neo-Christianity', *Westminster Review*, 18 (1860), 293-332 (p. 295). Published anonymously.

believe more, and they disbelieve too much not to disbelieve everything.'[32] Commenting on these reviews, Gerald Parsons has noted the irony that both 'radical positivist' and 'conservative bishop' could agree that in Christian belief 'it was either/or, all or nothing -- a critical liberalism was both intellectually and morally untenable'.[33] Josef L. Altholz has come to similar conclusions in his thorough analysis of the rhetorical strategies applied in over 140 replies to the volume. While *ad hominem* attacks and renewed defences of the doctrine of inspiration were popular among those who sought to refute the Essayists, by far the most characteristic strategy identified is a particularly extreme form of the either / or argument:

> The either-or argument, argued so forcefully as to impress itself even on doubters, was responsible more than anything for the peculiar dimensions and intensity of the Victorian crisis of faith. Either you accepted all of revelation and orthodox theology, or the whole edifice would fall if any of its elements were denied – so argued the 'defenders' of the faith. The argument was double edged: if you could not accept any one point of revelation or doctrine, you must renounce, not only that point, but all of Christianity. In all previous controversies, the doubter had been given the alternative of heresy – wrong faith, but faith nonetheless. Now it was held that there was no alternative between orthodoxy and total 'infidelity.' [34]

Finally, Chadwick has shown how the argument was not simply confined to the pages of middle-class journals. Discussing a series of public lectures delivered in 1866 and devoted to a sustained effort to refute the likes of Strauss, Chadwick mentions how here too the message was sent out that 'either you must believe all or you will end by not believing'. In terms of their popular appeal, the lectures seem to have gone down well, providing certainty and comfort in the face of abstruse ideas which threatened to 'disprove' the Bible. As Chadwick notes, when they were published the following year, 'edition after edition showed how the public valued these lectures as the most cogent defence of traditional belief' (II, p. 75).

What can account for such an extreme reaction? According to Reardon, part of the problem was that in contrast to Germany for instance, 'English Christianity since the Reformation had been absolutely explicit in its appeal to Scripture as the

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[32] 'Review of Essays and Reviews', *Quarterly Review*, 109 (1861), 248-301 (p. 284). Published anonymously.

[33] 'Reform, Revival Realignment: The Experience of Victorian Anglicanism', in *Religion in Victorian Britain*, ed. by Gerald Parsons, 5 vols (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), I: *Traditions*, ed. by Gerald Parsons (1988), pp. 14-66 (p. 42).

[34] 'The Mind of Victorian Orthodoxy: Anglican Responses to Essays and Reviews', in *Religion in Victorian Britain*, IV: *Interpretations*, ed. by Gerald Parsons (1988), pp. 28-40 (pp.. 29-30, 40).

sole authority in matters of faith' (p 251). Chadwick and Ellis have also maintained that the general tone of the volume was deliberately defiant, aggressive and calculated to shock the orthodox establishment into modernising.[35] While a preface to the work declared the authors' modest intention to treat 'in a becoming spirit', subjects which were peculiarly liable to suffer by the 'repetition of conventional language' and 'traditional methods of treatment', in private Jowett could speak of his determination not to submit to this 'abominable system of terrorism' which prevented the 'statement of the plainest facts'.[36] Clearly, the essayists felt themselves in an impossible position: new scientific and historical research plainly called for a radically revised approach to scripture, yet the authorities within the Church were unable or unwilling to face up to the evidence and accept the necessity of change. The idea that the controversy over the Higher Criticism might best be described as a clash between two opposing views of the rate at which the Church ought to modernise is most clearly illustrated in the case of the liberal theologian, Fenton Hort. During preparations for the publication of *Essays and Reviews,* Hort was invited to join the project but declined on the grounds that

> at present very many orthodox but rational men are being unawares acted on by influences which will assuredly bear fruit in due time, if the process is allowed to go quietly; but I cannot help feeling that a premature crisis would frighten many back into the merest traditionalism.[37]

In the end, Hort's prediction proved surprisingly prescient, though that gave him little cause for consolation. As Ellis has noted, for cautious theologists like Hort, the impatience of the Essayists had only succeeded in setting the cause back, leaving 'the fair field of theology in ruins'.[38]

In chapter 4, I described how Butler's evolutionary thought contains a model accounting for the origin and evolution of ideas within a society. In fact, we first saw this model during my treatment of 'Lucubratio Ebria' in chapter 3 when I quoted a passage from *Alps and Sanctuaries* in which Butler describes the process of fusing or confusing ideas. In *Life and Habit* itself, Butler provides us with a further account

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[35] See Chadwick, II, p. 73; and Ellis, pp. 257-58.
[36] Letter from Benjamin Jowett to A. P. Stanley, Aug. 15 1858, in Evelyn Abbott and Lewis Campbell, *The Life and Letters of Benjamin Jowett*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1897), I, pp 275-76 (p. 275).
[37] Letter from Fenton Hort to the Reverend Doctor Rowland Williams, Oct. 21 1858, in Arthur Fenton Hort, *Life and Letters of Fenton John Anthony Hort*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1896), I, pp. 399-401 (p. 400).
[38] Ellis, p. 258.

of this process in connection with a process he refers to as 'crossing'. As Butler describes it, this process is best explained with reference to the situation in which one is suddenly faced with a foreign idea or an alternative method of carrying out a familiar process. According to Butler, at such times

> there is a clashing of memories, a conflict, which if the idea is very new, and involves, so to speak, too sudden a cross - too wide a departure from our ordinary course - will sometimes render the performance monstrous, or baffle us altogether, the new memory failing to fuse harmoniously with the old. If the idea is not too widely different from our older ones, we can cross them with it, but with more or less difficulty, as a general rule in proportion to the amount of variation. The whole process of understanding a thing consists in this, and, so far as I can see at present, in this only. (p. 159)

Later in *Life and Habit*, Butler draws out the practical consequences of this theory, providing us with a clear statement of the conservatism which underpins much of his thought:

> In the first case we see the rationale of compromise, and the equal folly of making experiments upon too large a scale, and of not making them at all. We see that new ideas cannot be fused with old, save gradually and by patiently leading up to them in such a way as to admit of a sense of continued identity between the old and the new. This should teach us moderation. For even though nature wishes to travel in a certain direction, she insists on being allowed to take her own time; she will not be hurried, and will cull a creature out even more surely for forestalling her wishes too readily, than for lagging a little behind them. *(*p. 304)

For Butler, the concept of evolution and Darwin's *natura non facit saltum* in particular wasn't merely an objective description of our physical and psychological circumstances; it also functioned prescriptively as a model of behaviour reinforcing a typically English form of gradualism in both the moral and intellectual spheres.[39] In an article published in the *Reasoner* in August of 1865 we can clearly observe this aspect of Butler's world view. Entitled 'Precaution in Free Thought', the text concerns itself with the circumstances under which individuals choose to leave the Church and their rejection of miracles in particular. A thoroughly sober piece, it begins with the observation that 'very few men can be brought in middle life to change their mode of thought to one which is fundamentally different.' More likely is

[39] In addition to Willey's analysis identifying how Butler's religious opinions seemed to drift toward conservatism in later life, a number of other writers have also passed comment on how Butler's reputation as renegade is complicated by a conservative element. G. D. H. Cole has perhaps summed up this paradox best in his observation that 'Butler, iconoclast as he was by nature, was always a bourgeois idol-smasher, as well as a smasher of bourgeios idols' (*Samuel Butler and The Way of All Flesh* (London: Home and Van Thal, 1947), p. 24).

that they will develop a superficial understanding of the new method and end up merely making an outward show of their new beliefs. 'For this reason', Butler draws the conclusion, 'I have always rejoiced that the progress of free thought in England should not advance faster than men can understand it.' Not only this but 'a sudden change of creed,', Butler cautions, 'unless a man is very clear as to the steps by which he has changed it, is not unlikely to do him as much harm as good'. By contrast, those who have 'by patient thought' emancipated themselves from a personal God are in little danger of 'suffering from the changed view of the universe which results in consequence'. The 'care, and patience, and intelligence with which they thought the matter out will still be with them, and prevent them from rushing into extravagance'.[40]

Butler's position in this short article has much in common with his later theories in *Life and Habit,* particularly in its emphasis on patience and gradualism. Beyond this, it would also seem to comment upon the author's own painstaking journey from superstition and ignorance to enlightenment and autonomy. Here too there is the message that by carefully sifting the evidence at first hand, the conclusions one arrives at will be all the more authentic and reliable. Accepting then that the argument of this article owes much to Butler's own inquiry into Gospel authority, it is not altogether surprising that it should appear in the same year as the Resurrection pamphlet. Indeed, a letter from Charles Darwin dated the thirtieth of September and thanking Butler for sending him a copy of the pamphlet suggests that the two texts were published at roughly the same time.[41] Besides this, in the introduction to the pamphlet Butler reflects on the potentially radical nature of the ideas it contains in language which would not be out of place in the free thought article:

> My chief regret is that no publisher of position will publish heresy so rank as mine… It stands just thus. A man has remarks to make on certain discrepancies of the four Evangelists, remarks which must occur to anyone who has tried to put the four narratives together, and which, even if they be erroneous, should be published in order that their error may be publicly exposed instead of being latently held by hundreds; and yet no publisher of position can make them public, even if he would, without doing himself a greater injury than he would be warranted in doing.[42]

[40] 'Precaution in Free Thought', *Works*, I, pp. 238-41 (pp. 238-39).
[41] Charles Darwin to Butler, Sept. 30, 1865, in *Memoir*, I, p. 123.
[42] Cited in *Memoir*, I, p. 118.

It is revealing to view Butler's comments in this introduction as a product of the atmosphere of reaction and misrepresentation characteristic of the debate upon the new theology. Like the authors of *Essays and Reviews,* Butler felt that maintaining silence on a matter of such great importance as the foundation of one's faith was not an option. The ignorance and complacency which alone sustained the erroneous view of the scriptures ought to be addressed by an 'independent and unflinching' assessment of the facts. But the historical moment was against him. The plain fact was that the majority of the public were simply not ready to accept the truth that Butler and others sought to expose. Faced with such a dilemma, it seems that Butler had seen fit merely to construct a plain speaking argument and trust the fate of his central idea to the careful thought and judgement of his reader. In 1873 however, Butler evidently felt that the continuing climate of silence, wilful misrepresentation and controversy surrounding the Higher Criticism required not only that he take up the matter again, but that he also present the argument in a form in which it might stand a better chance of being heard.

The model of how new ideas develop that Butler sets out in *Life and Habit* places certain requirements upon a writer wishing to reform public opinion. In the notebooks, Butler reflects on the rhetoric of popularising ideas in a way which clearly illustrates the influence of his evolutionary thought. Under an entry entitled 'The Art of Propagating Opinion', he writes:

> Ideas and opinions, like living organisms, have a normal rate of growth which cannot be either checked or forced beyond a certain point. They can be held in check more safely than they can be hurried. They can also be killed; and one of the surest ways to kill them is to try to hurry them […] Arguments are not so good as assertion. Arguments are like fire-arms which a man may keep at home but should not carry about with him. Indirect assertion, leaving the hearer to point the inference, is, as a rule, to be preferred. The one great argument with most people is that another should think this or that. The reasons of the belief are details and, in nine cases out of ten, best omitted as confusing and weakening the general impression.[43]

In another related entry, Butler goes on to develop his criticism of reasoned argument, deeming it to be 'a waste of time and trouble' (p. 165). Such criticisms would appear to draw much on the revised conception of knowledge which plays such a central role in the Life and Habit theory. However, what concerns us most here is the related point which Butler makes regarding the use of indirect assertion. One consequence of the use Butler makes of juxtaposition in *The Fair Haven* is to

[43] *Notebooks*, p. 164.

lead his readers 'to the point of inference' such that they themselves are made actively to develop an awareness of the conclusions which Butler wishes to popularise. Such a technique, I would argue, goes beyond satire: it suggests a more involved plan for the piece than simply to undermine John's attempt to substantiate the miraculous element of Christianity or to mock the self-deception which would find comfort in an abstruse mytho-poetic understanding of the scriptures. Most fundamentally, it suggests that Butler was making provision for the reader to go through a similar process of practical, independent inquiry as he himself had undergone during his preparations for ordination. Of the utmost importance to this inquiry was of course the insight that the facts are often distorted by professionals whose vested interests lie with the status quo. When we consider the storm of protest and prejudice which surrounded the subject of the Higher Criticism until the 1880s, we can clearly see how here too, prejudice and lack of candour dominated the debates on the new theology. In such an intellectual climate, plain statement of fact was ineffective. What was required in effect was to create an artificial environment in which readers were not simply presented with alternative arguments, but encouraged actively and pragmatically to engage with the evidence themselves. Only then could conditions be provided which were more conducive to the gradual fusing of ideas after an organic fashion that Butler describes in his evolutionary writings, a process which would ultimately lead to the formation of more authentic and reliable opinions.

At two crucial points in *The Fair Haven*, Butler seems to make reference to his theory of how new ideas and opinions ought to develop gradually and organically. In that part of the memoir which includes excerpts from John's notebooks during his time as an unbeliever, we read: 'no change is good unless it is imperatively called for'. It is 'sanction which sanctifieth', John explains, 'I would no more undo the Reformation now than I would have helped it forward in the sixteenth century'. Later in 'The Christ Ideal' he protests that

> [a] man has no right to be very much in advance of other people; he is as a sheep, which may lead the mob, but must not stray forward a quarter of a mile in front of it […] He has no right to be right, unless he can get a certain following to keep him company; the shock to morality and the encouragement to lawlessness do more harm than his discovery can atone for. Let him hold himself back till he can get one or two more to come with him. (pp. 38, 250)

Viewing *The Fair Haven* as Butler's attempt to provoke his reader into following the same process of free and open inquiry as he himself went through brings with it an

interesting way of reading certain passages in William's account of John's intellectual development. Again, the style of these passages strongly suggests an element of self-reflexivity on Butler's part. Most obvious perhaps is the following passage in which William passes comment on John's period of spiritual wandering:

> On reviewing his letters written to me about this time, I am painfully struck with the manner in which they show that all these pitiable vagaries were to be traced to a single cause -- a cause which still exists to the misleading of hundreds of thousands, and which, I fear, seems likely to continue in full force for many a year to come -- I mean, to a false system of training which teaches people to regard Christianity as a thing one and indivisible, to be accepted entirely in the strictest reading of the letter, or to be rejected as absolutely untrue. The fact is that all permanent truth is as one of those coal measures, a seam of which lies near the surface, and even crops up above the ground, but which is generally of an inferior quality and soon worked out; beneath it there comes a labour of sand and clay, and then at last the true seam of precious quality, and in virtually inexhaustible supply. The truth which is on the surface is rarely the whole truth. (pp. 19-20)

In chapter 1, I included an excerpt from Butler's early New Zealand letters which makes reference to 'the many changes of opinion' which he had undergone. I have also argued that it followed as a result of Butler's personal crisis that it impressed upon him the necessity of a relativist point of view in which multiple competing interpretations can coexist. In this passage, Butler appears to be drawing upon these experiences to impress upon his readers the folly of either / or approaches to religion in which the unexamined assumptions and fixed prejudices of one's age distort the facts and prevent one from first hand contact with the evidence. As Butler's metaphor makes clear, what is required is a certain depth of understanding, the ability to clear away all preconceived opinion and get to grips with the evidence for oneself. Surprisingly often in the memoir, Butler appears to draw upon the hard won lessons of his own early intellectual development in order to influence the way the reader ought to approach his text. To cite one final example, reflecting on the moment at which his brother came to his conclusion that the discrepancies between the Gospel accounts actually enhanced their appeal, William writes:

> I remember once hearing him say that it was not till he was nearly thirty that he discovered 'what thick and sticky fluids were air and water,' how crass and dull in comparison with other more subtle fluids; he added that speech had no less deceived him, seeming, as it did, to be such a perfect messenger of thought, and being after all nothing but a shuffler and a loiterer. (pp. 23-24)

Butler turned thirty in 1865, the year he returned from New Zealand. Dean Alford may have played his part in first alerting Butler to the fact that language could be

manipulated to impede inquiry and conceal the truth, but he needed New Zealand to draw his full conclusions. As I have argued, it was here that Butler first made a thorough study of the scriptures employing the methods of the Higher Criticism; here too that he encountered Darwin and first began to explore the consequences of his critique of species. For Butler as for John. these were formative experiences, instrumental in developing awareness of the fact that far from providing a transparent window onto the world, language was in reality an unreliable medium, open to manipulation and prone both to mislead and to specious misuse. As such, it was all the more important that the reader of his text should not simply accept the arguments of others but be encouraged actively to interrogate the interpretations on which their present understanding of the faith was based:

> are we then content to answer in the words of others - words to which we have no title of our own - or shall we strip ourselves of preconceived opinion, and come to the question with minds that are truly candid? Whoever shrinks from this is a liar to his own self, and as such, the worst and most dangerous of liars. He is as one who sits in an impregnable citadel and trembles in a time of peace -- so great a coward as not even to feel safe when he is in his own keeping. (pp. 44-45)

This excerpt from John's notebooks during his time as an unbeliever again points up how this 'many-voiced satire' is more than simply a parody of a vain attempt at salvaging a reconstructed faith. Instead, as with those other moments in the text in which Butler addresses his reader more or less directly, it impresses upon us the potential the text has to take a certain kind of reader on a journey. Not perhaps to the 'holy pleasure of a settled faith', as one particularly obtuse reviewer put it; but to a location beyond the ignorance, complacency and prejudice which often served to insulate Butler's fellow Victorians from an open-minded appraisal of alternative arguments. And in this sense, the title of the text is particularly apt.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A Lamarckian to the Core: The Later Evolutionary Writings

In December of 1878, Butler wrote to Miss Savage with details of how he was progressing with *Evolution, Old and New*:

> So far as I can see, Charles Darwin is being a good deal discredited; and if I do not bring my book out soon it may easily be too late to be effective. Someone in the *Contemporary* a year or so ago declared Lamarck to be preferable to Darwin, and quoted Mivart as calling Darwin's theory 'puerile,' which is too good a name for it.[1]

In the 1870s, Darwinism was in a precarious position. Ten years after the *Origin* had made naturalists take evolution seriously, the question of whether species descended with modifications from earlier ancestors had been settled on the strength of the evidence. What now concerned Darwin and his followers were the numerous and compelling scientific arguments which challenged the workability in practice of Darwin's claim that natural selection was the main means whereby species had become substantially modified.[2] Foremost among these voices of dissent was Mivart's himself, and his argument for 'the inutility of incipient structures'. Although he fully accepted that nature would select species possessing fully developed organs and structures providing them with an advantage in the struggle for life, Mivart was less convinced that natural selection could account for the development of incipient stages of these organs. How could half a wing be of use to a bird fleeing from attack? If no selective pressure could be brought to bear upon the usefulness of such intermediary forms, Mivart argued, then natural selection could not in all fairness be cited as the main means of organic modification. Instead, Mivart opted for a distinctly theological take on Lamarck's *besoins*, positing '"special powers and tendencies" to supplement natural selection in bringing species into existence according to God's preconceived ideas'.[3] Another criticism against natural selection came from Fleeming Jenkin, a Scottish professor of engineering, in an influential article in the *North British Review*. Jenkin's argument progressed from a simple observation: how could variations providing individuals

[1] Letter to Miss Savage, Dec. 15 1878, in *Memoir*, I, pp. 291-92 (p. 291).
[2] Moore, p. 141.
[3] Ibid., p. 121.

with an advantage in the struggle for life take hold within a larger population? Would there not be a tendency for the variation, however adaptive, to be swamped and diluted down by breeding with the general population? In short, how could variations providing a benefit prove their substantial adaptability in the struggle for life without first accumulating to a certain critical level? Drawing on mathematical proofs, Jenkin claimed that 'the chances were practically *nil* of any favourable variation being preserved over a series of generations'.[4] Here again it seemed as if some additional element was required to give aim and direction to the accumulation of variations before a new species could eventually be established. Much the same conclusion followed from a third major criticism of Darwin, namely that there simply hadn't been enough time for natural selection to give rise to the complexity and rich abundance of forms observable in the natural world. In addition to their main arguments, both Jenkin and Mivart made use of William Thomson's claim of 1862 that the planet was no more than 100 million years old, a finding which was widely felt to be 'profoundly damaging to Darwin's supposition of the slow accumulation of chance variations'.[5]

Despite these considerable difficulties, Darwin never faltered in his belief that natural selection was the principal means whereby species had significantly diverged. Yet in rescuing natural selection from its critics, he was forced to adapt his theory to give greater emphasis to those same Lamarckian elements which Mivart and Butler made central to their analysis. In his study of the challenge of Lamarckian evolution, James R. Moore describes how in subsequent editions of the *Origin*, Darwin 'drew repeatedly on the heritable effects of non-selective factors – the direct action of the environment and the use and disuse of parts', in effect blurring the distinction between his theory and that of the older evolutionists (p. 141). Quoting a long passage from the 'Recapitulation and Conclusion' chapter of the last edition of the work in 1872, Moore illustrates just what a hard time Darwin was having resolving 'the tension among the causes of evolution':

> Species have been modified, during a long course of descent […] chiefly through the natural selection of numerous successive, slight, favourable variations; aided in an important manner by the inherited effects of the use and disuse of parts; and in an unimportant manner, that is in relation to adaptive structures, whether past or present, by the direct action of external conditions, and by variations which seem to us in our ignorance to arise spontaneously. It appears that I formerly underrated the frequency and value of these latter forms of variation, as leading to permanent modifications of structure independently of natural selection. But as my conclusions

[4] Ellegard, p. 244.
[5] J. W. Burrow, editor's introduction to the Penguin Classic's edition of *The Origin of Species* (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 46.

> have lately been much misrepresented, and it has been stated that I attribute the modification of species exclusively to natural selection, I may be permitted to remark that in the first edition of this work, and subsequently, I placed in a most conspicuous position - namely, at the close of the Introduction - the following words: 'I am convinced that natural selection has been the main but not the exclusive means of modification.' This has been of no avail. Great is the power of steady misrepresentation; but the history of science shows that fortunately this power does not long endure.[6]

'The first half of the paragraph', Moore comments, 'brings to mind those who relieved the tension in favour of Lamarckian evolution' while the later half 'brings to mind those who relieved the tension in the opposite manner: by emphasising, even to the point of misrepresentation, the all-sufficiency of natural selection'. In his desire to uphold natural selection as 'the most important, but not the exclusive, means of modification' while retaining 'every workable adjunct explanation in the face of troublesome evidence' Darwin seemed to be overstretching himself.[7]

In his final three evolutionary essays, Butler seizes upon such confusion, subjecting Darwin's language to a merciless close reading. 'The sentence [sic] just given', Butler comments after quoting the first two sentences of the above passage, 'is one of the most confusing I ever read in the works of Mr Darwin.' In illustration, he attempts a paraphrase:

> The sentence really amounts to this – that modification has been effected *chiefly through selection* in the ordinary course of *nature from among spontaneous variations, aided in an unimportant manner by variations which quâ us are spontaneous*. Nevertheless, though these spontaneous variations are still so trifling in effect that they only aid spontaneous variations in an unimportant manner, in his early editions Mr. Darwin thought them still less important than he does now.

'This comes of tinkering.', he concludes, 'We do not know whether we are on our heads or our heels. We catch ourselves repeating "important," "unimportant," "unimportant," "important," like the King when addressing the jury in "Alice in Wonderland."'.[8] In keeping with his status as a creative writer, it is his opponents' language that Butler most attacks in these later essays. Over and again in these texts Butler seeks to uncover the hidden motives which lie behind his opponents' arguments by subjecting their writing to a penetrating and at times highly controversial close reading. In chapter 5, I have already argued that *Life and Habit* both as text and as theory was instrumental in causing Butler to cite authorial

[6] *Origin of Species*, 6th edn, p. 421.
[7] Moore, p. 174.
[8] *Luck, or Cunning?,* pp. 185-86.

intention as the standard by which his text ought to be judged; and in chapter 6, we have seen how this same category was key to Butler's strategy in *The Fair Haven* of actively fashioning his reader's reading strategies. In this chapter, I will show how Butler continued to appeal to the category of authorial intention as part of his attack on the professional scientist, often divining in the arguments of these professionals a personal quest for fame and financial gain.

Butler also close read the intentions of those whom he considered his allies, and in his reading of the older evolutionists, and Buffon in particular, he has a quite different purpose in mind. In *Evolution, Old and New*, Butler concerns himself with the task of getting a fair hearing for the older evolutionists, Buffon, Erasmus Darwin and Lamarck. I will deal with his reasons for undertaking this task in a moment; for now, it suffices to state that in providing a running commentary on certain key passages from these writers, Butler's overall aim is to position their works within the broader history of the development of the idea of evolution. Here again Butler's approach is influenced by the substance of the Life and Habit theory. In my previous chapter on *The Fair Haven,* I made reference to various passages from *Life and Habit* as well as the notebooks which illustrate how Butler speculated upon the mechanism whereby ideas develop within society. Drawing upon an organic paradigm of the gradual fusing of ideas through the rhetorical strategies of indirect reference or suggestion, such passages provide us with Butler's thoughts on how progressive authors might delicately air potentially controversial ideas. In his analysis of Buffon in particular, Butler's approach consists in close reading his language in order to show how Buffon also used irony and suggestion delicately to hint at the reality of the mutability of species at a time when this doctrine was still considered controversial. Building upon this analysis, Butler then proceeds to sketch out the history of evolutionary thought as a necessary teleology, proceeding from Buffon through Erasmus Darwin to Lamarck, with mind, will and intention playing an increasingly central role. Crucially, Butler's so constructing the history of evolution has significant consequences for the argument of his time between the Lamarckians and the Darwinists. According to the logic of this developmental sequence, it is clear that it is the Life and Habit theory and not evolution by natural selection that ought now to hold sway.

Lastly, as with *Life and Habit*, Butler continues to critique the 'priestly' aspirations of professional scientists in his final evolutionary essays, often citing the non-specialist reader as the final arbiter in scientific matters. In chapter 5 I argued

that Butler's strategy of appealing to the 'true scientists' who are his untrained readers can easily be regarded as an expression of the revised interpretation of knowledge outlined by the Life and Habit theory itself. Beyond this, Lightman's description of how popularists such as Robert Chambers and Anthony Proctor drew on a 'republican image of the scientific community' illustrates just how much contemporary concern there was over the growth of a professional class of scientists. Taking these two observations as our starting point, I will consider the extent to which the later evolutionary writings reflect Butler's growing belief in scientific writing as a will to power. Of particular relevance here are certain passages in the notebooks in which Butler speculates upon the relationship between authors, their audience and their work in terms borrowed from the hypothesis of 'Lucubratio Ebria'. As I intend to argue, these passages reveal Butler developing the argument of this early sketch in such a way as to suggest that 'bodies of writing' may also be classified as extra-corporeal limbs capable of extending an author's sphere of influence into society.

In the following sections, I deal with each of these elements of Butler's approach in turn, citing evidence from the texts in order to justify and develop my basic position. I begin with Butler's treatment of the works of the earlier evolutionists in *Evolution, Old and New.*

Evolution, Old and New: **Re-interpreting the history of a theory**

In *Evolution, Old and New*, Butler draws up short of directly accusing Darwin of failing to give due credit to the earlier evolutionists. In the latter works however, he was in no mood to pull punches and tells us straight why he believed Darwin had led the world astray. In *Unconscious Memory*, Butler quotes the opening paragraph of the *Origin* in which Darwin describes the gestation of his theory. Recalling his voyage on the *Beagle*, Darwin describes how he was 'much struck' with the distribution of plants and animals in the South American continent, an impression which to him seemed to 'throw some light on the origin of species -- that mystery of mysteries'. On arriving home it 'occurred to him' that something might be made of his observations by 'patiently accumulating and reflecting upon all sorts of facts which could possibly have a bearing upon it'. 'After five years' work I allowed myself to speculate on the subject, and drew up some short notes;', he continues, 'these I

enlarged in 1844 into a sketch of the conclusions which seemed to me probable'. At the close of the passage, Darwin excuses his going into such personal details, making it clear that he only gives them to show that he has 'not been hasty in coming to a decision'.[9] However, we might also suggest that the circumstances of Alfred Russell Wallace having come up with the same idea at the same time may also have motivated Darwin to mention at the outset the fact that he had reached his conclusions some sixteen years previously. Butler goes further still:

> What could more completely throw us off the scent of the earlier writers? If they had written anything worthy of our attention, or indeed if there had been any earlier writers at all, Mr. Darwin would have been the first to tell us about them, and to award them their due meed of recognition. But, no; the whole thing was an original growth in Mr. Darwin's mind, and he had never so much as heard of his grandfather, Dr. Erasmus Darwin.[10]

What grounds were there for Butler to make such an accusation? In his essay 'The Origin of the *Origin*', Michael Ruse points out that even before his voyage, Darwin knew about evolutionary ideas from a wide variety of sources, including his grandfather's *Zoonomia,* encounters at Edinburgh with future London professor of anatomy Robert Grant, and Lyell's discussion of Lamarck in his *Principles of Geology*.[11] In his treatment of Butler's quarrel with Darwin, Basil Willey reaches a similar conclusion, though he emphasises Darwin 'was not deeply versed' in these writers nor 'conscious of any great debt to them' (p. 43). Reference is also made to selections from Darwin's correspondence in which he is extremely vocal in his criticism of Lamarck, going so far as to refer to his works as 'wretched', 'veritable rubbish', and 'clever' yet 'absurd' and 'harmful'. For Willey, the neglect and dismissal characteristic of Darwin's treatment of his predecessors is explained by the fact that Darwin believed he had supplied 'the necessary foundation of fact for what had hitherto, to some extent, been airy speculation. But Lamarck he consistently decried and almost certainly undervalued' (p.44). 'We may safely say of Buffon, Erasmus Darwin and Lamarck', he concludes, 'that between them they had supplied nearly all the necessary ingredients, and that these ingredients only needed the added tincture from Malthus, the idea of natural selection and the massive substructure of Darwin's own observations, to produce the complete Darwinian dish' (p. 45). It would also seem that Butler was not the only one to question Darwin's originality. In

[9] *Origin of Species*, p. 1.
[10] *Unconscious Memory*, p. 8.
[11] *Cambridge Companion to the Origin of Species*, pp. 1-13 (p. 2).

a letter to Oxford professor of geometry Baden Powell written shortly after the appearance of the *Origin,* Darwin appears to defend himself against the accusation that he had not fully acknowledged a debt to Powell: 'To the best of my belief I have acknowledged with pleasure all the chief facts & generalisations which I have borrowed. If I have taken anything from you, I assure you it has been unconsciously; but I will reread your essay'. On the question of his failure to mention previous research, Darwin answers in unequivocal terms:

> No educated person, not even the most ignorant, could suppose that I meant to arrogate to myself the origination of the doctrine that species had not been independently created […] Had I alluded to those authors who have maintained, with more or less ability, that species have not been separately created, I should have felt myself bound to have given some account of all.

And he goes on to mention Buffon, Lamarck, his grandfather and a host of others who had expressed similar views.[12] In the third edition of the *Origin* in 1861, Darwin seemed to address the issues raised by Powell, prefacing the text with a brief historical sketch of the history of evolutionary theory in which he makes explicit reference to the earlier authors. Over the years with each new edition, the sketch was expanded until it mentioned thirty-six previous writers. Yet even in the final edition of 1872, Darwin still maintains that when he originally published, he 'spoke to very many naturalists on the subject of evolution and never once met with any sympathetic agreement' (p. 424). Moreover, from the context, it is clear that Darwin means the general doctrine of descent with modification or the fact that species were in fact mutable. Naturally Darwin's greatest gift as a scientist was his patience, caution and eye for detail; but in failing to cite the work of the earlier evolutionists throughout his entire volume, with the exception of two passing references to Lamarck, he encouraged the kind of misunderstanding which Butler was only too eager to exploit.

In seeking to present his readers with the work of the older evolutionary thinkers, Butler often frames the history of the idea of evolution in terms of an organic paradigm: 'Buffon planted, Erasmus Darwin and Lamarck watered, but it was Mr. Darwin who said, "That fruit is ripe," and shook it into his lap.', writes Butler in *Luck, or Cunning?* (p.291). Elsewhere in this essay, Butler reflects on the development and propagation of ideas in ways which clearly reveal the influence of

[12] Letter to Baden Powell, Jan. 18 1860, in *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin*, ed. by Frederick Burkhardt and others, 18 vols to date (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), VIII, pp.39-40 (p. 39). Baden Powell's original letter to Darwin has not been found.

an evolutionary paradigm in particular. ‘Ideas are like plants and animals’, he comments,

> they are more fully understood when their relations to other ideas of their time, and the history of their development are known and borne in mind. By development I do not merely mean their growth in the minds of those who first advanced them, but that larger development which consists in their subsequent good or evil fortunes -- in their reception, favourable or otherwise, by those to whom they were presented. This is to an idea what its surroundings are to an organism, and throws much the same light upon it that knowledge of the conditions under which an organism lives throws upon the organism itself. (pp. 1-2)

In my previous chapter I argued that Butler was driven to construct *The Fair Haven* as a many-voiced satire in order to provoke an otherwise hostile readership into serious consideration of novel ideas. With his claim here that adaptation to the intellectual environment of the day increases the likelihood that innovative ideas may ‘survive’ and ‘thrive’ in a given community, Butler gives us further indication of just how sensitive he was to the intellectual climate of his day. As we shall shortly see, the idea that the previous writers on evolution were also driven to obscure their potentially subversive conclusions out of respect for the prevailing conservatism of their day is central to Butler’s project in *Evolution, Old and New*. However, one other consequence followed from Butler’s attempt to apply evolutionary paradigms to the history of evolutionary thought. Quoting French physiologist Jean Pierre Flourens at the outset of *Evolution, Old and New,* Butler contends that ‘“true theories make themselves”, they are not made but grow; they cannot be stopped from insisting on their vitality by anything short of intellectual violence, nor will a little violence suffice to kill them’ (p. 22). It is not unlikely that Butler has Darwin here in mind and the way in which his theory of descent by natural selection violated the increasing emphasis upon mind and purpose which Butler fancied he could discern in the historical development of evolutionary models. We will deal with Butler’s quarrel with Darwin in the following section; but for now, we can note how Butler’s historical analysis in *Evolution, Old and New* is deeply informed by the very Lamarckian belief that an inexorable teleological *nisus* has guided the development of evolutionary thought.

Of course, if one is to frame the history of evolutionary thinking as a teleological movement, an end point toward which the successive theories of the older evolutionists have ultimately been tending is required. To this end, Butler begins *Evolution, Old and New* by looking back from his own historical perspective: ‘It is easy to understand the difficulty felt by the fathers of evolution when we

remember how much had to be seen before the facts could lie well before them'. There then follows a summary of these facts taking the form of a four point synopsis of the Life and Habit theory, in which points one and two are the oneness of personality between parents and offspring and the continuity of memory throughout the ancestral line. According to Butler, Buffon was 'too busy with the fact that animals descended with modification at all' to ever see more than the first, and even that 'dimly'. As for Erasmus Darwin, Butler considers he was 'the first to point out the first two considerations with some clearness', though the two remaining points 'do not appear to have occurred to him' (p. 37). Having established his own Life and Habit theory as yardstick against which all previous theories are to be measured, Butler then presents a six stage summary of the development of evolutionary theory from Buffon to the present day such that the reader can 'follow the development of a great conception as it has grown up in the minds of successive men of genius', and by 'thus growing with it', make themselves 'more thoroughly the master of it in all its bearings' (p. 62). Here we learn that Lamarck developed 'with greater fullness of detail' the theory of Erasmus Darwin, 'but perhaps with somewhat less nice sense of some important points'; that stage four is characterised by a 'more distinct perception of the unity of parents and offspring', with a 'bolder reference' to the facts of heredity to memory; and that stage five, in which the younger Darwin arrives on the scene, constitutes a 'time of retrogression' (pp. 64-66). In his current age, Butler surveys 'a reaction against modern Darwinism, with a demand for definite purpose and design as underlying variations' (p. 66). Explicit reference is also made to his own contribution to this history in terms which have a similar ring of self-justification as his early letters home from New Zealand. Affecting what sounds very much like fake modesty, Butler claims that the 'only' new feature he believes he may 'claim to have added to received ideas concerning evolution', is the identification of heredity and memory, and an explanation both of 'the phenomena of old age' and of 'the main principle which underlies longevity'. 'I may, perhaps, claim also', Butler adds almost as an after-thought, 'to have more fully explained the passage of reason into instinct than I yet know of its having been explained elsewhere.' (p. 67).

The vanity and self-importance of Butler's view of the history of evolutionary theory is something that I return to discuss at the close of this chapter. However, we might note here that by thus framing the development of evolutionary theory in terms of a necessary teleology, Butler illustrates just how seriously he took his status as an evolutionist in the Lamarckian tradition. For Butler, the Life and Habit theory was

not just a description of organic processes, but a metaphor which he could apply to a wide range of disparate phenomena. More to the point, in applying it to the history of evolutionary thought, Butler was led to some highly creative interpretations of the works of the early evolutionists. Keen to corroborate his neat six stage summary, Butler is at pains to emphasise the inter-relatedness of their work, even to the extent of explaining away apparent contradictions or twisting the slightest of details to make them out in his favour. In his treatment of Lamarck for example, Butler is faced with the problem of why he maintained the immutability of species for so long. In explanation, he puts it down to Lamarck's originally failing to grasp Buffon's indirect hints at the reality of transmutation, while simultaneously strengthening the ties between the three writers as a whole:

> We may then suppose that Lamarck failed to understand Buffon, and conceived that he ought either to have gone much farther, or not so far; not being yet prepared to go the whole length himself, he opposed mutability till Dr. Darwin's additions to Buffon's ostensible theory reached him, whereon he at once adopted them, and having received nothing but a few notes and hints, felt himself at liberty to work the theory out independently and claim it. (p. 260)

Similarly, in *Luck, or Cunning?* he draws upon the revised definition of knowledge from *Life and Habit* to explain away Lamarck's apparent denial of design by claiming him as an 'unconscious teleologist, and as such perhaps more absolutely an upholder of teleology than Paley himself' (p. 10). However, by far the most remarkable instance of this strategy comes again in *Evolution, Old and New* in the form of Butler's highly imaginative reading of Buffon.

In Buffon, Butler sees a writer struggling with the dilemma of how to air the controversial subject of the mutability of species in the hostile environment of pre-revolutionary France. For Butler, Buffon solved this dilemma by adapting his ideas to the conventions and modes of thought of his day, relying on contradiction and implication to muddy the waters and avoid recrimination in much the same way as Butler himself had done in *The Fair Haven*. 'What he did was to point so irresistibly in the right direction, that a reader of any intelligence should be in no doubt as to the road he ought to take,' Butler explains, 'and then to contradict himself so flatly as to reassure those who would be shocked by a truth for which they were not yet ready.' (p. 83). In just one of the many examples he brings to bear, Butler describes how Buffon deals with the kinship between the ass and the horse. Translating from Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle*, Butler further italicises the passage and provides the original French for comparison:

> *If for example it could be once shown that the ass was but a degeneration from the horse – then there is no further limit to be set to the power of nature, and we should not be wrong in supposing that with sufficient time she could have evolved all other organized forms from one primordial type.*

'Buffon now felt that he had sailed as near the wind as was desirable.', Butler comments:

> His next sentence is as follows: 'But no! It is certain *from revelation* that all animals have alike been favoured with the grace of an act of direct creation, and that the first pair of every species issued full formed from the hands of the Creator.' (pp. 90-91)

In another instance, reference is made to a passage in which Buffon admits for the sake of argument that the behaviour of certain animals who cache food against the possibility of future hardship suggests powers of reasoning equal to or even in advance of those of humans. Having placed this argument before his reader, Buffon then inquires in a manner exactly akin to that of John Pickard Owen: 'Does not such a consequence, I ask, *prove repugnant alike to religion and common sense?*'. 'This is Buffon's way.', Butler again explains, 'Whenever he has shown us clearly what we ought to think, he stops short suddenly on religious grounds.' (p. 115).

Butler obviously enjoyed claiming Buffon as an ironic writer. In another example he quotes Buffon on classification:

> To class man and the ape together, or the lion with the cat, and to say that the lion is *a cat with a mane and a long tail* -- this were to degrade and disfigure nature instead of describing her and denominating her species.

Commenting, Butler observes: 'Buffon very rarely uses italics, but those last given are his, not mine; could words be better chosen to make us see the lion and the cat as members of the same genus?' (p. 143). He then goes on to show how Buffon contradicts himself repeatedly during his treatment of the cat family in a passage which must be negotiated 'with the hurried whisper "*cat with a mane and a long tail*" still haunting our ears' (p. 144). Rounding off his unorthodox reading, Butler concludes: 'A surface stream has swept the members of the cat family away in different directions, but a stealthy undercurrent has seized them from beneath, and they are now happily reunited' (p. 145).

Although we can smile at such ingenious speculation, Butler's reading of the earlier evolutionists did occasionally come up trumps, such as when he identifies

seemingly unambiguous statements of the oneness of personality between parents and offspring in both Buffon and Erasmus Darwin.[13] Besides this, the obvious affinity Butler felt for Buffon leads him to reflect on the role of an ironic writer in revealing terms. Such is the case in the following passage which begins with a quotation from the *Histoire Naturelle*:

> 'Animals have excellent senses, but not *generally, all of them*, as good as man's.' We have heard of damning with faint praise. Is not this to praise with faint damnation? Yet we can lay hold of nothing. It was not Buffon's intention that we should. An ironical writer, concerning whom we cannot at once say whether he is in earnest or not, is an actor who is continually interrupting his performance in order to remind the spectator that he is acting. Complaint, then, against an ironical writer on the score that he puzzles us, is a complaint against irony itself; for a writer is not ironical unless he puzzles. He should not puzzle unless he believes that this is the best manner of making his reader understand him in the end, or without having a *bonne bouche* for those who will be at the pains to puzzle over him; and he should make it plain that for long parts of his work together he is to be taken according to the literal interpretation of his words. (pp. 111-12)

It is difficult to say whether Butler has Buffon or himself in mind in here. However, his comments do seem to echo the main points of my study of *The Fair Haven*. Here again there is the assertion that inconsistency itself is somehow part of the message that the ironic writer seeks to convey; additionally, there is an allusion in the form of Butler's actor metaphor to those moments of self-reflexivity in *The Fair Haven* in which Butler seeks actively to fashion his reader's reading strategies. In another such passage, Butler reflects that Buffon's irony is not 'the ill-natured irony of one who is merely amusing himself at other people's expense', but the 'serious and legitimate irony' of one who must 'limit the circle of those to whom he appeals' (p. 91). By making this distinction, Butler provides a clear statement of the constructive side of his project, a side which I made the focus of my analysis in the previous chapter. Aware of the relative unpopularity of his position, the ironist adapts his language to the modes of thought of his day in order ultimately to increase its

[13] From Buffon, Butler identifies the following passage as a presentiment of his own theory: 'This reunion in a single person of the experience of many ages, throws back the boundaries of man's existence to the utmost limits of the past; he is no longer a single individual, limited as other beings are to the sensations and experiences of to-day. In place of the individual we have to deal, as it were, with the whole species'; from Erasmus Darwin, he italicises the following passage which not only expresses the same basic idea, but also, like Butler's analysis, points to the role language plays in constructing our everyday conception of personal identity: '*Owing to the imperfection of language the offspring is termed a new animal, but is in truth a branch or elongation of the parent, since a part of the embryon-animal is, or was, a part of the parent, and therefore in strict language, cannot be said to be entirely new at the time of its production; and, therefore, it may retain some of the habits of the parent system*' (pp. 152, 214).

chances of survival in a hostile environment. What he loses in definition, he gains in the increased likelihood that his readers will understand him 'in the end'. So much is clear from the substance of yet another comment Butler makes on Buffon's method of advancing his argument by implication. Having considered a range of such instances, Butler maintains that this ironic writer would probably have been 'well enough pleased to let the wedge enter still farther' but ultimately felt that 'he had said enough, and that others might be trusted to carry the principle farther when the time was riper for its enforcement' (p. 106).

In his historical sketch of evolutionary theory, Darwin had dismissed serious consideration of Buffon on the grounds that his opinions 'fluctuated greatly at different periods'.[14] For Butler, Buffon contradicted himself and drew up short of his full conclusions on purpose. By appealing so consistently to Buffon's intentions, Butler provides us with a model example of the kind of reader his own works require. Both *Life and Habit* and *The Fair Haven* require a reader capable of discerning the author's intentions, without which his or her understanding will necessarily fall short of the full message Butler sought to convey. For Butler, the fact that language was always open to a rhetorical sleight of mind necessarily shifted the locus of meaning from the words on the printed page to the set of intentions that had given them shape and meaning. In this section, we have seen how such a reading position can lead to the strengthening of ties between allies. In the following section, Butler turns it on what he perceives to be the hidden agenda of his greatest enemy.

Cunning, not luck: authorial intention meets Lamarck

For Butler, the presence or absence of purpose was not only an academic issue of concern to naturalists weighing up the evidence as to which theory of evolution was 'the truer', but one which also exercised a considerable influence over his quarrel with Darwin. In *Evolution, Old and New,* Darwin's loose phraseology is relentlessly exposed, yet Butler is generally reluctant to extend the criticism *ad hominem*. In the latter two essays however, the attack becomes significantly more personal. What changed for Butler in the interim was an episode known among Butler scholars as the Krause controversy. Briefly, Ernst Krause was a German writer who in February of 1879 published an article in a German scientific journal discussing the life and

[14] *Origin of Species*, 6th edn, p. xiii.

works of Erasmus Darwin. In November of that year, an English translation was published in London. *Evolution, Old and New* had been published only six months previously and Butler was understandably eager to read the work. But on doing so, he was alerted to the fact that not only had the author used the same edition of Buffon as he had, and in some cases the same quotations, but also that certain passages of this supposedly 'accurate translation' appeared to criticise the argument of *Evolution, Old and New.* Sharpening up his close reading skills, Butler tells us how he read with more care before finally coming across the following decisive passage:

> 'Erasmus Darwin's system was in itself a most significant first step in the path of knowledge which his grandson has opened up for us, but to wish to revive it at the present day, as has actually been seriously attempted, shows a weakness of thought and mental anachronism which no one can envy.'
> 'That's me,' I thought to myself promptly. I noticed also the position in which the sentence stood, which made it both one of the first that would catch the reader's eye, and the last he would carry away with him.[15]

Always of a pragmatic persuasion, Butler took it upon himself to learn German and read Krause's original article. As a result he learned that the original article did not contain the final six pages of the English version: the provocative passage had been added in the course of translation. Moreover, this was a translation which Charles Darwin himself had overseen. Butler was now convinced that Darwin was using his involvement with the publication to conduct a covert attack upon him and immediately drafted a letter demanding an explanation. Darwin replied stating that alterations in translations were 'so common a practice that it never occurred to me to state that the article had been modified'.[16] Butler remained dissatisfied. Hadn't the author of the preface explicitly assured the reader of the absolute accuracy of the translation? He decided to air the matter publicly and wrote an open letter to the *Athenaeum*. Although Darwin drafted a response, Huxley advised silence on the grounds seemingly that Butler would be sure to twist whatever Darwin said against him. As a result, Butler never got the opportunity to learn that Darwin had accidentally omitted a passage from the translation which declared the work to be modified.[17]

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[15] *Unconscious Memory*, p. 39.
[16] Darwin to Butler, Jan. 3 1880, in *Memoir*, II, p. 448.
[17] In 1911, Butler's friend and biographer Henry Festing Jones undertook a joint effort with Charles Darwin's son Francis Darwin publicly to resolve the Krause controversy by publishing full details of what was essentially a very unfortunate misunderstanding. See

The Krause controversy and Butler's palpable sense that Darwin had done him wrong has often led scholars to adopt an apologetic tone with regard to the final two evolutionary essays. By suggesting that the provocative sentence was so positioned to maximise its impact, Butler certainly does not do himself any favours. However, in the following, I hope to show that most of the ingredients Butler needed to cast his argument with Darwin in terms of a deliberate personal attack were already in place when he wrote *Evolution, Old and New,* six months prior to the controversy. Over the course of this study, I have shown that beginning with his personal crisis, Butler had a firm belief that behind every author's interpretation of the facts there was always an intention. By the time of his reading of Buffon, Butler's practised eye could readily detect the presence of the author's intentions from the finest of textual cues. Of course, what made Darwin's case different from Buffon's was the fact that he was very much the enemy. But there is also something else to consider, namely Turner's idea of an 'illicit use of conventions'. In the specific case of scientific writing, this term might be defined as the effort on the part of authors to efface the status of their theory as *interpretation* by making special claims for the authority of their discourse. In his early 'Dialogue on Species', Butler already brings into play the idea that Darwin's discourse impresses by its apparent objectivity and basis in hard fact, even to the point of appearing dispassionate. However, at the same time, various features of 'F's performance and Butler's self-directed criticism in his follow up correspondence challenge this impression by suggesting a more intrusive role for the author than simply that of dispassionate observer.

Closer analysis of the methodology and language of the *Origin* reveals that Butler had good grounds to single out these two apparently contradictory characteristics of Darwin's text. In his study of the debates between the Darwinists and the Lamarckians, Alvar Ellegard describes the subtle methodological difference between the *Origin* and earlier writings on evolution. Fundamentally, what Darwin was seeking to do with the *Origin* was to provide a description of a mechanism of evolutionary change in terms of a set of empirically verifiable observations. It was this emphasis on *description* which set Darwin's theory apart from the earlier evolutionists who had more or less explicitly appealed to 'special powers and tendencies' as part of *explanations* about how organisms vary in the first instance. For Darwin, the occurrence of variation within a population was simply a fact that he

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Henry Jones and Francis Darwin, *Charles Darwin and Samuel Butler: A Step Toward Reconciliation* (London: A. C. Fifield, 1911). In addition, a full and balanced account is given in the *Memoir* along with all correspondence relating to the incident.

would not be drawn on, not even to the extent of explaining these events as random. As Ellegard explains, 'the distinction between explaining the variations themselves and describing the course of evolution' was 'one of the revolutionary features of Darwin's theory, and one which it took time to understand and accept'. Furthermore, it ought also to be acknowledged that

> Darwin himself, and other Darwinians of the time, did not bring out very clearly this fundamental difference between the new and the old explanations and the evolution of organic life. The term *random* variation was not employed by Darwin, who preferred *indefinite*, which might mean both indefinite in direction and indefinite in extent. Darwinians, like everybody else at the time, were also extremely loth to use the terms *chance* or *accidental.* (p. 258)

A related consequence of this failure to deal directly with the random element of spontaneous variations is one which we have already encountered, namely the considerable number of readers who mistook Darwin for offering a Lamarckian position from the start. However, even when one did understand Darwin's unique contribution to evolutionary theory one could still 'dismiss the Natural Selection theory altogether, and treat the Darwinian doctrine as no more than a description of the course which evolution perhaps had followed, and by no means as an explanation of why it had followed that course'.[18] In effect, Darwin's argument would then resolve itself into the earlier theory of descent with modification with the decidedly prosaic observation that only the fittest survive. In such circumstances the reader would once more be free to seek in Lamarckian terms an explanation for the 'spontaneous' variations at the heart of organic modification, most probably with reference to Darwin's increasingly frequent references to use, disuse and the direct adaptive influence of external conditions.

Ellegard's analysis points up the conceptual difficulties involved in processing Darwin's account of the generation of new life without recourse to the category of agency. In fact, Darwin himself could also fall prey to the language of agency even in the midst of insisting that he was merely offering a description of a natural mechanism. In *Darwin's Plots*, Gillian Beer makes this point most clearly:

> *Intention* is the key to Lamarck's concepts. And in this he accords with human wishes and human language. It is extraordinarily difficult to eradicate the language of intention from accounts of evolutionary development. Darwin himself never entirely succeeded. But for him there was a constant awareness that he must try to expunge from language the suggestion that will is a force for change […] Curiously and

[18] Ellegard, p. 260.

> revealingly, Lamarck's account of evolutionary process is *still* the popular one. An intentionalist language keeps creeping into accounts of evolution. (pp. 18-19)

For Beer, Darwin's decision to provide an objective description of the process whereby new forms of life come into being necessitated a certain writing 'against the grain of his discourse' in order to precipitate his theory as language. The discourse of natural history which Darwin had appropriated, for instance, was still imbued with natural theology with the result that several of his terms such as *contrivance* or *design* 'came freighted with presumptions of pre-emptive patterning'. And in more general terms, Beer makes the observation that 'language always includes agency, and agency and intention are frequently impossible to distinguish in language'. Darwin's theory had 'no place for an initiating or intervening creator. Nor for an initiating or intervening author', Beer points out, 'yet terms like "selection" and "preservation" raise the question, "By whom or what selected or preserved?"' (p. 48). Beer's reference here to the central metaphor of natural *selection* touches on the most acute problem Darwin faced in terms of precipitating his counter-intuitive theory as language. Struggling to describe how variations 'get accumulated' via the pressures engendered by the struggle for life, Darwin draws upon the analogy with selective breeding to coin the metaphor. Yet this coinage in turn encouraged exactly those kind of Lamarckian misreadings previously mentioned. In correspondence of the time, Darwin expresses consternation at the confusion his metaphor had given rise to: 'If I had to commence *de novo,* I would have used 'natural preservation', he ruefully explains, 'For I find that men like Harvey of Dublin cannot understand me, though he has read the book twice'.[19] However, as Robert M. Young points out, even *preservation* does not fully eliminate the impression that 'active processes with voluntary overtones are operative'.[20] More effective perhaps was Alfred Russell Wallace's suggestion in a letter to Darwin in which he declares himself to have been so 'repeatedly struck by the utter inability of numbers of intelligent persons to see clearly, or at all, the self-acting and necessary effects of Natural Selection' that he suggests Darwin adopt Spencer's term of 'the survival of the fittest'.[21] In the end, Darwin's solution was less radical, consisting of inserting into the third edition of the

[19] Letter to Charles Lyell, Sep. 28 1860, in *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, ed. by Francis Darwin, 3rd edn, 3 vols (London: Murray, 1887), II, pp. 345-46 (p. 346).
[20] *Darwin's Metaphor: Nature's Place in Victorian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 95.
[21] Letter to Charles Darwin, Jul. 2 1866, in *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin*, XIV, p 227-29 (p. 227).

work a passage dealing somewhat impatiently with those 'intelligent readers' who persisted in misreading his metaphor:

> In the literal sense of the word, no doubt, natural selection is a misnomer; but who ever objected to chemists speaking of the elective affinities of the various elements? -- and yet an acid cannot strictly be said to elect the base with which it will in preference combine. It has been said that I speak of natural selection as an active power or Deity; but who objects to an author speaking of the attraction of gravity as ruling the movements of the planets? Every one knows what is meant and is implied by such metaphorical expressions; and they are almost necessary for brevity. So again it is difficult to avoid personifying the word Nature; but I mean by Nature, only the aggregate action and product of many natural laws, and by laws the sequence of events as ascertained by us. With a little familiarity such superficial objections will be forgotten.[22]

For Butler this strategy failed to pass muster. As with the Krause controversy, Darwin was simply shifting the responsibility, this time from author to reader. Commenting on this passage in *Evolution, Old and New* Butler insists that 'the true complaint is that Mr. Darwin has too often written of "natural selection" as though it does induce variability' (p. 362). In his defence, he cites a number of confused passages in which Darwin, attempting to express himself in language loaded against him, resorts once more to metaphor. 'Natural Selection *might be most effective in giving* the proper colour to each kind of grouse, and in *keeping* that colour when once acquired.', Butler quotes before pouncing with the judgment of a third party, 'Such language, says the late Mr. G. H. Lewes, "is misleading;" it makes "selection an agent."' (pp. 345-46). 'Nothing can be clearer, from a large number of such passages', Butler concludes, 'than that natural selection is an efficient cause; and in spite of its being expressly declared to be only a "means" of modification, it will be accepted as cause by the great majority of readers' (p. 348). Similarly, Darwin's attempt to naturalise *natural selection* by comparing it with other such anthropomorphic metaphors commonly used in scientific works failed equally to convince Butler. Like Wallace, Butler felt Darwin ought to have stuck with 'survival of the fittest' and countered accordingly:

> No one complains of the use of what is, strictly speaking, an inaccurate expression, when it is nevertheless the best that we can get. It may be doubted whether there is any such thing possible as a perfectly accurate expression. All words that are not simply names of things are apt to turn out little else than compendious false analogies; but we have a right to complain when a writer tells us that he is using a less accurate expression when a more accurate one is ready to his hand. […]

[22] *Origin of Species*, 3rd edn, p. 85.

> Chemists do not speak of 'elective affinities' in spite of there being a more accurate and not appreciably longer expression at their disposal. (p. 365)

If any writer's text was open to the charge of the misuse of metaphor it was of course *Life and Habit*; except that Butler had gone out of his way in this text to relinquish all claims to accuracy and explicitly foreground the status of his text as a 'compendious analogy'. By contrast, Butler's purpose in the two critiques just given would seem to be that of impressing upon his reader the discrepancy between the *Origin's* appearance as an objective description of natural processes and the underlying reality that in its most essential detail it is in fact just as much a construction as *Life and Habit.* In this sense, the writing of the *Origin* constitutes a particularly illicit use of conventions, one in which special claims to accuracy and impartial observation run counter to the fact that the language of the argument has been weighted with a view to exercising a subtle effect on the reader.

Unable to accept Darwin's defence of *natural selection* Butler goes to work on the term himself with a view to clarifying the limits of its signification. Stripping it of all its anthropomorphic associations, Butler reduces it to the status of a description, namely 'the survival of the fittest for the conditions of their existence', with exactly those consequences as Ellegard has described:

> Certainly those animals and plants which are best fitted for their environment, or, as Lamarck calls it, '*circonstances*' - those animals, in fact, which are best fitted to comply with the conditions of their existence - are most likely to survive and transmit their especial fitness. No one would admit this more readily than Lamarck. This is no theory; it is a commonly observed fact in nature which no one will dispute, but it is not more 'a means of modification' than many other commonly observed facts concerning animals. (p. 349)

For Butler, Darwin was simply giving his readers the earlier theory of descent with modification and failing to deliver on the title of his book: 'He is really leaving us absolutely in the dark as to the cause of all modification -- giving us an "Origin of Species" with "the origin" cut out' (p. 363). It was clear how the situation ought to be resolved. Natural selection was simply Lamarck's *circonstances*, or the conditions of existence to which an animal adapts through the continued use or disuse of an organ. Moreover, he could cite passages from the *Origin* in which Darwin *himself* suggests this is case:

> I think I can show, moreover, that Mr. Darwin himself holds natural selection and the conditions of existence to be one and the same thing. For he writes, 'in one sense,' and it is hard to see any sense but one in what follows, 'the conditions of life may be

> said not only to cause variability' (so that here Mr. Darwin appears to support Lamarck's main thesis) 'either directly or indirectly, but likewise to include natural selection; for the conditions determine whether this or that variety shall survive.' But later on we find that "the expression of conditions of existence, so often insisted upon by the illustrious Cuvier' (and surely also by the illustrious Lamarck, though he calls them '*circonstances*') 'is fully embraced by the principle of natural selection.' So we see that the conditions of life '*include*' natural selection, and yet the conditions of existence *'are fully embraced by'* natural selection, which, I take it, is an enigmatic way of saying that they are one and the same thing, for it is not until two bodies absolutely coincide and occupy the same space that the one can be said both to include and to be embraced by the other. (p. 355)

On reviewing this passage, we might feel inclined to liken Butler to a persistent biting insect, ruthlessly attacking the grand old man of science wherever he could land. One might also argue that inconsistencies can be found in any argument, if only one looks hard enough. However, of the two excerpts that Butler quotes in this passage, the second appears in the 1859 edition while the more decisive first quotation is from the fourth edition of 1866. By 1866 the pressure upon Darwin from the likes of Mivart had taken its toll. In reformulating his language to place a greater emphasis on Lamarckian factors, Darwin had blurred the distinction between his position and that of the older evolutionists even further. Clearly the complexity of the ideas that Darwin had to express in language ill-suited to the job was taking its toll. However, beyond the historical forces at work here, Butler clearly had an obsession with seeking out and exploiting inconsistencies -- in his own work as well as that of others. For Butler, language, like species, was always prone to modification or that rhetorical sleight of mind that he had identified at work in Alford, Paley, Buffon and others. Moreover, a Lamarckian to the core, he found it difficult to accept that the numerous slight variations he had identified in Darwin's text were not the result of cunning. For Butler, Darwin had shown time and again his aim to manipulate the understanding of his reader, whether he was conscious of this or not. But to what end? If the *Origin of Species* could in fact say nothing new about how species had originated, what was Darwin's real purpose?

Continuing his reading, Butler claims that the difficulty of understanding Darwin's meaning, is enhanced by his 'repeatedly writing of "natural selection," or the fact that the fittest survive in the struggle for existence, as though it were the same thing as "evolution"'. There then follow three examples from the recapitulatory chapter of the *Origin* in which Darwin makes reference variously to 'the theory of descent with modification' and 'the theory of natural selection' 'as though the two expressions were identical'. 'This is calculated to mislead.', Butler judges, 'Independently of the fact that "natural selection," or "the survival of the fittest," is in

no sense a theory, but simply an observed fact' (pp. 355, 356-57). *Mislead* for Butler was always a loaded word, and some pages later he clarifies in less equivocal terms. According to Butler, Darwin's language concerning natural selection is

> so confusing that the reader is not helped to see that it really comes to nothing but a cloak of difference from his predecessors, under which there lurks a concealed identity of opinion as to the main facts. The reader is thus led to look upon it as something positive and special, and, in spite of Mr. Darwin's disclaimer, to think of it as an actively efficient cause. (pp. 362-63)

With this passage comes the first bold accusation from Butler that Darwin was intentionally manipulating his audience via the rhetoric of the *Origin.* Following the Krause controversy, Butler would become more brazen in his accusation of Darwin's hidden agenda to 'filch' the laurels from the brows of the 'great dead who went before him'.[23] However even at this stage it is clear that he could not accept that the inconsistencies in Darwin's argument were merely accidental. Elsewhere in *Evolution, Old and New* he compares Darwin to a 'lawyer who has obscured the main issue as far as he can, and whose chief aim has been to make as many loopholes as possible for himself to escape through in case of his being called to account' (p. 358). Darwin's reliance on anthropomorphic metaphors, pressure from his critics, and a project of re-writing had provided the ingredients, but it took Butler's scepticism over the possibility of discursive knowledge and characteristic appeal to authorial intention to bring them together in the form of an accusation. In effect, what Butler had done was to turn scientific authorship itself into an evolutionary struggle which must be fought out in accordance with Lamarckian rules, a battle of wills for public favour where the prize was fame, status and financial gain.

Authors, readers and the will to secular power

During the writing of *Life and Habit,* popular success was of the highest importance to Butler. Ten years later in a letter written a few months after the publication of *Luck, or Cunning?*, Butler describes how he still aspired to a position of cultural authority, though apparently now resigned to posthumous success. In response to the suggestion from an acquaintance that he publish something on 'the sexual question', Butler considers this injudicious:

[23] *Luck, or Cunning?,* p. 295.

> At present I have the religious world bitterly hostile; the scientific and literary world are even more hostile than the religious; if to this hostility I am to add that of the respectable world, I may as well shut up shop at once for all the use I shall be to myself or anyone else. Let me get a really strong position like that of Ruskin, Carlyle, or even Matthew Arnold, and I may be relied upon to give the public to the full as much as they will endure without rebellion; but I will not jeopardise what I believe to be a fair chance of future usefulness by trying to do more than I can.[24]

Butler's reference to these three cultural heavyweights is intriguing, for we can safely assume that he cared little for the writings of any of them. Rather, it is their position of cultural dominance which he appears to envy, their ability to command attention and influence public opinion on even controversial issues. As we have seen, the public's need to be entertained and kept up to date with the implications of the latest theories from the world of science provided a new position in society for professional scientist and populariser alike. However, it is clear that for the professional, the rewards in terms of financial security and social status were far greater. In his recent biography of Thomas Henry Huxley, Paul White draws the parallel with Arnold to show how like his contemporary, Huxley also positioned himself in the 1860s and 70s as a source of cultural authority. On analysing the personal relationship between the two men and their methods of boosting the prestige of their respective disciplines by campaigning for educational reform, White concludes:

> By dividing culture exclusively between science and literature, Huxley and Arnold authorized their joint possession of its terrain. In their public confrontations, they shaped the man of science as the converse of the man of letters, apportioning between themselves the values and virtues that were essential to the education of the people.[25]

Picking up on the campaign to establish the study of science within the educational institutions of the time, Frank Miller Turner has charted the rise of the professional scientist into salaried positions of influence in the decades following the publication of the *Origin*. In addition to the increasing numbers of teaching positions that were then becoming available, Turner also points to editorships, the reformation of the rules governing entry to the Royal Society to favour those with scientific

[24] Letter to Mrs Heatherley, Apr. 19 1887, *Memoir*, II, pp. 49-50 (p. 49).
[25] *Thomas Huxley: Making the 'Man of Science'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 94.

achievements, and the fact that professionals were now 'frequently consulted by the government on issues of scientific research, industry and education'.[26]

Like Tess Cosslet, Turner also suggests that these young men, having 'generally grown up on the peripheries of the English intellectual establishment' had much to gain from their new found positions of influence.[27] Butler certainly felt that behind the appeals to accuracy and impartial observation of this new breed of professional scientist lurked a secular agenda. Already in *Life and Habit* he had likened them to a priestly class, a force requiring to be 'well watched by those who value freedom'. Nor was such a warning completely without grounds. In 1874, Charles Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton published a statistical inquiry into the influences moulding the scientific temperament entitled *English Men of Science: Their Nature and Nurture*. In the conclusion to the work he surveys the recent historical gains made by his fellow professionals in language which seems to justify Butler's warning. Making reference to the additional sources of income which the professional scientist might take advantage of, Galton concludes:

> These and adequately paid professorships may, as I sincerely hope they will, even in our days, give rise to the establishment of a sort of scientific priesthood throughout the kingdom, whose high duties would have reference to the health and well-being of the nation in its broadest sense, and whose emoluments and social position would be made commensurate with the importance and variety of their functions.[28]

The cultural climate that could give rise to such rhetoric goes some way toward explaining the strategy of popularisers such as Proctor and their appeal to a republican image of the scientific community. Moreover, Butler's revised definition of *scientist* as the layperson reader possessed of good sense gave him more reason than most to challenge the exclusivity of this new professional class.

In the later evolutionary essays, Butler continues to appeal to his readership as the final arbiter in scientific matters. At its most basic, this strategy could consist simply of laying before the reader evidence and arguments which had hitherto been misrepresented or concealed from public view altogether. Such is the case with *Evolution, Old and New* when Butler twice urges the reader to reconsider the

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[26] 'The Victorian Conflict Between Science and Religion: A Professional Dimension', in *Religion in Victorian Britain*, IV: *Interpretations*, ed. by Gerald Parsons (1988), pp. 170-97 (pp. 178-79).

[27] Ibid., p. 79-80. See also J. C. Waller, 'Gentlemanly Men of Science: Sir Francis Galton and the Professionalization of the British Life-sciences', *Journal of the History of Biology*, 34 (2001), 83-114.

[28] *English Men of Science: Their Nature and Nurture*, (London: Macmillan, 1874), p. 260.

legitimacy of Darwin's claim to have made out a demonstrative case against Lamarck while neglecting even to describe what Lamarck's position was (pp. 298, 314). Beyond this, Butler's rhetoric in his attack on the scientific establishment in these later essays is clearly designed to draw the battle lines in such a way as to group himself and his readership together. The second edition of *Evolution, Old and New* published in 1882 is a case in point. As with *The Fair Haven,* Butler takes the opportunity to discuss the reviews of the first edition as well as George Romanes' scathing criticism of *Unconscious Memory*.[29] Meeting Romanes' criticisms, Butler points out that his book 'was not written for the kind of people whom Mr Romanes calls men of science' but 'the general public, who have been kind enough to testify their appreciation'. Furthermore, he is only too willing to concede that he is 'not a man of science', not at least men of that kind of science 'whose aim is to thrust itself upon the public as actually knowing. "Evolution Old and New", could be of no use to these' (p. 392). Implicit in these comments would seem to be a reference once more to Butler's revised definition of *knowledge* and *scientist*, the latter being his layperson reader whose plain common sense was enough to intuit that the older model of evolutionary change was clearly the most self-evident and convenient. In the following passage from *Luck, or Cunning?*, Butler returns to this idea of a society divided into true scientists and specialists who must ultimately bow to the judgement of the general public:

> Mr. Darwin and his supporters are misleading the public to the full as much as the theologians of whom they speak at times so disapprovingly. They sin, moreover, with incomparably less excuse. Right as they doubtless are in much, and much as we doubtless owe them (so we owe much also to the theologians, and they also are right in much), they are giving way to a temper which cannot be indulged with impunity. I know the great power of academicism; I know how instinctively academicism everywhere must range itself on Mr. Darwin's side, and how askance it must look on those who write as I do; but I know also that there is a power before which even academicism must bow, and to this power I look not unhopefully for support. (pp. 188-89)

Butler may have had his own particular reasons for appealing to a republican image of the scientific community. However, it is clear from passages such as this that he was of one voice with other non-professional writers of the time who looked equally upon the specialist's claim to provide the authoritative voice of nature with scepticism and anxiety.

[29] See introduction, n. 23.

Concomitant with Butler's appeal to the layperson in these final essays is his appeal to the economic incentives motivating scientific writing. In *Unconscious Memory,* Butler once again concludes an evolutionary essay by pointing up his lack of scientific credentials. 'If I have sometimes used hard terms, the probability is that I have not understood them', he claims, before explaining away any cases of abstruse terminology that the reader might come across as 'a bad habit' contracted from his reading of professional scientists. According to Butler, the reader ought not to get 'too much cast down' by the 'bad language' used by such professionals: 'It is not the ratcatcher's interest to catch all the rats; and, as Handel observed so sensibly, "Every professional gentleman must do his best for to live."' (p. 179). For Butler, as professionals paid for their ability to deal in complex ideas, scientists cannot survive without making out matters to be more obscure than they actually are. In *Luck, or Cunning?,* Butler twice mentions the pensions that his opponents can look forward to for the achievement of having 'hoodwinked us so much to our satisfaction' or their success in having got rid of 'feeling, consciousness and mind generally from active participation in the evolution of the universe' (pp. 8, 157). Regarding this latter point, Turner has identified how the narrow doctrines of scientific naturalism held sway among English men of science during the post-*Origin* period despite the existence of more moderate methodologies.[30] Certainly, Butler was unwilling to concede that the extreme materialist positions held by some of his opponents were motivated merely by disinterested scientific inquiry. Also in *Luck, or Cunning?,* Butler considers the case of the prolific popularist Grant Allen. Allen had recently published a biography of Darwin and again Butler's close reading skills are employed to illustrate how in his desire to eulogise Darwin, Allen appears to contradict statements he makes elsewhere regarding the workability of natural selection. Explaining this inconsistency, Butler appeals to the financial incentives motivating Allen to write, claiming that he has presumably 'taken a brief, as it were, for the production of a popular work and feels more bound to consider the interests of the gentleman who pays him than to say what he really thinks'. Pausing to elaborate upon the economic dimension to scientific writing, Butler draws the parallel with the legal world once more:

> surely, as things stand, a writer by the mere fact of publishing a book professes to be giving a *bona fide* opinion. The analogy of the bar does not hold, for not only is it perfectly understood that a barrister does not necessarily state his own opinions, but

[30] *Between Science and Religion*, p. 20.

> there exists a strict though unwritten code to protect the public against the abuses to which such a system must be liable. In religion and science no such code exists -- the supposition being that these two holy callings are above the necessity for anything of the kind. Science and religion are not as business is; still, if the public do not wish to be taken in, they must be at some pains to find out whether they are in the hands of one who, while pretending to be a judge, is in reality a paid advocate, with no one's interests at heart except his client's. (pp. 257-58)

With this, the fullest account of the economic argument Butler offers, he once more challenges the special status of scientific writing with the claim that despite its gloss of objectivity, it can be abused for the pursuit of self-interest. In fact, so pervasive did Butler sense this practice to be that he concludes with the observation that the debate between science and religion has hitherto been misunderstood. When people talk about reconciling these two great interpretations of humankind's place in the universe what they really mean is 'reconciling the statements made by one set of professional men with those made by another set whose interests lie in the opposite direction' (p. 258). For Butler, the secular interests motivating authors were central to the positions they espoused, and this held true regardless of whether they were tough-minded scientists or tender-minded religious idealists.

In perhaps the most spectacular instance of Butler's drive to uncover the covert secular interests at work behind scientific discourse, he returns in *Luck, or Cunning?* to his grievance with Darwin. In yet another attempt to show that Darwin wished to steal Buffon's laurels, Butler quotes all ninety-seven passages from the *Origin,* as near as he can make them, in which Darwin claimed the theory of descent either 'expressly by speaking of "my theory"' or 'by implication', as with the opening passage of the *Origin* (pp. 192-234). Such a thorough-going insistence on the controlling presence of authorial intention in the service of self-advancement is breathtaking, and, it must be said, bordering upon the pathological. However, as I argued in the previous section, Butler's appeal to authorial intention may equally be regarded as simply an expression of his evolutionary beliefs, albeit one which in these later essays is cut with a liberal dose of bitterness. As such, one can suggest that Butler's refusal to put down Darwin's slips as a writer to mere accident was one of his greatest weapons in his crusade to enshrine mind and purpose at the heart of our model of the universe. But there is also another side to Butler's Lamarckian take on authorial intention, one which challenges his credentials as a fearsome opponent of a priestly class of authors whose aim it was to exert control over society; for if he too is to be configured as a player in this debate then presumably his intentions ought also to be open to question.

In ‘Lucubratio Ebria’, Butler had broken down the barrier between humankind and its creations, viewing property and wealth as the means to extend one’s sphere of influence. Hence it was the rich man who ought to be regarded as ‘the true hundred-handed Gyges of the poets’. At the time of my reading of this passage, I remarked how Butler also considered ‘bodies of writing’ to constitute extra-corporeal limbs with the ability to reach out and affect others. In a notebook entry, entitled ‘Trail and Writing’, Butler muses on the material influence which writing can exert:

> Before the invention of writing the range of one man's influence over another was limited to the range of sight, sound and scent; besides this there was trail, of many kinds. Trail unintentionally left is, as it were, hidden sight. Left intentionally, it is the unit of literature. It is the first mode of writing, from which grew that power of extending men's influence over one another by the help of written symbols of all kinds without which the development of modern civilisation would have been impossible.

In the substance of Butler’s comments here is the extension of the hypothesis of his early sketch to configure writing as a repository of the author’s intentions and means ultimately of extending his or her sphere of influence. In a separate notebook entry, Butler returns to the subject of the relationship existing between artist, creation and audience, this time in the context of a discussion of music:

> Though we think so much of our body, it is in reality a small part of us. Before birth we get together our tools, in life, we use them, and thus fashion our true life which consists not in our tools and tool-box but in the work we have done with our tools. It is Handel's work, not the body with which he did the work, that pulls us half over London. There is not an action of a muscle in a horse's leg upon a winter's night as it drags a carriage to the Albert Hall but is in connection with, and part outcome of, the force generated when Handel sat in his room at Gopsall and wrote the *Messiah*. Think of all the forces which that force has controlled, and think, also, how small was the amount of molecular disturbance from which it proceeded. It is as though we saw a conflagration which a spark had kindled. This is the true Handel, who is a more living power among us one hundred and twenty-two years after his death than during the time he was amongst us in the body.[31]

Such speculations on the legacy that artists leave behind may well find their origin in the fact that for all his evolutionary speculations, Butler died childless. Certainly, Butler mused at length in his notebooks and elsewhere on ‘the life of the world to come’ where ‘dead men meet on lips of living men’.[32] However, it ought also to be

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[31] *Notebooks*, pp. 96, 22.

[32] ‘The Life of the World to Come’ is the title of a section of the *Notebooks* under which Butler’s musings upon the possibility of posthumous recognition are gathered together. The other quotation here is from a sonnet Butler had published in the *Athenaeum* in 1902 in which he addresses other writers who were also neglected in their day: ‘Yet meet we shall, and part, and meet again | Where dead men meet, on lips of living men.’ *Memoir*, II, p. 361.

acknowledged that these passages reveal Butler reflecting upon a particularly subtle and invasive understanding of authorial intention in ways which clearly apply to his own position. Ultimately, Butler's quarrel with the Darwinists in these later essays sheds as much light upon his own writings as it does upon those of his opponents.

CONCLUSION

In this study I have attempted to challenge Butler's reputation as a satirical writer by showing how sophisticated assumptions about language and rhetoric often lie behind the form in which he cast his thought. Of central importance has been my argument that shortly after he graduated, Butler came to the understanding that his intellectual development had been arrested by the illicit use of conventions. This realisation not only left him with a lasting commitment to develop his own ideas and opinions through a process of practical inquiry, but was also instrumental in instilling in Butler an awareness that language is always open to manipulation; that multiple competing interpretations can coexist; and that behind every interpretation there is always an intention.

Signs of these preoccupations are already in evidence in Butler's undergraduate writing. What impresses most about the Cambridge pieces is Butler's pervasive preoccupation with the effects that can be generated by manipulating literary conventions, be these register, point of view, or subtle re-evaluations of familiar terms. Indeed, in two of the most characteristic texts of the collection, Butler concerns himself directly with the dichotomy between social image and substance with a burlesque on the idea of sincerity as well as a wry look at how one may manipulate the understanding of others for personal gain. In chapter 1, I suggest that such features find their origin in the world Butler describes in the early chapters of *The Way of All Flesh,* a world in which patriarch and principal maintain their position of dominance by manipulating appearances and making dubious appeals to the authority of dogma. Beyond this, it is also clear from the remainder of this study that at various strategic moments in his career as a writer and a thinker, Butler encountered specific methods and paradigms which were instrumental in focusing and developing these same preoccupations.

Butler's first encounters with the Higher Criticism, which texts he studied and how they influenced his view of language are, in the opinion of this author, some of the most intriguing questions yet to be answered in Butler criticism. Indeed, it is questionable whether these issues will ever be addressed given that very little is

actually known about this crucial period of his intellectual development.[1] Nevertheless, in its preoccupation with the distinction between figurative and literal language use as well as the constant change to which language and modes of thought are always subject, it is arguably the case that the methods and conclusions of the Higher Criticism were instrumental in contributing toward Butler's view of language as always prone to modification. Also relevant is my argument in chapter 6 that Butler's preoccupation with authorial intention was bound up with the revised doctrine of inspiration which many liberal theologians of the time were keen to emphasise. Ultimately, this section of the text, mixing metaphors from painting with passages which Butler would later incorporate into *Life and Habit,* is particularly dense with influences. However, it seems reasonable to suggest that for a writer like Butler who was not only preoccupied with authorial intention, but who also made a habit out of appropriating theological terms to his own purpose, the word *spirit* always came with a history of use.

Yet more decisive in developing Butler's views on language was his discovery of evolutionary theory. Here I would argue that two moments were of particular significance. In his essay on Butler, David Amigoni has pointed to the central role metaphor played in Butler's view of language development, and it has been one of the main aims of this study to provide a thorough and sustained account of both the origin and development of this view. This I have undertaken in chapters 3 and 4, where I base my analysis of the early evolutionary writings and *Life and Habit* on Butler's reflections on how he came to write these texts. Just as in the natural world where no consideration of the physiological features of an organism is complete without viewing these as a product of an evolutionary process, any analysis of *Life and Habit* which does not consider how it developed from the early machine sketches is necessarily limited. Giving full weight to Butler's comments, I have argued that these early speculations represent Butler's attempts at exploring the consequences of Darwin's critique of species. In prodding at the boundary between the organic and inorganic worlds, Butler found in the juxtaposing devices of metaphor and analogy the most appropriate tools for his purpose. Not only this, but his was a method that could yield surprisingly persuasive results -- provided the reader could make that slight shift to a metaphorical understanding. In his study of the role of metaphors in language change, Earl R. Mac Cormac has

[1] The existing published material pertaining to these questions is limited to those few passages from the New Zealand correspondence that I have already included in chapter 1. See chapter 1, footnotes 24-29 et passim.

emphasised the importance of the reader's perception of authorial intention, or the belief that 'the author intended these semantically anomalous words to generate meaning rather than gibberish'. As I have argued, Butler did himself no favours on this score by deliberately mixing his metaphors with moments of levity. But for those readers who did accept Butler's claim to have been in 'very serious earnestness', Mac Cormac's cognitive theory of metaphor is highly suggestive in pointing up a possible means by which we might read from Butler's side of the story. By emphasising the role metaphor plays in bringing about new possibilities for perceiving the world, not to mention the pragmatic value of the resulting conceptual modification when set to work in an evolutionary framework, Mac Cormac's theory seems to fit well with Butler's reflections on the status of his theory at the close of *Life and Habit*.

The second influence related to evolutionary theory was arguably Butler's dramatic discovery of Lamarck while readying *Life and Habit* for publication. Following this discovery, Butler tells us how he went through the manuscript cutting out those terms which were inconsistent with a teleological point of view: 'This necessitated only verbal alterations;' he quickly clarifies, 'for, though I had not known it, the spirit of the book was throughout teleological.'[2] Even before his discovery of Lamarck, the category of intention was fundamental to Butler's worldview. No doubt the battle of wills he had waged against his father over what course his life would take was instrumental in this respect; but so was his experience of deceit. And it was insofar as Butler well knew the power language had to both channel and conceal powerful interests that the category of *authorial* intention in particular was so central to his worldview. As an author of purportedly serious books the arguments of which often issued in paradox and contradiction, Butler often saw fit to emphasise his intentions as part of attempts to encourage his more discerning readers to move beyond the conventional. Hence the appeal at the close of *Life and Habit* that his readers grasp the intention behind the startling and unorthodox theory he was proposing. As the latest in a line of experiments manipulating the face of nature, Butler required his readers to share his awareness that words were merely 'creatures of convenience' which could be manipulated in order to arrive at a more commodious construction. Similarly, the series of parallels Butler draws between painting and the Gospels in *The Fair Haven* also seems designed to focus the more acute reader on the overall intention behind this many-

[2] *Unconscious Memory*, p. 24.

voiced satire. However, it is with his penetrating readings of Darwin and the Darwinists following his discovery of Lamarck that Butler's appeal to authorial intention really takes off. In chapter 7, I have argued that for all the sound and fury of the Krause controversy, Butler's relentless appeal to the hidden agenda he believed these writers shared was merely a coherent expression of his Lamarckian beliefs. In effect, what Butler had done was to turn scientific authorship itself into an evolutionary struggle which must be fought out in accordance with Lamarckian rules, a battle of wills for public favour where the prize was fame, status and financial gain.

In the remainder of this conclusion, I wish to make a series of more speculative observations based upon the discoveries Butler made during the course of his early evolutionary speculations. To this end, we can begin with the observation that for the most part, the early evolutionary sketches and even *Life and Habit* itself have very little to do with evolution.[3] Indeed, in these texts Butler seems more preoccupied with the relationship between language and knowledge, exploiting the imaginative potential of Darwin's critique of species to reclassify the world at the level of perceptual or conceptual similarities. Besides this, Butler's periodic references throughout *Life and Habit* to the role language plays in constructing the categories by which we experience the world, as well as clarifications that the text itself is just another interpretation, would also suggest a response to evolutionary theory primarily in terms of Butler's standing as a creative writer. The accumulated weight of such evidence leads me back to a speculative claim from chapter 4 when I alluded to the possibility that Butler's theory may itself have been shaped by the insights he gained as a creative writer in the course of composing his early evolutionary sketches. At the time, I was prompted to make this observation on remarking how the redefinition of knowledge which Butler presents in *Life and Habit* seems to give central position to those same elements of paradox and inconsistency which had characterised Butler's writings since the Cambridge pieces. Certainly Butler's involvement with evolution was often of an intensely personal and self-reflexive nature. But what evidence can be cited in support of this more extreme form of the argument that Butler's literary imagination made a constructive contribution to the content of his thought as an evolutionary writer?

Of central importance here I would argue are certain intriguing parallels between the form of Butler's speculations in his three early evolutionary sketches

[3] A point also emphasised by Jonathan Culler (see 'The Darwinian Revolution and Literary Form', in *The Art of Victorian Prose*, ed. by George Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 224-246 (p. 233).

and some of the propositions contained in the Life and Habit theory itself. The first of these I have already mentioned in chapter three when I noted that instead of using the word *hypothesis* to refer to the central idea at the heart of the evolutionary sketches we might equally refer to it in terms of evolutionary theory as a *modification*. The resulting sketch with its diachronic element would therefore lend itself to description in terms of an evolutionary experiment in which the 'fitness' of each modification is put to the test. Certainly Jones saw fit to make use of an evolutionary paradigm in his description of these sketches when he refers to *Life and Habit* 'descending from the machines of Erewhon'.[4] Moreover, if we are fully to apply this paradigm then the 'fitness' or otherwise of each modification could only be measured in terms of how convincing the idea appeared on paper once it had been fleshed out and made to run as far as Butler's imagination could take it. In effect, in this world of fiction the parameters for success in the struggle for life would be set by the principle of 'the survival of the most convincing' with the author selecting or culling out each modification respectively on the basis of whether it raised a smile or an eyebrow. Indeed, Butler was not above applying evolutionary paradigms to texts, as is suggested both by those notebook entries I have included at the close of my final chapter and his comment on the conditions for the favourable reception of ideas in *Luck, or Cunning?*.[5]

On the face of it, this interpretation of the early sketches would suggest rather an influence of evolutionary theory on Butler's literary imagination rather than vice versa. However, a more symbiotic relationship between these elements reveals itself when we extend the analysis to consider the origin of Butler's concept of 'cunning'. To reiterate, cunning for Butler was the unconscious *nisus* which blindly yet inexorably gave rise to purposeful progress. In the notebooks, Butler confesses of his most significant work:

> I did not see my way clearly with *Life and Habit* when I began to write it. I knew I was close on to a big thing, but I should never have got hold of it if I had waited till I understood myself before I began to write.[6]

Following Butler's comments in *Unconscious Memory* on how he wrote *Life and Habit,* it is hard not to be impressed by the improvised, unpremeditated, feeling-

[4] See chapter 4, n. 11.
[5] See chapter 7, section '*Evolution, Old and New*: Re-interpreting the history of a theory' and my argument in chapter 6 for Life and Habit as expedient fiction.
[6] *Further Extracts*, p. 113.

your-way-in-the-dark quality of the form which Butler's speculations in the sketches took. 'Illusion, mistake, action taken in the dark --', Butler elsewhere writes, 'these are among the main sources of our progress.'[7] Always a self-conscious writer, deeply preoccupied by his own intellectual development free from the straitjacket of an imposed curriculum, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the form of Butler's speculations in these fictional sketches played a significant role in giving shape and substance to his later emphasis on cunning as the guiding force driving development forward.

Further evidence for a more radical assessment of the influence of Butler's literary imagination on his evolutionary thought arises when we consider certain parallels between the use of metaphor and analogy in the evolutionary sketches and that component of the Life and Habit theory which Butler terms 'crossing'. In chapter 6, I make reference to this component as part of a wider discussion aimed at illustrating the conservatism inherent in Butler's view of the development of ideas. To reiterate, according to Butler, if new ideas differ too greatly from existing ones, attempts to 'cross' the one with the other will fail, rendering performance 'monstrous' or simply 'baffling'. However, a little later in *Life and Habit*, Butler applies the same model to biology, using the concept of crossing to explain the sterility of hybrids. Quoting from a study into five hundred eggs produced from various crosses between three species of fowl, Butler describes how either the chick failed to develop or died within a few weeks of hatching. 'No wonder the poor creatures died,', Butler comments, 'distracted as they were by the internal tumult of conflicting memories'. There then follows a wry reference to how the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ought to 'keep an eye' on such practices: 'five hundred creatures puzzled to death is not a pleasant subject for discussion. Ten or a dozen should, I think, be sufficient for the future.' Of course, this is a comical passage, but again we ought to be on guard against rejecting too much. In an entry in his private notebooks written in 1885 and edited two years later, Butler was still asserting his claim to have offered a *bona fide* working hypothesis to account for the sterility of hybrids, one based upon the conflict of inherited memories.[8] In a real sense then, Butler's solution to one of the great biological unknowns of his time, the mechanism underlying inheritance, was to apply a cognitive paradigm to biology, a paradigm

[7] *Notebooks*, pp. 229-30.
[8] *Notebooks*, pp. 66-67.

which in turn seemed to owe much to his experimentation with the juxtaposing devices of analogy and metaphor in the early sketches.

On assessing the evidence for a more extreme form of the argument that Butler's literary imagination influenced his evolutionary writings, one is once more impressed with just how deeply personal and self-reflexive Butler's relationship with evolution was. Certainly if my analysis of *Life and Habit* reveals anything it is how closely allied language, epistemology and evolution were for Butler. In bringing this conclusion to a close I would like to pick up on an observation I make in my final chapter in order to show how in his later writings, Butler seems to come full circle by applying his own evolutionary theory to the act of writing again.

In chapter 7, I end by arguing that Butler framed his quarrel with the Darwinists as an evolutionary battle of wills in which authorial intention was always present. Not only this, but certain notebook entries also suggest that in later life, Butler returned to the argument of 'Lucubratio Ebria' to muse upon the possibility that 'bodies of writing' could also constitute extra-corporeal limbs, functioning to exert influence over others even long after the author had died. In his final work, *Erewhon Revisited,* Butler treats this hypothesis at length. In a chapter entitled 'On the Physics of Vicarious Existence' Butler presents the argument of an eponymously entitled pamphlet written by President Gurgoyle. Beginning where Butler leaves off in 'Lucubratio Ebria', the president argues that our influence upon the world is not strictly limited to how we can affect it with our bodies and proposes the following thought experiment by way of illustration:

> A man, we will say, has written a book which delights or displeases thousands of whom he knows nothing, and who know nothing of him. The book, we will suppose, has considerable, or at any rate some influence on the action of these people. Let us suppose the writer fast asleep while others are enjoying his work, and acting in consequence of it, perhaps at long distances from him. Which is his truest life – the one he is leading in them, or that equally unconscious life residing in his own sleeping body? Can there be a doubt that the vicarious life is the more efficient? (pp. 131-32)

Developing his argument, the president then considers the consequences that such a theory has in providing for a kind of afterlife. In her recent essay in *Against the Grain*, Gillian Beer makes reference to this episode maintaining that such speculations functioned to provide existential comfort to Butler in his twilight years.[9] However, what interests me in this episode is the core idea, namely literature as a

[9] Gillian Beer, 'Butler, Memory and the Future', in *Against the Grain*, pp. 45-57 (p. 54).

means of exercising influence over others. If Butler's aggressive reading of Darwin reveals anything about his psychology in later life it is the extent to which he continued to view rhetoric as a powerful and covert means of exerting influence over others. Not only this, but in placing himself and his work at the culmination of a necessary historical movement in the development of evolutionary thought, Butler invites accusations of vanity and self-importance. How are we to square this invasive interpretation of authorial intention with Butler's credentials as an advocate of candour and defender of individual conscience?

As I see it, two points are of relevance. Firstly, it would of course be naive to argue that authorial intention in the form of the will to be read, accepted and appreciated is wholly absent from Butler's prose writings. Indeed, during my analysis of that most ambivalent of Butler's works, *The Fair Haven*, I accept that despite all its contradictions, Butler's intention for this work was clearly to get a fair hearing for the thesis of his earlier Resurrection pamphlet. However, if we survey Butler's writing as a whole, it is arguably the case that the arbitrariness of conventions and the permanent existence of alternative interpretations is the dominant message he sought to convey. Even with his greatest work and clearest statement of his 'philosophy', Butler closes *Life and Habit* by reminding his readers that these are only 'another man's words'. In this sense, Butler's intentions, far from posing a threat to his readers, constantly function to increase his readers' freedom. Secondly, it should be clear from the argument of my final chapter that Butler was a total evolutionist and a Lamarckian to the core. Even before his encounter with Darwin, Butler had a deeply held belief in developing into an authentic and autonomous being on his own terms, of advancing his knowledge in the immediacy of practical experience, and of the will to power as a reality manifesting itself in everything from the pursuit of financial independence to the intellectual dishonesty of professionals who deal in lies in order to protect their self interest. 'No one will understand me or my work unless they bear in mind that I was an unusually slow and late grower', Butler reminds us. By insisting that Darwin's scientific neutrality concealed his cunning, by placing himself at the fulfilment of the story of evolutionary theory and by encouraging us to view texts as limb-like extensions of our bodies, it seems more likely that Butler was simply expressing his evolutionary beliefs and holding out for a universe in which mind and purpose played the defining role.

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