

**The Victorian Crisis of Faith in Australian Utopian Literature,
1870-1900**

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The research behind this paper was motivated by Lyman Tower Sargent's keynote address on Australian utopian literature, presented at the *Demanding the Impossible: Utopia, Dystopia and Science Fiction* conference, held at Monash University in 2007.¹ In the printed version of his paper, Sargent notes that the theme of religion "runs throughout Australian utopianism, but with extremely varied content."² This is certainly true of the late Victorian era, when public discussion of issues relating to evolutionary theory and the role of religion in society grew particularly intense. This paper will investigate some of the different treatments of science and religion in Australian utopian literature from 1870 to 1900. I will contend that an examination of this literature supports recent historiography, which contests the problematic science-versus-religion dichotomy that has often been used to characterise the Victorian "crisis of faith." I will first consider the historical context of the late Victorian era and scholarly trends concerning the relationship between science and religion, before moving on to examine how some Australian utopian authors of the late nineteenth century approached the issues of science, Darwinism, eugenics, secularism, church reform, spiritualism, and agnosticism. Through a brief examination of selected contemporary utopian texts that focus on issues relating to science and religion, I intend to demonstrate the wide range of attitudes and beliefs influencing uto-

pianism in late-nineteenth-century Australia.

Crisis of Faith, Crisis of Historiography

Numerous scientific discoveries of the nineteenth century shook the relationship between scientific research and religious faith. This began with a series of geological discoveries that called into question traditional Christian beliefs regarding the age of the Earth, with tensions reaching an unprecedented high following the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. With Darwin's controversial book, discussions on evolution and the origins of the human race became widespread, as further challenges were presented to long-standing Christian beliefs regarding Creation. Australia's experience with these debates paralleled that of Britain, with *On the Origin of Species* being published in Australia only four months after its release in London. Barry W. Butcher has noted that "debates over the relation of science and religion in general, and Darwinism in particular, extended into the very heart of Australian cultural life," and the late nineteenth century was filled with public lectures and debates on the veracity of Darwin's theories and their implications for Christianity.³ Butcher also notes that although there was general opposition to Darwinism in Australia's scientific and religious communities until the late 1880s, the 1890s brought some major cultural changes that saw educational institutions embrace evolutionary theory.

Until recent years, historians of the Victorian era typically adopted a "conflict thesis" or "warfare model" in order to conceptualise the relationship between science and religion during this period. This approach, which presents science and religion as permanently locked in unavoidable conflict, was formulated strongly by historians such as John William Draper in *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (1874) and Andrew Dickson White in *The Warfare of Science* (1876) and *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (1896). Relying heavily on simplistic understandings of "science" and "religion," and narrow interpretations of specific historical events, such as the Galileo affair and certain heated debates over Darwinism, the conflict thesis remained the dominant historical approach well into the twentieth century. In the 1950s, however, resistance to the conflict thesis started to take shape, and by the 1970s prominent historians were writing open refutations of the approach. Among the most significant of these were Frank Turner's *Between Science and Religion* (1974) and James Moore's *Post-Darwinian Controversies* (1979), which strengthened a growing movement against this approach. Thus, by the 1980s, the conflict thesis had come to be replaced by a "complexity thesis,"

which resisted the temptation to reduce the historical relationship between science and religion to one of simple antagonism.⁴

The complexity thesis is particularly helpful for understanding the tensions of the late nineteenth century, which resist reduction to the clear-cut binary opposition between science and religion formulated by the conflict thesis. When it came to evolutionary theory, there were clergymen and other religious people who were glad to adapt their beliefs to accommodate new scientific discoveries, just as there were secular scientists who objected to Darwin's theories. In Australia, for example, widespread public debate over Darwinism was initiated in 1863 by the eminent medical scientist George Britton Halford of the University of Melbourne, who objected to the scientific methodologies of Darwin and T. H. Huxley, one of Darwin's most avid supporters.⁵ There were, of course, also religious scientists who could not be easily placed in one category or the other. The wide variety of views that were active in society at this time makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to find two utopian authors that completely agree on the future of science and religion in society. Throughout this paper I will argue that the conflict thesis is insufficient for understanding the state of Australian society in the late Victorian era, and that although there are utopian texts that would appear to uphold the notion of unavoidable conflict, there are also many that make such a simplistic model untenable.

Science, Darwinism and Eugenics

It should be said that Australian utopian literature certainly does contain examples of religious reactions to Darwinism and other scientific discoveries that challenged traditional Christian beliefs and values. Colin A. Russell has noted that, during the late Victorian era, "one of the more serious reasons for opposing Darwin was the fear that his theories would lead to the law of the jungle, the abandonment of ethical constraints in society."⁶ This concern is certainly evident in the 1879 utopian novel *Erchomenon; or, The Republic of Materialism*, by Rev. Henry Crocker Marriott Watson, published in London anonymously. Watson was born in Hobart in 1835 and served as vicar of several Anglican churches in Australia and New Zealand before his death in 1901. Although Sargent identifies *Erchomenon* as a "eutopian" novel, I believe it was intended to be dystopian, a cautionary tale warning against what Watson refers to as the "materializing effects" of the theory of evolution.⁷ The story opens with the protagonist returning from an evening lecture on evolution and proclaiming that, in nature, there is "No room for God."⁸ He awakes the next morning to find himself in an apparent utopia six hundred years in the future. In spite of great advances in technology,

this future society, which reveres Darwin and has a “religion of humanity” based on the writings of Auguste Comte, has some nasty aspects born of its strict utilitarianism and materialism: the injured and lame are executed so as not to be a burden on society, and children are taken from their parents to be raised in communal “baby farms.” What at first appears to be a utopia turns out to be a dystopia, in which everyone is secretly miserable because of society’s materialism, which, according to Watson, is contrary to human nature. The story soon becomes an apologetics for Christian faith, preaching at length on the “everlasting and consoling conceptions of Christianity, which met the wants of the human heart.”⁹ It culminates with the mass conversion of the people of the republic and, in a sudden and bizarre twist, the Parousia, or second coming of Christ, during which the narrator awakes from his dream. It should be noted, however, that Watson does not attack the science behind Darwinism, nor question its accuracy; rather, he attacks what he believes to be the unavoidable transformation of Darwinism into a dangerous utilitarian and materialist ideology. Watson published another dystopian novel in 1890 titled *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire; or, the Witch’s Cavern*, in which the downfall of Britain is attributed to numerous causes, including socialism and a loss of religiosity.

Another Christian reaction to Darwinism can be seen in Edward Francis Hughes’s *The Millennium: An Epic Poem*, self-published in Melbourne in 1873. Unlike Watson, however, Hughes (1814-1879) circumvents contemporary issues concerning the relationship between science and religion by ignoring science altogether. His poem, which desperately attempts to emulate Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, depicts the Parousia, the ensuing battles between Christian and non-Christian armies, and the subsequent establishment of a heavenly utopia ruled by Christ and his angels. In this spiritual utopia, education is central, but only education in the humanities. The arts are presented as the pinnacle of human intellectual achievement, and people spend their time reading, writing, painting, and praising great artists.¹⁰ Science, on the other hand, is nowhere to be seen, apparently having no place in Hughes’s rather exclusive Christian utopia.¹¹

There were also plenty of religious utopian authors who reacted positively to the scientific discoveries of the Victorian era. In fact, some were so enthralled by Darwinism that they incorporated eugenics into their utopias – eugenics, at the time, being considered a natural outworking and implementation of evolutionary theory. Social Darwinism, heredity, and eugenics play an important role in the 1873 utopian novel *By and By: An Historical Romance of the Future*, written by Edward Maitland (1824-1897), an English author and spiritualist who spent some years in Australia as a commis-

sioner of Crown Lands and police magistrate.¹² In *By and By*, evolutionary theory and eugenics provide the author with a pseudo-scientific foundation for his extreme racism. For example, in one of Maitland's frequent bursts of anti-Semitism we are told that the novel's protagonist has both Greek and Jewish blood, and that the "appreciation of knowledge and beauty" that comes from his Greek blood counteracts the "sordid nature" of his Jewish blood.¹³ Likewise, we are informed that the wickedness of one of the characters can be explained because "her blood was not purely white, but contained a dark infusion, probably of Hindoo or African."¹⁴ Yet despite its praise of Darwinism and eugenics, Maitland's novel also focuses greatly on the development of a new, utopian religion, which I will discuss in more detail below.

Probably the most fascinating treatment of Darwinism and eugenics, however, was William Little's *A Visit to Topos, and How the Science of Heredity is Practised There*, published in Ballarat in 1897. Although Sargent labels the text a satire, the eugenic regime proposed by Little (1839-1916), a former mayor of Ballarat, was certainly taken seriously at the time, with reviewers praising him for his novel ideas, which they believed were worthy of serious scientific investigation.¹⁵ Little's utopian city of Topos adheres strictly to the "laws of heredity," which have seen the eradication of conditions such as tuberculosis, alcoholism and syphilis. All procreation in Topos is the result of careful consideration, not what the narrator calls "degrading wedlock customs."¹⁶ As a side effect of their eugenics programs, the people of Topos have (strangely enough) developed telepathy, and mothers teach their children while they are still in the womb using "thought-transference."¹⁷ The author calls Darwin a master of biological science, and spends considerable time quoting eminent eugenicists, including Joseph Cook, author of *Heredity, with Preludes on Current Events* (1880), and Amory H. Bradford, author of *Heredity and Christian Problems* (1895). Little, however, was also deeply religious, and he expends considerable effort attempting to reconcile Darwinism and the Bible, making Christian arguments for the implementation of eugenics. Using some very creative exegesis, Little makes a biblical argument for diseases, disabilities, and genetic defects being abolished after three to four generations of eugenics, quoting Exodus 34:7, which speaks of "Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children unto the third and fourth generations."¹⁸ He also discusses the advantages of eugenics and telepathic pre-natal education in creating good and moral Christian children, and argues that telepathy, as used by the people of Topos, was previously used "in the days of Scripture."¹⁹ The resulting text has been called "confused and contradictory," with its author "torn between an Eden-restoring religious mysticism

and a forward-thinking scientific optimism.”²⁰

As strange as his utopia sounds, Little was not the only Australian author to attempt to reconcile Darwinism and eugenics with mainstream Christianity. We find a similar hybridisation of science and religion in *Beyond the Ice: Being a Story of the Newly Discovered Region Round the North Pole, edited from Dr. Frank Farleigh’s Diary* by George Read Murphy (1856-1925), published in London in 1894. The book’s technological utopia, which the narrator discovers at the North Pole, practices eugenics while being guided by “the laws of the Almighty as ineffaceably written on the page of Nature, and expounded by Christ.”²¹ Like *By and By* and *A Visit to Topos*, *Beyond the Ice* demonstrates that there certainly were religious people in the late Victorian era that were accepting of evolutionary theory, with some, such as Little, even becoming obsessed with heredity and eugenics. Society’s fascination with eugenics, however, would not last. By the late twentieth century, when eugenics was a more frequently discussed issue, it had become a common feature of dystopian novels, due to its association with the Nazi regime.

Secularism

Secularism took a firm hold on Australian society after scientific breakthroughs in geology and evolution caused many religious people to become disillusioned with literal interpretations of the Bible. A number of utopian novels published in the late Victorian era reflect this growing secular movement, with some authors using science and evolution to level attacks on faith and organised religion. Melbourne, in particular, was the site of many feverish debates over scientific discoveries and spirituality, and the city became the home of such radical and controversial late-nineteenth-century groups as the Eclectic Association of Melbourne, the Sunday Free Discussion Society, and the Australasian Secular Association.

A prime example of the influence of this emergent secularist movement is *Misopseudes: or the Year 2075; A Marvellous Vision*, published anonymously in Melbourne, with two editions appearing in the early 1870s. *Misopseudes* comprises a brief look at a future utopia, followed by a series of the author’s polemical letters. The utopian story is strongly anti-religious, and it concerns itself primarily with a lecture given at a university in the year 2075, in which the speaker mocks the Bible relentlessly, ridicules Christian beliefs in heaven, hell, eternal damnation, the immortality of the soul, and predestination, and makes pointed attacks on traditional Catholic rituals and dogma. In the author’s ideal future the “Gospel of Science” has abolished the “Gospel of Christ.” The author repeatedly uses evolutionary the-

ory to discredit religion, and sections from Darwin's writings are quoted at length. There appears to be little doubt in this author's mind that contemporary scientific discoveries should mean the end of religion.

Misopseudes, however, is not merely an anti-religious work, it is also anti-communist, sexist, and incredibly racist. In a particularly anti-Semitic letter the author blames the "dark and gloomy conceptions" of "baleful Hebrew stock" for the emergence of Judaism and Christianity. In another the author predicts the inevitable extinction of the Australian Aborigines, whom he claims are "not quite the same as human beings."²² Butcher has noted the prevalence of such racism in Australia: "Popular journals such as *The Bulletin* looked forward to the day when a new and superior variety of the Anglo-Saxon race would appear in the favourable climate of Australia, a day when the 'uncivilized' indigenous population would disappear, swept aside by the inevitable process of biological and social evolution."²³ Indeed, racism is a common thread throughout early Australian utopianism, and Sargent has identified *Misopseudes* as the first of many "overwhelmingly racist" utopias.²⁴

There are, of course, less extreme secular utopias from this period, such as W. H. Galier's *A Visit to Blestland*, published in Melbourne in 1896. The book's title would appear to be largely ironic, since religion, although only discussed briefly in the story, is depicted as a hindrance to social progress.²⁵ Unlike *Misopseudes*, Galier's novel does not become obsessed with attacking religion, but rather chooses to go into more depth regarding other aspects of the utopia, such as its cooperative and anti-capitalist nature, and the emancipation of its working class.

During the late nineteenth century we also find religious reactions to the growing secularist movement, such as *The Future of Victoria*, published in Melbourne around 1873 under the pseudonym "Acorn."²⁶ Throughout this utopian story, the author warns against what he regards as secularist propaganda, frequently asserting that Victoria is under threat by a "mixed lot of heathens, Mahommedans, and unbelievers."²⁷ The author's utopian vision is of a Victoria entirely comprised of devout Christians that strictly enforce the religious education of their children, emphasising the literal truth of Bible stories, especially the biblical account of Creation. Science, we are told, is still taught in schools, but is of secondary importance to Christian studies; evolution is not mentioned. The main subject of the author's attacks would appear to be contemporary secular literature, or perhaps scientific writings that contradicted traditional Christian beliefs, for there are repeated warnings against the "destructive poisons" of the irreligious literature permeating society.²⁸ According to the author, in the future Victoria no one would write "such vile stuff as is sometimes written now, stuff to de-

grade the mind, to stultify the faculties of the soul, and to make ignoble the noble creature of man,” and if such works did appear, “the flames would be their speedy tomb.”²⁹ It is not surprising that *The Future of Victoria* was published in the same city, and around the same time, as the vehemently anti-religious *Misopseudes*.

Church Reform

Although the author of *The Future of Victoria* adopted a very reactionary stance towards contemporary criticisms of religion, many other Christian authors saw it as an opportunity to call for Church reform, so as to harmonise Christian practice with the changing values and attitudes of society. The theological implications of Darwinism were often of less concern to these authors than the conditions of Protestant and Catholic Christianity and their perception in society. Such calls for reform are made in *Kingcraft & Priestcraft in 1971; or, a Review of a Curious Old Ms. Written by My Great-Grandfather*, one of several papers selected for publication by the Sunday Free Discussion Society in Melbourne, published “by request” in 1871 with the author identified only as “J. D.” The utopian future depicted in *Kingcraft & Priestcraft* was, we are told, made possible largely by Church reforms, including: the abolition of clerical attire, so that priests dress like everyone else; the complete cessation of preaching on hell and eternal punishment; the end of celibacy, with priests being allowed to marry; the democratic election of the Pope; the end of enforced Sunday reverence; and the Church staying out of politics and education. We are also told that, in this utopia, there is no more Catholic-Protestant rivalry and no persecution of unbelievers. These reforms have apparently resulted in the unification of science and Christianity, as the author writes: “Hymns of loving praise [are] chorused by the glad nations to the Infinite, ever revealing great mysterious First Cause, whereby his unerring prophet (Science) is daily teaching men and women how little they yet know—and how much more they have to learn.”³⁰

In *By and By*, Maitland depicts a Church that has undergone even more extreme reforms. This “National Church” purports to be the amalgamation of all Christian denominations, Catholic and Protestant, with absolutely no doctrines, creeds, or catechisms, nor any teachings on sin, hell, or the Devil. The Bible is treated as just one spiritual text among many, and is not believed literally or revered as divinely inspired. We are also told that the National Church has done away with all dogmatism and replaced it with scientific reason. The primary message of *By and By* is that religion and science must learn to coexist, and in order to do so, religion must undergo

some drastic overhauls. The resulting religion ends up holding little in common with the Christianity it grew out of, coming to resemble something more akin to an agnostic spiritualism, with even the existence of God and the afterlife being optional elements of the religion.

Although *By and By* is only tenuously an Australian utopian novel – it was probably written after the author’s return to England – Maitland did write a more distinctively Australian near-future dystopian novel titled *The Battle of Mordialloc; or, How We Lost Australia*, printed in Melbourne in 1888. Although published anonymously, the book’s introduction attributes the manuscript to Herbert Ainslie, a fictional creation of Maitland, first used in his book *The Pilgrim and the Shrine; or, Passages from the Life and Correspondence of Herbert Ainslie, B. A., Cantab* (1867). *The Battle of Mordialloc*, every bit as racist as *By and By*, depicts the invasion of Australia by Chinese and Russian forces. Among the contributing factors to Australia’s downfall, Maitland identifies the “doctrinal differences which separated Anglican from Presbyterian, Presbyterian from Wesleyan, Wesleyan from Independent, and all combined from the Unitarian and the Freethinker.”³¹ This doctrinal division, which is also attacked in *Kingcraft & Priestcraft* and *By and By*, is held responsible for the creation of a weak and fragmented society. In an amusing critique of Australia’s worldly materialism, Maitland has the invading forces enter Victoria on Melbourne Cup Day, when everyone was too distracted by horse races to notice.

Kingcraft & Priestcraft, *By and By* and *The Battle of Mordialloc* all reveal issues troubling some Christians in the late nineteenth century, including the difficulty of maintaining literal interpretations of Genesis, the fragmentation of Christianity into so many denominations, and the increasingly ridiculed teachings on hell and eternal punishment. These authors, however, were not driven to abandon religion entirely; rather, they wanted to see Christianity reformed and changed so as to be brought in line with contemporary thinking.

Spiritualism

Another reaction to the questioning of traditional Christian beliefs during the late Victorian era was the increase in Spiritualism. As Francis Barrymore Smith explains: “The world-wide Spiritualist movement of the 1870s was the first attempt to rebuild the temple of belief upon the rubble of broken dogma.”³² In the Spiritualist movement, Christian adherence to the Bible and the Church’s many creeds and catechisms were cast away in favour of what was believed to be a more scientific belief in the existence of spirits and an afterlife in a utopian spiritual realm. In fact, many Spiritualists were

so insistent on the scientific veracity of their beliefs that they invited teams of scientists to attend séances in order to prove the existence of spirits, as evinced by levitating objects, participants entering trances, and spirits communicating through mediums. Like the secular movement, with which it was often intertwined, the Spiritualist movement found its Australian centre in Melbourne, with the first and most influential Spiritualist organisation being the Victorian Association of Progressive Spiritualists, established in 1870.³³

Smith writes: “The preoccupation with fantasy led many Victorian Spiritualists to dramatize their thoughts in Utopian novels and verses.”³⁴ One such utopia published during these early years of the Australian Spiritualist movement was William Bowley’s *Affinity: A Teaching from the Spirit-World, Concerning the New State of Existence*, published in Melbourne in 1872. The title page of the book claims that it was “received and written under spirit-impression,” and most of the book purports to be relaying information given by spirits regarding the utopian state of existence in the spiritual realm. Bowley claimed that the people in his society were living unnatural lives because of orthodox religion, which he says is opposed to science and reason. We are told that the spirit life, on the other hand, is “purer, more perfect, and more exalted” than earthly life, and that one can become a medium and interact with the spirit world if they adopt a healthier and more natural lifestyle.³⁵

Probably the most fascinating of the Spiritualist utopias, however, is the 1877 novel *A New Pilgrim’s Progress, Purporting to be Given By John Bunyan, Through an Impressional Medium*, written by Alfred Deakin (1856-1919), although published anonymously. Deakin, the second Prime Minister of Australia, was an active Spiritualist for a number of years, helping coordinate a Spiritualist Sunday school, the Progressive Lyceum, and even serving as president of the Victorian Association of Progressive Spiritualists for a short time.³⁶ He frequently assumed the role of the medium during séances, and while writing *A New Pilgrim’s Progress* genuinely believed he was channelling the spirit of Bunyan, claiming in the book’s preface: “I have not in any way exercised either invention or reflection upon the characters, incidents, or principles contained in the following sections.”³⁷ The book was something of an embarrassment during Deakin’s early political career when, on the day of the 1880 election, Melbourne’s *Daily Telegraph* identified Deakin as the author of the book, which it claimed was “beneath contempt,” calling its author, and authors of similar works, “manifest rebels against religion and morals, enemies of society, foes to the human race.”³⁸

Deakin’s allegory follows a man named Restless as he sets forth from the city of Worldly Content in search of truth and spiritual fulfilment. For a

while he sojourns at a place called Faith's Content, where simple Christians live simple agrarian lives, and although they are, for the most part, good people, they oppose all technological progress and adhere to unreasonable creeds and doctrines. From there, Restless travels via the road of Progress to the City of Reason, a highly scientific utopia opposed to religious orthodoxy and superstition. Although religion still exists in the city, it has been stripped of all its doctrines and creeds, and the Bible has been cast aside in favour of secular literature. Unlike Faith's Content, the City of Reason is filled with advanced technology and everyone is taught Darwinian evolution in school. Yet in spite of his insistence on the inherent conflict between science and religion, Deakin insists upon the harmony that exists between science and Spiritualism. Restless comes to adopt Spiritualism while in the City of Reason, and becomes a prominent Spiritualist, eventually writing the Spiritualist's Bible and scientifically proving the existence of the spirit world. The City of Reason then also becomes a Spiritualist utopia, filled with Seers, Clairvoyants and Mediums. Restless, renamed Redeemer by the spirits he communicates with, sets out with his wife, Redemptress, to preach Spiritualism to the ignorant Christian masses, and although both are martyred for their beliefs, their spirits go on to take their place in the perfect spiritual realm.

What is most fascinating about *A New Pilgrim's Progress* is that while Christian "superstition" is condemned as contrary to science and reason, Spiritualism is wholeheartedly upheld as scientific and rational. This reflects prominent Spiritualist ideas of the late nineteenth century, which held that the existence of spirits, their communication through mediums, and an afterlife in the spirit world, were not superstitious at all, but purely logical. During the 1870s the Spiritualist Movement attracted many followers, including prominent intellectuals and scientists, though it was constantly under attack by both scientific materialists and Christian authorities. By the late 1890s, however, the Spiritualist Movement had been largely discredited, and several prominent Melbourne Spiritualists confessed to fabricating evidence of spirit activity during séances.

Agnosticism

Another approach that gained momentum in the late Victorian era was agnosticism, which offered people the opportunity to distance themselves both from traditional Christianity, which was often perceived as being too dogmatic and anti-science, and hardline secularist materialism. Catherine Helen Spence (1825-1910), a highly significant Australian author and advocate of women's rights, adopted just such an approach in her anony-

mously published novel *An Agnostic's Progress from the Known to the Unknown* (1884), which reads as an agnostic allegory modelled, like Deakin's book, on Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). *An Agnostic's Progress* opens with a discussion of the massive, high-walled city of Within, in which everyone lives until their souls are wisped away, in death, through the city walls into the mysterious Beyond, the great Unknown. All religion in Within is constrained to the smaller city of Superstition, which is criticised for being full of feuds and disputes, constantly preaching "terrible accounts of the doom of the impenitent, of the unbelieving, and of the misbelieving."³⁹ In order to escape this Religion of Fear, the pilgrim Quaester must travel through the Wicket Gate of Doubt, the only way to reach the Home of Truth, the utopian city of the Unknown. Along the way he must pass through the Valleys of Humiliation and Death, resist the temptations of the decadent and materialist Vanity Fair, escape the miserable dungeon of Despair's Castle of Pessimism, and remain steadfast in spite of characters such as Compromise, Irresolute, Turnaway, Ignorance, Giant Pope and Giant Pagan, all of whom would sway him from his righteous path. The story ends with the predictable line: "And I awoke, and behold it was a dream."⁴⁰

Throughout the book, Spence remains very critical of organised religion. The Catholic Church, in particular, is strongly denounced, with Spence calling it "the oldest superstition and the deadliest ... a mighty mass of cruelty and injustice."⁴¹ Spence even inserts a brief mockery of the Spiritualist movement while her pilgrim sojourns in the city of Vanity Fair, characterising mediumship as a game played by the "physically weak and mentally excitable" who are overly eager to believe the "puerile and foolish" messages supposedly from the spirit world.⁴² Discussing the book in her autobiography, Spence explains that she wanted to show that "reverent agnostics were by no means materialist," and the novel tends to serve as an apologetics for agnosticism.⁴³ Thus, Spence demonstrates yet another perspective on faith and religious belief, avoiding all established religions and movements, and instead promoting the personal discovery of a true faith that accords with science and reason.

In conclusion, the Victorian "crisis of faith," which came about as traditional Christian beliefs were called into question by modern scientific discoveries, had a wide range on impacts on Australian society. Throughout the utopian writing of the late nineteenth century there are debates on scientific issues, such as Darwinism and eugenics, being carried out in the literature itself, with many texts refusing to be placed in either the category of "science" or "religion". There is also an increase in secular activity during this period, particularly in Melbourne, with some utopias eagerly promoting the bur-

geoning secular movement. The various religious responses to scientific advances are also demonstrated in this utopian literature, with a spectrum of approaches ranging from more conservative and reactionary ones, to progressive calls for Church reform. A number of Spiritualist utopias also appear as the Spiritualist movement gained a foothold in Melbourne in the 1870s, with authors stressing the scientific and reasonable nature of Spiritualism over the unscientific superstitiousness of Christianity. And finally there are some that refuse to align with any established group or movement, as Spence does in her agnostic allegory. Although this paper is by no means an exhaustive study of the Australian utopian literature of the late nineteenth century, it should be sufficient to demonstrate the accuracy of more recent historicism, which insists that the issues facing society at this time, and people's responses to them, were much more complex than first believed. At the close of the Victorian era, Australian society was brimming with many competing worldviews that can in no way be reduced to a single cohesive "scientific" ideology and a competing "religious" one.

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NOTES

- ¹ This paper draws from research undertaken during a 2008/2009 Summer Research Scholarship with the School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University. I am indebted to the resources made available by the ANU, the National Library of Australia, the State Library of Victoria, and Monash University. I took as my starting point Sargent's fantastic bibliography of Australian utopian literature, see: Lyman Tower Sargent, "Australian Utopian Literature: An Annotated, Chronological Bibliography 1667-1999," *Utopian Studies* 10, no. 2 (1999): 138-73, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20718099>.
- ² Lyman Tower Sargent, "Australia as Dystopia and Eutopia," *Arena* 31 (2008), 121.
- ³ Barry W. Butcher, "Darwin Down Under: Science, Religion, and Evolution in Australia," in *Disseminating Darwinism: The Role of Place, Race, Religion, and Gender*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers and John Stenhouse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 39-40, 52-3.
- ⁴ David B. Wilson, "The Historiography of Science and Religion," in *Science and Religion: A Historical Introduction*, ed. Gary B. Ferngren (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), 15, 21, 23-4.
- ⁵ Butcher, "Darwin Down Under," 41-2.

- ⁶ Colin A. Russell, "The Conflict of Science and Religion," in *Science and Religion: A Historical Introduction*, ed. Gary B. Ferngren (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), 6.
- ⁷ Sargent, "Australian Utopian Literature," 142; [Henry Crocker Marriott Watson], *Erchomenon; or, The Republic of Materialism* (London: Samson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1879), 220.
- ⁸ [Watson], *Erchomenon*, 1.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 221.
- ¹⁰ Edward Francis Hughes, *The Millennium: An Epic Poem* (Melbourne: published by author, [1873]), 134-58.
- ¹¹ A contemporary review in *The Argus* summarised Hughes's utopia thus: "His lively fancy depicts the establishment of a New Jerusalem, from which all religions and their professors will be excluded, but to which Pythagoras, Plato, and Socrates, Moses, Dante, and Shakespeare, St. Bartholomew and John Huss, will be freely admitted, while all the celebrated artists who lived in former times receive fresh commissions from Christ, and are installed 'prophets of new styles and nobler schools.'" The reviewer concludes that *The Millennium* is a "literary curiosity." See: "Recent Publications", *The Argus* (Melbourne), September 19, 1873.
- ¹² "Maitland, Edward," in *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, William H. Wilde, Joy Hooton, and Barry Andrews (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994), 504.
- ¹³ Edward Maitland, *By and By: An Historical Romance of the Future* (London: Richard Bentley and Sons, 1973), 44, 249.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 404.
- ¹⁵ Review of *A Visit to Topos*, by William Little, *Ballarat Star*, April 16, 1897; Review of *A Visit to Topos*, by William Little, *Ballarat Courier*, April 16, 1897.
- ¹⁶ William Little, *A Visit to Topos, and How the Science of Heredity is Practised There* (Ballarat: Berry, Anderson, 1897), 25.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ²⁰ Russell Blackford, Van Ikin, and Sean McMullen, *Strange Constellations: A History of Australian Science Fiction* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 22.
- ²¹ G. Read Murphy, *Beyond the Ice: Being a Story of the Newly Discovered Region Round the North Pole, edited from Dr. Frank Farleigh's Diary* (London: Samson Low, Marston, [1894]), 50.
- ²² *Misopseudes: or the Year 2075; A Marvellous Vision* (Melbourne: W. H. Williams, [187-]), 13, 30.
- ²³ Butcher, "Darwin Down Under," 56.
- ²⁴ Sargent, "Australia as Dystopia and Eutopia," 115.
- ²⁵ Blackford, Ikin, and McMullen, *Strange Constellations*, 22.

- ²⁶ According to Sargent, a handwritten note in the card catalogue at the National Library of Australia suggests that the author is one James Oakes, although I was unable to find further evidence of this. Furthermore, although Sargent claims the text was published in the 1880s and the NLA catalogue entry lists the 1850s, the book was in fact published in either 1872 or 1873: the copy held at the State Library of Victoria has “Presented by the Author April 16th 1873” inscribed on the title page, and the book’s printers, Wigney and Summerscales (Ballarat), only operated between 1872 and 1875. See: Sargent, “Australian Utopian Literature,” 142; Stephen J. Herrin, *The Development of Printing in Nineteenth Century Ballarat* (Melbourne: Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand, 2000), 143-4.
- ²⁷ Acorn, *The Future of Victoria* (Melbourne: James Smith, [1873?]) 14.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 17-18.
- ³⁰ J. D., *Kingcraft & Priestcraft in 1971; or, a Review of a Curious Old Ms. Written by My Great-Grandfather* (Melbourne: Robert Bell, 1871), 2.
- ³¹ [Edward Maitland], *The Battle of Mordialloc; or, How We Lost Australia* (Melbourne: Samuel Mullen, 1888), 11.
- ³² Francis Barrymore Smith, “Religion and Freethought in Melbourne, 1870 to 1890” (master’s thesis, University of Melbourne, 1960), 30.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 81.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 104.
- ³⁵ William Bowley, *Affinity: Teaching from the Spirit-world, Concerning the Next State of Existence* (Melbourne: W. H. Terry, 1972), 5.
- ³⁶ J. A. La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin: A Biography, Volume 1* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1965), 55-79.
- ³⁷ [Alfred Deakin], *A New Pilgrim’s Progress, Purporting to be Given By John Bunyan, Through an Impressional Medium* (Melbourne: W. H. Terry, 1877), 3.
- ³⁸ *Daily Telegraph* (Melbourne), July 14, 1880, 2.
- ³⁹ [Catherine Helen Spence], *An Agnostic’s Progress from the Known to the Unknown* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1884), 10.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 266.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 113-14.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 195-6.
- ⁴³ Catherine Helen Spence, *Catherine Helen Spence: An Autobiography* (Adelaide: W. K. Thomas, 1910), 63.