

RACIALISATION AND DYSTOPIANISM IN THE IRISH LITERARY CONTEXT: A CASE-STUDY*

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ABSTRACT

The “anomalous state” of Ireland that David Lloyd (7) referred to in his homonymous volume portrays accurately the in-betweenness in which the Irish have been historically relegated. In this respect, not only critical theory but also a considerable number of literary works have attempted to give voice, respond and, ultimately, challenge the stereotypical imagery associated with the country in the heyday of the Victorian era and afterwards. Peter Dickinson’s rather unknown *The Green Gene* (1973) emerges as a noteworthy example of how notions of race in an Irish/Celtic context can be anatomised through traditional dystopian tropes. Thus, the aim in this study is to analyse how this work epitomises a new way of dealing with the very concept of race and how, in this precise case, it is strongly determined by the excesses of science and genetic manipulation, two questions that have been strongly related with dystopian literature.

KEY WORDS: Race, dystopia, postcolonialism, *The Green Gene*, satire.

RESUMEN

El “estado anómalo” al que se refería David Lloyd (7) en su obra homónima describe a la perfección la indefinición sociopolítica, económica e, incluso, geográfica, a la que se ha relegado al pueblo irlandés a lo largo de su historia. En este sentido, tanto la crítica literaria como la comunidad de escritores han intentado dar voz y cuestionar los clichés y estereotipos que se asociaron al país en el periodo de máxima algidez del victorianismo. *The Green Gene* (1973), novela escrita por Peter Dickinson y escasamente conocida, entremezcla cuestiones raciales largamente debatidas con una aproximación distópica a través de la cual el autor disecciona la realidad del pueblo irlandés en una época clave en su desarrollo como país. De esta manera, el objetivo de este estudio es el de analizar cómo esta novela representa una nueva e innovadora vía en el tratamiento del concepto de raza y cómo esta idea viene altamente determinada por los excesos de la ciencia y la manipulación genética, dos cuestiones que siempre han estado íntimamente ligadas con la literatura distópica.

PALABRAS CLAVE: raza, distopía, postcolonialismo, *The Green Gene*, sátira.



The “anomalous state” of Ireland that David Lloyd (7) referred to in his homonymous volume portrays accurately the in-betweenness in which the Irish have been historically relegated, in terms and conditions that scholars and academics in the line of Declan Kiberd, Seamus Deane or Clare Carroll have considered rather vague and sometimes untenable. In the postcolonial framework in which the country has been located by critics from Edward Said to Luke Gibbons (*Transformations; Gaelic*), Ireland has been entrapped in the ambivalences that underlie its own peculiar characteristics as a country that has undergone a severe though often veiled colonisation. In this respect, not only critical theory but also a considerable number of literary works have attempted to give voice, respond and, ultimately, challenge the stereotypical imagery associated with the country in the heyday of the Victorian era and afterwards. These approaches aimed at substantiating the idea that Irish citizens should be the target of the same process of racialisation as that of other native populations in Nigeria, India or the West Indies. The purpose behind this process was, thus, to objectify the Irish population as though it belonged to a different race, understood not only in terms of the skin colour but also in relation to more sociological, philosophical or anthropological considerations.

As it is widely known, the “perforce” ostracism of Ireland also awoke a profound interest in the context of Irish literature, in which authors like William Molyneux, Jonathan Swift, Maria Edgeworth, W.B. Yeats or George Bernard Shaw, among others, denounced, usually in a satirical way, the unfair treatment received by the country and its *de iure* colonial condition. In this like vein, the list of writings that revolve around this question is long and some of them would arise as good and appropriate exponents of what might be labelled as anti-colonial literature. The most inquisitive works of William Molyneux, Jonathan Swift, Maria Edgeworth, George Bernard Shaw or Brian Friel opened the path to new ways of dealing with the intricacies of colonialism and the effects it produced on the Irish population. The tone that prevails in the approach to Britain’s colonial practices in Ireland is sustained upon the suffocating and occasionally revolting atmosphere that is depicted in them, especially noticeable in Swift’s cannibalistic proposal of 1729. It goes without saying that Ireland has been extraordinarily prolific in the production of a type of literature that sought to, through the sharp use of irony and satire, uncover the evils of colonialism. However, if we focus more specifically on this paper’s main concern, the use of dystopia in inextricable conjunction with satire has not been a recurrent choice among Irish authors, although it is manifestly present in novels such as Eilis Ni Dhuibhne’s *The Bray House* (1990) or Catherine Brophy’s *Dark Paradise* (1992), in which both writers analyse Ireland from multiple and, occasionally, unexplored perspectives. Peter Dickinson’s rather unknown *The Green Gene* (1973) emerges as a noteworthy example of how notions of race in an

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Irish/Celtic context can be anatomised through traditional dystopian tropes. Thus, the aim in this study is to analyse how this work epitomises a new way of dealing with the very concept of race and how, in this precise case, it is strongly determined by the excesses of genetic and scientific manipulation.

The dystopic microcosm Dickinson constructs for *The Green Gene* is founded upon the consequences that derive from the racial situation in Britain at a period of time that is not clearly specified.¹ The story narrates the vicissitudes of a Hindu statistician, P.P. Humayan, who arrives in Britain to investigate the genetic reasons that might have caused the outburst of green-skinned people and the possibilities that this population might eventually outnumber the white, mainstream, Anglo-Saxon citizens. In London, Humayan starts working for the so-called Race Relations Board (RRB), an institution that claims to harmonise all the racial sensibilities that exist in the country and which apparently struggles to meet with all their necessities in the most equalitarian way possible. However, the scientist soon discovers that the living conditions of the green people do not exactly respond to the idealistic scenario designed by the members of the RRB. Humayan's strolls around the area where he lives allow him to realise that, contrary to its claims, the RRB is subliminally implementing a harsh policy of exclusion in which green people are continuously rejected.

It is precisely the marginalised position of the greens what enables Dickinson to enhance the theoretical postulates that defined the Irish, and extensively the Celtic population, as a distinct, and therefore, a minority race. Perhaps echoing the anthropological treatises that legitimated the belief that all those peoples who departed from the officially sanctioned and accepted races were abnormal or deficient creatures, the green characters in the novel are regarded as genetic deviations.² To endow this idea with a deeper sense of verisimilitude, Dickinson wisely includes introductory paragraphs in each of the chapters in which he fictionalises the words of the British highest political authorities, actually the ones that maintain the racial barrier as unbridgeable as possible: "And the same thing *mutatis mutandis*, applied to the Celts and the Celtic Law. It was an irrelevance that the majority of Celts, and no Saxons, had green skins. That was a genetic accident" (7). In relation to this last idea, Jim Mac Laughlin argues that the Irish population in Victorian Britain was "forced to define themselves in terms of their 'otherness' and perceived themselves as 'mutant people'" (61). The words uttered by the Home Secretary in the previous quote point to the extended and widely accepted conviction that racial difference

¹ Although the action of the novel is not framed in a clear period of time, it clearly echoes the situation that the Irish emigrants were forced to go through in Victorian Britain. The number of studies, literary, historical and sociological, that gravitate around this question are considerable and reveal the discrimination that Irish experienced in Great Britain (See Hickman and Walter; Paz).

² As John Brannigan points out: "The Irish were, thus, an anomaly, an aberration, in an otherwise effective visual schema of racial distinction, and it is this anomalous position — a 'white colony' in an empire premised upon white superiority, or as Gibbons memorably coined, 'a First World country, but with a Third World memory'" (180).



necessarily meant otherness and, similarly to what happened to the African-American population in the United States, segregation.

Apart from suggesting a conspicuous parallelism with the country's colour "par excellence," the utilisation of green-skinned characters in the novel also intends to deepen into the incongruities that lay at the heart of the colonisation of Ireland. The takeover and exploitation of the island never responded to the British imperial architecture, founded on the assumption that the country had a sense of duty and responsibility to indoctrinate and enlighten those populations that were categorised merely as savages. The main criterion to taxonomise these native peoples as inferior was chiefly based on racial considerations, a fact that, in the end, nourished the notion of the "white man's burden." However, Gibbons assuredly argues that these preconceptions could not possibly have an actual realisation in Ireland since British colonisers and Irish people belonged to the same race: "The 'otherness' and alien character of Irish experience was all the more disconcerting precisely because it did not lend itself to visible racial divide" (*Transformations* 149).³ In *The Green Gene*, Dickinson consciously takes this very conceptualisation to the extreme and builds up a socio-political scenario in which the Celtic sectors are undermined in ways similar to the African, South-American or Asian citizens. Therefore, what the novelist achieves by "colouring" the skin of Irish people is to bring into the forefront a thought that enabled many colonial advocates to endorse the racial distinctiveness of the British with respect to the Irish. According to Joseph Lennon, studies conducted by General Vallancey, Henry O'Brien or Sir William Betham concluded that the "Celtic race" had "Eastern origins, a conclusion based on various readings and misreadings of medieval and classical allusions to the Celt" (130).

Lennon's illuminating analysis on Irish Orientalism leads us to echo Said's foundational study and how his examination of the Oriental as the "other" can be fully applied in *The Green Gene*.⁴ Said noted that the biased reconstruction of the Orient as an entity opposed to the Occident was based on the promulgation of a series of stereotypes and clichés that sought both to debase the Oriental subjects and also to define them not as what they were but as what they were not. The foundations of imperialism were, therefore, sustained upon the fabrication of these stereotypes as a way to strengthen the power relationships that were inherent to this process. In his reading of *Orientalism*, John McLeod points out that colonialism drew on five main concepts that should project a completely distorted and partial image of the Orient as a way to justify the atrocities perpetrated in these territories. McLeod refers to backwardness, strangeness, femininity, race and gender as the key assumptions

³ In this respect, it is interesting to note what Seamus Taylor suggests about this issue. He refers to Robert Miles's *Racism and the Migrant Labour* to reaffirm the idea that "phenotypical difference in the form of skin colour only takes on significance if a social significance is attached to it" (15).

⁴ Clare Carroll's ideas also gravitate around Ireland as an Oriental nation because: "In comparing Ireland in the West to the 'countries of the East,' Gerald [of Wales] places both cultures not only outside European culture but also in an exotic place of the bizarre and unknown, in what could be seen as an early example of English orientalist discourse" (67).



elaborated by the imperial nations in order to enlarge the differences with the native populations (44-46). In *The Green Gene*, Dickinson's description of the greens would adjust to what Said put forward in *Orientalism*, since they are often regarded as brutalised beings only capable of satisfying their most primary instincts. In this respect, women in the colonised lands were usually characterised as naturally-born sexual creatures, source of endless pleasures and always ready to comply with the desires of the coloniser.⁵ Women in *The Green Gene* soundly respond to this cliché and are represented as beings whose amatory skills are both glorified and fantasised: "And of course, my dear fellow,' he added, 'you will not go chasing the green ladies. Oh no. The English are very superstitious about such things. I tell you often I have laughed at their ignorances, and they believe the green ladies have special talents, you know?'" (57). Paradoxically enough, Humayan, himself a member of an ethnic minority, believes that the inferior racial condition of the green women allow him to have free and unrestricted sexual access.

Following with the re-examination of these stereotypes, Dickinson also retakes a question that was significantly empowered by the imperial ideologists and which defended the metropolitan supremacy in terms of progress as opposed to the native backwardness. The Western nations believed that the scientific or technological development was a way to undercut any expression of fantasy, which they associated with the realm of the superstitious. The rush for the discovery of new machinery and equipments at the end of the nineteenth century was not only impelled by the country's own necessities but also and, most importantly, as a display of pragmatism. As was stated above, all that escaped from these criteria was considered pernicious and therefore prone to be cleansed and civilised. While the colonial territories, with an especial emphasis on the African continent, were repeatedly identified with all types of mysterious practices—hoodoo, voodoo, black magic, witchcraft—the Western countries proclaimed their industriousness and common sense. If we concentrate on the context of the Anglo-Irish relationships, this opposition was made clear from the very moment in which Ireland was defined simply as a rural country anchored to a meaningless folkloric past, with no capacity to partake of the modernising impulse of its British neighbours and thus incapable of turning into a developed country.

The debate that Dickinson proposes in *The Green Gene* is particularly relevant as he centres on the way the British authorities sanctioned their own socio-cultural and historical background and downgraded the Irish, which they perceive as a mere compilation of myths and legends. The words that follow are pronounced by the Minister of Education in an official statement on the question of which textbooks are the most appropriate for British school children: "But I am sorry to have to tell the House that many scholars have refused to abandon the myths—often patently

⁵ In relation to this idea, Ania Loomba points out that: "The long pictorial tradition in which the four continents were represented as women now generated images of America or Africa that positioned these continents as available for plunder, possession, discovery and conquest" (151).



absurd and even wicked myths— on which their reputation is founded. It has been a matter of discovering scientists of real calibre who are prepared to take a more realistic view of the social function of history” (24).⁶ Apart from discarding Irish history as a source of “absurd” and “wicked” myths, the attitude shown by this representative evinces the same patronising tone as, for instance, when Captain Lancey addresses the “childish” Irish characters in Friel’s *Translations*:

Lancey: I see [*He clears his throat. He speaks as if he were addressing children—a shade too loudly and enunciating excessively.*] You may have seen me—seen me—working in this section—section?—working. We are here—here—in this place—you understand?—to make a map—a map—a map and— [Act I, sc. I, 30]

In Dickinson’s novel, it is not a question of which historical or cultural tradition is better, which is obviously taken for granted by the speaker. It also points to the necessity of the imperial nation to substitute or erase these local or native expressions to impose their own, much in the line of what Friel describes with the Anglicisation of Irish place-names in his play.

Whenever stereotyping is dealt with, drinking and violence must be necessarily touched upon as they have been historically conjoined with the personality and psychological profile of the Irish people. In his thought-provoking study *Racism in the Irish Experience* (2004), Steven Gardner argues that the Irish immigrant in Victorian Britain was discriminated in a three-fold way: religion, class and race. The reasons to justify their socio-economic exclusion were mainly related to their natural tendency towards violence and drunkenness, which Gardner also connects with their religious background: “The Irish were thus racialised as one section of a more widely racialised working class, but also with an extra dimension. In the logic of this view, their natural propensity for fighting, drinking and low morals, present to a certain extent among English Protestant workers, was exacerbated by their popish religion and inferior cultural background” (123). *The Green Gene* is quite prolific in the description of situations in which the green population is accused, often without any clear evidence, of causing riots and disturbances in London. In

⁶ Also exhibiting a similar paternalistic position, the Minister for Arts argues that the budget destined to the expansion of Anglo-Saxon and Celtic art cannot be the same: “I cannot assert too strongly that the Arts Council Grants are distributed with absolute impartiality between the Celtic and Saxon sections of our community, bearing in mind the differing financial demands of different arts. The last clause is the vital one. It so happens that the Saxon culture covers a wider range of artistic endeavour than the Celtic culture. Painting, sculpture and all the visual arts have become increasingly expensive in our day, while the verbal and musical arts in which the Celts traditionally excel have remained comparatively cheap” (66). The Minister’s words simply evidence the generalised assumption that Irish people were only good at partying around, cracking jokes and playing jigs and reels, being the latter completely disregarded by the Minister as music is a minor, cheaper artistic manifestation. Related to this idea, Hickman and Walter argue that the Irish population living in Victorian Britain was seen as “artistic, impractical and unreliable in contrast to rational, thrusting Anglo-Saxons” (13).



the novel, drinking and violence seem to be deeply rooted in the green citizens, who are made responsible for several explosions that take place in the city. One of these assaults has a more than obvious symbolical implication for it is Harrod's, one of the most recognisable icons of British culture—in spite of its Arabian ownership—the target of the bombing.

In this like vein, many sociologists and anthropologists believed that these outbursts of violence were mostly the result of the binge drinking propensity that Irish people had and which, as Gardner points out, led many municipal and police forces to develop “patterns of policing that prioritised visible street crime, which meant, *de facto*, a focus on, and large presence in, areas where Irish people congregated” (122). In the novel, Anglo-Saxon citizens share the idea that massive drinking is part of the Irish idiosyncrasy, a fact that explains why they behave in the way they do and also why they are displaced and dislocated in the British social spectrum. As in many colonialist discourses, this kind of simplistic generalisations led to distortion and to present an image of the native populations that did not correspond with their own reality.⁷ Consequently, generalisation inevitably results in caricature, as the following quotation demonstrates: “‘Checking for empty bottles,’ she said. ‘Moirag’s half-drunk in the mornings and fully drunk in the evenings—they all are. Luckily she’s got a head like an iron, but she does hide her empties in funny places’” (27). The use of the very recurrent Gaelic name Moirag already hints at the greenness of this character and, subsequently, at her inevitable relation with alcohol. Also, her job in the domestic service determines the social stratum she belongs to and exemplifies once again that Irish immigrants in Britain were doomed to occupy those jobs that were discarded by “mainstream citizens.” Echoing the policies of exclusion of the African-Americans in the public services, Moirag is not allowed to interact with the Anglo-Saxon members of the household and is consequently located in separate areas: “Greens in domestic service had to be separately accommodated, which meant having their own plumbing and cooking, in London, anyway” (27).⁸

As was stated in the introduction, the racialisation of the green characters in the novel ends up generating an atmosphere of distrust, hatred, racial compartmentalisation, control and surveillance that constitutes the perfect arena for the establishment of a dystopian society. From the beginning of the novel, Dickinson stresses the clear divisions that exist in the country and explores the causes and

⁷ Homi K. Bhabha argues that this is precisely one of the aims of the colonialist discourse: “The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (43).

⁸ The parallelisms between the racism suffered by the Irish and African-American have been many times paralleled. In *The Green Gene*, Dickinson seems to have this connection in mind from the moment in which he colours the skin of the green citizens in order to make their “racial condition” more explicit. Noel Ignatiev elaborates further on this question and claims that: “In the early years Irish were frequently referred to as ‘Niggers turned inside out’; the Negroes, for their part, were sometimes called ‘smoked Irish,’ an appellation they must have found no more flattering than it was intended to be” (41).



consequences of this situation. The story is prolific in allusions to zoning laws and to areas that cannot be trespassed by green people, bringing about their complete ghettoisation and a subsequent impossibility to achieve full integration. Dystopian novels are characterised by the suffocating environment in which they are set, usually as a result of the excesses of science and technology, as in Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) or of a dictatorship, as in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Dystopian literature aimed at denouncing the nightmarish consequences that this kind of regimes could bring about and how the social well-being could be demolished if any of these leaders could take over power. As is widely known, Orwell's novel dissects not only the dangers of a dictatorship but also and, perhaps more significantly, the mechanisms such as propaganda, media manipulation or historical distortion that contribute to legitimise it.

The Green Gene exhibits some of the traits that are recognisable in any dystopia, although most of them are directly related to the racial issues that have been discussed so far. Dickinson draws our attention to the patent compartmentalisation of the green population in both the professional and personal realms, which pushes them into a ghettoised labyrinth from which it is difficult to escape.⁹ The parallels that could be drawn are multiple and all of them reasonable in historical terms. Bearing in mind the novel's date of publication, it seems that the presence of the Northern Irish Troubles is an unavoidable source of veiled allusions, especially when characters refer to the zoning laws or to green-only/Anglo-Saxon-only areas. The underlying references to religious sectarianism, to the Peace Lines as horrendous symbols of the most discarnate separatism and to the riots caused by either of these factions are recurrent throughout the narrative, as this dialogue between Humayan and her landlady evinces:

'How does one distinguish the border of a zone' said Humayan. 'You don't,' she said. 'You're supposed to know. But when you have been here a couple of weeks you'll find you can smell it. Get to a Green Zone, though, and you'll see the riot barriers stacked up. You're not allowed in there. Right, let's cross'.... 'I have read about the zoning laws,' he said stiffly. 'I was not aware that persons of different races were forbidden to walk together in a Saxon Zone' (14).

This sectarian apartheid Dickinson examines in *The Green Gene* is, therefore, the element that more clearly triggers its dystopian atmosphere. It was argued above that the distortion of truth and the forgery of history were two fundamental strategies for the indoctrination of the citizenship and the creation of brainwashed, robotic beings with no capacity for dissent or criticism. In this respect, Krishan Kumar points out that: "From the totalitarian point of view history is something to be created rather than learned. A totalitarian state is in effect a theocracy, and its ruling caste, in order to keep its position, had to be thought of as infallible...

⁹ For a series of illuminating studies on the exclusion of the Irish population in Britain and its subsequent ghettoisation, see Swift and Gilley.



Totalitarianism demands, in fact, the continuous alteration of the past, and in the long run, probably disbelief in the very existence of objective truth” (306-307). Celtic history in the novel is not only repeatedly mocked for being merely a succession of tales and legends, it is also object of subliminal attempts to make it disappear in favour of the more canonical and respect-worthy British history.¹⁰ The Irish, and generally speaking, the Celtic world, are conscientiously forced to accept that its national and international role must be relocated in a secondary position and subdued to the demands of the empire. Therefore, Ireland is pushed to rewrite its own past to become solely an appendix of the metropolis, a de-historicised land where the colonial powers can re-introduce their own history.¹¹ As the Minister for Internal Defence patronisingly suggests in *The Green Gene*, “the whole Celtic Nation is an irresponsible minority” (89), reinforcing once more the dependent condition of the colonised nations.

The falsification of history finds in mechanisms like control and surveillance two powerful allies in any dystopian society. One of the bases of a totalitarian state is to maintain the population under strict vigilance so that any outburst of rebellion or resistance can be instantly suffocated and eliminated. The Orwellian imagery of the telescreens, the Thought Police or Big Brother’s staring look form part of a graphic imagery that mirrored quite accurately the political functioning of Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia. As a matter of fact, the performance of racial groups has always been severely scrutinised by the authorities, being systematically targeted as the prime suspects for any riot within the community. This condition of escape-goats motivated many countries, especially those with a higher rate of immigration, to keep these groups under constant observation, a fact that, directly or indirectly, leads to a *Nineteen Eighty-Four*-like scenario. The events depicted by Dickinson in *The Green Gene* are tinged by a clear and present sense of proximity since they are still sadly present in our day-today reality. In spite of the apparent social stability the authorities seek to transmit, the world Dickinson creates in the novel is prevalently dominated by curfews and warnings, by police officers watching over every street and by dubious arresting procedures in which the *habeas corpus* rights of green citizens are rarely taken into consideration. The ideal of freedom is deterred by this inescapable reality, which Humayan’s landlady depicts quite accurately: “Ten minute warning for curfew. There’s another in five minutes, and then the real thing. After

¹⁰ Very closely related to this idea, Dipesh Chakrabarty reinforces the inferiority of what he calls “subaltern histories”: “There are at least two everyday symptoms of the subalternity of non-Western, third world histories. Third-World historians feel a need to refer to works in European history; historians of Europe do not feel any need to reciprocate” (224).

¹¹ Albert Memmi polemicalizes about this vision of history and supports the idea that the colonial subject must be necessarily de-historicised to go through the colonisation process: “The most serious bluff suffered by the colonized is being removed from history and from the community... He is in no way subject of history any more. Of course, he carries its burden, often more cruelly than others, but always as an object” (91-92).



that, if you meet a cop whop feels like target practice... oh, you'd be alright, with your pass, provided he gave you time to show it" (80).

The underlying *martial law* that reigns in London contrasts with the hypocritical approach to racism evinced by the Race Relations Board. It is very paradoxical to read how the incitement to racial hatred is severely penalized by the police forces when strict zoning laws and apartheid mechanisms are continuously implemented. Racial difference is clearly penalized, as Humayan suffers in his peaceful walks around London, although the authorities want to disguise this policy behind a veil of faked tolerance and respect for the minorities. Humayan's first encounter with two officers is marked by a tense exchange in which the statistician is "kindly" suggested to keep away from that area: "I see, sir. Well, the road here is a Zone border. I'm afraid I have to ask you to go back the way you came, sir.' 'Of course, of course,' said Humayan, determined to show himself a good Saxon citizen. 'Can you tell me please what that mark means?'... 'But whatever it means it's IRH.' 'Incitement to Racial Hatred, sir,' translated the first policeman. 'Good day, sir'" (54). The clash that is produced between the claims to racial respect and integration with the implementation of mechanisms that legitimise the creation of Zone borders gives a clear idea that the immigration laws and anti-racist policies usually stand upon a very subtle master/servant relationship, in which the former has traditionally attempted to outwit the latter with multiple discursive understatements.

The paradoxes that lie beneath the racial divide presented in *The Green Gene* also allow Dickinson to hypothesise about the possibility of breeding a purely, non-mixed Anglo-Saxon race in which the gene that provoked this mutation could be discovered and erased. At a certain stage, Humayan eventually finds out the real objectives of the Race Relations Board, based primarily on the belief of a superior race over the others. This goal, which echoes not only Darwin's theories but also Hitler's paranoid search of the Aryan racial purity, strengthens once more the dystopian atmosphere of the novel and, as Mac Laughling suggests, traces back to a shared presumption in Victorian Britain: "The conservative political outlook of this Victorian Britain gave rise to a xenophobic opposition to Irishness based upon a purified national sense of identity, and a sense of themselves as an 'Elect People'" (54). The British self-categorisation as the "Elect People" points straightforwardly to the pseudo-scientific conjectures that insisted upon the existence of a racial hierarchy in which only a few were on top while others were forced to adopt a subservient role.

In a conversation with the Head of the Race Relations Board, this is what Humayan is recommended to do: "What I really want from you, or from you and a few other guys, is a way of reaching accurate criteria of who is or isn't a Celt, regardless of the colour of their skins [...]. Because it means that we have a lot of crypto-Celts walking around in white skins' [...]. 'If this was a fascist like Frank and the Doc make out, we could simply say it was a problem of racial purity, and start breeding back to pure strains'" (71-72). Mr. Mann's attempts to sound racially tolerant clash with his real intention of filtering those who are not purely Saxons as a way to create a strictly departmentalised society. This obsessive desire to preserve the Anglo-Saxon racial uniqueness finds a notable satiric response from some of the characters that intervene in the last section of novel. The hysteric attitude shown



by the RRB is contested by a humorous satiric counterfactual posed by some social underdogs, who imagine what would happen if the Royal family had any trace of Celtic ancestry in its blood. One of them even assures that it existed and that it could be easily demonstrated:

‘Stuart is maybe no verra gude. But there’s been green bairns born in plenty behind palace walls. Mr. Zass, only the English bishops have smuggled them awe and brocht in some bonny Saxon bairn. Generation after generation it has happened, so in what manner can her present Majesty be callit wull-brred? For a’ anybody kens her true name is Ruth Potts, and the rightful king o’ Scotland is lockit in a tower.’ (124)

The utilisation of one of the most iconic symbols of the British culture to exemplify the most likely possibility that green people might have been clandestinely hidden in order to maintain the image of racial integrity that must characterise the Royal family.

The ending of the novel, in which Humayan presents the final conclusions of the research conducted in London, comes to support the abovementioned hypothesis. His presentation of these results confirm that the green population might eventually outnumber the Saxon, provoking thus an overturn of the racial hierarchy and creating a situation that could also be analysed in terms unknown so far. However, the most significant idea that derives from Humayan’s study is that this unstoppable re-emergence of green people would be, in the statistician’s words, “proportional to the severity of the... er, discipline... or restriction what they would call repression experienced by the Celts... There is going to be a surge in any case, but if you do not want to see, in one generation, a minority of Saxons living among a majority of green Celts, then you must either wipe the Celts out or you must dramatically relax the restrictions that now exist” (182-83). Humayan’s courage in the exposition of these details opens a new debate that points directly at the ideological apparatus that supports the colonial project and which is openly dismantled in the previous quotation.

Humayan’s idealistic proposal favours a vision that pursues the integration of all racial minorities rather than their exclusion from the socio-political and economic panorama of any country.¹² In other words, by denying the essential component of repression and segregation, Humayan’s study challenges the foundations of both the Race Relations Board and of the colonial essence proper. Nonetheless, what seems to be an open gate to a better understanding of the racial dynamics ends up in a clearly dystopian *fnale* in which Humayan has to leave the country almost as a fugitive, heading for a secret destination as a hideout. In the end, his truthful argu-

¹² As Benita Parry rightly asserts: “The statements of the theoretical paradigms, where it can appear that the efficacy of colonialism’s apparatus of social control in effecting strategies of disempowerment is totalised, are liable to be (mis)read as producing the colonised as a stable category fixed in a position of subjugation, hence foreclosing on the possibility of theorising resistance” (84-85).



mentation, based on a solid research, necessarily collides with the interests of those who instigate the existence of a racialised world in which inequality and prejudice are the dominant forces at work.

To conclude, the contention of this paper has been to demonstrate that all process that involve any kind of oppression or exclusion can eventually result in the emergence of a dystopian society in the line of what Zamyatin, Orwell, Huxley or Bradbury depicted in their works. The racialisation of the Irish has been the object of an incessant and, sometimes passionate, critical debate that has sought to reveal the ambivalences that have historically surrounded the colonisation of the island. *The Green Gene* emerges as a more than appropriate instance to exemplify how the Irish also underwent a severe process of segregation, especially in Victorian times, and how they were systematically objectified by means of orientalising the population through a series of stereotypes and clichés that had been largely applied to other minority races. Therefore, the novel's dystopian tone is largely founded upon all those mechanisms employed in order to maintain the racial barrier as unbridgeable as possible and also to reinforce the power relations that relegated the Irish into an extremely marginal and voiceless position.

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