



# Samuel Butler, Victorian Against the Grain: A Critical Overview

*James G. Paradis*

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Samuel Butler (1835-1902), Victorian satirist, critic, and visual artist, possessed one of the most original and inquiring imaginations of his age. The author of two satires, *Erewhon* (1872) and *The Way of All Flesh* (1903), Butler's intellectually adventurous explorations along the cultural frontiers of his time appeared in volume after eccentric volume. Author of four works on evolution, he was one of the most prolific evolutionary speculators of his time. He was an innovative travel writer and art historian who used the creative insights of his own painting, photography, and local knowledge to invent, in works like *Alps and Sanctuaries* (1881), a vibrant Italian culture that contrasted with the spiritually frigid experience of his High Church upbringing.

Despite his range and achievement, there remains surprisingly little contemporary analytical commentary on Butler's work. *Samuel Butler, Victorian against the Grain* is an interdisciplinary collection of essays that provides a critical overview of Butler's career, one which places his multifaceted body of work within the cultural framework of the Victorian age. The essays, taken together, discuss the formation of Victorian England's ultimate polymath, an artistic and intellectual ventriloquist who assumed an extraordinary range of roles - as satirist, novelist, evolutionist, natural theologian, travel writer, art historian, biographer, classicist, painter, and photographer.

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