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“My Pilgrim is with Some, Worth
More than Gold”: the British
Reception of John Bunyan's
The Pilgrim's Progress

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“My Pilgrim is with Some, Worth More than Gold”: the British Reception of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*

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Preface

It has often been claimed that no other English work except the Authorised Bible has had such varied and wide a readership as John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*.¹ The reception of the text has varied significantly according to the different audiences the *Pilgrim* has encountered, as well as according to developments in culture and aesthetic. Bunyan's authorial status has also changed through time:² from nonconformist enthusiast to unrefined writer, from atypical genius to author indebted to his time's culture. In this thesis I try to trace the history of *The Pilgrim's Progress*'s reception throughout the centuries, from the time of its publication to the twentieth century.

The first chapter offers an essential summary of Bunyan's life. Though we lack detailed and precise information about it, Bunyan's involvement in seventeenth-century political and religious turmoil was to have a marked influence on the reception of his work in the years to come: some of his early critics would scorn him on apparently political grounds; later on, champions of both conservative and progressive stances would argue over his political position, in order to influence their contemporaries.

As the changing reactions to allegory as a literary device undoubtedly had an effect on the responses to Bunyan's allegorical work, the second chapter analyses the workings of allegory and its history as a literary mode. Hopefully,

¹ See W. R. Owens, "Introduction", in John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. xiii – xxxviii, p. xiii; Anne Dunan-Page, "Introduction", in *The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan*, edited by Anne Dunan-Page, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1990, p.2. The latter puts the Bible's and Shakespeare's readerships above Bunyan's.

² See W. R. Owens and Stuart Sim, "Introduction", in *Reception, Appropriation, Recollection. Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress*, edited by W. R. Owens and Stuart Sim, Bern : Peter Lang, 2007, p. 15.

this will throw light on certain attitudes towards Bunyan's allegory that may otherwise be ambiguous or unclear.

Each of the successive chapters deals with the reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in a particular century: the third chapter deals with the seventeenth century; the fourth deals with the eighteenth century; the fifth analyses the nineteenth century; the sixth chapter is devoted to the twentieth century. Obviously, the division by centuries is an arbitrary standard I have chosen for clarity's sake. No century was uniform in its critical treatment of the *Pilgrim*, not to mention the fact that the turn of a century does not coincide with a sudden change of heart about the value of the work. Moreover, the analysis takes into consideration the prevailing critical trends, though it is highly likely that heterodox views often showed up beside them.

Each chapter analysing the reactions to Bunyan's work is divided into two broad sections. The first section introduces some general notes on the historical and cultural contexts of the century the chapter considers; these notes concern the political and aesthetic factors that exerted a certain influence on the reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The second section deals with the reception proper of the work: how it was greeted and read by men of letters and common readers; its editorial success; the widening of its readership; the different purposes for which it was put to work. Moreover, for each century I provide an essential analysis of a particular literary work of the time that was significantly influenced by Bunyan's *Pilgrim*. I try to highlight the constants and variants in the literary conversation that later authors made with Bunyan, focusing on how they appropriated and adapted the text according to the needs of their own age.

Chapter 1. Life of John Bunyan

In his introduction to the Oxford World's Classics edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, W. R. Owens highlights the massive success that Bunyan's work has enjoyed since the year of its publication:

From the moment of its publication, *The Pilgrim's Progress* has appealed to an extraordinarily large and varied readership. No other work in English, except the Bible, has been so widely read over such a long period. [...] the book has never been out of print. It has been published in innumerable editions, and has been translated into over 200 languages.¹

It is therefore surprising that there should be a “relative paucity of biographical data for Bunyan”,² the author of so successful a work.

Such a shortage of information leaves the matter open to speculations. Some commentators have relied on the data recorded by Bunyan himself in his autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, published in 1666, to trace the main lines of his life. However, such data are of questionable validity as for what regards Bunyan's life. Apart from the usual considerations that are to be kept in mind when approaching a biography or an autobiography – namely, the fact that the hope of grasping a life from an account of it, from a selection of facts coming from an unstructured material, is wishful thinking – it must be highlighted, as Michael Mullett has done,³ that a consistent part of Bunyan's autobiography is devoted to his spiritual crisis (a mere 5 years in a sixty-year-long life) making it more the recording of a spiritual experience than the account of a life. Several personal details are overlooked, as they are considered unimportant for his spiritual testimony to work; hence, we do not

¹ W. R. Owens, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

² Richard L. Greaves, “John Bunyan: the Present State of Historical Scholarship”, in *Bunyan in England and Abroad*, edited by M. van Os and G.J. Schutte, Amsterdam : VU University Press, 1990, p. 29.

³ See Michael Mullett, *John Bunyan in Context*, Keele, Staffordshire : Keele University Press, 1996, pp. 9 – 59.

have thorough details regarding Bunyan's schooling and family. One has also to be wary of the use of hyperboles, motivated by Bunyan's will to cast his own life onto a pre-determined scheme which, besides being shaped by Bunyan's religious experience, is moulded by the very religious purpose of the text; for instance, the notes on his family's social position may well have been influenced by the preference that Christian thought shows for poverty over richness. What we do know is that the 60 years of his life-span witnessed a period of turbulent political events and religious contrasts, in which he took active part and which inevitably affected him and exerted an influence on his writing.

John Bunyan was born in 1628 to a family of relatively low social position – his father was a tinker, a profession he would eventually take up and later on flank to his activity as a preacher. He was nonetheless schooled, though later on he would tend to diminish the knowledge gained by formal education.⁴ At the time of the Civil War (1642 – 1651) – in his teens – he was recruited in the Army. It has been debated whether he had been a soldier for the Parliamentary or the Royalist forces; many scholars have then come to the conclusion – grounded on several evidences – that he had sided with the Parliamentary Army, where he may have come into contact with the fervent Puritanism that characterised it.⁵ Following his discharge, he got married, in 1647, and then underwent the spiritual crisis that would eventually lead him to conversion and the joining of Bedford congregation (around 1655). Later on, in

⁴ With regard to this, see Michael Mullett on Bunyan's seeming intellectual self-consciousness in *Grace Abounding to the Chief Sinners*, when talking of “a stile much higher then this in which I have here discoursed”. Michael Mullett, *op. cit.* p. 57.

⁵ See Anne Laurence, “Bunyan and the Parliamentary Army”, in *John Bunyan and His England*, edited by Anne Laurence, W. R. Owens and Stuart Sim, London and Ronceverte : The Hambledon Press, 1990, pp. 17 – 30.

1656, he “heard the call and began to preach”,⁶ in a period of religious freedom – the years of the Interregnum – that enabled him to freely devote himself to preaching. His activity as a preacher gained him popularity, thanks to his simple but appealing and effective speech style.

However, things came to a dramatic sea-change – the Stuart monarchy was restored, Charles II ascended the throne and a new political establishment was to be set. In 1662 the Act of Uniformity was brought in by the Parliament, prescribing the form of the rites of the Established Church. People were required to conform and adhere to the set of rules. For Bunyan, this meant either stopping his preaching or accepting the imprisonment. He chose the latter. Bunyan was kept in Bedford County Gaol from 1660 to 1672, the year of the Declaration of Indulgence, which extended religious freedom to Protestant Nonconformists and Roman Catholics; he was then again briefly imprisoned in 1675, after Charles II's withdrawal of his former Declaration. In spite of the seclusion, these proved the most fruitful years for Bunyan – as a matter of fact, while in prison he wrote several essays and his already-mentioned spiritual autobiography and conceived his allegorical work, *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

In 1672 he was chosen as pastor of Bedford congregation and started devoting himself to its ministerial and administrative management. Apparently, he worked also to establish a network of local dissenting churches, maintaining the connections between different nonconformist congregations. In spite of his considerable commitment on church organisation, he also kept up his preaching and his writing – besides several ecclesiological works, he published *The Pilgrim's Progress* (the first part was put out in 1678, the second one in

⁶ I. M. Green, “Bunyan in Context: the Changing Face of Protestantism in Seventeenth Century England”, in M. van Os and G. J. Schutte (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 6.

1684), *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (1680), *The Holy War* (1682). His dedication to his pastoral work was to be fatal to him; during a trip to Reading in pursue of the reconciliation of a family quarrel he caught a severe chill. He would die on 31 August 1688.

Chapter 2. The allegorical mode

Allegory has been a constant presence in Western thought and literature. Adapting itself to the changes of culture – that is, man's perception of the world and his place in it – it has come a long way, from the very beginnings of Greek thought to contemporary times.¹ Along its path, it has fulfilled different needs and elicited mixed and diverse reactions.

This chapter aims at providing a definition of allegory and tracking the transformations allegory has gone through in its history. Notice will be taken of the diverse reception allegory has received; this may help us understand the reasons for the ebbs and flows in the reception of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Since we are mainly interested in the period of time which goes from the publication of Bunyan's work (1678) onwards, the historical survey will examine in detail the history of allegory from the XVII to the XX century. A brief account of the previous ages will nonetheless be provided. Besides a general examination of allegory, a paragraph will also be devoted to the study of the allegorical structure at work in *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

¹ For a thorough survey of the history of allegory, see *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, edited by Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2010.

The allegorical mode – attempts at a definition

I

“Allegory, where the secondary meaning arises immediately from the primary surface of literal narration or drama, and constitutes the *raison d'être* of the primary surface”.²

To grasp the basic principle of so complex a subject as allegory, it might be useful to turn to the classical scholars' codification of the concept. The term “allegory” has Greek origins; it is formed by the adjective “ἄλλος” (“allos”, meaning “other”) and the verb “ἀγορεύειν” (“agoreuein”, meaning “to speak in public”), hence determining the meaning of “other-speaking”.³ In other words, allegory is a way of codifying speech so that it says one thing while meaning something *beyond* it.⁴ It is thus a multi-layered structure, made up of at least two levels of meaning – the primary level being that of literal narrative, which points to a secondary, non-literal level of meaning. The secondary level of meaning engages the reader in an activity of interpretation. As Fletcher points out, the literal level of an allegorical work already makes sense by itself, but the whole text gets nonetheless a far deeper and richer significance when interpreted.

As a matter of fact, the act of interpreting is twice performed in an allegorical text. The reader's interpretation of an allegory, in fact, follows the

² Angus Fletcher, *Allegory. The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, Ithaca and London : Cornell University Press, 1964, p. 220.

³ See Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck, “Introduction”, in Copeland and Struck (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁴ See Angus Fletcher, *op. cit.*, pp. 2 – 3. The seminal definition on which almost all those who write on the subject of allegory draw, Fletcher included, comes from Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*: “Allegory [...] either presents one thing in words and another in meaning, or else something absolutely opposed to the meaning of the words”, Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, VIII, vi, 44, online source:

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=quint.%20Inst.%208.6.44&lang=original>, accessed on 4th April 2013, 10.26.

author's interpretation, which is at the very roots of the allegorical creation; it is the author who, given a body of doctrine to keep to, first identifies a part of the phenomenal world as apt means to refer to abstract ideas, and then codifies it into the allegorical text. As Honig puts it in his work on allegory, *Dark Conceit*, any part of the world may be subject to interpretation and provide the text for an allegory. Elevated to the abstract context of ideas, the chosen part will then serve as a text depicting man's perception of the world, his philosophical, religious and political beliefs.⁵

We might ask ourselves whether the allegorist has a practical aim to accomplish in portraying man's perceptions, besides trying to give an order to the world and answer metaphysical speculations about man's place in it. If we assume that the allegorist writes his work with a pre-determined structure in mind – the body of doctrine influencing his interpretation of the world, hence his shaping of the allegorical text – the feeling of a persuasive intention cannot be avoided. One has only to think of the great number of allegorical works having a patently didactic aim that have been published so far, or those having a propagandist or conservative intention at their core; it seems, thus, that the very process on which the creation of an allegorical work is based implies the persuasive character of its structure.

So far, we have traced some fundamental characteristics of allegory, which we may sum up as follows: a) allegory is a mode of encoding speech, whereby meaning is determined by a parallel between a literal and an abstract meaning; b) its arguments are man's beliefs and perceptions of himself and the

⁵ See Edwin Honig, *Dark Conceit. The Making of Allegory*, Evanston : Northwestern University Press, 1959, p. 28.

world, hence abstract features of human experience; c) the function of the mode is persuasive, thereby we may predict a certain degree of discursiveness.

Allegory has been regarded as a non-mimetic literary device. In spite of this, I maintain that, though the first level of meaning – the literal one – may present varying degrees of non-mimetic features, the second level, however abstract it may be in depicting philosophical, ethical, religious and political realities, does indeed provide an accurate mimetic account of the universe of human beliefs.⁶

II

Having first offered a concise definition of the concept of allegory, what secondly comes under the spotlight is the way this very concept works once put into the realm of an actual literary creation. We may begin with the famous notion of allegory as an “extended metaphor”⁷ sprawling across a whole text (whereas a metaphor usually involves a single textual instance). I do not assume the notion of “extended metaphor” to be valid;⁸ however, changing the expression from “extended” to “*constant* metaphor” may help us to

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁷ The term has a long history, as pointed out by Copeland and Struck (*op. cit.*, p. 2). See Quintilian, *op.cit.*, VIII, vi, 44; in modern times, see Rosemond Tuve, *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery. Renaissance Poetic and Twentieth-century Critics*, Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 1947, pp. 105 – 106.

⁸ “Such a rhetorical terminology [that is, defining allegory as an extended metaphor] will obscure the very complications which are the interesting aspect of allegory”. See Angus Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 71 – 84.

I add some further remarks to his accurate reflections: firstly, it seems to me that while a metaphor exhausts his figurative value in relating two different levels of meaning, allegory, as has already been noted, works in *at least* two different levels, that is, it may work in more than two; secondly, I feel that a metaphor's centre of interest is generally the primary level (i.e.: in the exclamation “Paul's a real lion!” we are only interested in Paul's courageousness, not in the lion called upon), whereas in allegory – though the secondary level is generally the most important one – the primary level may be followed with enough interest.

understand a first point of allegory's working process.⁹ Indeed, an analogy stands at the main core of the allegorical text; all parts of the text must constantly refer back to it to keep their significance and their function,¹⁰ otherwise, not only would each part lose its significance, but the whole allegorical text would crumble under the mad weight of its own lack of sense. It is for this reason that I have used the term “constant metaphor”, that is, a constant guide motif,¹¹ whose function is to identify and keep the identities of the objects encoded in the whole text.

Honig calls the guiding motif of the allegorical text the “ideal”¹² – the dominant belief that constitutes the theme of the work. As a thematic force, the ideal not only directs the codification process, as already mentioned, but it is a “pervasively animating force [...] the end toward which the whole work tends”,¹³ so that it inevitably anticipates what is to come later on.

To a certain degree the ideal also determines the allegorical agents. The heroes of the allegorical works, in fact, act in a limited way, which is constricted by the ideal they must demonstrate or accomplish.¹⁴ The degree of pre-determined agency ranges from dramatical to slight. The former pole comprises the personification, which has always been considered the most

⁹ While the qualifier 'extended' implies a spatial dimension, the term 'constant' shifts it to the temporal. Clifford rightly claims that allegory is impossible without narrative, that is, without a temporal dimension. De Man, too, highlighted the peculiar temporal quality of allegory. See Gay Clifford, *The Transformations of Allegory*, London and Boston : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974, p.14.

¹⁰ See Edwin Honig, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

¹¹ See *ibid.*, p. 12.

¹² For a full exploration of the issue, see Edwin Honig, *op. cit.*, ch. VI “The Ideal”, pp. 147 – 177.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 14. See also Angus Fletcher, claiming that “whenever a literary work is dominated by its theme, it is likely to be called an allegory”, Angus Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 220, and Gay Clifford: “the structure of the fiction is dominated or preceded by the ideological structure”, in Gay Clifford, *op. cit.*, p.7.

¹⁴ For an in-depth discussion on the topic of the 'daemonic agent', see Angus Fletcher, *op. cit.*, ch. I, “The Daemonic Agent”, pp. 25 – 69.

typical and obvious allegorical agent.¹⁵ Personifications are the actual representations of abstract ideas interacting; they thus give life to intellectual concepts and, as Fletcher remarks, they may well be termed “ideas in action”.¹⁶ At the other end of the scale, allegorical agents are less pre-determined. Their actions, though, are always under the influence of the ideal; they are still general representative types and not real people.

Allegorical action falls under the influence of the ideal, as well. We have already said that by his actions the allegorical agent must demonstrate the validity of the ideal, or has to accomplish it as the purpose of the unfolding narrative. It should not surprise us, then, that the allegorical narrative is fundamentally arranged into a scheme of battles and progresses.¹⁷ The progress may be either an actual journey or not. Be it a real travel – accompanied by the description of voyages and new lands – or rather a journey into the self, the progress always exemplifies a constant movement onwards, which is directed toward the attainment of the hero's aim. The movement may be either anagogical or katagogical. Along the path, the hero's actions widen his self-consciousness, until he (together with the reader) eventually acknowledges his thematically predestined purpose, of which he was previously doubtful, when

¹⁵ The work that is generally regarded as the first major allegory, Prudentius's *Psychomachia*, is indeed based on the personification of virtues and vices fighting for the human soul. See Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck, *op. cit.*, pp. 6 – 7; Angus Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 26; Carolynn Van Dyke, *The Fiction of Truth. Structures of Meaning in Narrative and Dramatic Allegory*, Ithaca and London : Cornell University Press, 1985, pp. 29 – 37. With regard to personification, Van Dyke reports the general mistrust to which such device is subjected: “personification allegory, which everybody understands because it is so transparent – and dislikes for the same reason”, in *op. cit.*, p.30.

¹⁶ See Angus Fletcher, *op. cit.*, pp. 26 – 32; Gay Clifford, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

¹⁷ See Angus Fletcher, *op. cit.*, pp. 151 – 159; Gay Clifford, *op. cit.*, pp. 26 – 27. As an example of allegorical narrative structured around the paradigm of battle, see the already mentioned *Psychomachia*; for what regards the pattern of progress, see, for example, Dante's *Divine Comedy* or the very *Pilgrim's Progress*. As we shall see, however, both paradigms are usually coupled in one single work.

not totally unaware.¹⁸ As for the battle narrative pattern, we must not consider it as comprising merely actual fights and wars, since debates and dialogues are featured as verbal battles. In any case, both the actual and verbal fights display a clash of ideals, the hero usually endorsing the guiding motif of the allegorical work. Though for clarity's sake the two narrative patterns have been closed off from one another, they usually feature jointly in allegorical texts, thereby conferring it its peculiar, episodic pace, made up of fluid progressions (the journey or movement onwards) and recurrent digressions (battles or debates), which provide clearness to the ideological theme of allegory and variety to the text.¹⁹

So far we have analysed the narrative structures that make up an allegory; let us now turn to language, or better, to the rhetoric of allegory. We have already claimed the presence of a figure at the very core of allegory, that is, the analogy – Honig's “ideal” – which the allegorist wants to assert. We have seen that this central analogy serves as a guiding motif, how it is structured according to an external system of beliefs and how it determines, in turn, the codification of allegorical elements and the characteristics of allegorical agents and actions. As for what regards language, the central analogy variously determines its rhetorical structure. First of all, the central analogy identifies the phenomenal objects by elevating them in an abstract context wherein they acquire another meaning; this entails the establishment of metonymy as a fundamental figure of the encoding process at work in allegory, since metonymy is the trope that substitutes one name for another.²⁰ One has

¹⁸ See Edwin Honig, *op. cit.*, p. 82; Angus Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

¹⁹ See Gay Clifford, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

²⁰ See Angus Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

only to think about the simplest allegorical form, personification, whereby abstractions are referred to by the name of concrete objects related to it. Secondly, while the central analogy works as an integral system which organizes the whole text and identifies each part of it, each part in turn refers to the central analogy and makes it understandable; here the rhetorical figure at work is the synecdoche,²¹ whereby a part is used to refer to the whole and vice versa. In the allegorical text, indeed, each and every single element recalls a wider system of symbols. By both metonymy and synecdoche, thus, allegory is enabled to allude to the ideal that constitutes its very theme.

Another peculiar characteristic of the allegorical text is the presence of comments guiding its reading. We have already remarked that allegory is born out of a double interpretation – the author's and the reader's – however, only the reader needs help in interpreting authorial intentions.²² Besides the very textual frame of allegory, which already implies correct interpretations of the text as opposed to other ways of reading it, the author may also use specific devices to guide and control the reader through the text, in order to elicit the desired responses. Tags, notations and comments scattered throughout the text are the most obvious devices, nonetheless, authors themselves may directly comment on the narrative: they may do it directly, as for example in prefaces, where it is possible to state one's expectations about readers' responses to the text; they may do it via a fictional persona who acts as the hero's guide. It is precisely in commentary that the body of doctrine at the core of allegory comes to the surface.

²¹ See *ibid.*, pp. 85 – 86.

²² See Gay Clifford, who has efficaciously termed “The Reader as Participant” a paragraph of her *The Transformations of Allegory*. Gay Clifford, *op. cit.*, pp. 36 – 53; Angus Fletcher, *op. cit.*, pp. 317 – 319.

The visual aspect of allegory also helps the interpretation.²³ Visual details of a landscape, descriptions of images seen by the hero, the appearance of a character all provide hints by which to understand the meaning of the text. Indeed, since allegory is the representation of an ordered system where everything has its function and meaning, any visual element in the text is meaningful and takes part in the significant whole. The visual aspect, thus, both helps the interpretation and must be interpreted. It helps the interpretation by providing further elements that add up to the cluster of associations which is connected to the central analogy at the core of allegory; by reinforcing the value of an action, place or person; by wholly displaying the value of an allegorical element, as it is the case with personifications, which fulfil their meaning by simply exhibiting a set of traditionally codified elements. It must be interpreted, as it is part of a symbolically significant whole that does not exhaust its value on a mere literal level. As a matter of fact, Fletcher uses the term “emblem”²⁴ in referring to allegorical imagery, as the allegorical visual details – like emblems – are complex systems of associations that must be interpreted to display their hidden power and significance. It is true that visual details are endowed with peculiar significance in other literary forms, too; however, allegory makes a more extended use of this device, since, as already noted, in allegory any visual element tends to be significant.

Quite interestingly, the interpreting activity of the reader may parallel that of the literary hero, whose progress in the allegorical world is often a matter of correct interpretation of what he meets and sees.²⁵ The need for an

²³ For an in-depth analysis of how the visual aspect affects and works with allegory, see Gay Clifford, *op. cit.*, pp. 71 – 93.

²⁴ See Angus Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

²⁵ In providing a pattern of allegorical narrative, Honig hints at the hero/reader parallel in their reading activity, be it a reading of fictional experience or of an actual text: “the

interpretation of the allegorical text may also account for the traditional dream artifice employed in allegories; like allegories, dreams must be interpreted, if one wants to catch their revelations.²⁶

It must be highlighted, nonetheless, that though interpretation is a crucial feature of allegory, a certain elusiveness is unavoidable and quite as important. As allegory is concerned with complex, abstract truths, it cannot be reduced to a simple and univocal interpretation²⁷ – were it the case, a mere prescriptive statement would be the preferred means to convey the intended meaning, virtually outdoing allegorical expressions. To a certain degree, thus, allegory resists being interpreted, or better, as Clifford puts it, “the heart of all allegories is a focus of multiple interpretations rather than *a* meaning”.²⁸

Having provided a brief description of allegory's characteristics, we may now sum them up and give a more comprehensive definition of allegory. Allegory is a mode of encoding speech, whereby meaning is determined by a parallel between a literal meaning and an abstract one. An analogy, which is structured according to an extra-textual system of beliefs, lies at its core and is

meaning he gives his experiences will be partial and indeterminate if he lacks the confirmation of others. He may have a choice of guides, who will either help or mislead him”. As the narrative hero has his fictional guides, the reader is guided by the author. See Edwin Honig, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

²⁶ There is no anachronism imposed by a culture accustomed to psychoanalysis, here, as the interpretation of dreams has a long history. See, for example, the encyclopedic entry of the term “oniromanzia” online: <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/oniromanzia/>, accessed on 6th April 2013, 11.54. For an extensive exploration of the issue as related to allegory, see Edwin Honig, *op. cit.*, p. 68 – 81.

As a matter of fact, and most interestingly for us, Greco-Roman dream books placed the literary theory of allegory and the theory of allegorical reading of dreams side by side (see for example Artemidorus' *The Interpretation of Dreams* [2nd - 1st century B.C.]). The Latin scholar Macrobius would eventually transmit the connection between dream narrative and allegorical reading to the Middle Ages. See Peter T. Struck, “Allegory and Ascent in Neoplatonism”, in Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 64.

²⁷ As Clifford claims, “the allegorical action is not a paraphrase of something capable of alternative expression”. See Gay Clifford, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

²⁸ *Ivi.*

the theme of the work. It works as a guiding motif in framing the narrative parallel, by giving significance and function to any element that construes the text. As a guiding motif in the creation of the allegorical text, the analogy also (pre)determines the narrative and linguistic structures: rhetoric, fictional agents and narrative development. The function of allegory is persuasive, that is, it aims at persuading the reader of the goodness of the beliefs codified in the analogy. Since allegorical meaning is born out of a parallel between two levels of significance, wherein the literal refers to an abstract one, the reader has to interpret the literal text in order to attain an understanding of the latter.

2.2 The allegorical mode through times and cultures: a historical survey

“Any mode that survives over a long period is likely to take on very different shapes under pressures of the needs and expectations of different generations”.²⁹

There is a characteristic of allegory that we have not previously mentioned, since it is not properly identifying and does not affect the mode's way of working; nonetheless, it is important for allegory's literary history, namely, its flexibility. We have seen that allegory refers to extra-textual beliefs and needs. Beliefs and needs are not permanent. They regard man's perception of the world, of society, his own place in them, that is, cultural values that change through history;³⁰ it is in accordance with them that allegory is transformed. In this section, we will track the development of allegory through its most significant changes.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

As Dirk Obbink remarks, “where and when the impulse to read poems allegorically emerged is impossible to say”;³¹ however, allegory is generally understood as having arisen as a means of reading Homer's poems, which were held to be sacred books containing the foundations of Greek tradition and theogony.³² According to this view, allegorical reading – which is termed “allegoresis” – originated from the belief that the surface of a text might hide a deeper meaning, which, once discovered, would provide information on both physical and otherworldly realms. At the beginning, thus, allegory was a hermeneutical and philosophical tool that aimed at discovering the transcendental truths encoded in language.³³

Early Christian theologians, too, took advantage of allegory as a means of hermeneutical inquiry; by applying allegory to their reading of the Scriptures, they aimed at discovering the transcendental truths hidden in the sacred texts. Paul's interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, whereby allegorical connections were drawn between the Old and the New Testaments, seemed indeed to sanction the allegorical practice.³⁴ The well-known passage from 2 Corinthians 3:6, “The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life”,³⁵ could well be read as encouraging a non-literal reading. In any case, around the second century allegory moved his first steps into a Christian context.³⁶

³¹ Dirk Obbink, “Early Greek Allegory”, in Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 15.

³² SeeCarolynn Van Dyke, *op. cit.*, p. 16; Edwin Honig, *op. cit.*, pp. 19 – 22; Dirk Obbink, *op. cit.*, p. 17; for an in-depth examination of the issue, see also Robert Lamberton, *Homer, the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition*, University of California Press, 1989.

³³ See Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck, *op. cit.*, pp. 2 – 4.

³⁴ See Daniel Boyarin, “Origen as Theorist of Allegory: Alexandrian Contexts”, in Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 39.

³⁵ St. Paul, 2 Corinthians 3:6, online source: <http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/2-Corinthians-3-6/>, accessed on 8th April 2013, 13.11.

³⁶ For a thorough exploration of this specific moment in the development of allegory, see Daniel Boyarin, *op. cit.*, pp. 39 – 54.

Christian scholars were not the only ones to employ allegory within a hermeneutical context. The Greek Neoplatonists carried out their inquiries into the transcendental by applying an allegorical frame of mind to their speculative practice. Their allegorical thought³⁷ would eventually exert considerable influence on later applications and conceptions of allegory, hence I feel it worthwhile to spend some few words on this issue. It will be of help in understanding later debates on allegory, casting a light on otherwise tricky arguments.

Neoplatonist allegorical thought

What Neoplatonists did was basically interpreting Plato's metaphysics. While Plato conceived the phenomenal world as an imitation of a higher reality from which it was extremely distant, Neoplatonists claimed that the levels of being were indeed separated, but nonetheless connected; while Plato saw the world as made up of images that imitated the superior truth, Neoplatonists saw it as comprising manifestations of the higher order.

Plotinus's metaphysics (205 – 269/70 C.E.) had indeed major repercussions on the theory of allegory.³⁸ He conceived the universe as created by a transcendent first principle, which he called the One. The One emanates reality in a series of tiers that pile up below itself: the intellectual realm is the closest to the One; the material world is the furthest. As Peter T. Struck points out, Plotinus's conception of the ontological levels of Being has allegorical

³⁷ See Peter T. Struck, *op. cit.*, pp. 57 – 70.

³⁸ See *ibid.*, pp. 58 – 59; Plotinus's entry in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plotinus/>, accessed on 9th April, 9.56.

implications: each and every element of the phenomenal world has an hidden, superior aspect to it; a connection between the material and the transcendental exists in the very being of things, as they are emanated by the One; the transcendent One manifests itself in the concrete things it creates through emanation. All these theoretical implications indeed betray an allegorical way of thinking, though it is not yet applied to the literary context.

The Neoplatonist philosopher Iamblichus (245 – 325 C.E.) agreed with Plotinus's notion of the phenomenal world as connected with the higher, divine level of truths.³⁹ Most importantly, he developed the concept of symbol as a fragment of the divine hiding in the phenomenal world, that is, as a manifestation of the divine in the material world. Taken together, symbols form a code that enables the phenomenal world to communicate with the divine one.

Iamblichus's theory touches on language, as well. According to his view, not all language is a creation of man; symbolic language is a fragment of the superior order, which bears in itself the trace of the transcendent reality:

in those names we possess a knowledge of the whole divine essence, power, and order, comprehended in the name. And farther still, we preserve in the soul collectively the mystic and arcane image of the Gods, and through this we elevate the soul to the Gods, and when elevated conjoin it as much as possible with them.⁴⁰

By stating that symbolic language might promote an anagogic movement toward the One, Iamblichus would eventually come to the aid of later intellectuals claiming the existence of a link between poetic language and superior truths.

³⁹ See Peter T. Struck, *op. cit.*, pp. 64 – 66.

⁴⁰ Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Assyrians*, London : Bertram Dobell & Reeves and Turner, 1895, pp. 292 – 293, online source : <http://archive.org/details/iamblichusonmys00taylgoog>, accessed on 16th April, 11.33.

Still, it is only with Proclus's theory (410 – 485 C.E.) that Neoplatonist allegorical thought directly tackles the issue of allegorical literary creation.⁴¹ Arguing that Plato's disparagement of poetry calls into question only mimetic literature,⁴² Proclus claims that there is indeed a good, superior kind of poetry; this superior kind of poetry does employ concrete, material things, but not in a mimetic, imitative way, rather, they are symbols representing the divine truth. The notion of symbolic language Proclus borrows from Iamblichus gets expanded. According to Proclus, the symbol is a material token of divine presence; once the symbol/token is inserted in language, words not only resemble the divine, they *are* the divine. A connection between the different orders – between symbols and what they mean – is thus established, allowing poets to claim a pivotal, transcendental role for their literary practice.

It is important to stress that ancient allegorists did not make any distinction between the notions of symbol and allegory, though later on intellectuals would eventually start differentiating the concepts.⁴³ The passage of Proclus's theory of symbol to Christianity is also noteworthy, as the agent of the passage, known as Pseudo-Dionysius, was to become one of the most important figures for Western medieval Christianity. His notion that the portrayal of God in the Scriptures are not mere imitations of divinity, but

⁴¹ See Peter T. Struck, *op. cit.*, pp. 66 – 68.

⁴² According to Plato, poetry is just the imitation of an imitation, as it imitates the phenomenal world, which is already the imitation of the superior intellectual realm. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁴³ “At its most fundamental, [...] allegorizing is a search for esoteric truths, for meaning that is concealed but ultimately interpretable. The later term *allēgoria* was thus nearly synonymous with symbolon, the encoded expression of a mystical or philosophical truth, a manifestation of transcendental meaning that is at once immediate and remote”, Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck, *op. cit.*, p. 3; see also Peter T. Struck, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

symbols bearing immediate ontological connection with divine truth, was to influence several authoritative figures of Christianity.⁴⁴

Allegory as a literary figure

A crucial moment in the history of allegory came with the Roman treatment of the concept. Indeed, it is with Latin scholars that allegory began to be considered a rhetorical figure, similar to metaphor and irony.⁴⁵ Allegory was now seen as a rhetorical device – a technique to compose texts⁴⁶ – not only as a way of reading, searching for mystical and philosophical truths. As Copeland and Struck remark, from that moment on the overlapping of meanings was to lead to ambiguity and confusion; it was not clear whether allegory was a mere rhetorical figure – having a limited linguistic value – or a means to attain a transcendental meaning, one that goes beyond the worldly area wherein language is comprised. As we will see, this ambiguity was to have far-reaching consequences for the concept of allegory.

As for Christian allegory, an effort was indeed made by late medieval scriptural scholars to distinguish theological allegory from the literary practice, in order to prevent the divine power of the Scriptures from being confused with the all-too-human power of literary creations.⁴⁷ According to Thomas Aquinas, figurative language features both in secular poetry and in the Scriptures; it works according to the semantic character of words; it is always literal,

⁴⁴ See Peter T. Struck, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

⁴⁵ See Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck, *op. cit.*, pp. 4 – 5; Denys Turner, “Allegory in Christian Late Antiquity”, in Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 79.

⁴⁶ See, for example, the already quoted passage in Quintilian, *op. cit.*: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=quint.%20Inst.%208.6.44&lang=original>, accessed on 4th April 2013, 10.26.

⁴⁷ See Denys Turner, *op. cit.*, pp. 78 – 82.

because it lacks hermeneutical significance and therefore cannot go beyond language. On the contrary, allegory is to be found *only* in the Scriptures. It is not a figure of speech, as it does not concern semantics; rather, it concerns the meaning of events – a meaning that anticipates other events or things.

As Turner highlights, the original intention of such intellectual effort was to prevent theological allegory from being confused with literary tropes. However, the outcome was quite different: allegory was freed from its theological manacles; its literary possibilities were highlighted. As a matter of fact, secular allegories flourished during the Middle Age. Usually, the main theme of medieval allegories was love, but the topic had a broader value as it often served to explore philosophical and ethical issues.⁴⁸ In any case, allegory was not considered a strictly Christian exegetical tool, as Thomas Aquinas had hoped it would be.

A further blow came during the Renaissance, when Petrarch stated that *all poetry* – not just some passages of the Bible – is allegory, since it is wonted practice of the poet to veil the truth in his texts (the poet having in this claim an almost scriptural value).⁴⁹

In the XVI century, Protestantism suddenly entered the debates around allegory, questioning its value both from a theological and a humanist point of view. Though Protestantism is generally viewed as rejecting the very idea of allegory,⁵⁰ the question is much more complex.

⁴⁸ See Stephanie Gibbs Kamath and Rita Copeland, “Medieval Secular Allegory: French and English”, in Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 136.

⁴⁹ See Michael Murrin, “Renaissance Allegory from Petrarch to Spenser”, in Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 163.

⁵⁰ See Brian Cummings, “Protestant Allegory”, in Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 177.

Allegory and Protestant religion

As Cummings remarks, the Protestant theory of interpretation denies the value of allegory as a valid hermeneutical practice. According to him, the reasons were both theological and literary: theological, because reformers as Luther (1483 – 1546) focused on the *literal* sense of the Bible, which, being the Word of God, would surely be able to convey truth on its own; literary, because Luther himself often seems to mock the redundant and old-fashioned character of allegory, rather than its spiritual value.⁵¹ The fact that the Protestant rejection of allegory is grounded not only on theological motives, but also on rhetorical taste, should already confuse the issue. One could ask oneself why religious matter should be (more or less) consciously enmeshed with literary questions, and, in the case, where the main focus of allegory's rejection is, given the very use of metaphor in Luther's writings and of allegory in his own biblical exegesis.⁵²

Actually, as Cummings goes on exploring the issue, it is increasingly clear that Luther made an attempt at approving a particular kind of allegorical approach to the Scriptures, by distinguishing it from the allegory that Catholic scholars employed and he objected to.⁵³ The difference between the two is subtle and Luther describes it carefully. Catholic allegory is applied to the text from the *outside*, he claims; it is *external*, as the text does not need a figure to explain its meaning, otherwise it would have shown it *in* its own textual layer. Distortion of truth is the outcome; the meaning of Scripture is changed in order

⁵¹ See Brian Cummings, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 178 – 179.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

to suit what the interpreter wants to express. This he calls a “licence of interpretation” for people “who care nothing whatever about the certainty of the Scripture”.⁵⁴ On the contrary, the allegorical process that Luther accepts is the one that can be shown to work *inside* the text. There is not an external agent who employs it, rather, it is Scripture itself that implies it inside the text, or better, within the literal. As a matter of fact, as Cummings sums up, Luther “sees a figurative explanation, when it occurs, as being part of the literal sense”.⁵⁵ One could well claim, therefore, that Luther thinks of allegory as a mere rhetorical figure employed by man, while the allegorical process at work in the Scriptures is just a continuation of the literal sense and has divine origins.

This view was fully endorsed by William Tyndale, one of the best known English theologians of the XVI century. Tyndale claimed that “there is not a more handsome or apt thing withall, than an allegory, nor a more subtle and pestylente thyng in the world to perswade to false matter”.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, like Luther he too retrieved the allegorical figuration of Scriptures by assigning a particular richness of meaning to the literal – a richness of meaning that had to be expounded by figurative speech:

the Scripture has but *one* sense, which is the *literal* sense. And that literal sense is the root and ground of all, the anchor that never fails, which if you cling to it, you can never err or go out of the way. [...] Nevertheless, the Scripture uses proverbs, similitudes, riddles, or allegories, as all other speeches do; but what the proverb, similitude, riddle, or allegory signifies, is always the literal sense, which you must seek out diligently.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Martin Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio. “On the Enslaved Will” or the Bondage of Will*, free pdf file online: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/luther/bondage.pdf>, p. 224, accessed on 9th April, 11.43.

⁵⁵ Brian Cummings, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

⁵⁶ William Tyndale, *A Prologue in to the Third Book of Moses, Called Leviticus*, London, 1593, p. 15, in E. Beatrice Batson, *John Bunyan. Allegory and Imagination*, London & Canberra; Totowa, New Jersey : Croom Helm, Barnes & Noble Book, 1984, p. 30.

⁵⁷ William Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, in *The Works of the English Reformers*, Vol. 1, London : Thomas Russell, 1831, online source:

The passage above well explains the Protestant point of view on the issue of allegory. We could well say that what sets them apart from Catholic ideas on allegory is a different distribution of weight upon the concepts. By claiming that figurative language is just “*strange speaking*”⁵⁸ – that is, a special manifestation of the literal that enables the latter to display its richness of meaning – Protestants placed their focus on the interpreted text, on the result of understanding the figurative sense, and this result is *literal*: “All fables, prophecies, and riddles, are allegories [...] and yet the interpretations of them are the literal sense”.⁵⁹ On the contrary, from their point of view Catholics lost themselves in the figures of speech, so much so that they ended up confusing the words of the Scripture by applying to the text allegories that they themselves crafted:

The great cause of [...] the decay of the faith, and this blindness in which we now find ourselves, sprang first from allegories, for Origen and the doctors of his time drew all of the Scripture into allegories. Those who came after followed his example for so long, that at last they forgot the order and process of the text, supposing that the Scripture served only to feign their allegories upon – and did so to such an extent that twenty doctors expound one text twenty ways.⁶⁰

Again, Catholics are charged for their alleged habit of applying allegory extrinsically, bringing about confusion around the word of God.⁶¹ Some

<http://onthewing.org/user/Tyndale%20-%20Obedience%20of%20a%20Christian%20Man%20-%20Modern.pdf>, p. 82, accessed on 10th April, 9.43.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁶¹ Later on Tyndale attacks the main justification Catholics provided for their way of reading the Scripture, that is, Paul's passage from the “Second Letter to the Corinthians”: “Indeed, they have come to such blindness, that they not only say that the literal sense does not profit, but that it is hurtful, noisome, and kills the soul. They prove this damnable doctrine by a text from Paul, 2Cor 3.6, where he says, “The letter kills, but the spirit gives life.” ‘Look,’ they say, ‘the literal sense kills, and the spiritual sense gives life. We must therefore seek out some chopological sense.’ – he then provides his own interpretation – Here learn what sophistry is, and how blind they are, so that you may abhor them and spew them out of your stomach for ever. Paul by ‘the letter’ means Moses’ law”. William Tyndale, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

decades later his views would be taken up by William Perkins's *The Arte of Propheying* (1592). Perkins claims that

Scripture has only one sense, the literal one. An allegory is only a different way of expressing the same meaning. [...] The principal interpreter of Scripture is the Holy Spirit. The one who makes the law is the best and the highest interpreter of it. The supreme and absolute means for the interpretation is the Scripture itself.⁶²

Once again the allegorical process is not altogether rejected, but is considered a particular way in which the literal sense works, a way that has divine origins. Later on, Perkins adds that “allegories or passages marked by literary symbolism should be expounded according to the scope or focus of the context”.⁶³ If we assume the context that must guide the interpretation of allegory to be a literal passage on which the understanding of literary symbolism must be grounded, it is finally clear how Protestant scholars, as Cummings puts it, held figurative reading “as part of the act of interpretation demanded by the literal”.⁶⁴

One should be wary of assuming allegory to be at odds with Protestantism. The fact that two of the greatest examples of Protestant English literature are allegories, namely, *The Fairie Queene* and the very *Pilgrim's Progress*, is not inconsistent. Though wariness and an initial refusal had characterised the beginning of the relationship between Protestant religion and figurative language, Protestant scholars eventually found a way to set the latter in their frame of mind. Nonetheless, this process was neither simple nor unambiguous.

⁶² William Perkins, *The Arte of Propheying*, ch. 4, online source: http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/perkins_propheying.html, accessed on 10th April, 11.37. See Brian Cummings, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

⁶³ William Perkins, *op. cit.*, ch. 5.

⁶⁴ Brian Cummings, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

The issue of allegory within a Protestant context, thus, is complex and many sided. Cummings indeed writes of a “sense of anxiety about figuration”⁶⁵ that characterised Protestant thought and turned itself into a confused clash between opposing expectations and attitudes: on one side, the call for a plain style as the most proper for Christianity; on the other side, a bent and a fascination towards the imaginative, which seemingly reached its peak during the years of the Civil War in the imaginative writings of the Dissenters and radical sects.⁶⁶ This tendency, however, was to undergo the restraint that the XVIII century – the Age of Reason – would impose upon figurative language.

Allegory in the Age of Reason

In *The Triumph of Augustan Poetics* Blanford Parker claims that the Augustans tried to “find a space for a new naturalistic and 'rational' discourse unencumbered by figural excesses. The common enemy of all Augustan authors [...] was the fancy or imagination”.⁶⁷ In his view, cooling off the imagination was part of a broader process meant to moderate the cultural – and hence political – enthusiasm that had characterized the previous century and had disrupted the public order. Allegorical writings had indeed been common among seventeenth-century radical sects; it is not surprising, then, that nonconformist prose was attacked by conformist Anglicans and Royalists during the Restoration.⁶⁸ The use of figurative language and political and

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁶⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 188; Theresa M. Kelley, *Reinventing Allegory*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 52.

⁶⁷ Blanford Parker, *The Triumph of Augustan Poetics*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 70.

⁶⁸ See Theresa M. Kelley, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

religious enthusiasm were indeed put side by side: “[nonconformists] have effectually turn'd all Religion into unaccountable Fancies and Enthusiasm [...] and so embrace a few gaudy Metaphors and Allegories”, claims Samuel Parker, before arguing that a nation “shattered into infinite factions with senseless and phantastick phrases” needs “an Act of Parliament to abridge Preachers the use of fulsome and luscious Metaphors”.⁶⁹ Augustan literature did follow in the footsteps of the post-Restoration empirical and rational environment.

According to Blanford Parker, the space for a new and rational literary manner was found by clearing the cultural environment from the predominant analogical mode of thinking – that is, the mental habit of seeing an object or creature as the image of a metaphysical, not just intellectual, reality – and the Dissenters' imaginative and world-negating culture of faith.

Satire, the predominant literary form of the Augustan Age, was the tool of this process; as a means for the twofold attack against Reformation culture, satire associated “the culture of analogy with Catholic superstition and the culture of faith with personal madness”,⁷⁰ finally succeeding in disregarding both. By fostering the use of a language that subdued imagination to rational judgement, Augustans eventually discovered the *literal*, creating an art that described natural reality and was “based on the observed and observable world”;⁷¹ “there was [...] metaphor without illumination [...] while the

⁶⁹ Quoted by Roger Pooley, “Language and Loyalty: Plain Style at the Restoration”, in *Literature and History* 6, (1980), pp. 7 – 8, in Theresa M. Kelley, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁷⁰ Blanford Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁷¹ Ralph Cohen, “The Augustan Mode in English Poetry”, in “Eighteenth-century Studies”, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 3 – 32, (Autumn 1967), p. 24.

seventeenth-century staples of metaphysical conceit [...] had almost disappeared”.⁷²

Allegorical practice was thus codified in order to meet the needs of the age. Beside being troublesome for its connections with the preceding decades’ revolutionary stances – as Kelley points out, the eighteenth-century wariness of allegory is “the residual effect of the preceding century, when allegorical figures and rhetoric were powerful weapons, akin to deeds”⁷³ – allegory was also at odds with the realm of sense experience, which was becoming increasingly important in the cultural agenda of the time. Thus, the demands were for an “open, accessible, and transparent” allegory that could offer a “stable, one-to-one correspondence between image and idea”,⁷⁴ between figure and abstraction. While the previous centuries, as we have already seen, had started to include allegory in the broader definition of poetry, the XVIII century picked up personification fiction and identified allegory with it. While allegory had to be interpreted, and its dark conceits ran the risk of bringing about confusion and misinterpretations, personification allegory – with its abstract character and lack of human features⁷⁵ – drastically limited the functions and associations of its images.⁷⁶ The result was a clear allegorical fiction that could easily guide its readers’ understanding throughout the reading. Eighteenth-century desire for clarity was satisfied and from that moment on personification, which was previously just a component of the allegorical process, came to be seen as allegory itself.

⁷² Blanford Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

⁷³ Theresa M. Kelley, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 72 – 73. See also Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck, *op. cit.*, pp. 8 – 9.

⁷⁵ See Theresa M. Kelley, “Romanticism’s Errant Allegory”, in Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 212.

⁷⁶ See Michael Murrin, *op. cit.*, pp. 175 – 176.

Romantic rejection of allegory is to be seen against the eighteenth century's restricting conception of allegory as a mere personification fiction. Indeed, as we shall see, what the Romantics opposed was not the very concept of allegory, but the idea of allegory that the Neoclassical scholars had promoted in the previous century.⁷⁷

The Romantic Age – symbol vs allegory

“Romantics were the first to exploit theoretical distinctions between allegory and symbolism as part of the larger campaign they fought to disentangle themselves from all rationalistic predeterminations”.⁷⁸

Honig mentions “rationalistic predeterminations” as the chief enemy of the Romantics. Since the eighteenth century is largely known to us as the Age of Reason, it should not come as a surprise that the Romantic attitude towards the main elements of Augustan culture was broadly negative and dismissive. As a matter of fact, the last decades of the XVIII century and the first ones of the XIX were marked by the repudiation of Augustan values. Romantic rejection of allegory is indeed part of this larger framework.

The stress on the individual and his personal experiences, which characterised the Romantic cultural climate, opposed itself to the Augustan preference for objectivity and universals.⁷⁹ Moreover, Romantic esteem for originality clashed with Augustan learned refinement – a refinement that was bred on rhetoric. As a matter of fact, the very idea of rhetoric – a set of

⁷⁷ See Theresa M. Kelley, “Romanticism's Errant Allegory”, *cit.*, pp. 211 – 212. As a matter of fact, though the Romantics would be the first to wage a strong campaign against Neoclassical allegory, a first opposition to the eighteenth-century general disregard for figurative speech came with the Evangelical Revival, which started in the 1740's.

⁷⁸ Edwin Honig, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁷⁹ See Gay Clifford, *op. cit.*, p. 122 – 123.

established aesthetic norms and practices – collides with the concept of original genius that Romantic culture strongly paraded. It is this widespread opposition to Augustan values that finds expression, among others, in the Romantic attack on allegory. Allegory is not the intended target – after all, Romantic poetic practices often employs allegory⁸⁰ – rather, it is a means for opposing a whole frame of mind, the Neoclassical one.

Let us go into detail. As we have seen, Neoclassical allegory was a fixed, mechanical form, wherein the narrative was peopled by didactic personifications. Images had to be simple, their meaning determinate. What is more, allegorical characters were devoid of pathos and realistic details. Romantic theories about allegories aimed precisely at discrediting these characteristics. As Kelley remarks, Romantic allegory replied to Neoclassical decorum and abstract personifications with “phantasmagoric and monstrous figures”⁸¹ that were prompted to action by passion. What seemed most to bother the Romantics, though, was precisely the highly mechanical, artificial nature of allegory, its arbitrary and motivated representation,⁸² that is, its rhetorical character. The profound distaste for this peculiar feature prompted them to theorize what was to become a major and controversial issue up to our own times, namely, the concept of symbol.

Usually, the concept of allegory has been used as a foil to define what the concept of “symbol” stands for. Indeed, both allegory and symbol aim at

⁸⁰ See Theresa M. Kelley, “Fantastic Shapes: From Classical Rhetoric to Romantic Allegory”, in “Texas Studies in Literature and Language”, Vol. 33, No. 2, *Romans and Romantics*, pp. 225 – 260, (Summer 1991), p. 225.

⁸¹ Theresa M. Kelley, “Romanticism's Errant Allegory”, *cit.*, p. 212.

⁸² See Nicholas Halmi, *The Genealogy of the Romantic symbol*, ch. 1, “Defining the Romantic Symbol”, pp. 12 – 13, online source: <http://fds.oup.com/www.oup.com/pdf/13/9780199212415.pdf>, accessed on 19th January 2013, 16.18

representing “higher reality” in a work of art. However, according to the Romantics the processes of representation are quite different. Symbol *is* the concretisation of the abstract; the transcendental, thus, is embodied in the phenomenal.⁸³ The meaning of the symbol coincides with its form and grows out of an unconscious process of the artist's mind. Berefelt quotes the definition of symbol provided by a student of Romanticism in the 1930's, which might enlighten the concept: “The symbol is a metaphysical something in sensuous representation. It is a transcendental idea compressed into the focus of the visible. The contrast between life upon Earth and the Beyond is annulled by the symbol”.⁸⁴ On the other hand, allegory merely *points towards* an idea, it means “a thing other than itself”.⁸⁵ It is an interpretation of the abstract – hence, a pre-constructed and univocal form, imposed from the outside – not its embodiment.

As a matter of fact, this distinction readily recalls to mind Coleridge's dichotomy between organic and mechanic forms of art.⁸⁶ According to Coleridge, any work of art that is created through a compromise between imagination and reason is a mechanic form, whereby meaning is consciously and artificially established. On the contrary, an organic form grows naturally out of meaning – it is the meaning itself that determines the material shape it eventually takes on to be expressed. The process in the writer's mind is unconscious, therefore the vision is direct and not mediated, allowing one's mind – as Romantic theory goes – to apprehend the ultimate Truth. As one can

⁸³ See Gunnar Berefelt, “On Symbol and Allegory”, in “The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism”, Vol. 28, No. 2, (Winter, 1969), pp. 201 – 212.

⁸⁴ Jutta Hecker, *Das Symbol der Blauen Blume im Zusammenhang mit der Symbolik der Romantik* (Jena, 1931), p. 5, in Gunnar Berefelt, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

⁸⁵ Gunnar Berefelt, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

⁸⁶ See Angus Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 15 – 18; Gay Clifford, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

easily imagine, allegory was considered a perfect example of mechanic form, while symbol was associated to organic form.

There is a thread that clearly runs across all this reasoning. Indeed, one cannot but notice that what is at stake here is the issue of the artist's autonomy, and here we come full circle.⁸⁷ We began by highlighting the growing importance that originality and subjectivity had acquired with the advent of Romanticism. We also stressed that the Romantic attacks against allegory were, in fact, directed against the Augustan frame of mind that peeped out from the allegorical mode. Allegory was one of the battlefields where the Romantics waged war to affirm their ideas on art and artists; symbol – as a seemingly indeterminate concept that is not built on either reason or firmly established norms – was both their offensive weapon and the banner proclaiming the artist's freedom. Some further notes will now be of help in fully understanding the motives behind this situation.

A chapter of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, named “The Limit of Erlebniskunsts and the Rehabilitation of Allegory”, advances an explanation as to what happened in the late XVIII/early XIX century that sounds fairly convincing.⁸⁸ According to him, until the nineteenth century poetry and rhetoric were both considered important part of what made up Art – the human faculties of intellect and emotion being deemed equally relevant. With the advent of Romanticism, though, the concepts of genius and inspiration completely overcame the ideal of formal perfection, eventually taking up the space previously occupied by rhetoric in the conception of Art. Emotion seized

⁸⁷ See Hans-Georg Gadamer, “I Limiti della 'Erlebniskunst'. Riabilitazione dell'Allegoria”, in *Verità e Metodo*, Milano : Bompiani, 1988, pp. 99, 103.

⁸⁸ See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *op. cit.*, pp. 98 – 110; Steven Mailloux, “Hermeneutics, Deconstruction, Allegory”, in Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 256 – 259.

the power and tried to banish intellect from the realm of Art. At this time, the idea of symbol suddenly entered literary debates as a concept opposing the allegorical mode.

As we have already said, the concepts of symbol and allegory once were not opposed to one another. Indeed, Gadamer claims that

entrambe indicano qualcosa il cui senso non risiede nell'apparenza immediata, sia l'aspetto visibile o la lettera del discorso, ma in una significazione che va al di là di essa. Ciò che hanno di comune è dunque il fatto che una certa cosa sta per qualcos'altro [...] ciò che non è sensibile diventa percepibile coi sensi.⁸⁹

He then goes on claiming that the process of connecting meanings – a process that symbol and allegory equally perform – occurs both in art and religion. We have already stressed this point, when tracing the development of the concept of allegory: the term “allegory” had first identified a metaphysical practice to be performed for spiritual and transcendent matters; only at a second stage did it assume the value of ornamental, rhetorical device. What happens during the Romantic Age is the disregard of the latter to the advantage of the former, all for the sake of an artistic autonomy that nineteenth-century intellectuals felt was threatened by rationalistic demands. The indeterminacy of the symbol was opposed to the predetermined character of Neoclassical allegory as an attempt at liberating the original genius from the chains of established rules. What happened is paradoxical. The Romantics did reject the rhetorical aspect of allegory – that is, the sense allegory had acquired with Latin scholars; on the other hand, they retrieved the oldest meaning of allegory – a means for attaining the highest truth – and this they called “symbol”.⁹⁰ This strategy eventually managed to discredit allegory. A century would pass before the

⁸⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

⁹⁰ See Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

allegorical mode was to be revalued, and the contradictions of Romantic thought revealed.

The rehabilitation of allegory in the twentieth century

The hierarchy of values established in the Romantic Age was to be reversed in the XX century. Indeed, during the XIX century the symbol had been championed as a unique means for presenting – and not *representing* – truth and the transcendental; in the following century, allegory struck back and was variously pointed to as the peculiar condition of modernity and as an advocate of Postmodernism.⁹¹ The reappraisal of allegory was the outcome of both a rethinking of the mode and a deconstruction of the idea of symbol.

The work of Walter Benjamin contributed enormously to the reconsideration of allegory. Though he did not leave behind him an entirely structured theory of allegory, he did intersperse his ideas on the matter among his works, so that it is possible to retrieve his understanding of allegory from them;⁹² as a matter of fact, the allegory for Benjamin is not only an object of study, but an integral part of his works' structure. It could not be otherwise, as in his view allegory is the expression of experience, or, better, it is experience itself. Just like experience is given in signs that the mind must deconstruct and reconstruct, allegory works as an aggregation of significant fragments.⁹³ On the

⁹¹ See Gail Day, "Allegory: between Deconstruction and Dialectics", in "Oxford Art Journal", Vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 105 – 118, (1999), pp. 105 – 106; Howard Caygill, "Walter Benjamin's Concept of Allegory", in Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (eds), *op. cit.*, p 242.

⁹² See Bainard Cowan, "Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory", in "New German Critique", No. 22, special issue on Modernism, pp. 109 – 122, (Winter 1981), pp. 109 – 110.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 110, 112.

contrary, symbol, with its presumption of presenting the transcendental, is just wishful thinking.

In criticizing the idea of symbol, Benjamin makes it clear that he considers it to be the result of misconstruction.⁹⁴ In the symbol, the Romantics sought the union between transcendent ideas and material phenomena, but a union between the two is impossible, as Plato had already claimed. The certainty that a symbol might present truth is delusive. Quite interestingly, as Cowan remarks, Benjamin seems to imply that the concept of symbol is nothing less than a “nostalgic impulse within allegory”.⁹⁵ Being it an attempt at *representing* truth, allegory is indeed the implicit recognition of the absence of truth in the phenomenal world; as a matter of fact, were truth accessible in the world, allegory would lack its main reason for existence – attempting at establishing a connection with it.⁹⁶ Symbol may thus be considered the result of human failure in accepting the lack of completeness and unity – let us say, perfection – in the world.

The already-mentioned chapter of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1960) took part in the rehabilitation of allegory, as well. Gadamer casts the Romantic rejection of allegory in a general framework of hostility towards rhetoric. As we have already said, according to him the opposition between symbol and allegory was the means to assert the autonomy of art. The difference between the two concepts became tantamount to the difference between art and non-

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 111 – 112.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁹⁶ With regard to this, Cowan is quite enlightening in rephrasing Benjamin's claim in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928): “it is precisely the “immotivation” of the world [...] that causes the allegorical “way of looking at the world””. Binaard Cowan, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

art.⁹⁷ One has to bear in mind that this cultural shift took place during the assertion of the aesthetic of genius over that of reason. Being the space for allegorical interpretation finite, allegory came to stand for reason and artifice; on the contrary, the concept of symbol rose in value thanks to its indeterminacy, which allowed for a potentially infinite interpretability. For the Romantics, only the symbol – being an unconscious union of meaning and object, of symbol and what is symbolized, finite and infinite – was art, and a product of genius. However, Gadamer claims, the Romantics were wrong in believing that the tension between the realm of ideas and the realm of phenomenal objects could be resolved in the symbol. Indeed, the disproportion between an infinite content and a finite expression remained. Moreover, he underlines the dubious character of the abstract, unchangeable aesthetic consciousness the idea of symbol implies – an aesthetic consciousness that would be cut off from the pre-determinations of history and time.⁹⁸

In tracing a brief summary of the conjoined history of the two concepts, Gadamer recalls how the concepts of allegory and symbol were first placed side by side by the Neoplatonists. Peter T. Struck claims indeed that “important Romantic figures like Coleridge find their own form of inspiration in Neoplatonic writings”,⁹⁹ when dealing with the issue of symbol. In describing the Neoplatonic views on allegory, we have claimed that Neoplatonists generally used the terms “symbol” and “allegory” to point to the same concept. Moreover, in his *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Assyrians* Iamblichus writes that

⁹⁷ See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *op. cit.*, pp. 102 – 103. See also Steven Mailloux, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

⁹⁸ See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *op. cit.*, pp. 109 – 110.

⁹⁹ Peter T. Struck, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

the theurgic art [...] frequently *connects together* stones, herbs, animals, aromatics, and other sacred, perfect, and deiform substances of the like kind; and afterwards, from all these, it produces an entire and pure receptacle.¹⁰⁰

As we have already said, Iamblichus considered these stones, herbs, aromatics and other substances to be symbols of the divine scattered throughout the cosmos;¹⁰¹ only when symbols are connected together, Iamblichus claims, do they form a unity that puts us close to the divine realm.

This claim has a twofold consequence. Firstly, it seems to establish symbols as part of a broader framework, that is, as elements that only when taken together identify a coherent whole. Indeed, this very much resembles the proceeding of allegory that we have described in the first section of the chapter, so much so that we may rephrase the previous claim as “only when symbols are connected together do they form an *allegory* that puts us close to the divine realm”. Secondly, the fact that symbols must be connected to form an “entire and pure receptacle” erase any alleged synchronicity between symbol and symbolized. The process involves two actions: firstly, the identification of symbols; secondly, the connection that must be established between them. We are dealing thus with a diachronic figure, not a synchronic one. Any presumption of an immediate union between sensible and suprasensible is invalid.

The Romantics were influenced by the Neoplatonists in framing their concept of symbol. As we have already said, the Romantics rejected the rhetorical, artificial aspect of allegory and tried to restore the old metaphysical value of language. The Romantic concept of symbol, opposed to that of allegory, is born out of this necessity. There are two confusing elements that

¹⁰⁰ Iamblichus, *op. cit.*, pp. 266 – 267, italics mine.

¹⁰¹ See Peter T. Struck, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

complicate the picture. The need to free the artist from the necessity of reason – a need brought about by the clash between nineteenth-century and eighteenth-century aesthetics – incited intellectuals to postulate the possibility of a union between ideas and corporeal forms; such a union was said to take place in the symbol. The idea gave birth to ambiguous theories.

The second confusing element is embedded in the very history of allegory. As we have seen, during the development of the concept allegory acquired a rhetorical meaning, which flanked the hermeneutical and metaphysical one. Romantics wanted to reject the rhetorical aspect only; however, the accomplishment of their aim implied attacking the concept that comprised not only their enemy – rhetoric – but also the very metaphysical character they were attempting to rescue/promote. The latter had to be safely relocated. The metaphysical value was thus transferred into the symbol.

Paul de Man's seminal essay, "The Rhetoric of Temporality"¹⁰² (1969), begins indeed by pointing out the ambiguities and inconsistencies in Coleridge's theorization of the symbol.¹⁰³ What sets de Man apart from others is his shifting the issue from a question of subject-object dialectics to that of a temporal relation that, in his view, constitutes allegory. According to him, the

¹⁰² Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality", in *Blindness and Insight. Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1983, pp. 187 – 228, free online pdf file:

http://www.colorado.edu/humanities/THEORY/DeMan_Rhetoric%20of%20Temporality.pdf, accessed on 16th April 2013, 16.47.

¹⁰³ As de Man highlights, Coleridge first establishes a difference between symbol and allegory, whereby symbol displays the union of material objects and symbolic image – life and form – while allegory is abstract and devoid of substance. However, soon after Coleridge describes the essence of the symbol as the "translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal". Just like allegory, then, the symbol seems to be the mere reflection of a unity that is not part of the phenomenal world. Any difference of substantiality between the two has been suddenly cast aside in favour of the description of a common origin in the transcendental. See Paul de Man, *op. cit.*, pp. 191 – 193.

relationship between allegorical sign and meaning is characterised by a temporal property:

it remains necessary, if there is to be allegory, that the allegorical sign refer to another sign that precedes it. The meaning constituted by the allegorical sign can then consist only in the *repetition* [...] of a previous sign with which it can never coincide, since it is of the essence of this previous sign to be pure anteriority.¹⁰⁴

On the contrary, since the symbol claims the possibility of identification and continuity between sign and meaning, the temporal relationship that it establishes is that of simultaneity; strictly speaking, then, the relationship is not temporal, but spatial.¹⁰⁵

De Man echoes Benjamin in claiming that the concept of symbol is a self-mystification. Benjamin had already suggested that the symbol is born out of a failure in recognizing a lack of unity in the world; similarly de Man describes the symbol as an illusory veil that tries to hide – by displaying a relationship of coincidence, devoid of temporality – the “authentically temporal predicament”¹⁰⁶ characterising the human self.

The works of Benjamin, Gadamer and de Man made a unique contribution to the rehabilitation of allegory in the XX century. By showing the contradictions and ambiguities that lie at the core of Romantic criticism on allegory, they have re-established its value and rescued it from the previous century's neglect. However, in spite of this theoretical rehabilitation Fletcher speaks of a “modern distaste for allegory”.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Paul de Man, *op. cit.*, p. 207. See also Steven Mailloux, *op. cit.*, pp. 262 – 263.

¹⁰⁵ See Paul de Man, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

¹⁰⁷ Angus Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

Hunter claims that in the second half of the twentieth century allegory has been taken over by theatre and performance events engaged with socio-political commentary; as for what regards literature, the allegorical mode has been remarkably used by postcolonial writers.¹⁰⁸ Genres that often employ the allegorical mode are the dystopia,¹⁰⁹ the “western”, detective fiction¹¹⁰ and science fiction;¹¹¹ nonetheless, it seems that modern authors use allegory only in “nervous or deliberately ironic ways”, as Clifford remarks.¹¹² A cultural change in the attitudes towards the world and its meaning may account for this development.

With the advent of modern scientific empiricism, the medieval notion of an external, hierarchical and immutable order broke up.¹¹³ The purpose of allegory gradually changed: earlier allegories were grounded on the notion of an external meaning, which is independent of the reader and whose value is didactic and moral; modern allegories doubt the validity of such notion and often depict a fragmented universe that is devoid of significance.¹¹⁴ Clifford is right in disputing any modern allegorist's demands on his readers – if the demanded interpretative activity results in the notion of a universe lacking in significance, the effort to gain this knowledge may seem comic at the least.

¹⁰⁸ See Lynette Hunter, “Allegory Happens: Allegory and the Arts Post-1960”, in Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 266 – 280. Hunter’s essay underlines the political character of allegory. As a matter of fact, according to her, allegory insists on “context and history”, which would make it an ideal mode to talk politics. Equally, she advances a political explanation for the use of allegory in postcolonial writings: “do ‘postcolonial’ writers construct allegorical texts because their experiences are traditionally outside of ideological representation, or is the allegorical reading only available to Euro-American readers who do not understand their experience?”. Lynette Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

¹⁰⁹ See Lynette Hunter, *op. cit.*, pp. 268 – 270.

¹¹⁰ See Angus Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 336 – 337.

¹¹² Gay Clifford, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

¹¹³ See Angus Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 135; Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

¹¹⁴ See Gay Clifford, *op. cit.*, p. 53 – 71.

In the wake of Benjamin, I advance another reason for the alleged distaste for allegory. According to Benjamin, allegory is the modern man's peculiar experience – not literary, but existential. Under the weight of a capitalist exchange value that has established itself as founding and guiding principle, allegory has shifted from literary mode to personal predicament.¹¹⁵ Again, we may consider the distaste for allegory as a defensive strategy, the disfavour of the allegorical mode as a refusal to see one's dire predicament.

2.3 Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*

The Pilgrim's Progress, from This World to That Which is to Come is a Christian allegory in two, closely interlaced parts. Bunyan began working on the first part while in prison, at the time of his first imprisonment for the breach of the Act of Uniformity. It was published in 1678. Later on he would write a second part to his work – a decision that was probably driven both by his will to express his reconsiderations on theological matters and by his resentment over the spurious sequels that had come out after the publication of the first part. The second part was published in 1684.

*The first part of *The Pilgrim's Progress**

The story is presented as the account of a dream – the dream artifice being, as we have seen, a classic in allegories – and traces the perilous journey of Christian, a man burdened with sin, to the Celestial City. We witness him

¹¹⁵ See Howard Caygill, *op. cit.*, p. 251 – 252.

struggling against the dangers and hindrances that pave the way to the eternal life – from the Slough of Despond to the Hill Difficulty, from the Valley of Humiliation to the Valley of the Shadow of Death – meeting friends and companions along the path, as well as enemies who try to stop him.¹¹⁶ He eventually reaches the Celestial City, where is welcomed by shining angels and trumpet fanfares. The literal level of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, then, narrates the pilgrimage and human experiences of a Christian everyman. The allegorical level describes the journey of a soul from a life without Grace¹¹⁷ to the eternal life in Heaven. The guiding motif – which determines, as we have seen, the allegorical structure – is the faith in the saving Grace of Christ. Almost all the elements in the text refer back to, and champion, this ideal.¹¹⁸

The opening scene of *The Pilgrim's Progress* immediately puts us in the action, as we get the idea of a desperate man facing a dire predicament. The first glimpse we get of the hero is an emblem, open to our interpretation;¹¹⁹ Christian's clothes and his burden have a significance we grasp at once, and so have the objects he gets along the path, as the roll he is given by a Shining One after seeing the Cross.¹²⁰ Honig calls these objects “talismans”; being charged

¹¹⁶ Honig provides a paradigm for allegorical narratives that, as we will see, indeed suits *The Pilgrim's Progress*. I have already mentioned it briefly, but I feel it deserves to be quoted extensively: “Generally the hero [...] starts out in despair to face an unprecedented ordeal. The progress of this ordeal provides the whole sequence of action for the ensuing allegory. The dream of the real world is the world of the narrative – the world of unmitigated moral consciousness where every experience has a greater possible value than the hero can himself detect. The meaning he gives his experiences will be partial and indeterminate if he lacks the confirmation of others. He may have a choice of guides, who will either help or mislead him. [...] his choice of the wrong guide will reveal some incapacity for pursuing the “true way”; for what misleads and deters him is always a personal fault”. Edwin Honig, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

¹¹⁷ “Graceless” is indeed Christian's name before he ventures in his pilgrimage: “My name is, now, *Christian*; but my name at the first was *Graceless*”, Christian tells Watchful, the porter, when arriving at palace Beautiful. John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

¹¹⁸ An unequivocal evidence is the burden's falling from Christian's back at the sight of the Cross. See John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

¹¹⁹ See Edwin Honig, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

¹²⁰ See John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 37. As Clifford remarks, Christian's clothes significantly change from the initial ragged clothes to the “Raiment [...] that shone like Gold”. The

with symbolic meaning, they help us understand the present narrative situation and what is to come.¹²¹

We have said that in *The Pilgrim's Progress* the allegorical form of the pilgrimage is a means for recording the spiritual growth of a believer. As we have already seen, journey and battle are the peculiar narrative patterns of allegory; the pilgrimage is comprised among the former. Every character that Christian meets along the road and every place where he sets his foot represent a specific abstract quality or idea – be it a positive, godly one or not – which Christian has to decode and understand in order to attain the eternal life. The first part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* “deals with an individual fighting alone to save his soul”¹²² – the ability to interpret correctly whatever he meets along his path being the principal instrument for his growth as a Christian believer. Actually, the decoding task of Christian and the decoding activity of the reader while leafing through the pages of the text run parallel to one another; Christian and the reader thus share the purpose of the text, that is, the exposition and learning of Christian morality.

As a matter of fact, the allegorical form also enables Bunyan to display the pattern of religious conversion as elaborated by Protestant theology in the sixteenth and seventeenth century,¹²³ a scheme which in the text is exemplified

external change is a symbol of what Christian's soul has undergone. Gay Clifford, *op. cit.*, p. 29 – 30.

¹²¹ See Edwin Honig, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

¹²² Christopher Hill, *A Turbulent, Seditious, and Factious People*, Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1988, p. 200.

¹²³ In the introduction to his edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, W. R. Owens accurately summarizes the stages of conversion as follows: "effectual calling", by which the Holy Spirit would 'call' the sinner to repentance, and bring about conversion"; "justification", by which the newly converted sinner would be made just before God, and forgiven [...] through the merits of Christ"; "sanctification", the continuing supply of divine grace which would enable the convert to 'persevere' in faith"; "glorification", the reward of eternal life in heaven. This is the scheme of salvation that Christian's experiences exemplify in *The Pilgrim's Progress*". W. R. Owens, *op. cit.*, p. xxvii.

by the very progress of Christian. However, not only is this pattern represented allegorically, but it is also discussed by the characters themselves. The second allegorical pattern, that of battle, is here employed in the form of discussions. Indeed, throughout the journey Christian opens up and is involved in theological discussions with other characters. Such conversations on religious matters perfectly mirror “the exchanges taking place in the gathered churches” in the seventeenth century, “in which participants disclosed their spiritual case-histories”.¹²⁴ We have to bear in mind that at the time prospective members of gathered churches were required by the congregation to give an account of their conversions, hence the considerable importance that is attached to discussions and conversations in *The Pilgrim's Progress*.¹²⁵ These conversations make up the more explicitly didactic core of the work, but there are also notes at the margins of the text – captions, comments and, more frequently, references to the Bible – which aim at guiding the reader throughout his journey inside the text, to a deeper understanding of the narrative.

The second part of *The Pilgrim's Progress*

If the first part is the account of the spiritual journey of a lonely man pursuing the safety of his soul, the second part “deals with a family, a community, on the way to the heavenly city”.¹²⁶ Christian has already reached

¹²⁴ Michael Mullett, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

¹²⁵ However, to be faithful to Bunyan's work, it must be highlighted that action is equally important – discourse alone does not automatically entail a godly life. Just take into consideration the character of Talkative, who is strongly criticised by Christian. See John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, pp. 74 – 83.

¹²⁶ Christopher Hill, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

the Celestial City and the narrative now tracks the journey of his wife Christiana, his sons and a young friend of hers, Mercy. The account of the pilgrimage is again given through the narrative convention of the description of a dream. Christiana and her companions follow in Christian's footsteps – “throughout Part II” they “are continually being reminded that Christian has preceded them on their journey. Memorial stones recall his struggles and triumphs”¹²⁷ – and they face several, though less daunting, challenges. They can also rely on the aid of Great-Heart, a guide who is specifically appointed to conduct them along the road. During the journey, they meet other pilgrims that eventually join their group, hence the claim that the “emphasis on human companionship and mutual support is the dominant theme of Part Two”.¹²⁸ The allegorical narrative is once again organized around the peculiar patterns of journey and battles.

The narrative is only apparently a mere retracing of the same journey; in fact, it differs from that of Part One – “as they gather a travelling church around them, the emphasis shifts from the confrontation of enemies to the building up of a spiritual community”.¹²⁹ While the guiding motif of the first part was faith in Christ's saving Grace, the second part seems to be structured around the ideal of Christ's warm welcome to each and every believer, no matter his provenance or peculiar flaws.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

¹²⁸ W. R. Owens, *op. cit.*, p. xxxi.

¹²⁹ Roger Pooley, “*The Pilgrim's Progress* and the Line of Allegory”, in Anne Dunan-Page (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 90.

¹³⁰ See, for example, Mercy's entrance at the Wicket Gate, though uninvited. The Lord replies to her: “I pray for all them that believe on me, by what means soever they come unto me”, John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 180; the water of the River of Death especially lowered to make Mr. Fearing's ford easier, p. 236; the meeting between Feeble-mind and Ready-to-hault, whereby Feeble-mind – troubled by his own faults, which make it difficult for him to go along with the company – finds a suitable companion for the journey, pp. 252 – 253.

The idea of the church as a family was central to Dissenters, who could rely solely on the bonds between members of the congregations. In the text, the idea of the spiritual community as a family is not only a symbol; Christiana's siblings get married during the pilgrimage and children are born – the Christian community strengthens its internal bonds and becomes larger. Thus, the literal level of the text describes the earthly pilgrimage of a group of people, while the allegorical level narrates the birth of a Christian community.

One last remark on the visual character of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. We have seen the deep significance that both Fletcher and Clifford attach to the visual features of allegory. E. Beatrice Batson notices that sight indeed provides a unifying metaphor for *The Pilgrim's Progress* – the dream is a *vision*, the narrator frequently states “I *saw* in my dream”.¹³¹ The repeated references to sight seem to resume the opposition between the visible – the phenomenal world – and the invisible – the transcendental to which allegory points to.

The visual landscapes that Bunyan pictures in his work have considerable importance for its overall significance. Indeed, the whole picture is frequently devised as having a coherent transcendent value, from the smallest particular up to the general scenery, as in the description of the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Such passages are much like textual versions of those figurative emblems that were highly popular at the time of *The Pilgrim's Progress's* composition.¹³² Emblems were little pictures that illustrated moral truth and were usually matched with a scriptural citation; through a symbolic

¹³¹ See E. Beatrice Batson, *op. cit.*, pp. 35 – 36.

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp. 87 – 99.

relationship that was to be established between picture and words – be it a simile, a metaphor, etc. – each explained the value of the other. Therefore, the final meaning resided neither in the illustrations nor in the accompanying quotes, but in the perception of the viewer. Through analogy, the mind was led from concrete elements to the perception and understanding of the invisible. Bunyan's aim was just the same. He designed his allegorical work as a way to grasp the unknown divine from known things.

This process is textually represented in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. When Christian and Christiana are hosted at the Interpreter's, he shows them symbolical pictures bearing a moral and edifying meaning. The explanations the Interpreter provides lead them from the perception of visible objects to the perception of invisible truths: the dusty parlour cleaned by the damsel actualizes the work of the Gospel in the heart of man; the fire that keeps burning explains how the “work of Grace is maintained in the soul”;¹³³ the robin eating a spider is “an Emblem very apt”¹³⁴ to represent the hypocrisy of some believers. The relationship that Bunyan establishes with his readers is thus actualized in the very text. Just as the Interpreter shows moral analogies to Christian, Bunyan shows them to his readers.

Bunyan's Protestant allegory

We have already discussed the ambiguous attitude of Protestantism towards allegory. Two opposing stances confused the space of Protestant writing: a theoretical preference for a simple and literal style; the acceptance of

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 191. See the whole passages: first part, pp. 29 – 36; second part, pp. 188 – 192.

figurative writing when brought about by the richness of God's literal word. Bunyan was perfectly aware of the issues that the use of figurative language for religious purposes might raise. Therefore, he felt the need to provide his readers with a justification and wrote "The Author's Apology for his Book" as a preface to his work. The crucial point of his self-defence is that the Bible – God's word – employs the very same method. Bunyan is careful enough to deliver this remark more than once, in words that very much echo Tyndale's in *The Obedience of a Christian Man*:

Am I afraid to say that Holy Writ,
Which for its Stile, and Phrase, puts down all Wit,
Is every where so full of all these things,
(Dark Figures, Allegories,) yet there springs
From that same Book that lustre, and those rayes
Of light, that turns our darkest nights to days¹³⁵

And again:

I find that Holy Writ in many places
Hath semblance with this method, where the cases
Doth call for one thing to set forth another¹³⁶

As an extra caution, he carefully added marginalia to the text – references to the Bible, additional authorial comments – as an immediate help for text understanding. After all, as Stuart Sim notices, "Bunyan's purpose in writing *The Pilgrim's Progress* was no different from his purpose in more straightforwardly homiletic works",¹³⁷ his aim is not to provide readers with mere entertainment, but to help the godly in understanding God's ways and to persuade the ungodly of God's righteousness.

With regard to this point, E. Beatrice Batson claims that during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance the use of figurative expression was

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹³⁷ Stuart Sim, "Introduction", in John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Hertfordshire : Wordsworth Editions, 1996, p. xxvii.

designed to train the mind and lead it to spiritual understanding.¹³⁸ She then mentions Augustine’s seminal work, *On Christian Doctrine*, which deals with the interpretation and teaching of the Scriptures. In his work, Augustine legitimises the obscurity of figurative expression, as in his view this obscurity is “divinely arranged for the purpose of subduing pride by toil, and of preventing a feeling of satiety in the intellect, which generally holds in small esteem what is discovered without difficulty”.¹³⁹ According to this view, the difficulty the believer finds in grasping the meaning is the necessary requirement for adequate appreciation of divine truths. Bunyan indeed agrees with this view and holds that the obscurity of God’s figurative expressions is a strategy to lead Christians to a more profound comprehension:

Whereas some say a Cloud is in his [the pilgrim’s] Head
That doth but shew how Wisdom’s covered
With its own mantles: And to stir the mind
To a search after what it fain would find,
Things that seem to be hid in words obscure,
Do but the Godly mind the more allure;
To study what those Sayings should contain,
That speak to us in such a Cloudy strain.¹⁴⁰

Readers then should search for the meaning beyond the literal text. At the end of the first part, Bunyan strongly urges them to do so: “Put by the Curtains, look within my Vail; / Turn up my Metaphors and do not fail”;¹⁴¹ while in the second part Gaius draws a comparison between nuts and obscure – that is, figurative – texts:

*Hard Texts are Nuts (I will not call them Cheaters,
Whose Shells do keep their Kernels from the Eaters.
Ope then the Shells, and you shall have the Meat,*

¹³⁸ E. Beatrice Batson, *op. cit.*, pp. 3 – 4.

¹³⁹ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, in *Four Books*, downloadable pdf file – online source: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/doctrine.pdf>, p. 59, accessed on 12th January 2013, 12.53.

¹⁴⁰ John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, pp. 162 – 163.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

*They here are brought, for you to crack and eat.*¹⁴²

There is a last interesting point that deserves our attention. We have already mentioned Paul's passage in the Second Letter to the Corinthians and how it had been championed as a justification for non-literal readings by Catholic scholars. Though the Protestant Tyndale had refuted this interpretation, it is not altogether improbable that Bunyan might have read Paul's passage as expressing the necessity of going beyond the literal to reach a yet invisible reality.

Quite interestingly, though, as Tyndale remarked, Paul's statement may also be interpreted as referring to the Law of the Old Testament – the “letter”, for a law cannot be effective if it is not understood literally, as referring only to itself – and to the New Testament – the “spirit”, that is, Christ and his words. If we are to take the statement in this way, it should not come as a surprise that in Bunyan's allegory preference is given to the New Testament over the Old one. See again, for example, the emblem of the dusty parlour at the Interpreter's house:

this Parlor, is the heart of a Man that was never sanctified by the sweet Grace of the Gospel [...]. He that began to sweep at first, is the Law [...] the dust did so fly about, that the Room by him could not be cleansed, but [...] thou wast almost choaked therewith.¹⁴³

Or the description that Christian gives of cantankerous Moses: “that Man that overtook you, was Moses, he spareth none, neither knoweth he how to show mercy to those that transgress his Law”.¹⁴⁴ It is questionable whether Bunyan accorded his preference to the “spirit” in a rhetorical and metaphysical sense – that is, to the Spirit that lives beyond words and literal meaning – or in

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 245.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

a religious sense – the New Testament, namely, Christ's words, carrying Grace and Salvation. In any case, it is remarkable to notice how the New Testament often uses parables and metaphors – the very figurative language that Protestantism made a great effort to accord with his theories.

Mullett claims that *The Pilgrim's Progress* is “hardly typical of [Bunyan's] overall *oeuvre*” as his “literary output before 1678 characteristically comprised sermon treatises, polemical tracts, ecclesiological and sacramental dialectics, Reformed soteriology, and so on”.¹⁴⁵ As a matter of fact, there has been considerable debate on the sources that may have influenced Bunyan's work. Besides specific authors and works, it has been suggested that prose romances may have had a significant impact on it – for example, consider the conventional characters of romance that figure in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, as the “dark and dangerous valleys; the distant glimpse of a far-off city or country; the arming of the hero; his imprisonment”.¹⁴⁶ Concerning this, Mullett is quite straightforward when he remarks that “*The Pilgrim's Progress* is an allegory grounded in fantasy, those of the chivalresque at its most elaborate – complete with giants and enchanted palaces, castles and kings' champions and all the other paraphernalia and cast of the chivalric cycles”.¹⁴⁷

Amongst the religious texts that may have influenced *The Pilgrim's Progress*, scholars have listed the metrical Psalms – versifications of the Psalms to be sung as hymns in church, which were produced at the time of the English Reformation; they are said to have affected the verses that feature in

¹⁴⁵ Michael Mullett, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

¹⁴⁶ Christopher Hill, *op. cit.*, p.203.

¹⁴⁷ Michael Mullett, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

the text. With regard to the pilgrim's journey as an allegory of Christian life, Christopher Hill highlights the fact that “the concept of life as a pilgrimage goes back far into the Middle Ages, if not further”.¹⁴⁸

Be it or not “hardly typical of his overall oeuvre”, *The Pilgrim's Progress* works nonetheless as a summary of Bunyan's views, as it contains his opinions on the church of England, kingship, government and social order. It is maybe due to its richness in opinions – together with the flexibility of the allegorical device, which allows more than one correspondence of meanings – that “writers as disparate as evangelicals and atheists, revolutionaries and imperialists, have found support for their views in the pages of Bunyan's work”.¹⁴⁹ It is exactly to this history of assimilation and reception that we now turn, tracking the ebbs and flows of its critical reputation throughout the centuries.

¹⁴⁸ Christopher Hill, *op. cit.*, p.201. See also Michael Mullett, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

¹⁴⁹ Richard L. Greaves, “Bunyan through the Centuries: Some Reflections”, in “English Studies”, Vol. 64, No. 2, pp. 113 – 121, (1983), p. 113.

Chapter 3. The seventeenth century

3.1 England in the seventeenth century

The historical context

Some details regarding the seventeenth-century historical context have already been supplied when sketching John Bunyan's biography. Nonetheless, we shall return on the matter, to provide further data that may be of help in analysing the reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress* at the time.

As already said, the seventeenth century was a turbulent period in English history.¹ Relationships between the king and Parliament were strained throughout the whole century. Clashes broke out over political as well as religious matters – the two were often closely intertwined, as England was still in the process of defining itself as a Protestant nation. As for what regards religion, the Established Church of England was challenged by Dissenters, who aimed at a wide-reaching Reformation and opposed the meddling of the king in church affairs, while amongst commoners there were frequent upsurges of Catholic fear, especially during Charles I's reign (1625 – 1649). Fear was fuelled by Charles I's pro-Catholic policies and his marriage to a Roman Catholic princess – the risk of a return to Catholicism was keenly felt. Besides, the king's attempts at negating parliamentary authority alienated him both the English and Scottish Parliaments, making the final contribution to the outbreak of the English Civil War in 1642. The civil war saw Royalists opposing

¹ See Jim Daems, *Seventeenth-century Literature and Culture*, London, New York : Continuum, 2006, pp. 19 – 35; Christopher Hill, *op. cit.*, chapter I, “Bunyan's England: 1628 – 1688”, pp. 1 – 27; K. M. P. Burton, *Restoration Literature*, London : Hutchinson University Library, 1958, pp. 11 – 24; I. M. Green, *op. cit.*, pp. 1 – 27.

Parliamentarians; I. M. Green confirms the correlation between political and religious issues when he notes that “the royalist propaganda tended to say that the war was being fought to suppress a rebellion against the king's rightful authority”, while “on the parliamentary side the contest was often presented in simple, biblical terms: those who fought for parliament were fighting for the true Protestant religion against the forces of Antichrist”.² During the war, Reformed sects and separatists came into the open to fight for the parliamentary army, where they managed to exert considerable influence among soldiers.

After the execution of the king in 1649, England was declared a Commonwealth and a free state. The Protectorate was established in 1653 and Oliver Cromwell appointed Lord Protector. Cromwell exercised power in an autocratic way, much like Charles I had done before him; nonetheless, the Interregnum was a time of religious toleration – “during the 1650's [...] there was a large amount of religious freedom”³ – and the press was freed from the strict censorship that had previously been imposed on it. However, after Cromwell's death unrest grew in the country. The conservative forces took advantage of the situation and called the exiled Charles II back to England; monarchy was restored. Order was to be re-established in every field. As for what regards religion, during the first years of the Restoration Charles II tried to impose again the Church of England's authority, while at the same time attacking the Dissenters – the Act of Uniformity was brought out in 1662, while in 1664 the Conventicle Act prohibited all services but those of the Church of England. Nonetheless, these measures did not stop dissenting and

² I. M. Green, *op. cit.*, p.4.

³ *Ibid.*, p.6.

nonconformity kept opposing Anglican liturgy.⁴

Fear for a Catholic invasion hit again a high peak when James, the Catholic brother of the heirless Charles II, ascended the throne in 1685. His reign, however, lasted only 3 years – his pro-Catholic policies aroused the opposition of both the Parliament and the Church of England. Parliament eventually asked William of Orange – the husband of James's Protestant daughter, Mary – to come to England; in April 1689 William and Mary were declared king and queen of England.

The cultural context

“Never before or since [the seventeenth century] in English history have so many peers of the realm also been poets and playwrights. At the same time, books by a multitude of commoners appeared, by gentlemen and tinkers”.⁵

The social statuses of seventeenth-century English authors are remarkably diverse. Never before had literary authors belonged to such a wide social spectrum. This could well have been a consequence of the civil war and Interregnum years – events which kindled a lively interest for political and religious matters and urged commoners to take part in debates of national importance. The collapse of censorship also gave free reins to the print – the number of publications increased⁶ and new ideas could be explored. Moreover,

⁴ See Barrie White, “John Bunyan and the Context of Persecution, 1660 – 1688”, in Anne Laurence, W. R. Owens and Stuart Sim (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 51 – 62.

⁵ Kay Gilliland Stevenson, *Milton to Pope, 1650 – 1720*, Palgrave, 2001, p. 221. See also *Culture and Society in the Stuart Restoration. Literature, Drama, History*, edited by Gerald MacLean, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 3 – 27; Jim Daems, *op. cit.*, pp. 1 – 19.

⁶ Some data from Hill's can suggest this dramatic change - “before 1640 newspapers were illegal; by 1645 there were 722. Twenty-two books were published in 1640; over 2000 in 1642”. Christopher Hill, “Bunyan's Contemporary Reputation”, in A. Laurence, W. R. Owens and Stuart Sim (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 6.

the literacy rate grew and literary outputs could aim at a wider range of readership. It is true that the Restoration brought back censorship, but this measure was not always entirely successful as it had previously been.

Besides the widening of readers and authors' social spectrum, it is interesting to notice another process that apparently took place in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – the widening of the gap between upper-class and popular cultures.⁷ According to Hill, there are several political and cultural events that took part in the process, such as the spread of literacy, the Reformation and the scientific revolution. This widening gap neatly identified two different groups/cultures, each with its own interests and needs; on one side, “high” culture – “that of Augustan literature, Latin-based” – on the other side, popular culture – “traditional, magical, full of song and dance [...] virtually unlettered”.⁸ Moreover, in Hill's view these two groups were cut across by a third minor group, consisting of godly people that dedicated themselves to a culture of the Bible and were hostile both to popular and “high” culture. Hostility was indeed mutual – “high” culture as well excluded the “dissenting culture of the Book”⁹ from its ranks.

The profane character of Charles II's court may account for the exclusion of ‘the culture of the Book’ from “high” culture, but it seems not too rash to discern also a political reason for such rejection; after the re-establishment of order – religious order in particular – there came a mistrust for “enthusiasm”, which had previously helped arousing the strong opposition of Dissenters to the Church of England. Indeed, “the leading bishops of the re-

⁷ See Christopher Hill, *A Turbulent, Seditious and Factious People*, *cit.*, pp. 348 – 357.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

⁹ *Ivi.*

established Church of England were moderate, secular men, who favoured a [...] plain style in sermons”,¹⁰ a cool and matter-of-fact tone.

The use of metaphors under attack and other stylistic issues

Sober tones and the use of a plainer language were not just furthered by members of the Church of England, but also by the intellectual milieu and promoted by the Royal Society, which recommended the use of a clear English; one result was the growing hostility to imaginative literature and the discredit of “the complex, allusive, metaphor-dominated poetry that had been so favourable to religious meditation”.¹¹ Metaphorical language was indeed what characterised the sermons and preachings of non-conformist sects.

The use of metaphors and figurative language was brought into spotlight and generally criticised by the exponents of seventeenth-century English “high” culture.¹² Metaphors were often considered deceptive artifices, marred by their arbitrary and subjective nature, and the relationship between the constituting terms always unclear. Hence, texts that employed metaphors were not always considered proper vehicles of truths, but were sometimes regarded as mere entertainment or, even worse, deceptions. According to this

¹⁰ Graham Parry, *The Seventeenth Century. The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature, 1603 – 1700*, London and New York : Longman, 1993, p. 123.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 124 – 125. See also Jim Daems, *op. cit.*, p. 44 – 46. See also Kaufmann’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation* (1966), which explores the issue of a peculiar devotional practice within seventeenth-century Puritanism – the heavenly meditation – that applied an imaginative approach to religion. The heavenly meditation implied the recapitulation of one’s experiences in images, so that through imagination one could better grasp the meaning of God’s ways and the reality of the world to come. U. Milo Kaufmann, *The Pilgrim’s Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation*, New Haven and London : Yale University Press, 1966.

¹² See K. M. P. Burton, *op. cit.*, pp. 39 – 41; Robert Adolph, “La Riforma della Prosa”, in *Storia della Civiltà Letteraria Inglese I*, edited by Franco Marengo, Torino : UTET, 1996, pp. 777 – 783.

view, the only metaphors that could be accepted were those whose imaginative power had waned due to daily usage or those whose subjective nature had been anchored to objective knowledge. As a matter of fact, in 1664 a committee for the improvement of English language was set up by the Royal Society – the enterprise, though, came to nothing. In his *History of the Royal Society*, Thomas Sprat gives an effective report of the hostile climate towards figurative language that characterised those times. His claim is a passionate plea for the use of a simpler and informative English:

To return back to the primitive purity, and shortness, when men deliver'd so many *things*, almost in an equal number of *words*. They have extracted from all their members, a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions; clear senses; a native easiness; bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness, as they can.¹³

However, the use of allegory in the religious field did not completely fall out of use. As a matter of fact, allegory was a necessary tool, as some of the more imaginative books of the Bible – i.e. the Song of Solomon, which was a favourite with believers – needed to be symbolically interpreted to be consistent with the religious reading. Moreover, the use of similes was deep-rooted in religious literary tradition. The very Christian believer had often been symbolically depicted either as a pilgrim treading his road to Heaven, or as a warrior struggling against sin. These images could be found in religious allegorical works, sermons and emblem books, which enjoyed a wide popularity in the XVI and XVII centuries; hence, evangelical metaphors were fairly popular and, in spite of the attacks, retained their importance and influence in the collective imagination.

There is a last, minor point that is of particular interest for us. In the

¹³ Thomas Sprat, *History of the Royal Society*, 1667, p. 113, in K. M. P. Burton, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

second half of the seventeenth century there were debates revolving around the suitability of Anglo-saxon words in literature – “Anglo-saxon plainness”,¹⁴ as Kay Gilliland Stevenson puts it. “To some, including Dryden, it seemed obvious that a series of short words rarely sound 'harmonious'”¹⁵ – if texts had to be characterized by a certain degree of plainness, nonetheless literary language was to be marked by refinement of expression and this was usually achieved by imitation of classical texts.

3.2 The reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in the seventeenth century

In 1976 Roger Sharrock published a selection of critical essays on *The Pilgrim's Progress* that ranged from the earliest pieces of criticism to the more recent ones. It is significant that there should be no critical remarks from the XVII century. Sharrock indeed notes that “literary criticism of *The Pilgrim's Progress* may be said not to exist before the Romantic period”.¹⁶

Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* among the men of letters

We have already traced some cultural trends of the XVII century that may help us understand why *The Pilgrim's Progress* was virtually neglected by the literati. Bunyan belonged to a culture that was disregarded by men of letters and encountered the difficulties of an “ill-educated and vulgar intruder into the province of duly qualified theologians, scholars, and men of letters”.¹⁷ At any

¹⁴ Kay Gilliland Stevenson, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

¹⁵ *Ivi.*

¹⁶ Roger Sharrock, “Introduction”, in *Bunyan. The Pilgrim's Progress: a Casebook*, edited by Roger Sharrock, London and Basingstoke : MacMillan Press, 1976, p. 19.

¹⁷ N. H. Keeble, “‘Of Him Thousands Daily Sing and Talk’: Bunyan and his Reputation”, in *John Bunyan: Conventicle and Parnassus*, edited by N.H. Keeble, Oxford : Clarendon

rate, Bunyan showed complete disregard for the literati, too – actually, he boasted of his supposed ignorance;¹⁸ in his view, being unlettered compelled him to speak with the authority of experience, which he considered much more valuable than the second-hand authority of those who follow other authors and opinions. As Stuart Sim remarks, the very style of Bunyan declares his intention of writing for a popular audience, rather than for scholars and men of letters;¹⁹ the plain structure of sentences, the use of short words and the high incidence of Anglo-Saxon words as compared to words of Romance origin – which men of letters regarded as better suited for literature – openly declare which was Bunyan's intended public. And again, with regard to his style, Hill claims that “at its best [it] is conversational, the conversation of yeomen and artisans” and that “Bunyan's art [...] springs from everyday life, shared with his audience”.²⁰ As a matter of fact, Bunyan's style is characterized by the use of dialectal or colloquial forms. The colloquial “a” for the verb “have” and the pronoun “he” frequently occurs throughout the text (forms like “I should a been”, “a came”), as does the dialectal “bin” for the past participle “been”. Equally common is the colloquial contraction “ 'tis” for “it is”. Popular proverbs and common sayings, too, are scattered throughout the text i.e., “Thou talkest like one, upon whose head is the Shell to this very day”,²¹ says Christian when reproaching Hopeful, while people that are acquainted with Talkative say that he is “a Saint abroad, and a Devil at home”.²² Bunyan's style is thus

Press, 1988, p. 244.

¹⁸ See *ivi*.

¹⁹ Stuart Sim, “Introduction”, *cit.*, p. xi.

²⁰ Christopher Hill, *A Turbulent, Seditious and Factious People*, *cit.*, p. 359.

²¹ John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 77.

unequivocally unrefined and far distant from the courtly tone that men of letters considered crucial for the making of good prose.²³

The distance between Bunyan – the preacher – and the intellectual milieu revolving around the court should not surprise us. Charles II's court was of a profane nature and this inevitably influenced the mainstream literary circles of the time. As a matter of fact, the age saw a decline in the production of devotional poetry; religion was mainly discussed in satires, but given the cynical nature of the court “it is hardly surprising that when religion [was] the subject [...] the mode [was] satirical”.²⁴ The newly-acquired importance of science may be another reason for this change of attitude towards religion – a change that affected mainly people belonging to “high” culture. Moreover, one has also to keep in mind the political and religious turmoil of the time; a Dissenter and “mechanick preacher” – “as the seventeenth century pejoratively termed self-appointed lay evangelists of the artisan class”²⁵ – like Bunyan was invested with a revolutionary value that was not acceptable in Restoration England and was perceived by conservatives as a danger for social order.

“Allegorize” or not to “allegorize”? That is the question

Keeping in mind the historical context traced so far, it should not come as a surprise that in Restoration England “it is the theological or evangelical aspect that is the main source of the work's appeal”.²⁶ In an age of religious

²³ See Christopher Hill, *A Turbulent, Seditious and Factious People, cit.*, p. 359.

²⁴ C. V. Wedgwood, *Seventeenth-century English Literature*, London, New York, Toronto : Oxford University Press, 1963, p.125.

²⁵ J. W. Martin, “Christopher Vitel: an Elizabethan Mechanick Preacher”, in “The Sixteenth Century Journal”, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 15 – 22, (Summer 1979), p.15.

²⁶ W. R. Owens and Stuart Sim, *op. cit.*, p.19.

conflicts and controversies, the few critical remarks on *The Pilgrim's Progress* focused on its religious value and on the appropriateness of its literary form – particularly, on the aptness of allegory as a means of putting religious issues forward.

We have already said that on one side allegory was scorned and attacked by the intellectual milieu while on the other it kept its importance and its hold on collective imagination. We have also discussed the ambiguous stance Protestant religion assumed towards allegory. We have then hypothesized that Bunyan was well aware of the issues that the use of figurative language would raise, since in the “Apology of the Author” he forestalls the criticism and disapproval he might meet with and already provides his own replies. As a matter of fact, the choice of employing the allegorical mode did trigger mixed reactions from his readers.

I

Not to allegorize

It is fairly likely that at the time of *The Pilgrim's Progress's* publication the allegorical approach was becoming a more problematic issue amongst a cultural élite influenced by the developing scientific culture rather than amongst protestant believers. Nonetheless, in spite of all of Bunyan's precautions and justifications, there was indeed “a certain unease among some of Bunyan's coreligionists at the reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress*”.²⁷ In 1682 Thomas Sherman, a General Baptist preacher, felt the need to publish his

²⁷ W. R. Owens, “The Reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in England”, in M. van Os and G. J. Schutte (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 92.

Second Part of the Pilgrim's Progress as a response to Bunyan's first part. He opens up his work with an "Author's Apology", too, where he puts forward explanations for Bunyan's decision of shaping his work as an allegory – a literary method that, through Sherman's words, takes on the appearance of a degenerate but necessary artifice. It seems convenient to me to thoroughly quote Sherman's own words, as nothing could better highlight his attempt at putting a discredited literary method as allegory within an acceptable framework:

It hath been observed of late years, that peoples minds are so vitiated and debauched, that no books will please them to read, but novels, romances and plays [...]; which have been bought up at a strange and prodigious rate, in vast and incredible numbers, whilst tracts of divinity are almost wholly slighted and neglected; and their stomachs turn upon them with loathing, unless they contain something that's new and unusual, either for matter, method or stile [...] the observation whereof put some eminent and ingenious persons upon writing some religious discourses, which they designed for a general use in such kind of methods as might incline many to read them for the methods sake, which otherwise would never have been persuaded to have perused them. [...] And this consideration was the motive which first put the author of the *first part of the Pilgrim's Progress*, upon composing and publishing that necessary and useful tract, which hath deservedly obtained such an universal esteem and commendation.²⁸

He then explains that his *Second Part* is an attempt at improving the theological contribution of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*; for example, he aims at stressing the importance of key aspects of religious life that have been neglected by Bunyan – namely, Christian companionship and the idea of the church as a family. With regard to this, it is interesting to notice that Bunyan's *The Second Part of The Pilgrim's Progress*, as we have previously said, deals exactly with the building up of a Christian community – Sherman's criticism

²⁸ Thomas Sherman, "The Author's Apology for his Book", in *The Second Part of the Pilgrim's Progress, from this Present World of Wickedness and Misery, to an Eternity of Holiness and Felicity; Exactly Described under the Similitude of a Dream, Relating the Manner and Occasion of his Setting Out from, and Dangerous Journey through the World; and Safe Arrival at Last to Eternal Happiness*, London, 1682, in W. R. Owens, "The Reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in England", *cit.*, p. 93.

may well have influenced Bunyan in writing it.

Another reason that urged the writing of Sherman's *Second Part* was a distaste with occasional comic passages in Bunyan's work, which, in Sherman's opinion, might elicit laughter from the readers; Sherman claims that he has been careful to treat the theological matters with due seriousness. If we are to take that Bunyan had indeed read Sherman's work, being partially influenced by it, we must then conclude that he did not take up this second suggestion; as a matter of fact, in the preface to his *Second Part* Bunyan replied to those who had accused him of a lack of seriousness. Again, he profited from the authority that the Bible could grant him and quoted a passage from the Holy Writ:

Object

But some there be that say he [the pilgrim/the first part] laughs too loud

[...]

Answer

One may (I think) say both his laughs & cryes,

May well be guest at by his watry Eyes.

Some things are of that Nature as to make

Ones fancie Checkle while his Heart doth ake,

When Jacob saw his Rachel with the Sheep,

He did at the same time both kiss and weep.²⁹

It is also fairly likely that somebody had complained about a Christian allegory being influenced by the romances. Maybe some readers had indeed regarded *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a romance, as there are several episodes that vividly recall the romances: Christian receiving his armour at the House Beautiful, his fierce fight against Apollyon, Great-heart's bloody battles against the giants they meet along the path. With regard to this, Great-heart's fight against giant Maull is the most notable episode; during the battle, Great-heart grants respite to his enemy: "Mr. Great-heart with a full blow fetch't the *Giant*

²⁹ John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

down to the ground. Nay hold, and let me recover, quoth he. So Mr. *Great-heart* fairly let him get up”.³⁰ A chivalric behaviour, indeed. Thus, the complaints Bunyan may have received would account for another passage of his preface:

But some love not the method of your first,
Romance they count it, throw't away as dust

Soon comes the reply:

[...] if with such thou meet,
By all means in all Loving-wise, them greet;
Render them not reviling for revile:
But if they frown, I prethee on them smile.
Perhaps 'tis Nature, or some ill report
Has made them thus dispise, or thus retort.³¹

After all, as W. R. Owens remarks, “it is probably safe to assume that for every godly reader who thought the work too much like a romance”, Bunyan's Christian pilgrims became acquainted with “many less godly readers precisely because of [their] romance qualities”.³²

II

Allegorize

Sharrock's Casebook's section dedicated to remarks of Bunyan's contemporaries features just three texts – namely, Bunyan's own prefaces to the first and second part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* and the anonymous preface to the French translation of 1685.³³ The latter may be of some interest for our discussion, since it resumes all the points previously covered, while putting

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 229. For the episode of Christian receiving his armour, see John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 55; the fight against Apollyon, p. 59; Great-heart's fight against Grim the Giant, p. 207; against Giant Slay-good, p. 249; against Giant Despair, p. 262.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

³² W. R. Owens, “The Reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in England”, *cit.*, p. 97.

³³ See Roger Sharrock (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 29 – 46.

them into a totally positive light.

Besides an introduction to the book and its author, a significant part of the preface to the French translation is devoted to the justification of Bunyan's method. The justification is threefold; two of its assumptions are drawn from Bunyan's "Apology" and another is similar to Sherman's. Unlike Sherman, however, the impression one gets is that this time the counsel for the defence is utterly convinced of his client's innocence and not just clutching at straws. The first attempt at defending Bunyan is grounded on Bunyan's own doubts about the suitability of his method:

If any one thinks that the style and manner of presentation are not sufficiently serious or fitting for such sacred matters as are here represented under various figures and in the form of a dream, let him know that the author, having applied himself to this manner of writing, found himself from the beginning, against his original intention, strongly pressed to the point of persuasion by several persons of good judgement and sincere conscience, until finally he allowed the book to be printed and published.³⁴

Indeed, this recalls a passage from Bunyan's "Apology", wherein he describes himself seeking advice with regard to the publication of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (this may well also be a dramatisation of his own doubts):

Well, when I had thus put mine ends together,
I shew'd them others, that I might see whether
They would condemn them, or them justifie:
And some said, let them live; some, let them die.³⁵

The anonymous writer of the preface to the French translation provides another reason that Bunyan himself has put forth as a defence, namely, the fact that similes and allegories – those "agreeable, edifying, and succinct mode of exposition"³⁶ – were indeed used by Jesus and his prophets, too, to convey spiritual meanings.

³⁴ "Preface to the French Translation of 1685", in Roger Sharrock (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 45.

³⁵ John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

³⁶ "Preface to the French Translation of 1685", *op. cit.*, p. 45.

One last remark echoes Sherman's words; the anonymous writer claims that an allegorical form is necessary nowadays to catch the interest of people:

We live in an age of refinement when things have to be subtly rendered in order to appeal to public taste. Our Bunyan treats his subject in the manner of an allegory so that divine truths may penetrate to the inmost heart.³⁷

Overall, the preface lacks the aggressive tones that steeped Sherman's "Apology". It would be interesting to know the social position and occupation of the anonymous writer. As an English Baptist preacher, Sherman expressed the distaste that he felt for the changing customs of English society – a behaviour that we may easily recognize as usual, if not typical, of a man who has since held an important position of moral guidance and is now witnessing the emergence of phenomena that his culture finds objectionable. Hence, his defensive stance towards Bunyan's use of allegory sounds more like an attack. On the contrary, the anonymous French writer shows a more conciliatory attitude – if not a totally positive one – towards Bunyan's method; besides the different conditions that characterised the English and French societies at the time, it would definitely make sense if his place in society were different from Sherman's.

Bunyan's success amongst the commoners

So far we have discussed how men of letters greeted – or better, ignored – *The Pilgrim's Progress*. We have also tried to explain the reasons why the literati showed no consideration for Bunyan's work. However, if we turn to non-intellectual readers, we cannot fail to notice the massive success that the

³⁷ *Ivi.*

book attained among them. The publication of an anonymous biography and a collection of Bunyan's works³⁸ in 1692, only 4 years after his death, constitutes a sufficient proof of the success and popularity he enjoyed. In his survey of the editions of the first part of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Frank Mott Harrison has listed 22 publications dating from 1678 to 1700. The greatest bulk is made up by Nathaniel Ponder's new editions – a remarkable fourteen editions in 22 years – but there are also spurious publications prepared by other editors.³⁹ Most of all, though, *The Pilgrim's Progress's* success is testified by the huge mass of imitations, adaptations and spurious additional parts that were published in the wake of the success of his first part; notably, in 1684 a twenty-two page abridged edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was brought out just to meet the needs of those who “either could not afford to buy the complete version, or whose level of literacy was such that they would have had difficulty in reading it”.⁴⁰

As already said, Bunyan was probably urged to write a second part to *The Pilgrim's Progress* not only by his will to improve his theological exposition, but also by public requests and his annoyance over spurious works. In the preface, he complains:

'Tis true, some have late, to Counterfeit
My Pilgrim, to their own, my Title set;
Yea others, half my Name and Title too;
Have stitched to their Book, to make them do;
But yet they by their Features do declare
Themselves not mine to be, whose ere they are.⁴¹

³⁸ It is *The Works of that Eminent Servant of Christ, Mr. John Bunyan*, edited by Charles Doe, London : William Marshall, 1692. See Richard L. Greaves, “Bunyan through the Centuries: Some Reflections”, *cit.*, p. 113.

³⁹ See Frank Mott Harrison, *Handlist of Editions of the First Part of The Pilgrim's Progress*, Hove, 1941.

⁴⁰ W.R. Owens, “The Reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in England”, *cit.*, p. 97.

⁴¹ John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

In spite of Bunyan's absolute trust, spurious works continued to be published, and with the expiry of the Licensing Act in 1695 an increasing number of pirated and unauthorized editions would eventually come out.⁴²

The Pilgrim's Progress was a best-seller not only in England – in fact, the work was soon translated into Dutch (1682), French (1685), Welsh (1687) and apparently into Gaelic (around 1684), though this translation does not seem to have survived.⁴³ Bunyan himself boasted about the international success of his work in the prefatory verses of the second part, where he proudly wrote that his “Pilgrims book has travel'd Sea and Land” and “in France and Flanders” it is “esteem'd a Friend, a Brother. In Holland too” it is “with some, worth more than Gold”.⁴⁴ One has to consider that, as a result of religious and political persecution, many dissenters fled to America or to European Protestant countries, carrying with them a culture wherein *The Pilgrim's Progress* held a special place. Quite ironically, then, England's unfavourable climate towards those who were at the margins of the political and religious scene helped the dissemination of the text – a text that was indeed a favourite among those very marginal groups.⁴⁵

There are literary as well as social and political reasons that account for Bunyan's success amongst commoners. Certainly, while Bunyan's work did not meet the stylistic expectations of the literary establishment, its drawing on popular tradition – chapbook romances for the prose, ballads and metrical Psalms for the verse – managed to catch the interest of non-intellectual readers;

⁴² See N. H. Keeble, *op. cit.*, pp. 245 – 246.

⁴³ See Christopher Hill, *A Turbulent, Seditious and Factious People, cit.*, pp. 373 – 374.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁴⁵ See Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan. A Transnational History of the Pilgrim's Progress*, Princeton, New Jersey & Woodstock, Oxfordshire : Princeton University Press, 2004, pp. 1, 11.

in *The Pilgrim's Progress* they also found a language that was nearer to theirs than to scholars'. Moreover, while politics and the so-called "high" culture had lost to a considerable extent their religious attitudes, as we have seen, Puritanism continued to be the prevailing mind-set of English society outside court. This is confirmed by Luigi Sampietro when he claims:

la severità di Bunyan sembrerebbe ormai incongrua e remota dai costumi di un paese in cui erano tornate in piena auge le parrucche dell'aristocrazia. Ma il successo perdurante e immediato dei suoi libri e della sua predicazione sta a indicare il contrario. Il distaccato cinismo e la disinvoltura morale dei tempi nuovi era solo una faccia – quella visibile sui palcoscenici della capitale – della società inglese. Mentre Bunyan dava voce all'Inghilterra del popolo minuto e dei villaggi artigiani ai margini delle foreste.⁴⁶

There was a strong demand for books of practical divinity from less cultivated readers. *The Pilgrim's Progress* was a fine example of this literary form.⁴⁷

Bunyan was thus more attuned to the sensibilities of the poor and the middling sort than to the literary establishment's and the court's. Besides, there are also elements of political significance that must be kept in consideration. Bunyan did not properly fit in Restoration order; though his political views were of a rather conservative nature, nonetheless his religious beliefs prevented him from conforming to the proposed rules. This behaviour might have helped building up the image of a "socially dangerous" Bunyan, which in turn would make it harder for him to be accepted by high society.⁴⁸ On the contrary, the lower orders of society would not feel the need to confront the issue when approaching his writings.

There are thus different elements that gave their contribution in making

⁴⁶ Luigi Sampietro, "Le Idee e la Prosa nel Trapasso alla Modernità", in Franco Marengo (ed.), p. 735.

⁴⁷ See *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature in 18 Volumes* (1907–21), Vol. XI, "The Period of the French Revolution", chapter XIV, "Book Production and Distribution, 1625–1800", 30, "Popular Literature", online source: <http://www.bartleby.com/221/1430.html>, accessed on 14th November 2012, 10:48.

⁴⁸ See Christopher Hill, *A Turbulent, Seditious and Factious People*, cit., p. 372.

The Pilgrim's Progress a spectacular and immediate success among the middle and lower social classes – a best-seller book from the very start – while a despised work among the intellectual and academic milieu.⁴⁹ It is therefore all too bad that we do not possess direct testimonies and comments by seventeenth-century common readers on Bunyan's work, which could help and further articulate our understanding of the phenomenon.

⁴⁹ See Christopher Hill, "Bunyan's Contemporary Reputation", *cit.*, p. 15.

Chapter 4. The eighteenth century

4.1 Great Britain in the eighteenth century

The historical context¹

While the seventeenth century had been a period of political turmoil for England, the eighteenth century was a peaceful time, at least for what regards internal policy; as a matter of fact, the homeland witnessed just two Jacobite uprisings supporting the Stuart's claim to the throne in 1715 and 1745, while continual warfare was conducted on foreign soils, as Great Britain was engaged in the War of Spanish Succession, the Seven Years War and the American Revolution.²

The Glorious Revolution at the closing of the seventeenth century had profound consequences on the organization of England's power structure in the eighteenth century, the deposition of James II and the ascension of William of Orange being both enacted by the Parliament. The Parliament rose to a position of primary importance, as the 1689 Bill of Rights established that parliamentary meetings should be called on a regular basis and the agreement of the Parliament was needed for judicial proceedings; the monarch had now to collaborate with the Parliament in order to govern the state. Factions within the Parliament became thus more significant, the principal opposition being that

¹ For a brief but detailed overview of England's eighteenth-century history, see Paul Goring, *Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture*, London, New York : Continuum, 2008, pp. 5 - 30; see also Thomas Keymer and John Mee, "Preface", pp. xiii - xiv, and Michael Scrivener, "Literature and politics", pp. 43 - 50, both in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740 - 1830*, edited by Thomas Keymer and Jon Mee, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2004.

² See Paul Goring, *op. cit.*, pp. 8, 21 - 22.

between Whig and Tory, where Tories came to be the party supporting the landed interests and the Anglican Church, while the Whigs supported industrial interests, the emerging merchants and the Dissenters.³ Amongst the political figures of the time, the most notable was Robert Walpole, who is generally regarded as the first Prime Minister ever.⁴ A Whig statesman, he served during the reigns of George I (1714 – 1727) and George II (1727 – 1760) and acquired an infamous reputation for corruption, which earned him several negative portrayals in the literary works of the time.

A major political event taking place at the start of the century was the introduction of the Acts of Union (1707), which combined the English and Scottish kingdoms into a single one – the kingdom of Great Britain. During the century, the kingdom of Great Britain was to become the world's dominant colonial power, expanding its domains throughout the world.

From a social point of view, Great Britain kept being a profoundly inegalitarian society⁵ – a tiny elite owned most of the land, which was the primary source of wealth; only a small part of the population was thus granted access to education and could enjoy good health thanks to good living conditions. Nonetheless, a new social stratum was to emerge during the century, adding a further division to a so-far twofold society – trade and the emerging manufacturing industry brought about the emergence of what was to be called the middle-class.

Fear for religion-motivated national turmoil continued to grip Great Britain; however, the Established Church of England was able to retain all its

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 13 – 16.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 18 – 19.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

privileges, while Anglicans and Dissenters managed to live side by side, as the latter enjoyed a relative freedom of worship. Catholics and Jews were nonetheless still greeted with widespread hostility.

The cultural context

Eighteenth-century culture underwent some significant changes. A drastic change occurred in the printing industry, which increased its outputs, varied its readership and became a more commercialized business.⁶ This was partly due to the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1695, which set out the requirements for the creation of a free literary marketplace and virtually lifted pre-publication censorship. The literary marketplace was flooded not only by books – a large amount of periodicals, enduring or not, saw the light of day; “it was the first time in British history that the technology of print was harnessed for the purpose of regular, mass communication”.⁷ Periodicals became the upper and middle-classes’ ideal place for reflection and discussion of topical matters, helping readers in distant places creating and keeping contact with a culture they all shared.⁸

The variety of a cultural scene that could offer both modern and classical works, vernacular and imported texts, compelled men of letters to demarcate a space of refined culture. Emphasis was put on artistic taste as a marker of educated classes’ members. Proper aesthetic appreciation came thus

⁶ See Barbara M. Benedict, “Readers, writers, reviewers, and the professionalization of literature” in Thomas Keymer and Jon Mee (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 3 – 20. For this overview of eighteenth-century culture, see also Paul Goring, *op. cit.*, pp. 3 – 4; 47 – 58.

⁷ Paul Goring, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁸ See Barbara M. Benedict, *op. cit.*, pp. 10 – 12.

to be identified as a feature of education – what people read revealed their social and cultural status.

“Mass communication” implied also that all readers had to share a common, standard language in order to express and convey clear meanings. It should not surprise us that language provided a popular subject of interest among men of letters at the time.⁹ During the Augustan Age – the first four decades of the century – an attempt at regularisation of language was made. As a matter of fact, John Locke's plea for a polished and refined English language, issued in his *Essay upon Several Projects*, provoked a great deal of comments and probably induced many to engage in the enterprise.¹⁰ A consistent stream of grammar books and dictionaries entered the printing market. The will to impose uniformity to language spelling gave birth to standard modern English.

A considerable influence on eighteenth-century culture was exerted by the Enlightenment. “The Enlightenment was, at its center, a celebration of ideas – ideas about what the human mind was capable of, and what could be achieved through deliberate action and scientific methodology”.¹¹ Rationalism and empiricism raised in esteem within the cultural agenda. As a matter of fact, reason was considered an effective tool to fight superstition and ignorance; hence, the devaluation of non-rational features of human nature. This attitude explains the rational approach that men of letters and thinkers generally had towards religious beliefs. Indeed, deism, which holds that people can know God only by means of their reason and not by supernatural events or revelation,

⁹ See Loretta Innocenti, “Il Linguaggio nella Riflessione Settecentesca”, in *Storia della Civiltà Letteraria Inglese 2*, edited by Franco Marengo, Torino : UTET, pp. 33 – 54.

¹⁰ See George E. Smock, “John Locke and the Augustan Age of Literature”, in “The Philosophical Review”, Vol. 55, No. 3, pp. 264 – 281, (May 1946), p. 279.

¹¹ Josh Rahn, “The Enlightenment”, online source: <http://www.online-literature.com/periods/enlightenment.php>, accessed on 12th December 2012, 11.14.

considerably flourished during the first decades of the century. However, from the 1740's onwards a different approach to religion eventually emerged, challenging other manners of observance – the Evangelical Revival would provide people with fresh spiritual nourishment.

The Augustan Age

The Augustan Age has been generally described as an age devoted to harmony and refinement, conscious imitation of classics, cool rationalism, control and polite taste.¹² Precise and narrow definitions of an era are always misleading, as they tend to overlook all the elements that do not fit in the cultural mainstream. As a matter of fact, the eighteenth century was rather ambiguous, as it was a time of cultural transition. However, as we are interested in Bunyan's reception among the eighteenth-century mainstream men of letters, the ideas that circulated among the elite literary circles and were generally championed by them are indeed what matters to us. It was Alexander Pope that set the literary standard of the age, that is, “grace, high style, urbanity of tone, meticulousness of form”.¹³ The Augustan Age

was a period in which imagination slept, and in which the sense of the temporal was strong. It was a period of criticism rather than creation, a period in which regularity and perfection of literary form were of more importance than originality of thought.¹⁴

¹² See George E. Smock, *op. cit.*, p. 266; Moody and Lovett, *A History of English Literature*, p. 158, in George E. Smock, *op. cit.*, p. 265; James William Johnson, “The Meaning of “Augustan”, in “Journal of the History of Ideas”, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 507 – 522, (October 1958), pp. 510, 512, 522.

¹³ James William Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 512.

¹⁴ Moody and Lovett, *op. cit.*, p. 158, in George E. Smock, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

It is not surprising then that considerable effort was devoted to the refinement of English language; standardisation of language was one of the primary concerns. As L. Innocenti points out:

sul piano della lingua comune [questo atteggiamento] è riconoscibile nei programmi tesi a regolarizzare arbitri e improprietà linguistiche, a fornire delle norme per scrivere e parlare correttamente [...]. I <<mali>> denunciati da tanti intellettuali sono in particolare i difetti di stile, l'ortografia incerta, le forme grammaticali e sintattiche scorrette.¹⁵

As for words, the preference was still accorded to words of Romance origin, as in the previous century.¹⁶

We have already touched upon the issue of figurative language during the Augustan Age, when dealing with the history of allegory. We have seen how figurative style was kept under control and generally disregarded, as it was perceived to be closely connected with the political turmoil of the XVII century. Apparently, then, the Augustan Age had its roots in the rational climate that followed the Restoration and reached its peak in the first half of the XVIII century. The rationalism of the Augustan Age was highly unfavourable to the excesses of the imagination – the literal was given preference over the figurative, and literature was sanitized accordingly.

Preaching was exposed to the effects of the eighteenth-century revolution of taste, as well – to a certain extent, the rational approach was applied to religion, too. As a matter of fact, some people complained for a preaching style they felt to be dull and uninspired, devoid of the passionate enthusiasm that had characterized pre-Restoration sermons. Paul Goring notices that “it became common [...] for eighteenth-century clergy to downplay the mysteries of divinity in favour of 'practical religion'”.¹⁷ The

¹⁵ Loretta Innocenti, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

¹⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁷ Paul Goring, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

figurative Protestant reading culture would reemerge only during the 1740's, with the advent of the Evangelical Revival.

The Evangelical Revival

Scholars usually place the beginning of the Augustan Age's decline in the 1740's, the very same years that witnessed the emergence of a renewed spiritual culture. The concurrency is indeed significant. The Augustan frame of mind got increasingly challenged by opposing stances favouring a re-awakening of those elements – inward analysis, enthusiasm, figurative thought and inspiration – that it had disregarded in the previous decades. These opposing stances were expressed by a religious movement whose importance was dramatically growing around the half of the century – the Evangelical Revival.

The Evangelical movement¹⁸ sprang up within the Established Church of England and, though some of its followers would eventually leave it, many others would remain within the National Church – as a matter of fact, Evangelical followers were generally contented with the liturgy and ceremonies of the Established Church:

¹⁸ See Charles J. Abbey and John H. Overton, *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century*, ch. 9, "The Evangelical Revival" – online source: http://christianbookshelf.org/abbey/the_english_church_in_the_eighteenth_century/chapter_ix_the_evangelical_revival.htm, accessed on 30th November 2012, 11.58; *Encyclopædia Britannica*, entry "Anglican Evangelical", online source: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/24938/Anglican-Evangelical#ref84601>, accessed on 30th November 2012, 11.58; "Evangelical Revival in England", online source: <http://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1701-1800/evangelical-revival-in-england-11630228.html>, accessed on 30th November 2012, 11.56; "The Eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival", online source: http://www.daleappleby.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=75:18th-century-evangelical-revival&catid=37:anglican-history&Itemid=53, accessed on 30th November 2012, 11.59.

the truths which they brought into prominence were not new truths [...] but they were truths which acquired under the vigorous preaching of the revivalists a freshness and a vitality, and an influence over men's practice, which they had to a great extent ceased to exercise.¹⁹

The focus on the intensity of inward experience was so marked that the Evangelical Revival may well be termed a “revival of religious enthusiasm”; besides “evangelism, social welfare, and missions”,²⁰ Evangelicals emphasized the importance of self-awareness, introspection, emotional involvement and personal spiritual conviction. They also “mocked the rational and scientific project of Enlightenment”²¹ and asked believers to turn from science to faith – as Protestantism was reaffirming itself, “the most common form this reassertion took was the denunciation of science [and] worldly pleasures”.²²

Field preaching and a conversionist campaign among the masses were the methods employed by Evangelicals to convey their belief. As for the religious issues explored by preachers during the gatherings, the “common themes of preaching” were “the awfulness of sin, the wonder of the cross of Christ, the possibility of present forgiveness of sins through the placing of faith in Christ who suffered and rose”.²³

What is most important for the further concerns of this work is the fact that at the end of the century Evangelicals began to found voluntary associations for the purpose of promoting their movement throughout the world, as proselytisation was of the utmost importance for the Evangelicals;²⁴

¹⁹ See Charles J. Abbey and John H. Overton, *op. cit.*, p. 301.

²⁰ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Anglican Evangelical”, online source: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/24938/Anglican-Evangelical#ref84601>.

²¹ Blanford Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 219.

²³ Kenneth J. Steward, *Restoring the Reformation: British Evangelicals and the Francophone 'Réveil', 1816 – 1849*, ch. 1, “The Evangelical Revival in Retrospect”, online source as a downloadable pdf file: http://www.wtsbooks.com/pdf_files/restoring_the_reformatio.pdf, accessed on 28th December 2012, 11.09 p. 8.

²⁴ See Isabel Hofmeyr, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

among the others, the Evangelicals founded the *Evangelical Magazine* (launched in 1793), the London Missionary Society (1795) and the Religious Tract Society (1796). The “pan-evangelical enthusiasm”, as Stewart calls it, must be considered along with the expansion of the British empire, as the latter acted as a strong incentive to missionary endeavours.

Genius vs learning – Addison’s “On Genius” and Edward Young’s

Conjectures on Original Composition

An interesting cultural phenomenon that took place in the 18th century is the growing importance of the concept of literary Genius as opposed to learning within the period's cultural agenda. Though the idea took on paramount importance only with the emergence of Romanticism, a first appreciation of the concept of Genius developed in the 18th century. “It is generally agreed that Addison's 1711 Spectator essay on “Genius” is the [eighteenth-century] earliest contribution”²⁵ on the topic – this is quite interesting, given that mainstream cultural circles during the first decades of the 18th century generally accorded their preference to an art refined by knowledge, conformity to the acknowledged literary rules and imitation of the classics.

As a matter of fact, in his article Addison carefully distinguishes between the Genius that “without any Assistance of Art or Learning, have produced Works that were the Delight of their own Times”²⁶ and the Genius

²⁵ John Goodridge and Bridget Keegan, “John Clare and the traditions of labouring-class verse”, in Thomas Keymer and Jon Mee (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 285.

²⁶ Joseph Addison, in “The Spectator”, No. 160, (3rd September, 1711), in *The Spectator*, edited by Donald F. Bond, Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1965, Vol. 2, p. 127.

“that have formed themselves by Rules, and submitted the Greatness of their natural Talents to the Corrections and Restraints of Art”.²⁷ Nonetheless, challenging the polished and refined Augustan standards, Addison states that

there appears something nobly wild and extravagant in these great natural Genius's, that is infinitely more beautiful than all the Turn and Polishing of what the *French* call a *Bel Esprit*, by which they would express a Genius refined by Conversation, Reflection, and the Reading of the most polite Authors.²⁸

This is obviously not the first time the question is raised. Nonetheless, by acknowledging the existence of two different kinds of Genius – the original Genius and the refined, learned one – Addison paves the way to the growing emphasis that will be put on the superiority of the original Genius in the course of the XVIII century;²⁹ as a matter of fact, by the middle of the XVIII century essays and treatises examining the matter “had begun to privilege a genius untainted by the intervention of any education or training”.³⁰

Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition*, published in 1759, was probably the most influential contribution entering the debate. Actually, the ideas he expressed in his treatise had already been pondered over by others. However, Young's merit lay in his summarizing all previous remarks in one essay.

Young resumes the distinction between the original Genius and the imitative, learned one. Though holding the aesthetic achievement of the past in profound respect, he states a preference for the original Genius – the one that does not conform to established rules. In his view, only a Genius that freely

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 127.

²⁹ See Donald F. Bond, note to Addison's article, in Donald F. Bond (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 126.

³⁰ John Goodridge and Bridget Keegan, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

expresses itself can produce first-rank works, whilst an imitation can never reach the greatness of an original. He therefore tosses refined learning aside: “Genius is a master-workman, learning is but an instrument; and an instrument, tho' most valuable, yet not always indispensable”.³¹

Besides stating the preference for the original Genius, a most interesting feature of Young's treatise is his stressing the link between literary genius and the divine, as both God and the genius are able to create things “without the means generally reputed necessary to that end”.³² In joining together the literary and the religious field, he repeatedly associates himself with the then re-emerging Protestant culture. First, when claiming the importance of a “due inspection of ourselves”³³ for the creation of original art – a practice that recalls the Dissenters' peculiar habit of careful inward analysis. Second, when his writing of *Genius* reminds the reader of religious enthusiasm's characteristics – “learning we thank, genius we revere; That gives us pleasure, This gives us *rapture*; That informs us, This *inspires*”³⁴ – and again, when claiming the difference between learned writers and natural Geniuses, between “well-accomplished scholars and divinely-inspired *enthusiasts*”.³⁵ By joining the spiritual and literary fields together, not only did Young associate himself to the then re-emerging spiritual culture, but, as Fletcher remarks, he contributed to a cultural change that was soon to take place, that is, the shift of the sense of awe from the religious to the aesthetic field.³⁶

³¹ Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition*, p. 13, online source, downloadable pdf file: <http://archive.org/details/cu31924013204155>, accessed on 15th December 2012, 11.59

³² *Ivi.*

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17, italics mine.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 24 – 25, italics, again, mine.

³⁶ See Angus Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

By according his preference to the natural Genius – “that God within [...] that can set us right in Composition, without the rules of the learned”³⁷ – Young not only developed an opinion that Addison had voiced some decades before, but displayed the change that had occurred in English culture – a reaffirmation of inward spirituality, at the expenses of cool rationalism. Moreover, by challenging Augustan views, it anticipated Romantic preoccupations around the idea of the Genius and the artist.

4.2 The reception of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in the eighteenth century

The Augustan Bunyan

Given the importance placed on cultivation and elegance by Augustan men of letters, it is not surprising that Bunyan’s work should be disregarded as devoid of the “due” refinement.³⁸ As we have already seen, Bunyan’s style and usage of popular forms of speech marked him as a vulgar writer that only the uncultivated readers could appreciate – “throughout the eighteenth century Bunyan carried the stigma of being a writer who was popular with the common people; he was an artisan writing in the language of the market-place and his work fell outside the Augustan canon of polite literature”.³⁹

That an anonymous parody of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* should be written to satirize Sir Robert Walpole is an ample proof of Bunyan’s work’s popularity,⁴⁰ as a parody, to work, must be based on a popular text. As a matter

³⁷ Edward Young, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

³⁸ See W. R. Owens, “The Reception of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in England”, *cit.*, p.98.

³⁹ Roger Sharrock, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁴⁰ It is *The Statesman’s Progress, or a Pilgrimage to Greatness. Delivered Under the Similitude of a Dream*, published in 1741. See Richard L. Greaves, “Bunyan through the

of fact, Bunyan's very fame was considered a proof of his coarseness.⁴¹ Bunyan's name was often quoted in sarcastic remarks. Joseph Addison cited him as a proof that popularity might be gained regardless of real merit: "I never yet knew an author that had not his admirers. Bunyan and Quarles have passed through several editions, and pleased as many readers as Dryden and Tillotson".⁴² John Dennis backed his view and claimed that it would be a jest to say that Bunyan could "please and gratify the Minds of Men of Quality and Education".⁴³ As far as 1757 Bunyan is still an object of scorn, his value being ruthlessly mocked by David Hume:

Whoever would assert an equality of genius and eloquence between [...] BUNYAN and ADDISON, would be thought to defend no less an extravagance, than if he had maintained a mole-hill to be as high as TENERIFFE, or a pond as extensive as the ocean.⁴⁴

Nonetheless, it should be noted that critical assessment of Bunyan's work by men of letters – however negative the evaluation may be – finally comes to be based on literary and not only religious values.

However, this is not to imply that the religious value of *The Pilgrim's Progress* came to be overlooked, quite the contrary – its being steeped in Puritan dogma was another cause of disregard by men of letters living in an age that witnessed the Enlightenment. No doubt whoever had grown in a cultural

Centuries: Some Reflections", *cit.*, p. 114.

⁴¹ See N. H. Keeble, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

⁴² Joseph Addison, in "The Whig-Examiner", No. 2 (21st September 1710), in *The Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Addison in Four Volumes*, Oxford, 1830, Vol. 2, p. 236, pdf online source: <http://ia700307.us.archive.org/16/items/addimiscwo02addiuoft/addimiscwo02addiuoft.pdf>, accessed on 27th December 2012, 10.43.

⁴³ John Dennis, "Of Simplicity in Poetical Composition", in *Original Letters: Familiar, Moral and Critical. By Mr. Dennis. In Two Volumes.*, London, 1721, Vol. 1, p. 168, online source: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/ecco/004891057.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext>, accessed on 27th December, 11.16.

⁴⁴ David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste", in *Four Dissertations*, 1800, Vol. 1, p. 245, in Roger Sharrock (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 50.

environment that favoured rationality would shiver at passages like the one wherein Christian and Hopeful, having followed one Flatterer, take the wrong road; they are then reproached by a shining One:

I saw in my Dream, that he commanded them to *lie down*; which when they did, he chastized them sore [the shining One has a whip], to teach them the good way wherein they should walk [...]. This done, he bids them go on their way [...]. So they thanked him for all his kindness, and went softly along the right way.⁴⁵

Sharrock indeed cites James Foster, who declared, in a 1741 issue of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, that “none of the characters in *The Pilgrim's Progress* spoke sense except Ignorance”.⁴⁶ This statement is quite interesting, not least because the character of Ignorance has been one of the most debated topic in Bunyan scholarship so far.

The meeting between Christian and Ignorance takes place along the highway past the Delectable Mountains. Their discussion revolves around the way to attain Heaven and the nature of faith. They hold opposing views on the matter. Ignorance believes that good deeds will earn him a place in Heaven – “I know my Lords will, and I have been a good Liver, I pay every man his own; I Pray, Fast, pay Tithes, and give Alms”,⁴⁷ he says confidently. His faith is rational and acts mainly in the outer world (though, obviously, the believer must first acknowledge faith in his soul). Christian answers back that Heaven can only be attained as a gift of Christ, through a revelation; living a good life is not sufficient for the believer's spiritual growth. In his view, real faith acts both inwardly and outwardly, as the believer's progress entails an inner

⁴⁵ John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

⁴⁶ Roger Sharrock, *op. cit.*, p.20.

⁴⁷ John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

struggle and the will to work on oneself – and here Bunyan seems to hint at his own real experiences.

Augustan attitude towards faith – more rational and restrained – seems to be more akin to Ignorance's. One may easily imagine Ignorance's exclamation being uttered by an eighteenth-century follower of the Enlightenment: "What! You are a man for revelations! I believe that what both you, and all the rest of you say about that matter, is but the fruit of distracted brains".⁴⁸ It is not surprising then that Ignorance should be considered by eighteenth-century learned readers the only character to speak sense in *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

With regard to this episode, there is a last interesting point that deserves to be highlighted, namely, the nature of the pilgrims' journey. Ignorance seems to consider his journey a mere external movement, devoid of symbolical meanings – for example, he sensibly asks Christian why he should start his pilgrimage from a faraway gate when there is "a fine, pleasant, green Lane, that comes down from [his] Countrey the next way into it".⁴⁹ On the contrary, Christian's pilgrimage is an inward journey as well as an outward one. As we have already said, he has to decode every object and person he meets along the road, as they are signs of a higher and spiritual reality; the decoding activity is the only way to make his soul grow. We may thus define his pilgrimage a journey throughout language, as the road is an allegorical text he has to decipher to reach the desired destination. Unlike Ignorance, Christian would never consider one path to be like any other, as he knows that each is invested

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

with a symbolical meaning. Christian recognizes and decodes the allegorical reality. Ignorance does not. Quite curiously, this trait of Ignorance's character perfectly fits in the Augustan framework we have built around him, given the predominant Augustan distaste for the allegorical frame of mind. However, at the half of the century, the opinions that in the text are expressed by Christian began to be distinctly voiced in opposition to Augustan views. Christian's views on religion would be endorsed by the Evangelicals.

The Evangelical Bunyan

While Augustan and Enlightenment-influenced men of letters did not have kind things to say about Bunyan, voices supporting the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress* did eventually rise. But if the former were mainly interested in Bunyan's literary value, the latter focused on and were mainly "appreciative of Bunyan's edifying didacticism".⁵⁰ As N. H. Keeble highlights, "Bunyan's reputation ran in two channels which rarely converged" – on one side, the men of letters that scorned Bunyan's literary and aesthetic value and his religious enthusiasm; on the other side, believers and men of letters that recognized Bunyan's moral and didactic merit.

Bunyan's intense and less restrained spirituality, his enthusiasm and the stress he puts on inward self-analysis are consistent with the character of eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival. As a matter of fact, leaders of the Evangelical movement and of Methodism were devoted readers of Bunyan:

⁵⁰ N. H. Keeble, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

George Whitefield contributed a preface to the third edition of *The Works of John Bunyan* (1767). John Wesley more than once read through *The Pilgrim's Progress* (and other Bunyan titles) on horseback, and himself abridged it in 1743. [...]Methodist preachers made frequent reference to Bunyan.⁵¹

Fostered by this tradition, new editions and reprints of Bunyan's works blossomed. According to the research carried out by Frank Mott Harrison,⁵² from 1743 – the year of the publication of Wesley's abridged version – to the end of the eighteenth century, there were almost 150 appearances in print of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, be they reissues, abridgements or new editions. From the beginning of the eighteenth century to 1743 there had been less than 30. The most notable publication was the first annotated edition, *The Pilgrim's Progress Complete in Two Parts [...] To Which is Now First Added, Practical and Expository Notes*, put out in 1775. The editor's notes were not concerned with linguistic or literary issues, rather, they sought to elucidate moral questions.⁵³ The enterprise was to be followed by a stream of editions with explanatory notes of the spiritual kind. In a sense, John Wesley's edition perfectly mirrors the evangelical spirituality of the time. Its being abridged – be it to make reading easier to uncultivated people or to produce an affordable edition – betrayed Wesley's will to reach the highest number of people, hence spreading God's word far and wide.

If Augustan spirituality may well be represented by Ignorance's natural faith, the members of the Evangelical movement could find in Christian a valid representative of their stances. Evangelicals undoubtedly mirrored themselves in Christian's spiritual urgency – how many of them would “burst out [...] crying, *What shall I do to be saved?*”⁵⁴ as Christian does? They also saw

⁵¹ *Ivi.*

⁵² See Frank Mott Harrison, *op. cit.*, section regarding the eighteenth-century editions.

⁵³ See N. H. Keeble, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

⁵⁴ John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

themselves in his recurrent attempts to carry God's word to people Christian meets along the road – “Come with me Neighbour *Pliable*, there are such things to be had which I spoke of [...] If you believe not me, read here in this Book”,⁵⁵ says Christian, before he starts depicting the things that are to be found in Heaven. Indeed, as “evangelical” is he who brings the good news – from the greek εὐαγγέλιον, *evangelion* – Christian may be rightly said to be an Evangelical believer. Quite curiously, thus, an episode from *The Pilgrim's Progress* proves to be useful in depicting the opposing Augustan and Evangelical stances that clashed several decades after Bunyan's work had first been published.

Moreover, all the key themes of Evangelical preaching constantly recur throughout *The Pilgrim's Progress*: the awfulness of sin – see for example the descriptions of its epitomes, Apollyon, the Monster living in the woods around Vanity, etc.; the wonder of the cross of Christ – “thou art to prefer [the Cross] before the treasures in Egypt”, says Evangelist to Christian, who will eventually be delivered from his burden after reaching the Cross: “Thus far did I come loaden with my sin, / Nor could ought ease the grief that I was in, / Till I came hither [...] Blest Cross!”; the possibility of forgiveness of sins through the placing of faith in Christ – see the discussion that takes place between Faithful and Talkative, wherein Faithful mentions “mercy at Gods hand by faith in Jesus Christ”.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵⁶ For Apollyon's episode, see John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 57; the Monster, p. 258; Evangelist's quotation, p. 24; Christian's song, p. 37; the discussion between Faithful and Talkative, p. 81.

Bunyan in eighteenth-century popular literature: *Robinson Crusoe*.

Eighteenth-century popular literature warmly welcomed Bunyan, too. His works entered the stream of books pertaining or linked to the Puritan tradition, so that other authors could hark back to Bunyan and engage their texts in a conversation with his works. As J. Paul Hunter remarks, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, then as now, appeared to be the epitome of Puritanism;⁵⁷ though scorned by the establishment's men of letters, then, Bunyan had left a legacy that affected the works of popular writers.

As a matter of fact, Bunyan had used two of the favourite metaphors of Puritan's discourse⁵⁸ – that is, the journey (Christian's pilgrimage) and the war between good and evil (the battles he engages along the road) – to structure the Christian theme of repentance and deliverance. Given the popularity he had achieved, one should not be surprised at the allusions and references that were made to his text.

Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) shows structural resemblances as well as textual allusions to *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Being both cast in a Puritan framework, *Robinson Crusoe* shares several features with Bunyan's work, for example, the metaphors of the voyage and of the spiritual warfare. Bunyan's Christian starts a journey to attain Heaven, battling against devilish enemies along the road; Crusoe's voyages to the sea show his corrupt soul, while the real progress towards deliverance takes place with his wanderings through the island where he is cast away.⁵⁹ As for the warfare metaphor, throughout his

⁵⁷ See J. Paul Hunter, *The Reluctant Pilgrim. Defoe's Emblematic Method and Quest for Form in Robinson Crusoe*, Baltimore : The Johns Hopkins Press, 1966, p.22.

⁵⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 103.

⁵⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 127, 140 – 143.

travelling Crusoe battles with several beasts – a lion, a leopard, a bear – which are standardised biblical symbols of evil.⁶⁰ The pattern of the fallen man’s rebellion, punishment, repentance and salvation is also held in common,⁶¹ though in Bunyan we do not really see Christian’s rebellion, nor the punishment for his initial wickedness.⁶² Both Bunyan and Defoe heavily focus on the hardships a Christian convert meets before eventually attaining his personal salvation⁶³ – indeed, almost all of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and the greatest part of *Robinson Crusoe* deal with the difficulties the converts face between the moment of the conversion and their final deliverance. In both cases the stated aim is to provide a series of exempla to help Christians in regulating their conducts.⁶⁴

The difficulties Crusoe and Christian meet are often realistic events – better, they are *always* so in Defoe, sometimes in Bunyan – nonetheless, in both instances the events are infused with a spiritual meaning. Let us take into consideration, for example, the description of the Christian necessity to subdue pride and the punishment that follows the failure in the task: in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Christian stumbles along the road and *falls down* while he prides himself that he has overtaken Faithful;⁶⁵ in *Robinson Crusoe*, Crusoe gets dissatisfied with his station and superbly decides to attempt on his own a deliverance from the island – that is, without considering God’s providential

⁶⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 198.

⁶¹ See *ibid.*, p. 200.

⁶² As a matter of fact, the punishment for his wickedness – the burning of the City of Destruction – is proposed only to urge Christian to start his pilgrimage.

⁶³ See J. Paul Hunter, *op. cit.*, pp. 177 – 178.

⁶⁴ Defoe’s preface claims that “the Story is told [...] with a religious Application of Events to the Uses to which wise Men always apply them (viz.) to the Instruction of others by this Example”. Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 1.

⁶⁵ See John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 67. Note the significant polisemy of the term “fall”, having both a real and a spiritual meaning.

plan for him – and spends six months in building himself so big a boat that he will not be able to get it into the water.⁶⁶ Thus, in both texts the spiritual and the physical dimensions are blended, whereby a realistic action works as a means to depict the spiritual state of the character; the realism of the text materialises an emblematic view of the world.⁶⁷

Besides the similar structures and methods, however, there is a crucial difference between Bunyan's text and Defoe's. Though maintaining the realism of some details, *The Pilgrim's Progress* has to a high degree an abstract nature, whereby the Puritan metaphor of the journey is generalised to an Everyman's experience, and the dimensions of time and place are not specified. On the contrary, *Robinson Crusoe* is not an abstract story; rather, it is presented as the experience of a particular man, hence, the definiteness of time and space and Crusoe's engagement in day-to-day activities – i.e., Crusoe builds boats, sows the barley, makes pots and pans.⁶⁸ This explains why a modern reader may be surprised at the comparisons between *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* – the abstract nature of the latter is more immediately associated to the allegorical method, while the wealth of realistic details of the former conceals the workings of Puritan models in Defoe's work.⁶⁹ However, as J. Paul Hunter remarks, should we deliver *Robinson Crusoe's* plot in abstract

⁶⁶ See Daniel Defoe, *op. cit.*, pp. 125 – 128. Note the arrogant undertone of Crusoe wondering whether “Solomon ever had such a [cedar tree] for the Building of the Temple at Jerusalem”, [p. 126]. See also J. Paul Hunter, *op. cit.*, pp. 179 – 180.

⁶⁷ See J. Paul Hunter, *op. cit.*, pp. 189 – 191. See also the depiction of sickness in both texts: Crusoe's relief from the disease emblematises the cure of his soul [see Daniel Defoe, *op. cit.*, pp. 86 – 88; J. Paul Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 190]; Christian's son eats of the devil's fruit and falls ill [see John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, pp. 215 – 216].

⁶⁸ See J. Paul Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

⁶⁹ See Stuart Sim, “Bunyan and the Early Novel: *The Life and Death of Mr Badman*”, in Anne Dunan-Page (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 95.

terms, its conformity to the Christian pattern of the journey allegory appears more clearly:

a man first sails away from the Home appointed to him (instead of proceeding toward it), and then becomes isolated from God as a result of discontent and selfish pride. Ultimately, however, God intervenes to deliver him from destruction, and the direction of his life is altered to a course pleasing to God and leading at last to the man's ultimate Home. The man, however, still must undergo numerous battles with evil before he can rest content at the end of the journey.⁷⁰

The day-to-day activities he performs are cast within a world where temporal actions bear a further meaning; as in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the ideal sustains the narrative.⁷¹

The similarities outlined so far regard general features of the texts pertaining to the Puritan tradition. At a textual level, though, there are some passages in *Robinson Crusoe* that specifically recall Bunyan's work. When opening his journal, Crusoe claims: "I, poor miserable Robinson Crusoe, being shipwrecked during a dreadful storm in the offing, came on shore on this dismal, unfortunate island, which I called 'The Island of Despair'".⁷² One cannot fail in noticing the reference to Bunyan's giant "Despair". The similarity is not just a question of name, as both – Crusoe in his Island of Despair and Christian in the giant's clutches, at Doubting Castle – are in the grip of discouragement, at first, though they will both regain their strength through faith.⁷³ I feel there may be another allusion to Bunyan's Doubting Castle in *Robinson Crusoe*. When Crusoe sees "the shore spread with skulls, hands, feet, and other bones of human bodies"⁷⁴ – the remnants of the cannibals' feast –

⁷⁰ See J. Paul Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

⁷¹ See *ibid.*, p. 200.

⁷² Daniel Defoe, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

⁷³ When ill, Crusoe has a vision that reveals the divine to him, while Christian is comforted in his faith by Hopeful.

⁷⁴ Daniel Defoe, *op. cit.*, pp. 164 – 165.

Defoe seems to be mindful of the yard of Doubting Castle, full of the “bones and skulls of those that [the giant has] already dispatched”.⁷⁵

Some passages of *Robinson Crusoe's* final part recall Bunyan's language,⁷⁶ as well: “we came in view of the entrance of a wood, through which we were to pass, at the farther side of the plain”.⁷⁷ The simplicity and clarity of prose and the sparse description of the landscape very much resemble Bunyan's language, his way of describing actions and places by mentioning only what is sufficient to delineate a terse picture, as when he writes: “Now they began to go down the hill into the Valley of Humiliation. It was a steep hill, and the way was slippery”.⁷⁸

Robinson Crusoe, thus, has the same structural features of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, as those structures were characteristic of the Puritan tradition that Bunyan and Defoe had both inherited. It is true that, being part of a common tradition, one cannot pinpoint Bunyan as one of Defoe's influences only on the grounds of the usage of such structural devices. However, the patent allusions to Bunyan's *Pilgrim* that can be found in *Robinson Crusoe* shows that Bunyan was indeed one of Defoe's benchmarks in the writing of his work; this in turn demonstrates how Bunyan had become by then an established part of a wider Puritan tradition, to which writers might refer to in the writing process.

⁷⁵ John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

⁷⁶ See J. Paul Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

⁷⁷ Daniel Defoe, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

⁷⁸ John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

Bunyan's untutored genius

Bunyan's literary fortune in the eighteenth century found support not only in the Evangelicals and popular literature, but also in those who discussed about and gave their preference to natural genius as opposed to cultivation – those who thought that genius “[sets us] above the learned, and polite”.⁷⁹ With regard to this, W. R. Owens and Stuart Sim quote the anonymous author of the Preface from the 1728 edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, who professes himself to be astonished that “a plain, simple Man, as Mr. *Bunyan* was, without the Assistance of any profound Learning or Erudition, should, notwithstanding, have composed so useful and admirable a Treatise”.⁸⁰ According to this view, Bunyan's work should be considered as the product of a stunning natural genius.

We should notice that the stress seems to be placed, as it was with the Evangelicals, on the usefulness and spiritual exactness of the work, rather than on Bunyan's aesthetic achievement. As a matter of fact, later on, in a 1765 issue of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, an anonymous contributor would claim that:

As a work of imagination [...], illustrating a particular set of religious principles, the *Pilgrim's Progress* is certainly a work of original and uncommon genius. [...] In a word, it contains a most excellent epitome and illustration of the *Calvinistic* divinity, under an allegory highly entertaining and affecting.⁸¹

Stress is put on the edifying character of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, so much so that the remark seems to claim that Bunyan's genius is not to be found in his literary achievement – however well-crafted and *entertaining* his work may be

⁷⁹ Edward Young, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁸⁰ W. R. Owens and Stuart Sim, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁸¹ Anonymous, “Review of *Some Account of the Imprisonment of Mr. John Bunyan*”, in “The Gentleman's Magazine”, 1765, p. 168, in Roger Sharrock (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 51.

– rather, on his ability to illustrate “a particular set of religious principles” by means of an allegory.

Moreover, according to the anonymous critical appraisal, Bunyan’s allegorical illustration of Calvinistic divinity is so perfect and clear that it ends up being *affecting*; but this remark seems to imply that what provokes the emotional effect is not precisely Bunyan’s allegorical construction, rather, the religious truths that Bunyan’s alleged genius manages to frame into the text. As an example, when Christian meets Formalist and Hypocrisie, he disapproves of them, for they have not come in through the Gate:

you will not be saved, since you came not in by the door. And as for this Coat that is on my back, it was given me by the Lord of the place whither I go [...]. And I take it as a token of his kindness to me.⁸²

In the anonymous critic’s view, what should entail an emotional response from the reader here is the religious significance of the text – the illustration of the theory of predestination – and not the allegorical narrative – the dismal failure Formalist and Hipocrisie are doomed to.

We have seen how Young, on his *Conjectures on Original Composition*, linked literary genius to the divine, as the former is able to create things from nothing, like God. As allegedly an uncultivated man devoid of cultural means – he himself boasted about his ignorance – it was striking that Bunyan could have written a work as *The Pilgrim’s Progress*; there had to be something powerful and/or divine in his nature. After all, it was Bunyan who wrote, in his “Apology”:

And thus it was: I writing of the Way
And Race of Saints in this our Gospel-day,
Fell suddenly into an Allegory
[...] In more than twenty things , which I set down;
This done, I twenty more had in my Crown,

⁸² John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

And they again began to multiply
Like sparks that from the coals of Fire do flie.
[...] Thus I set Pen to Paper with delight,
And quickly had my thoughts in black and white.
For having now my Method by the end,
Still as I pull'd, it came; and so I penn'd
It down, until it came at last to be
For length and breadth the bigness which you see.⁸³

Bunyan's words could be read as suggesting that the work is the natural outcome of his original Genius – the “things” being “set down” as they come, without observing established rules. Also, it is not too rash to imagine readers considering this stream of images and words an event of divine origin; the Genius of Bunyan – a “divinely-inspired enthusiast”, in Young's words – would be that of capturing God's truths, as already said when commenting on the remark published in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. In any case, his writing such an inspiring Protestant work, given the low social status and the supposed lack of education, made Bunyan the perfect candidate for the position of untutored genius.

4.3 The last decades of the eighteenth century

The stigma that the Augustans had attached to Bunyan was difficult to overcome. In 1784, William Cowper, in his *Tirocinium, or a Review of Schools*, “was still sensitive to the indiscretion of praising a writer in such poor standing as Bunyan”:

O thou, whom, borne on fancy's eager wing
Back to the season of life's happy spring,
I pleased remember, and, while memory yet
Holds fast her office here, can ne'er forget;
Ingenious dreamer, in whose well-told tale

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Sweet fiction and sweet truth alike prevail;
Whose humorous vein, strong sense, and simple style,
May teach the gayest, make the gravest smile;
Witty, and well employ'd, and, like thy Lord,
Speaking in parables his slighted word;
I name thee not, lest so despised a name
Should move a sneer at thy deserved fame;
Yet e'en in transitory life's late day,
That mingles all my brown with sober grey,
Revere the man whose PILGRIM marks the road,
And guides the PROGRESS of the soul to God.⁸⁴

There is an interesting element in Cowper's praise that needs to be highlighted. We have seen that eighteenth-century positive evaluations of Bunyan's work were generally prompted by an appreciation of his spiritual significance. Conformingly, Cowper ends his praise with a recognition of it. However, equal – if not superior – appreciation is accorded to Bunyan's literary achievements and style. The tale is *well-told* – Cowper enjoys its simple *style*, and its humour and strong sense alike. Sweet is not only the truth that Bunyan exposes, but also the *fiction* he has created.

Samuel Johnson had praised Bunyan, too, in 1773. However, his positive remark had only been voiced and not given in writing until Boswell recorded it in his *Life of Johnson*, in 1791. According to Boswell, Johnson said that:

[the] *Pilgrim's Progress* has great merit, both for invention, imagination, and the conduct of the story; and it has had the best evidence of its merit, the general and continued approbation of mankind [...] It is remarkable, that it begins very much like the poem of Dante; yet there was no translation of Dante when Bunyan wrote. There is reason to think that he had read Spenser.⁸⁵

The remark has a threefold interest. First, by quoting Dante and

⁸⁴ William Cowper, *Tirocinium, or a Review of Schools*, 1784, online source: <http://www.ccel.org/c/cowper/works/tirocinium.htm>, accessed on 26th December 2012, 16.28.

⁸⁵ James Boswell, *Life of Johnson, Abridged and Edited, with an Introduction by Charles Grosvenor Osgood, Professor of English at Princeton University*, online source: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1564/1564-h/1564-h.htm>, accessed on 27th December 2012, 14.40.

Spenser, Johnson acknowledges Bunyan's literary value. The focus is probably on the allegorical structure of the works, as Bunyan's allegory of an individual progress from conviction of sin towards moral redemption resembles Dante's *Divine Comedy's* allegorical framework. However, as Johnson points out, Dante had not been translated during Bunyan's lifetime, hence he suggests the more likely influence of Spenser. Quite interestingly, when forwarding *The Faerie Queene* to Sir Walter Raleigh, Spenser wrote a letter in which he acknowledged the risk he had undertaken in writing what was to become the first allegorical masterpiece of Protestant England. Indeed, Bunyan's cautious "Apology" at the beginning of *The Pilgrim's Progress* recalls Spenser's letter, which reads:

SIR, knowing how doubtfully all allegories may be construed, and this booke of mine, which I have entituled the *Faery Queene*, being a continued allegory, or darke conceit, I have thought good, as well for avoyding of gealous opinions and misconstructions [...] to discover unto you the general intention and meaning. [...] To some, I know, this methode will seeme displeasaunt, which had rather have good discipline delivered plainly in way of precepts, or sermoned at large, as they use, then thus clowdily enwrapped in allegoricall devises.⁸⁶

The second interesting point in Johnson's remark is indeed his recognizing Bunyan's inventive and imaginative abilities, rather than his spiritual significance. Like Cowper, Johnson praises Bunyan's imagination and talent in conducting the story, hence, his aesthetic achievements.

The third interesting element is Johnson's stress on the "approbation of mankind". As we have seen, during the Augustan Age men of letters usually set a negative value to literary works that attained popular success. However, just a few decades later Johnson would point at fame as a marker of merit. Johnson's remark seemed to be heralding the positive reappraisal of popular things that

⁸⁶ Edmund Spenser, "Prefatory Letter to Sir Walter Raleigh on *The Faerie Queene*", 1589, online source: <http://www.bartleby.com/39/14.html>, accessed on 30th December, 11.15.

would characterize the Romantic Age.

To sum up the diversity of attitudes in eighteenth-century reception of Bunyan, it could be useful to analyse the entries from biographical dictionaries published at the time. As Isabel Rivers explains, biographical dictionaries may be used as reliable records of writers' changing reputation.

When talking of Bunyan, she claims that he was virtually ignored by the biographical dictionaries up until the XVIII century; however, a dramatic change occurred in the years between the publications of the *Biographia Britannica's* first and second editions.⁸⁷ As a matter of fact, the first edition of the *Biographia Britannica* mentions only the title of Bunyan's work, without adding further information or details about it.⁸⁸ The second edition contains an entry that deals more extensively with Bunyan's literary achievements, showing that Bunyan's reputation has radically changed. Andrew Kippis, the editor, quotes the high praise that James Granger had for Bunyan in his *A Biographical History of England*. Granger's praise is interesting and deserves to be extensively quoted:

Bunyan, who has been mentioned among the least and lowest of our writers [...] deserves a much higher rank than is commonly imagined. His 'Pilgrim's Progress' gives us a clear and distinct idea of Calvinistical divinity. The allegory is admirably carried on [...]. The author's original and poetic genius shines through the coarseness and vulgarity of his language, and intimates that if he had been a master of numbers, he might have composed a poem worthy of Spenser himself.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ See Isabel Rivers, "Biographical Dictionaries" in *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-century England: New Essays*, edited by Isabel Rivers, London, New York : Continuum, 2003, p.160.

⁸⁸ The entry is listed in the second volume, published in 1748.

⁸⁹ James Granger, *A Biographical History of England, from Egbert the Great to the Revolution: Consisting of Characters Disposed in Different Classes, and Adapted to a Methodical Catalogue of Engraved British Heads*, 3rd edition, *With Large Additions and Improvements*, London, 1779, Vol. 3, pp. 346 – 348, in *The General Biographical Dictionary*, edited by Alexander Chalmers, vol.7, London, 1813, p. 292, online source: <http://books.google.it/books?>

Once again we find Bunyan's ability to clearly convey religious dogma highlighted as one of his biggest assets, as was common among eighteenth-century Evangelicalism-influenced readers. Positive appraisal is also given to the "admirably-carried on" allegory. The influence of the Protestant analogical mode of thinking – which Augustan Age had managed to defeat, until it bobbed up again with the Evangelical Revival – is here evident.

Moreover, Granger praises Bunyan's *original genius*, that natural and powerful talent that enables him to write so great a work in spite of his lack of education. No wonder Bunyan's language is "vulgar" and "coarse"! As an uneducated man, he could not possibly attain the refined language of a cultivated man of letter. Nonetheless, his lack of cultivation indeed acted as a foil to bring out his genius. The idea of Bunyan as an untutored genius has already got a foothold among readers.

Though he quoted Granger's remark on Bunyan in his entry for the *Biographia Britannica*, Andrew Kippis disagreed with Granger's enthusiasm and claimed that Bunyan did have "the invention, but not the other natural qualifications which are necessary to constitute a great poet".⁹⁰ Though Bunyan is raising in ranks, thanks to his imaginative genius, his style is still considered as weak. His position in English literature is unsteady.

However, Kippis's remark was to be disregarded as the comment of a "very incompetent judge"⁹¹ by Robert Chalmers, who produced an entry for Bunyan in his seventh volume of *The General Biographical Dictionary*.

[id=Dp9jAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_atb#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/16716/16716-h/16716-h.htm#id=Dp9jAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_atb#v=onepage&q&f=false), accessed on 29th December, 11.24.

⁹⁰ Andrew Kippis, entry of the *Biographia Britannica*, quoted in Alexander Chalmers (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 292.

⁹¹ *Ivi.*

Chalmers claims that the first qualification of a poet is indeed invention, which is a natural feature. All other qualifications depend upon the state of one's education. He then goes on saying:

Bunyan's want of education is the highest praise that can be given. Such a defect exhibits the originality of his genius in the strongest light: and since more attention has been paid by men of critical taste to his "Pilgrim's Progress", he has been admitted into a higher rank among English writers, and it seems universally acknowledged that nothing was wanting to advance him yet higher but the advantages of education, or of an intimacy with the best writers in his own language [...]. [...] Bunyan, without [the aid of learning] has produced "something very noble".⁹²

Not only does Chalmers highlight Bunyan's original genius, but also, by stating that he had produced "something very noble" without the aid of education, he seems to imply that learning is but an instrument, and a "not always indispensable" one, as Edward Young had claimed. Moreover, Chalmers seems to emphasise Bunyan's aesthetic achievements rather than his religious significance. He is more preoccupied with Bunyan's inventive talent than with his clear exposition of religious matters.

Thus, entries from different biographical dictionaries published along a time span of about eighty years do accurately record the trends in eighteenth-century reception of Bunyan. While scanty interest was shown for his literary activity in the first half of the century, the second half proved to be more concerned with his achievements. And if positive appraisals were first given on the basis of Bunyan's genius in dealing with things divine, later on his work would come to be valued (also) for its literary qualities. As a matter of fact, Chalmers's *The General Biographical Dictionary* was published in 1813. It was indeed the nineteenth century that introduced literary recognition of Bunyan's work, and it is to the nineteenth century that we now turn.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 292.

Chapter 5. The nineteenth century

5.1 The United Kingdom in the nineteenth century

The historical context

The French Revolution of 1789 exerted a marked influence on British history in the nineteenth century. Some regarded the overthrow of ancien régime as a mere catching up with the progresses that Britain had achieved since the establishment of a constitutional monarchy after the Glorious Revolution; others criticized the revolution, emphasizing the violence of an event that they considered unnatural,¹ but there were also people who greeted it with enthusiasm. In any case, such a landmark event sparked off debates and polemics over its nature and the assertion of civil rights, and stirred up political and social unrest.² As a matter of fact, the first decades of the nineteenth century witnessed riots and the championing of the “natural rights of mankind”,³ as Mary Wollstonecraft had accurately termed them in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).

Social demands were manifold. Women started asserting their rights; demands focused first on equal marriage, parenting and property rights, whilst the claims for women’s suffrage came in the second half of the century. Rights were also demanded for slaves. The anti-slavery movement, which had begun at the end of the eighteenth century, achieved its aim in 1833, when the Slavery Abolition Act outlawed slavery in the British Empire. The strong rise in

¹ See Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), a work which provoked an outpouring of pamphlets in response to its argumentations.

² See Sharon Ruston, *Romanticism*, London : Continuum, 2007, pp. 9 – 12.

³ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, London : Walter Scott, p. xviii, online source: <http://archive.org/details/vindicationofrig00wolliala>, accessed on 26th March 2013, 10.48.

population increased the difficulty of obtaining the means of survival; coupled with the industrial working conditions and with the systematic enclosure of what had previously been common ground, it incited major riots, as people demanded employment, increased wages and a lowering of the cost of food. Actually, the Corn Laws that were introduced in 1815 made the import of grain from other countries too expensive by imposing steep import duties on competitive-priced foreign grain, thus ensuring that the British landowners earned all the profits from farming and could keep food price up.⁴ Calls for changes in the electoral system were repeatedly issued, too. The demands for an extension of the voting rights were responded to with the Reform Acts of 1832, 1867 and 1884. All the acts extended voting rights down the class ladder, to people who were previously disenfranchised.⁵

The first working class movements were created during these years of unrest, the most notable being Chartism. Born out of industrialisation, Chartism peaked in the 1830's and 1840's – times of unemployment – when it advocated parliamentary reform, but died out before the half of the century. Nonetheless, its radicalism “eventually channelled itself into related areas like the Socialist movement”,⁶ retaining its influence on the establishment of a working-class stance.

A last feature that deserves to be highlighted is the interest that radicals had in the mid-seventeenth century. Actually, as an age of political turmoil, the seventeenth century attracted both positive and negative evaluations from the

⁴ The Corn Laws were to be repealed in 1846. See Sharon Ruston, *op. cit.*, pp. 14 – 21.

⁵ The Representation of the People Act would grant the universal suffrage for all men in 1918. Women would be granted vote in the same year, though a large proportion would be excluded on property grounds until 1928.

⁶ Glenn Everett, “Chartism or the Chartist Movement”, online source: <http://www.victorianweb.org/history/hist3.html>, accessed on 25th March 2013, 13.42.

British living in the first decades of the nineteenth century, which threatened to be equally a period of unrest; whereas radicals praised the mid-seventeenth century and its revolutionary edges, conservatives went to great length to accuse its fanaticism.

Changes occurred also in the religious field. The repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828 made it finally possible for Nonconformists to hold public offices, whilst a year later the Roman Catholic Relief Act would authorise the members of the Catholic Church to sit in Parliament.⁷

As for foreign policy, in the first years of the nineteenth century Britain was engaged in the Napoleonic Wars (1803 – 1815), but would later on enjoy a long period of peace – the so-called Pax Britannica, during the Victorian Age (1837 – 1901) – which enabled the country to wholly commit itself to the preservation of its colonial power.⁸ The British Empire’s position was virtually unchallenged throughout the century, as its traditional colonial rivals had their power severely diminished. Threats came rather from Britain itself, with the already-mentioned abolition of slavery and the freeing of slaves, which weakened the mercantile colonies. Moreover, the loss of the American colonies made the Empire shift its geographical focus towards Asia and Africa, in what has been called “the swing to the East”.

The cultural context

My short outline of nineteenth-century culture will be internally divided

⁷ See Sharon Ruston, *op. cit.*, pp. 29 – 31.

⁸ See David Cody, “The English Empire”, online source: <http://www.victorianweb.org/history/empire/Empire.html>, accessed on 25th March 2013, 13.44.

into two distinct sections. The first section will be devoted to the first decades of the century – what is commonly known as the Romantic Age – whilst the cultural climate of the Victorian Age will be discussed later on in this chapter. The same temporal division will be made when treating Bunyan’s reception in the nineteenth century.

The early nineteenth century

The cultural outputs of the early nineteenth century are varied and diverse. Scholars have frequently highlighted the manifold expressions of what has come to be known as Romanticism, which makes a definition of the age laborious.⁹ Some have gone so far as to question whether there has been indeed a single and homogeneous cultural phenomenon that we may safely term “Romanticism”. Claiming that Romanticism had expressed itself diversely in different countries – actually, even within the same country – Samuel C. Chew wrote that “no two writers are necessarily romantic in the same way or to the same degree, nor is a writer necessarily romantic in all his work or throughout his life”.¹⁰ Indeed, Schlegel himself defined the Romantic art as the union of opposing – when not contrasting – features;¹¹ though highlighting the synthetic nature of Romanticism, Schlegel’s claim acknowledged also its multifaceted nature. However, the attempts made at a definition of Romanticism have

⁹ See *Il Romanticismo*, edited by Marcello Pagnini, Bologna : Il Mulino, 1986, p. 29; Marshall Brown, “Romanticism and Enlightenment”, in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, edited by Stuart Curran, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 25; Samuel C. Chew, “The Nineteenth Century and After (1789 – 1939)”, ch. 2, “Romanticism”, in *A Literary History of England*, edited by Albert C. Baugh, New York : Appleton Century Crofts, 1948, p. 1122.

¹⁰ Samuel C. Chew, *op. cit.*, p. 1122.

¹¹ See Marcello Pagnini (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 28.

managed to single out characteristics that frequently recur in the cultural expressions of the time.

One may start this reckoning by acknowledging that each age kicks against its predecessor.¹² After all, when presenting the Lake school of poetry, William Hazlitt himself, in his *Lectures on the English Poets* (1818), wrote:

our poetical literature had, towards the close of the last century, degenerated into the most trite, insipid, and mechanical of all things, in the hands of the followers of Pope [...]. The change in the belles-lettres was as complete, and to many persons as startling, as the change in politics, with which it went hand in hand. [...] According to the prevailing notions, all was to be natural and new. Nothing that was established was to be tolerated.¹³

The Romantic age, therefore, could be seen as rising up against the classical rules and modes of eighteenth-century culture. However, the picture is not so simple and clean-cut. It is true that some aspects of Romanticism were clearly born out of a distaste for eighteenth-century values; nonetheless, the Romantic age was thoroughly indebted to the eighteenth century.¹⁴ As a matter of fact, the Enlightenment had handed down elements that still persisted in the Romantic age; on the other hand, counter-currents of eighteenth-century culture became mainstream currents in the nineteenth century. As an example, the idea of genius, which had risen in opposition to Augustan preference for learned refinement, gained wide currency among the Romantics; in the early XIX century, the singularity of genius widely asserted itself over the compliance of the refined talent.¹⁵ This was to provide a favourable condition for the reception of Bunyan, who had been scorned by the Augustans but appreciated by the eighteenth-century champions of his untutored genius.

¹² See Marshall Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 26; Marcello Pagnini (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 7.

¹³ William Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Poets*, 1819, online source: <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/16209/pg16209.html>, accessed on 5th February 2013, 10.36.

¹⁴ See Marshall Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

¹⁵ See Marcello Pagnini (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 12.

Indeed, the concept of genius fuelled the Romantic belief that uncultivated people are perfectly able to produce works that are equal to – if not better than – those of learned poets.

Moreover, the stress on genius made the Romantics prefer individualism over the collective. As a matter of fact, this is one of the elements which differentiate them from the men of letters of the previous century. As Sabbadini puts it, the Romantics opposed the myth of individualism to the old idea of an organic community based on hereditary class differences:

ecco l'io romantico come 'profondità' sentimentale, isolata, non erede di un gruppo sociale [...] ma capace di costruirselo, quel gruppo, tramite la 'simpatia' con gli altri [...] anche sul piano del progetto politico, utopico – la società dei giusti.¹⁶

The confidence on the individual's deliberate choices here seems to be coupled with the cultural influence of the French Revolution, which fuelled the desire for undermining past foundations – be they social, political or cultural.

Personal intuition and the depth of man's soul came to be highly valued, while rationalism – of which Augustans had prided themselves – was generally disregarded. With regard to this, Pagnini notices a telling shift in the consideration of the idea of “primitivism”: in the eighteenth century, the concept of primitivism referred to the *rationality* each man was endowed with by nature – a rationality that had been dimmed by culture's falsehood and artificiality; in the early nineteenth century, primitivism was associated to an *intuitive* and *imaginative* force, akin to the primeval force of the Creation.¹⁷ The Romantics wanted to investigate the deepest recesses of their own individuality, in search

¹⁶ Silvano Sabbadini, “I Testi nel Tempo: il Romanticismo”, in Franco Marengo (ed.), *Storia della Civiltà Letteraria Inglese 2*, cit., p. 301.

¹⁷ See Marcello Pagnini (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 12.

of things yet unseen – be they emotions, visions or fancies.¹⁸ The emotions and the unconscious became the subject of their analysis. In order to concentrate themselves on their inner experiences, Romantic men of letters escaped from actuality; the means to escape comprised fantastic literature and spiritual mysticism,¹⁹ hermit-like retreat and drug consumption.

As it may be easily conceived, imagination had a primary role during the Romantic age. Indeed, according to Romantic views, the highest truths could only be grasped through imagination, which enables one to get over the phenomenal world and reach the realm of the eternal – “to attain those truths that really matter [Romantics] relied on the irrational faculties of the mind—unmediated insight, 'enthusiasm,' 'intellectual intuition,' and the imagination”.²⁰ William Blake was apparently the first to assign greater value to the imagination, by making it the path that leads man to the transcendental; while the Age of Reason had scorned the imagination, Blake made it the crucial link between man and God.²¹

In his critical works, S. T. Coleridge thoroughly discussed the nature and significance of imagination. Actually, in his *Biographia Literaria* he identified two different faculties of the mind, which he called “fancy” and “imagination”.²² According to his theory, fancy is passive and mechanical and

¹⁸ See Herbert M. Schueller, “Romanticism Reconsidered”, in “The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism”, Vol. 20, No. 4, pp. 359 – 368, (Summer, 1962), p. 365; Sharon Ruston, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

¹⁹ See Samuel C. Chew, *op. cit.*, p. 1123.

²⁰ Hans Eichner, “The Rise of Modern Science and the Genesis of Romanticism”, in “PMLA”, Vol. 97, No. 1, pp. 8 – 30, (January, 1982), p. 17.

²¹ As a matter of fact, Franci and Pomarè claim that the Age of Reason considered the imagination along the same lines as an irreversible damage to the intellect. See Giovanna Franci, Carla Pomarè, “I Poeti della Prima Generazione Romantica”, in Franco Marengo (ed.), *Storia della Civiltà Letteraria Inglese 2*, *cit.*, p. 376. See also Marcello Pagnini (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 11, where it is claimed that many regarded the very act of the Creation as an act of the imagination.

²² See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1907, ch. XIII, p. 202, online source: <http://archive.org/details/cu31924102776196>, accessed on 13th

it stores the data of the external world; on the contrary, imagination is an active and creative power. He then distinguished two levels of imagination, the primary and the secondary. The primary imagination is a common human trait; it provokes the automatic inner response to perceptions coming from the external world. The secondary imagination, which pertains to the artistic genius, is the ability to dissolve the perceptions of the external world in order to recreate them; it is a creative force, whereby the mind can apprehend the external world as a symbol of something that goes beyond the phenomenal world usually perceived.²³ The external world appears to be, thus, the result of a relationship between the phenomenal sphere and the inner processes of the subject who perceives it.²⁴ The light of one's mind takes part in shaping one's perception of the world – imagination may enable him to see beyond the empirical world. Thus, the artistic genius becomes a prophetic figure, displaying the ultimate truth in his images, while the literary creation comes to be considered an effective tool to attain truth – a truth that is greater than that achieved solely through the material world. The rhetorical devices used by the artist/prophet are not considered mere decorations, rather, they become the means to convey and understand the truth.²⁵ These views were generally shared by the English Romantics.²⁶

February 2013, 12.05; “Notes on Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, online source:

<http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/harris/StudentProjects/Laset/BiogrNotes.htm>, accessed on 13th February 2012, 12.37.

²³ See Marcello Pagnini (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 30.

²⁴ See Sharon Ruston, *op. cit.*, pp. 25 – 26.

²⁵ See Marcello Pagnini (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 15. Giovanna Franci e Carla Pomarè, *op. cit.*, p. 370; Hans Eichner, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

²⁶ As an example, Blake's idea of the imagination as the epistemological basis for the attainment of truth – a truth that is also a mystical knowledge, as we have seen – was the very explanation of his aesthetic of the myth and the symbol. Wordsworth agreed on the idea of the imagination as a tool of knowledge, and so did Shelley. See Marcello Pagnini (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 30 – 32.

The keen interest that the Romantics showed for imagination and artistic activity had a philosophical undertone, namely, in their theoretical works they sought to explain the relationship between subject and object, possibly reconciling them in a single unit. Their hope was to erase the distance between the real, extra-textual world and the world they creatively shaped in their works. The Romantic artist's word aimed at being a phenomenal entity – a thing – not a distinct element detached from the real world.²⁷ Nonetheless, along with an alleged concreteness, the word had to retain its visual character and its ability to symbolize a super-reality. The symbol was precisely the means to hint at the absolute – the absolute that the artist/prophet would then hand over to the common men as a revelation, through his literary works.²⁸

The image as epiphanic perception of the artist was considered as a vehicle of truth, or, rather, as truth itself.²⁹ On the other hand, however, the Romantics often displayed a detached attitude towards their own works. Schlegel called it the “Romantic irony”, a term that described a destructive attitude that devalued the very Romantic attempts at attaining truth.³⁰ In spite of the yearning for truth, many of the Romantics highlighted their own sense of powerlessness about any actual attainment, the distance between the world and the word that tried to recreate it appearing unbridgeable.³¹

²⁷ See Giovanna Franci, Carla Pomarè, *op. cit.*, p. 371.

²⁸ See Marcello Pagnini (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 15, 198.

²⁹ As a matter of fact, Kant's idealism, which steeped the Romantic thought, claims that the objective reality can be apprehended only through a subjective perception. Thus, the artist's perceptions would take on an epistemological value. See *ibid.*, p. 10.

³⁰ Among the English Romantics, Coleridge and Wordsworth displayed an ironic attitude. See *ibid.*, pp. 200 – 201.

³¹ See Giovanna Franci, Carla Pomarè, *op. cit.*, p. 371.

Stylistic issues of the Romantic movement

As Sharon Ruston points out, poetry is traditionally considered the most Romantic of the genres.³² This feeling, she argues, is due to later critics rather than to the reading public of the time. As a matter of fact, what we now mark as the most prominent theorisation of English Romantic literature is Wordsworth's 1802 preface to *The Lyrical Ballads*.

In the preface, Wordsworth takes position against eighteenth-century poetic principles. The focus of poetry shifts from the élite world to the realm of poor or middle-class people caught in everyday life: “the principal object [...] which I proposed to myself in these Poems was to chuse incidents and situations from common life”.³³ Style is democratised, as well, as poetic diction is shunned in favour of everyday speech. Romantics replaced the learned complexity of the eighteenth century with a taste for naturalness – for “the language really used by men”³⁴:

W. Wordsworth [...] teorizzò una rivoluzione stilistico-letteraria [...] dichiarando di opporsi alle «regole» neoclassiche, all'uso del linguaggio letterario prevalente nella lirica seria settecentesca (*Poetic diction*) – linguaggio dignitoso, alto, per privilegiamento di lessemi neolatini, per l'uso di metafore mitologico-classiche, e per perifrasi che evitavano di richiamare direttamente oggetti o fatti ripugnanti alla raffinatezza dei modi – in favore di un eloquio spontaneo, passionale, realistico, ricorrente a privilegiamenti lessematici «bassi» (la lingua dei contadini e delle classi medio-borghesi).³⁵

³² See Sharon Ruston, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

³³ William Wordsworth, “Preface”, in *The Lyrical Ballads*, 1802, online source: <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~jenglish/Courses/Spring2001/040/preface1802.html>, accessed on 9th February 2013, 11.25.

³⁴ William Wordsworth, *op. cit.*. In spite of his statement of purpose, the language that would be used was indeed far from the actual vernacular speech. Actually, it was a popular language re-created by men of letters, as many would point out. See Massimo Bacigalupo, “Poetiche e Lingua Letteraria”, in Franco Marengo (ed.), *Storia della Civiltà Letteraria Inglese 2, cit.*, p. 342.

³⁵ Marcello Pagnini (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 18.

However, the observation of common reality is tinged with the “colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way”. It is through this “colouring of imagination”, as we have already seen, that phenomena might be charged with a new, previously undisclosed, meaning – “the primary laws of our nature”.³⁶

The origin of poetry is in the poet’s inner feelings. According to Wordsworth, “poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”,³⁷ not an exercise in wit and artifice, as it was for the Augustan taste – it is created by a passionate reaction to life, not by a strict adherence to classical rules, though Wordsworth stresses that a good poet must ponder over his emotions before expressing it.

Given the importance accorded to feelings, no wonder that Burke’s aesthetic theory of the sublime held sway in the Romantic age. According to Burke, the sublime is “the strongest emotion that the mind is capable of feeling”. Sublime is excited by “ideas of pain and danger” at the sight of apparently infinite spaces – such as mighty, towering mountains – which elicit a psychological and emotional reaction. “When danger or pain press too nearly”, he goes on, “they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances [...] they may be, and they are, delightful”.³⁸

Once again, the natural elements of the real world are seen as fostering a strong emotional reaction on men, binding together man and nature, vision and empirical reality. It is maybe this strong and subjective reaction to nature

³⁶ William Wordsworth, *op. cit.*

³⁷ *Ivi.*

³⁸ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of our Idea of the Sublime and Beautiful*, in *The Works of Edmund Burke in twelve volumes*, London : John C. Nimmo, 1887, Vol. 1, online source: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15043/15043-h/15043-h.htm>, p. 111, accessed on 9th February 2013, 11. 32.

that marks the greatest difference between the Romantic age and the previous ages.³⁹

Ruston argues that, in spite of the great prominence given to poetry by later critics, Romantic poetry was not a favourite among the reading public at the time.⁴⁰ Actually one of the most popular genres of the period was the novel; indeed, the nineteenth century witnessed the birth of the historical novel, which stemmed from the Romantic deep interest in history. The Gothic novel was also quite popular, riding the craze for the supernatural.⁴¹

Romanticism also re-evaluated the manifestations of popular culture. This may have been the consequence of increasing urbanization, which did disperse the expressions of folk culture – revolving around rural villages, i.e., ballads' singing, tale-tellers' unfolding narratives etc. – fostering at the same time the desire to preserve it. On the other hand, entertainments such as reading and writing came to be increasingly available to the lower classes – the favourite genres being the memoirs, the conduct books, the moral tales and religious writings.⁴²

As for periodicals, they widened their readership and increasingly established themselves as a means to engage in cultural and political debates.⁴³ The two major periodicals were *The Edinburgh Review* and *The Quarterly Review*, which introduced a substantial change in the structure of the review. These were not just the usual advertisements that had been previously published in periodicals; rather, they were pieces of criticism wherein

³⁹ See Sharon Ruston, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 70 – 73.

⁴² See Toni Cerutti, “Letteratura d'Elite e Letteratura di Massa”, in Franco Marenco (ed.), *Storia della Civiltà Letteraria Inglese 2, cit.*, pp. 358 – 359.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 354; Sharon Ruston, *op. cit.*, pp. 90 – 93.

ideological stances were championed or opposed.⁴⁴ Actually, reviewers were often interested in putting forward their very own ideas, not just in exploring those of the author whose work they were reviewing. Periodicals were also becoming increasingly decisive in the shaping of the literary canon: “dirette da uomini di cultura, le nuove riviste [...] divennero potenti organi di opinione [...]. I libri selezionati entravano così nella letteratura che contava”.⁴⁵

5.2 The reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in the early nineteenth century

Previously neglected or patronized by men of letters for its lack of refinement, in the nineteenth century *The Pilgrim's Progress* finally comes to be positively valued by the learned.⁴⁶ Favourable comments were given by several men of letters, the most quoted being Coleridge's:

in that admirable Allegory, the first Part of the Pilgrim's Progress, which delights every one, the interest is so great that in spite of all the writer's attempts to force the allegoric purpose on the Reader's mind by his strange names [...] his piety was baffled by his genius, and the Bunyan of Parnassus had the better of the Bunyan of the Conventicle – and with the same illusion as we read any tale known to be fictitious, as a novel, – we go on with the characters as real persons, who had been nicknamed by their neighbours. The Pilgrim's Progress is composed in the lowest style of English, without slang or false grammar. If you were to polish it, you would at once destroy the reality of the vision. [...] I read it once as a theologian – and let me assure you that there is a great theological acumen in the work – once with devotional feelings – and once as a poet. I could not have believed beforehand that Calvinism could be painted in such exquisitely delightful colours. [...] I know of no book, the Bible excepted [...] which I [...] could so safely recommend as teaching and enforcing the whole saving truth according to the mind that was in Christ Jesus, as in the Pilgrim's Progress. It is, in my conviction, incomparably the best *Summa Theologiae Evangelicae* ever produced by a writer not miraculously inspired. [...] I can find nothing homely in it but a few phrases and single words. The conversation between Faithful and Talkative is a model of unaffected dignity and rhythmical flow.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ See Sharon Ruston, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁴⁵ Toni Cerutti, *op. cit.*, p. 354.

⁴⁶ See N. H. Keeble, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

⁴⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in *Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century*, edited by Roberta Florence Brinkley, Duke University Press, 1955, pp. 475 – 476, in Roger Sharrock (ed.),

Quotes of Coleridge's comment are usually less extensive and often restricted to the famous distinction between the Bunyan of Parnassus – the artist – and the Bunyan of the Conventicle – the champion of nonconformist faith, linked to political radicalism – wherein Coleridge clearly states his preference for the former. However, I feel the passage deserves to be quoted at length, as it may be useful in tracing the character of Bunyan's reception in the early XIX century; as a matter of fact, Coleridge's single comment briefly touches on several aspects that recur in all Romantic appreciations of Bunyan's allegory.

The opening of the comment is particularly noteworthy. In Coleridge's words, in fact, the allegory is “admirable”. This is quite interesting, given that Coleridge had theorised the symbol as fundamentally opposed to allegory, in the process harshly criticizing the latter. This confirms that Coleridge, in attacking the allegorical form, was not criticizing allegory in general – as we have already pointed out – but the Neoclassical version of allegory. Wordsworth seemed to share Coleridge's view, too. In the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, he tackled the issue of personification, which at the time was generally identified with allegory;⁴⁸ interestingly, the passage commenting on the use of personification was modified for the revised 1802 preface, showing Wordsworth's changing view on the matter.⁴⁹ The 1800 preface plainly states that

except in a very few instances the Reader will find no personifications of abstract ideas in these volumes [...] in these Poems I propose to myself to imitate, and, as far as possible, to adopt the very language of men, and I do not

op. cit., pp. 52 – 53.

⁴⁸ See *infra*, p. 33.

⁴⁹ Theresa M. Kelley, “Romanticism's Errant Allegory”, *cit.*, pp. 107 – 108.

find that such personifications make any regular or natural part of that language.⁵⁰

In the 1802 preface, the claim is altered in a telling way:

The Reader will find that personifications of abstract ideas rarely occur in these volumes; and, I hope, are utterly rejected as an ordinary device to elevate the style, and raise it above prose. [...] such personifications do not make any natural or regular part of [the] language [of men]. They are, indeed, a figure of speech occasionally prompted by passion, and I have made use of them as such; but I have endeavoured utterly to reject them as a *mechanical device of style*.⁵¹

The revised preface's considerations seem to aim carefully at the stock images of Neoclassical allegory, which were rhetorically codified for clarity's sake; it is indeed their "mechanical" nature that attracts Wordsworth's fierce criticism. On the contrary, the images prompted by passion were deemed acceptable, passion seemingly destroying the conventionality of the figures of speech. As we have seen, the artist had a prophetic role and therefore he could not rely on well-known and univocal combinations; rather, he had to form subjective and indefinite associations to convey his own intuitive perceptions.⁵² Wordsworth must have deemed Bunyan's work an allegory based on the urgency and originality of pathos, rather than on the compliance to the rules, given his appreciation of *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a "beautiful allegory".⁵³ William Blake's stance towards allegory is more contradictory than Coleridge's or Wordsworth's; however, when he eventually concedes a clear praise of it, he does name Bunyan's work: "Allegory is seldom without some Vision. Pilgrim's Progress is full of it".⁵⁴

⁵⁰ William Wordsworth, "Preface", in *The Lyrical Ballads*, 1800, online source: <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8905/pg8905.html>, accessed on 13^h July 2013, 10.14.

⁵¹ William Wordsworth, *op. cit.* (1802). Italics mine.

⁵² See Marcello Pagnini (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁵³ William Wordsworth, in *The Prose Works Of William Wordsworth*, edited by W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1974, III vol. , p. 315, in David Walker, "Bunyan's Reception in the Romantic Period", in W. R. Owens, Stuart Sim (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁵⁴ William Blake, in *William Blake's Writings*, edited G. E. Bentley, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1978, II vol., p. 1008, in W. R. Owens, Stuart Sim (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 54.

With regard to Blake's stance on allegory, Deborah L. Madsen suggests that he distinguished two kinds of representational tools – “the fabulistic allegory of emblems and the mystical allegory or 'Vision' represented by the Bible”.⁵⁵ Actually, Blake would not have used the term “allegory” to explain what “Vision” meant to him, as he claimed that “Allegory and Vision [...] ought to be known as Two Distinct Things”.⁵⁶ To him, the Hebrew Bible and the Gospel of Jesus are Visions, as they provide the access to the timeless world of the transcendental. There is nothing mechanical in a Vision as Blake conceived it; rather, a Vision is a spontaneous access to the superior truth. Once again, the prophetic role of the artist gets highlighted. Moreover, the term “Vision” seems to refer to a process of unveiling wherein man does not perform an active role; rather, he seems to be the receiver of a revelation.⁵⁷ On the contrary, plain metaphorical allegory does not allow to enter the transcendental realm: allegory's rigid and controlled nature thwarts any attempt at going up the path towards it;⁵⁸ the artificial edifice of the allegorical mode is nothing like the unplanned and spontaneous revelation of the superior truth. However, Blake was the first to complicate the matter by relating these two different forms in the note we have quoted. According to Madsen, when writing of allegory and Vision Blake was actually defining and opposing “higher” and “lower” forms of allegory. These forms “are to be distinguished according to the priority given to the *letter* or the *spirit*”;⁵⁹ allegory would accord its priority to the letter, while Vision would accord it to the spirit. She

⁵⁵ Deborah L. Madsen, *Re-reading Allegory. A Narrative Approach to Genre*, New York : St. Martin's Press, 1994, online source: http://home.adm.unige.ch/~madsen/Allegory_CH7.htm, accessed on 3rd March 2013, 10.27.

⁵⁶ William Blake, in Deborah L. Madsen, *op. cit.*

⁵⁷ See Marcello Pagnini, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

⁵⁸ See Theresa M. Kelley, “Romanticism's Errant Allegory”, *cit.*, pp. 98 – 99.

⁵⁹ Deborah L. Madsen, *op. cit.*, italics mine.

then goes on saying that in providing a link between “the temporal world and the world of eternal Ideas” the Bible works as a true allegory, which is “the spiritualization of the textual letter”⁶⁰ – in Blakeian terms, a Vision. Indeed, we previously proposed that Bunyan was precisely trying to infuse the timeless significance of the *spirit* in his *letter*, binding together the phenomenal and the spiritual worlds; apparently Blake recognized it and was appreciative of the actual result, which he expressed using his own terminology – *The Pilgrim's Progress* is “full of Vision”.

We can now resume the definition of the Romantic idea of “symbol” we have previously proposed: a symbol is the concretisation of the abstract, the embodiment of the transcendental in the phenomenal. However ineffective such a theoretical concept may have been in practical terms, *The Pilgrim's Progress* might have been considered by the Romantics as an experiment carried out in this direction; hence, the positive evaluation they gave to an allegory they felt to be similar to their own conceptualisations – an allegory that, quite significantly, had been far from realising the expectations of Neoclassical men of letters.

If we turn again to Coleridge's remark, we will notice that a first critical evaluation follows the general opening praise. What is it that makes *The Pilgrim's Progress* appealing and *admirable*? Bunyan's creative *genius*, his ability to engage readers with his imaginative – albeit realistically detailed – narrative. Though Bunyan took the risk of writing a moral allegory, peopled by abstract and empty personifications – Coleridge seems to be implying – “his piety was baffled by his genius”; that is, he managed to catch fundamental

⁶⁰ *Ivi.*

truths and reshape them through his imagination into powerful images. Lack of refinement or cultivation was not a problem anymore, as naturalness had become an added value for the culture of the time.⁶¹ Indeed, Coleridge himself states that he cannot find “nothing homely” in *The Pilgrim's Progress* but “a few phrases and single words”.

The emotional power of Bunyan's images was surely appreciated by the Romantics, who emphasised the importance of human feelings and placed them above rationality. Christian's strong emotions all along the journey would engage the reader, enthraling him in the tale's unfolding; so would the realistic details of the characters. Although they are personifications of abstract ideas, Bunyan's characters are anchored to the phenomenal world by the realism of their depiction, as if they were abstract notions clothed with actuality. Not only does this suit the preference for particularity that many of the Romantics exhibited,⁶² but it also makes possible a suspension of disbelief, so that – as Coleridge says – the reader goes on with the characters “as real persons, who had been nicknamed by their neighbours”. Bunyan himself had indeed toyed with this idea; when Christian and Hopeful meet By-ends along the road, the latter complains about what he reveals to be only his nickname:

Christian: [...] if I take not my mark amiss, I deem I have half a guess of you:
Is not your name Mr. *By-ends* of *Fair-speech*?
By-ends: That is not my name, but indeed it is a Nick-name that is given me by some that cannot abide me, and I must be content to bear it as a reproach, as other good men have born theirs before me.⁶³

⁶¹ See N. H. Keeble, *op. cit.*, p. 252, 255.

⁶² See for example Wordsworth's preface to *The Lyrical Ballads*. When talking of the personification device, he claims “I have wished to keep my Reader in the company of *flesh and blood*”. The passage did not undergo any modification when the preface got revised. William Wordsworth, *op. cit.*, italics mine. See also Theresa M. Kelley, “Romanticism's Errant Allegory”, *cit.*, p. 96.

⁶³ John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

As a matter of fact, this aspect helps Bunyan to avoid the unreal personifications devoid of humanity that swarmed about Neoclassical allegory. After all, it is common practice to nickname a person after the predominant feature of his character, so that an abstract idea gets embodied in the real world. Bunyan's personifications are not fixed and empty figures; the abstract notions they stand for correspond to the human passions that move them. I deem it likely that Wordsworth noticed this aspect, being the one who validated the use of personifications when prompted by passion. See, for example, the trial scene at Vanity Fair: each member of the Jury is first presented by his abstract name; immediately after, the abstract notion gets embodied in his words and character:

Then went the jury out [...] And first Mr. *Blind-man*, the foreman, said, *I see clearly that this man is an Heretick*. Then said Mr. *No-good*, *Away with such a fellow from the Earth*. *Ay*, said Mr. *Malice*, *for I hate the very looks of him*. Then said Mr. *Love-lust*, *I could never indure him*. *Nor I*, said Mr. *Live-loose*, *for he would always be condemning my way*. *Hang him, hang him*, said Mr. *Heady*. *A sorry Scrub*, said Mr. *High-mind*. *My heart riseth against him*, said Mr. *Enmity*. *He is a Rogue*, said Mr. *Lyar*. *Hanging is too good for him*, said Mr. *Cruelty*. *Lets dispatch him out of the way*, said Mr. *Hate-light*. Then said Mr. *Implacable*, *Might I have all the World given me, I could not be reconciled to him, therefore let us forthwith bring him in guilty of death*.⁶⁴

One cannot fail to notice also the realism of minute details scattered throughout the text, like, for example, Formalist and Hypocrisie's mocking laughter at Christian's tirade:

Christian: By Laws and Ordinances, you will not be saved, since you came not in by the door [...] this Coat [...] was given me by the Lord of the place whither I go [...] I have moreover a mark in my forehead, of which perhaps you have taken no notice [...] I had then given me a Roll [...] I was also bid to give it in at the Cœlestial Gate, in token of my certain going in after it: all which things I doubt you want; and want them, because you came not in at the Gate. To these things they [Formalist and Hypocrisie] gave him no answer, only they looked upon each other, and *laughed*.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 94 – 95.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

Romantics would also appreciate the interest in human depth that characterise passages of Bunyan's work, though this interest is theologically limited. Being a work devoted to the spiritual journey of man, *The Pilgrim's Progress* is concerned with the inner world of the believer – his spiritual struggle and torment. Consider, for example, the desperate cry of the Man in the Iron Cage. Reviewing his spiritual faults, he finally breaks out: “God hath denied me repentance [...] O Eternity! Eternity! How shall I grapple with the misery that I must meet with in Eternity?”.⁶⁶

They would then mirror themselves in Christian and Christiana's escape, their resolute refusal to conform with a society they have inherited and not chosen, their building up a new social group with people that are akin to them.⁶⁷

Actually, the Romantics gave universal praise to the first Part of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, gauging it the more compelling, while some of them considered the second Part unsuccessful, lacking the interest and the powerful narrative of the first.⁶⁸ The first Part indeed has something that the second Part generally lacks and that the Romantics highly prized – the remarkable effect of sublime pictures. Consider, for example, the passage wherein Christian walks along the wrong path, heading towards Morality:

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Christian's attempt to persuade Pliable to go with him [John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, pp. 13 – 14], or Christiana's train growing larger along the pilgrimage.

⁶⁸ The Coleridge's very remark we have quoted starts by claiming “that admirable Allegory, *the first Part* of the Pilgrim's Progress”. See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in Roger Sharrock (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 52, italics mine. In his preface to the edition he produced, Robert Southey indeed felt the need of defending the second Part of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. See Robert Southey, “The Life of John Bunyan”, pp. 11 – 74, in John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress, with a Life of John Bunyan*, edited by Robert Southey, New York : Harper & Brothers, 1837, online source (available as a free e-book): http://books.google.it/books?id=BP0hAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false, p. 70, accessed on 6th February 2013, 11.48.

so Christian turned out of his way [...] but behold, when he was got now hard by the *Hill*, it seemed so high, and also that side of it that was next the way side, did hang so much over, that Christian was afraid to venture further, lest the *Hill* should fall on his head [...] there came also flashes of fire out of the Hill [...] here therefore [Christian] swet, and did quake for fear.⁶⁹

The terrifying mightiness of nature, albeit charged with moral significance, is depicted here; indeed, according to Burke's theory, nature's vastness accounted for a consistent part of what was considered to elicit the sublime. The unbearable feeling of the infinite was listed among the sublime-eliciting element, as well.

At the Interpreter's, Christian meets a man who describes him a dream he has had about Doom's Day. The vision of God's power, combined with a sense of the divine infinite, produces a sublime passage:

I Dreamed, and behold the Heavens grew exceeding black; also it thundred and lightned in most fearful wise, that it put me into an Agony [...] I [...] saw the Clouds rack at an unusual rate, upon which I heard a great sound of a Trumpet, and saw also a Man sit upon a Cloud, attended with the thousands of Heaven; they were all in flaming fire, also the Heavens was on a burning flame. I heard then a voice, saying, *Arise ye Dead, and come to Judgement*; and with that the Rocks rent, the Graves opened, & the Dead that were therein came forth.⁷⁰

There is a last interesting point in the Coleridge's remark that has been used as a basis for my analysis. Though praising the religious significance of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, famously calling it “the best *Summa Theologiae Evangelicae* ever produced by a writer not miraculously inspired”, Coleridge widely commends Bunyan artistic achievement, as well. For the first time, men of letters publicly and critically acclaim Bunyan's work; a passage from *The Pilgrim's Progress* is indeed signalled as a *model*. Up to then, the praises of *The Pilgrim's Progress* had generally focused on its moral value, while its aesthetic nature had often been withheld⁷¹ or neglected, when not scorned; in

⁶⁹ John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 35 – 36.

⁷¹ See the timidity of Cowper in praising Bunyan we have previously commented on.

the early XIX century Bunyan's work finally starts getting overt recognition of its artistic value and originality. A big contribution to its establishment in the literary canon would come from Southey's edition (1830) and the influential pieces of criticism the edition elicited from Walter Scott (1830) and Thomas B. Macaulay (1831).⁷²

5.3 The Bunyan of Parnassus or the Bunyan of the Conventicle?

Southey's edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress*

“The publication of Robert Southey's 1830 edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress, with a life of John Bunyan* marks a significant point in Bunyan scholarship and also in the politics of reception of Bunyan's work in the Romantic period”.⁷³

The importance of Southey's edition lies not only in his being a carefully-produced one,⁷⁴ restoring the work's “good old vernacular English” by “a collation of the first part with the earliest attainable copies”,⁷⁵ but also in his introducing a new critical direction in Bunyan scholarship. By keeping an eye to the historical developments of Bunyan's times – while trying at the same time to read and influence his own – Southey let politics and historical consciousness enter the reading of Bunyan's work. Moreover, its importance lies also in the critical response it provoked, namely, Scott's and Macaulay's critical reviews, which helped to establish the *Pilgrim's Progress* as an English classic.

⁷² See N. H. Keeble, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

⁷³ David Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

⁷⁴ As a matter of fact, Richard L. Greaves describes the eighteenth-century editions as “sloppy and poorly printed”. See Richard L. Greaves, “Bunyan through the Centuries: Some Reflections”, *cit.*, p. 114 – 115.

⁷⁵ Robert Southey, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

Southey's edition opens with a lengthy "The Life of John Bunyan"; in this opening essay, Southey aligns himself with those who praise Bunyan's natural genius and originality. Indeed, he interestingly traces the germ of *The Pilgrim's Progress* back to a sort of vision – "a revery, a waking dream"⁷⁶ – that Bunyan himself had recounted:

"I saw," he says, "as if they [Gifford's flock, which Bunyan was to join in] were on the sunny side of some high mountain [...] while I was shivering and shrinking in the cold [...]. Methought also betwixt me and them, I saw a wall that did compass about this mountain; now through this wall my soul did greatly desire to pass [...]. At the last I saw, as it were, a narrow gap, like a little doorway in the wall, through which I attempted to pass."⁷⁷

While Coleridge finds "nothing homely" in Bunyan's work, Southey does recognize his homespun style, his homeliness, but he defends it nonetheless from being charged with vulgarity: his "is a clear stream of current English – the vernacular speech of his age, sometimes indeed in its rusticity and coarseness, but always in its plainness and its strength".⁷⁸ Romantic appreciation of naturalness is here quite evident. Southey's following remark on Bunyan's technical ability– "he is indeed the prince of all allegorists in prose"⁷⁹ – is quite noteworthy; he is also the first to overtly praise the second Part of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which so far has been neglected or considered vastly inferior to the first.

The interest of "The Life of John Bunyan", however, lies somewhere else. A consistent part of the essay is devoted to the description of Bunyan's tormented feelings, the "extreme ignorance out of which he worked his way, and the stage of burning enthusiasm through which he passed".⁸⁰ "[Bunyan's]

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁷⁷ *Ivi.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

character”, Southey argues, “would be imperfectly understood, and could not be justly appreciated, if this part of history were kept out of sight”;⁸¹ hence, Southey provides his readers with a description of seventeenth-century England. This enables him to draw a gloomy picture of the politics of Bunyan's times; he is indeed free to judge and attack the radicalism of Parliamentarians – “the intention had been under the pretext of abating one tyranny, to establish a far severer and more galling in its stead”⁸² – and the enthusiasm of sectarian religion – “the wildest opinions of every kind were abroad, 'divers and strange doctrines”’.⁸³ He has thus the chance of expounding his conservative views on the matter. Actually, although he had previously been a radical supporter of the French Revolution, Southey eventually moved towards conservatism, just like other Romantic poets did.⁸⁴ From a committed republican Southey turned into a conservative who argued against parliamentary reform, opposed the anti-Catholic Emancipation in favour of the Established Church of England and privately proposed penal transportation for those who were guilty of sedition.⁸⁵ As one may easily imagine, then, Southey agreed with Coleridge in preferring the Bunyan of Parnassus to the Bunyan of the Conventicle.⁸⁶ As a matter of

⁸¹ *Ivi.*

⁸² *Ivi.*

⁸³ *Ivi.*

⁸⁴ His sympathy for the French Revolution led him to write several works where he exhibited his radical political views – amongst them, *Joan of Arc* (1795) and *The Fall of Robespierre* (1794), written in collaboration with S. T. Coleridge. Coleridge would equally begin as a radical and turn into a conservative. See the entry for “Robert Southey” in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, online source: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/556936/Robert-Southey>, accessed on 14th July 2013, 11.31; the Spartacus Educational Website: <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/Jsouthey.htm>, accessed on 14th July 2013, 11.37; Robert Southey's biography at the European Graduate School website: <http://www.egs.edu/library/robert-southey/biography/>, accessed on 14th July 2013, 11.39.

⁸⁵ See Monika Class, “The Life of Robert Southey”, online source:

<http://www.oxonianreview.org/issues/6-1/6-1class.htm>, accessed on 6th February, 17.35.

⁸⁶ Indeed, as Richard L. Greaves remarks, Southey “provocatively argued that Bunyan's religious enthusiasm was based on false notions of human corruption and a grossly exaggerated sense of his own depravity”, Richard L. Greaves, “Bunyan through the Centuries: Some Reflections”, *cit.*, p. 115.

fact, Southey's conservatism directed his reading of Bunyan's engagement in seventeenth-century politics and wielded enormous influence over his rendition of it.

In tracking the various stages of Bunyan's trial, for example, Southey clearly sides with the Established Church of England, trying to lessen the import of his imprisonment; according to him, "Bunyan has been, and no doubt will continue to be, most wrongfully represented as having been the victim of intolerant laws, and prelatical oppression".⁸⁷ Actually, Southey casts a positive light on Bunyan's imprisonment. In his view, while in prison Bunyan had "leisure to brood over his own thoughts"⁸⁸ and was protected from the wind of radicalism, which was still blowing outside. As a result, "the fever of his enthusiasm [...] spent itself", enabling him to survive the moral and political decay of his times. As David Walker points out, Southey seems to be claiming that *The Pilgrim's Progress* is "the product of enthusiasm experienced and then denied. Had Bunyan not denied it then he would undoubtedly have gone the way of Ranting libertines".⁸⁹ The way of religious enthusiasm, in turn, would have prevented Bunyan from writing his masterpiece.

According to Southey, then, *The Pilgrim's Progress* had been possible only because of a rejection of seventeenth-century enthusiasm, the sects' religious ardour, which, as we have seen, was usually linked to political radicalism; to understand *The Pilgrim's Progress*, one has to understand this crucial circumstance. The most interesting point, here, is the recognition of history as an influential agent for art. It is for this reason, indeed, that Southey

⁸⁷ Robert Southey, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁸⁹ David Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

claims the importance of casting a literary analysis on the historical background characterising the time of composition. Moreover, a historical survey as such obviously gives the chance for providing one's own reading of the politics of the age that is being analysed.

In Southey's essay Bunyan served a twofold function: on one side, he was the focus of a literary research that produced a new edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress* – an edition which promoted the establishment of Bunyan's work in the canon of English literature; on the other, he was the point of departure for a historical analysis of the past, which nonetheless hoped to have a hold upon Southey's actual times. Two influential reviews followed the publication of Southey's edition: Scott's review, published in the *Quarterly Review* (1830); Macaulay's review, published in the *Edinburgh Review* (1831). Both Scott and Macaulay adopted Southey's historical and political attitude towards the text, though their different opinions gave life to fundamentally contrasting reviews.

Walter Scott's review of Southey's edition

Scott's article appeared on an issue of *The Quarterly Review* of October 1830, the *Quarterly Review* being one of the most important periodicals in Britain and upholding conservative political views.⁹⁰ The article was 25-page long, therefore providing an outstanding contribution to the issue.

As David Walker remarks, a great part of Scott's review is devoted to Bunyan's acquittal from the charge of fanaticism;⁹¹ thus, not only does Scott

⁹⁰ See Sharon Ruston, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

adopt Southey's general attitude, namely, the inclusion of history and politics in the reading of Bunyan's work, but he fully endorses his personal opinions. A political conservative – though less intolerant than Southey – Scott agreed with his understanding of Bunyan and Bunyan's times.

The review starts with a recap of Bunyan's early life⁹² and character – his family, his “clownish and vulgar education”, his “powerful imagination”⁹³ and his spiritual torments. As a matter of fact, the picture he draws of Bunyan sometimes resembles much that of Waverley – Scott's famous character – particularly when he writes of Bunyan's inclination to “indulge in his own reveries”.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, Scott soon falls in the political/historical reading of Bunyan's life and art. In the wake of Southey's claim, Scott justifies his critical approach by stating that “the history of a man so distinguished by natural talents as Bunyan is connected with that of his age”.⁹⁵

Scott negatively mentions seventeenth-century fanaticism and radicalism as soon as he starts reporting Bunyan's times. “The doctrine which

⁹² Be him the first to publicly suggest it or not, Scott undoubtedly had a main role in opening up the debate around the Romani origin of Bunyan, given the importance of his review. “The tinkers' craft is, in Great Britain, commonly practised by gypsies”, he argues, “and we surmise the probability that Bunyan's own family, though reclaimed and settled, might have sprung from this caste of vagabonds”. Walter Scott, “*The Pilgrim's Progress, with a Life of John Bunyan*” in *Sir Walter Scott on Novelists and Fiction*, edited by Ioan Williams, London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968, p. 380. As far as 2012, John Bunyan is still listed among writers of Romani origin in S. Spinelli's *Rom, Genti Libere*. See Santino Spinelli, *Rom, Genti Libere. Storia, Arte e Cultura di un Popolo Misconosciuto*, Milano : Dalai Editore, 2012, p. 274.

By lingering on Bunyan's inner torments, Southey and Scott may also have had a significant part in sparking off the debate on his alleged psychological disorders. Many were the hypotheses suggested during the nineteenth-century: some highlighted Bunyan's morbid – if not psychopathic – temperament, while others suggested that Bunyan suffered from melancholic depression; some psychologists argued that his visions were the result of dyspepsia; John Ruskin was “plainly horrified by Bunyan's spiritual autobiography” – the already mentioned *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* – “which he could explain only as the product of a diseased mind”. Richard L. Greaves, “Bunyan through the Centuries: Some Reflections”, *cit.*, p. 116.

⁹³ Walter Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 380.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 385.

summoned all men to the exercise of the private judgement, as it was called, led the way to the wildest, most blasphemous, and most fatal excesses”⁹⁶, he writes, just before citing Laurence Clarkson's⁹⁷ life as an example of what the indulgence in reveries – as he calls the religious free-thinking that blossomed in the seventeenth century – may cause to men. A contemporary of Bunyan, Clarkson started “under a vague apprehension of an extreme tenderness of conscience, afflicted “with a toleration of Maypole dancing and rioting”, and ascended from one flight to another till he became in principle a materialist, almost an atheist, and in practice a coarse and profligate latitudinarian”.⁹⁸ In Scott's view, “such were the effects on different men of the then prevailing audacity of fanaticism. The same course of study which all but fixed Bunyan in religious despair, hurried into profligacy and atheism the less favourably constituted mind of Claxton”.⁹⁹ He thus agrees with Southey, both in pointing at the moral danger of spiritual enthusiasm and in claiming that Bunyan was saved from the moral decay of his times.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 386.

⁹⁷ Laurence Clarkson (1615 – 1667), alternatively spelled Claxton, was an English Ranter [a radical religious sect, which was involved in the English Revolution. Its Antinomianism led its members to believe that the Holy Spirit would remove sin from all their acts; they were frequently accused of libertinism] – then a Muggletonian [a radical sect that developed during the Interregnum. Muggletonians were ahead of their time in having a sort of deist belief] – and theologian. He wrote spiritual texts, the most famous being the autobiographical work *Lost Sheep Found* (1660). See *The Oxford Concise Companion to English Literature*, entry “Clarkson, Laurence”, online source:

<http://oxfordindex.oup.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199214921.013.1256>, accessed on 7th February 2013, 13.27.

See also the “Ranters” entry in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* online: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/491287/Ranters>, accessed on 13th July 2013, 20.10; <http://www.exlibris.org/nonconform/engdis/ranters.html>, accessed on 13th July 2013, 20.10. For the Muggletonians, see <http://www.exlibris.org/nonconform/engdis/muggleton.html>, accessed on 13th July 2013, 20.21.

⁹⁸ Walter Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 386.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 388.

Much like what happened to the fictional Waverley, Bunyan's safety – in Scott's view – came from acting and occupying himself concretely. Scott extensively quotes a passage from Southey:

In an evil hour [...] were the doctrines of the Gospel sophisticated with questions which should have been left in the schools for those who are unwise enough to employ themselves in excogitations of useless subtlety! Many are the poor creatures whom such questions have driven to despair and madness, and suicide; and no one ever more narrowly escaped from such a catastrophe than Bunyan.¹⁰⁰

As Walker points out, this passage seems to suggest that the uneducated toying with serious questions are eventually led to psychological crisis or self-violence. Such questions should be left, instead, to “those with the education and social standing best fitted to address them”.¹⁰¹ As a matter of fact, Scott seems to be drawing a conservatory line between educated and uneducated people – hence, between social classes and the right activities pertaining to them – as he is wary of the capacity of uneducated people to understand affairs that he considers to be above them. He is also casting religious enthusiasm, which in the seventeenth century was closely linked both to Nonconformity and radicalism, in a framework of perverted mental activity.¹⁰² Indeed, this is the passage where Southey's and Scott's conservatism runs highest.¹⁰³ What

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

¹⁰¹ David Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

¹⁰² Let us take into consideration, for example, the case of Laurence Clarkson, who Scott uses as a bogeyman when talking of the dangers Bunyan had faced; Scott's criticism gives rise to the suspect that what disturbed him the most was not seventeenth-century heterodox religious belief, but the political radicalism the religious sects of the time were linked to.

¹⁰³ Scott, too, defends the government's measures against Nonconformity, when claiming that a “persecuting spirit which had, *by a not unnatural reaction*, taken possession for a time of the government, imposed direct personal and penal consequences for nonconformity”. Walter Scott, *Ibid.*, p. 390, italics mine.

Though Scott does not mention radical opposition to the monarchy in this passage, Walker argues that it was impossible for him to ignore the connection between Nonconformism and republicanism in the seventeenth century. He then suggests that, by the 1820's, sectarian and political radicalism in England were not aligned anymore – hence, Scott may have omitted to mention the connection between seventeenth-century religion and politics in order to help keeping the issues separated in his own time. See David Walker, *op. cit.*, pp. 57 – 59.

saved Bunyan from a personal catastrophe, then, was “a minute and systematic investigation of the scriptures”,¹⁰⁴ which “could not but have had a tranquillizing [...] effect”.¹⁰⁵ Bunyan was also helped by his activity as a preacher, which turned him away from his reveries. Once again, the repudiation of the former enthusiasm is cast in a positive light.

Walker assumes that Scott’s aim was whitewashing the radicalism that some were beginning to read in Bunyan’s text.¹⁰⁶ The first decades of the nineteenth century being rather stormy,¹⁰⁷ the Tories feared the resurgence of XVII-century-like religious and political turmoil, whose republicanism was indeed being praised by progressive men of letters and politicians.¹⁰⁸ Scott’s review, then, could be read as an attempt at neutralising the praises of seventeenth-century radicalism – be it political or religious – by depicting a gloomy picture of that period and commending Bunyan’s alleged repudiation of it.

A couple of years before, Scott had already written a novel related to the Civil War, *Woodstock; or The Cavalier* (1826),¹⁰⁹ which had earned him an accusation of “falsifying history to propagate his political tenets”¹¹⁰ from the liberal *Westminster Review*. Whether he falsified history or not, there are

¹⁰⁴ An investigation that Scott considered “politically quite”, as Walker notices [*op. cit.*, p. 61], while recent scholarship has strongly argued in favour of Bunyan’s anti-authoritarian stance during the Restoration.

¹⁰⁵ Walter Scott, *op. cit.*, p 385.

¹⁰⁶ With regard to this, see *infra*, pp. 173 – 175. See also David Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

¹⁰⁷ See the historical introduction to the present chapter.

¹⁰⁸ See an example of the Whig historians’ positive evaluations of the seventeenth century in Macaulay’s *The History of England*.

¹⁰⁹ The complete title is *Woodstock; or The Cavalier. A Tale of the Year Sixteen Hundred and Fifty-One*. The historical novel deals with Charles II’s escape after the defeat of his army at Worcester. The plot features a love story between the daughter of a monarchical ranger – Alice Lee – and a Parliamentarian colonel – Markham Everard – who will eventually become a supporter of the Restoration. See the “Woodstock” page on the Edinburgh University’s Walter Scott Digital Archive, online source: <http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk/works/novels/cavalier.html>, accessed on 14th July, 12.26.

¹¹⁰ *Ivi.*

indeed passages in the novel where a hint of criticism towards seventeenth-century radicalism can be noticed. Let us take, for instance, the description of a Parliamentary character, where Scott alludes to the character's "spirit of enthusiasm, which operated like a partial insanity", soon after defining him a "true representative of the fanatical soldiers of the day, who filled those ranks and regiments which Cromwell had politically kept on foot".¹¹¹ Scott's review of Southey's edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, then, is to be cast into the broader framework of his Toryism.

As for the literary value of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Scott aligns himself with Southey's recognition of Bunyan's original genius. He indeed ranks Bunyan's work among the most interesting "peculiarities of [English] national literature",¹¹² therefore deserving an illustration of its features. Scott appreciates the realism of his narrative – the "life-like manner in which Bunyan puts the adventures of his pilgrim before us"¹¹³ – and the well-structured plot of the story.

Most interestingly, he advocates Bunyan's use of the allegorical device, both for its moral and "intellectual" value. As a matter of fact, Scott describes allegory as an effective tool to put moral truth forward without arousing the suspicion of "those passes of the human heart that [are] vigilantly guarded against the direct force of truth by self-interest, prejudice or pride".¹¹⁴ Besides its moral value, Scott praises allegory's ability to exercise the faculties of the

¹¹¹ Walter Scott, *Woodstock*, New York; London : Longmans, Green & Co., 1895, p. 151, online source: <http://archive.org/details/woodstock00scotgoog>, accessed on 16th July 2013, 12.45. There is indeed a striking resemblance between Scott's reference to "partial insanity" when describing enthusiasm in *Woodstock* and his description of "the poor creatures [...] driven to despair and madness" by enthusiasm in his review of Southey's edition.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 379.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 394.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 396.

human mind: judgement, which gets “engaged in weighing and measuring the points of similarity between the reality and the metaphor”; fancy, which is amused by “the witty turns of thought, through means of which associations are produced between things”.¹¹⁵

Scott also commends the way in which Bunyan has carried his allegory on; indeed, he finds Bunyan's allegory so coherent and consistent that he considers it superior to Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. When he comes to the point of a definition of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, he calls it the “classic of the common people”,¹¹⁶ acknowledging its “wit, beauty, and sublimity”¹¹⁷ (note the Romantic term). Not only does he praise the first Part, but he follows Southey in appreciating the second. According to him, the first Part, “far from exhausting his subject, opens new sources of attractions”,¹¹⁸ the second Part satisfies the reader's interest, as it focuses on the effects that the challenges met by Christian – “a man, and a bold one” – have on women and children, analysing the different approach they have to the pilgrimage and expressing “that species of inspired heroism by which women are supported in the path of duty, notwithstanding the natural feebleness and timidity of their nature”.¹¹⁹

It is still the Bunyan of Parnassus that gets the praise. At the very end of the review, Scott gifts Bunyan with a tender mark of recognition:

in whatever shape presented, John Bunyan's parable must be dear to many, as to us, from the recollection that in youth they were endued with permission to peruse it at times when all studies of a nature merely entertaining were prohibited. We remember with interest the passages were, in our childhood, we stumbled betwixt the literal story and metaphorical explanation; and can even recall to mind a more simple and early period, when Grim and Slaygood, and even he “whose castle's Doubting, and whose name's Despair,” were to us as

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 396 – 397.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 395.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 405.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 400.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 401.

literal Anakim as those destroyed by Giant-killing Jack. Those who can recollect the early development of their own ideas [...], will many of them [...] remember the reading of this work as the first task which gave exercise to the mind, before taste [...] taught them to be more disgusted with a single error than delighted with a hundred beauties.¹²⁰

The son of a strict Calvinist,¹²¹ it is likely that Scott had received *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a Sunday reading in his youth, just like working children would read it at Sunday schools.¹²²

Walter Scott agrees with Southey in all respects. They both claim that to understand Bunyan one must first understand the historical context of Bunyan's times. Hence, both Southey and Scott provide a historical framework to their critical analysis of Bunyan's work. In both cases the historical framework is influenced by the conservative opinions of the writers. It is Macaulay that will offer a different reading of Bunyan's times and art, in an effort to highlight his radical idiom.

Macaulay's review of Southey's edition

While Scott frequently expresses his agreement with Southey, at the very beginning of his review Macaulay shows his strong dissent from Southey's opinions: "Mr. Southey propounds [...] many opinions from which we altogether dissent; and his attempts to excuse the odious persecution to which Bunyan was subjected have sometimes moved our indignation".¹²³ This

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 406.

¹²¹ See the "Family Background" page on the Walter Scott Digital Archive, online source: <http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk/biography/origins.html>, accessed on 14th July 2013, 11.37.

¹²² There are evidences of pedagogical readings of *The Pilgrim's Progress* at Sunday schools. See W. R. Owens, "The *Pilgrim's Progress* in England", *cit.*, p. 101; Isabel Hofmeyr, "How Bunyan Became English: Missionaries, Translation, and the Discipline of English Literature", in "Journal of British Studies", Vol. 41, No. 1, pp. 84 – 119, (Jan., 2002), p. 90.

¹²³ Thomas Babington Macaulay, "John Bunyan", in *Critical and Historical Essays contributed to the Edinburgh Review*, London : Longmans, Green and Co., 1883, p. 132.

claim indeed sets the tone for the text that follows. It is immediately clear, in fact, that a consistent part of the review will address historical issues – and address them it will, in contrast with Southey and Scott’s conservative views. As a matter of fact, Macaulay’s article was published on December 1831 in *The Edinburgh Review*, the progressive and Whig-oriented periodical¹²⁴ that usually clashed with the Tory *Quarterly Review*, where Scott’s article had been published a year before. Macaulay’s article is far briefer than Scott’s, as it is 11-page long.

Macaulay agrees only with Southey's way of framing his critical analysis, that is, the necessity to cast the reading of Bunyan's work in its own historical context. “In whatever age Bunyan had lived”, he argues, “the history of his feelings would, in all probability, have been very curious”; he then immediately claims:

but the time in which his lot was cast was the time of a great stirring of the human mind. A tremendous burst of public feeling, produced by the tyranny of the hierarchy, menaced the old ecclesiastical institutions with destructions. To the gloomy regularity of one intolerant Church had succeeded the license of innumerable sects, drunk with the sweet and heady must of their new liberty. Fanaticism, engendered by persecution, and destined to engender persecution in turn, spread rapidly through society. Even the strongest [...] minds were not proof against this strange taint. Any time might have produced George Fox and James Naylor. But to one time alone belong the frantic delusions of such a statesman as Vane, and the hysterical tears of such a soldier as Cromwell. The history of Bunyan is the history of a most excitable mind in an age of excitement.¹²⁵

Macaulay's picture of the seventeenth century is quite different from Southey and Scott's. As Walker points out, the blame for the turmoil of fanaticism is not placed on those who practised it, but on an intolerant

¹²⁴ See Sharon Ruston, *op. cit.*, p. 90. Indeed, Macaulay was also a Whig politician, becoming an MP for Leeds in 1832. See the entry for “Thomas Babington Macaulay” in the Spartacus Educational website: <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/PRmacaulay.htm>, accessed on 14th July 2013, 13.31.

¹²⁵ Thomas Babington Macaulay, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

hierarchy that engendered it by imposing religious conformity.¹²⁶ Most of all, according to Macaulay, Bunyan's literary genius was stirred by the very tumultuous events of his times, not by his rejecting them. The excitement of Bunyan's age was a prime agent for his literary output; hence the claim that the Bunyan we know could only be produced by seventeenth-century England.

Once again, knowledge of the historical context is deemed necessary to understand Bunyan's work. Nonetheless, there is a fundamental difference between Macaulay's approach and Southey and Scott's: Southey and Scott's approach keeps history *outside* the text – having been supposedly rejected by Bunyan, the historical context of seventeenth-century radicalism features in their essays only as a wider set that includes Bunyan and Bunyan's work; it does not provide textual structures, nor an interpretative key for the text. Macaulay, on the contrary, lets history slip *inside* the text – history becomes woven into the textual fabric of *The Pilgrim's Progress* – and it is always a republican history. According to his reading, in fact, characters and events depicted in the narrative of *The Pilgrim's Progress* have a concrete equivalent in the real world. With regard to Faithful's trial, for example, he claims: “It is impossible to doubt that Bunyan intended to satirise the mode in which state trials were conducted under Charles the Second”.¹²⁷ He then enters into a tirade against such trials:

the license given to the witnesses for the prosecution, the shameless partiality and ferocious insolence of the judge, the precipitancy and the blind rancour of the jury, remind us of those odious mummeries which, from the Restoration to the Revolution, were merely forms preliminary to hanging, drawing and quartering.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ See David Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

¹²⁷ Thomas Babington Macaulay, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

¹²⁸ *Ivi.*

While Southey and Scott believe Bunyan rejected the turmoil of his age, Macaulay finds in Great-heart the sure portrait of one of those religious field commander who led the Parliamentary troops during the Civil War:

we have not the least doubt that Bunyan had in view some stout old Greatheart of Naseby and Worcester, who prayed with his men before he drilled them, who knew the spiritual state of every dragoon in his troop, and who, with the praises of God in his mouth, and a two-edged sword in his hand, had turned to flight, on many fields of battle, the swearing, drunken bravoos of Rupert and Lunsford.¹²⁹

With regard to the seventeenth-century political radicalism, there is another interesting point in a passage of Macaulay's essay we have previously quoted. When claiming that "any time might have produced George Fox¹³⁰ and James Naylor¹³¹ [but] to one time alone belong [...] Vane, and [...] Cromwell", Macaulay seems to highlight the singularity of a time of political radicalism in England. Seemingly, Macaulay claims that the religious fervour of preachers like Naylor or Fox – the former a Quaker preacher, the latter the very founder of the religious group – might belong to any time in the history of a country where religion is practised; on the other hand, the political radicalism of a Vane¹³² or a Cromwell, albeit often coupled with religious belief, was a peculiar feature of mid-seventeenth century. By his statement, Macaulay seems to emphasise the unique nature of the seventeenth-century desire for a political change – a desire for change that would lead to the 1688 Glorious Revolution and the parliamentary limitations of the king Macaulay extolled in his

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 138 – 139. See also David Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

¹³⁰ See the entry for "George Fox" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*:
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/215366/George-Fox>, accessed on 14th July 2013, 14.22.

¹³¹ For further information on James Nayler, alternatively spelled "Naylor", see
<http://www.british-civil-wars.co.uk/biog/nayler.htm>, accessed on 14th July 2013, 14.23.

¹³² For Henry Vane's biographical entry, see:
http://www.theodora.com/encyclopedia/v/sir_henry_vane_statesman.html, accessed on 14th July 2013, 14.30.

writings.¹³³ Some years later, when describing Charles I's decision to force English liturgy on Scotland – an act that would precipitate the outbreak of the Civil War – in his *The History of England* (1849), Macaulay would tellingly remark: “to this step, taken in the mere wantonness of tyranny, and in a criminal ignorance or more criminal contempt of public feeling, our country owes her freedom”.¹³⁴ As it may be easily imagined, Macaulay was particularly interested in highlighting the radical political dimension of the events occurring in Bunyan's time, as seemingly he considered them to be of cardinal importance for English freedom.¹³⁵ Moreover, such political dimension was similar to the one Macaulay himself was committed to and that had been lessened both in Southey's preface and Scott's review.

The Bunyan of the Conventicle, so far neglected, gets Macaulay's deep appreciation and sympathy. Nonetheless, this does not imply that Macaulay disregards the Bunyan of Parnassus. On the contrary, Bunyan's artistic achievements are equally commended.

As we have said, Macaulay tends to find a concrete equivalent to Bunyan's fictitious characters. It is a similar process that he appreciates in Bunyan's allegory, namely, Bunyan's ability to give abstract figures the concreteness of reality: “Bunyan is almost the only writer who ever gave to the

¹³³ In *The History of England*, Macaulay harshly attacks seventeenth-century despotism, implicitly praising the constitutional limitations that were to come. When writing of Charles the I, he claims: “many English Kings had occasionally committed unconstituted acts: but none had ever systematically attempted to make himself a despot, and to reduce the Parliament a nullity”, and again: “the tribunals afforded no protection to the subject against the civil and ecclesiastical tyranny of that period. The judges of the common law, holding their situations during the pleasure of the King, were scandalously obsequious”. Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James II*, Philadelphia : Porter & Coates, vol. 1, online source: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1468/1468-h/1468-h.htm>, accessed on 14th July 2013, 14.39.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* Italics mine.

¹³⁵ See David Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

abstract the interest of the concrete”,¹³⁶ he claims. Macaulay indeed commends a feature that – as we have already seen – the Romantics highly praised, that is, the realism of Bunyan's abstract notions. The characters of *The Pilgrim's Progress* are not mere personifications, as it is the case in other allegorical works, where “we have not a jealous man, but jealousy; not a traitor, but perfidy; not a patriot, but patriotism”;¹³⁷ on the contrary, Bunyan's imagination was so lively that “personifications, when he dealt with them, became men”.¹³⁸ We have already highlighted how this point made the central core of Romantic appreciation of Bunyan's allegory.

Actually, Macaulay claims that *The Pilgrim's Progress* is not a perfect allegory – “the types are often inconsistent with each other; and sometimes the allegorical disguise is altogether thrown off”.¹³⁹ Nonetheless, he considers Bunyan's allegory superior to Spenser's or Addison's, and this because of *The Pilgrim's Progress*'s uncanny ability to arise strong feelings in the reader: “other allegories only amuse the fancy”, he claims, “the allegory of Bunyan has been read by many thousands with tears”;¹⁴⁰ “this is the highest miracle of genius”, he concludes, “that things which are not should be as though they were”.¹⁴¹ Macaulay, Scott and Southey, then, did have a shared opinion – they all considered Bunyan an original and natural genius.

They all also praised Bunyan's style and English – Macaulay more than the others, as he defines it delightful and “invaluable as a study to every person who wishes to obtain a wide command over the English language”.¹⁴² There is

¹³⁶ Thomas Babington Macaulay, “John Bunyan”, *cit.*, p. 135.

¹³⁷ *Ivi.*

¹³⁸ *Ivi.*

¹³⁹ *Ivi.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 139.

indeed a hint of national pride in Macaulay, when he claims that Bunyan's vocabulary – built on Anglo-Saxon words of “the old unpolluted English language” – clearly shows “how rich that language is in its own proper wealth, and how little it has been improved by all that it has borrowed”.¹⁴³ Moreover, he firmly aligns himself with the Romantic appreciation of the language of common people – featured in Bunyan – offering lavish praise to its power and effectiveness:

for magnificence, for pathos, for vehement exhortation, for subtle disquisition, for every purpose of the poet, the orator and the divine, this homely dialect, the dialect of plain working men, was perfectly sufficient.¹⁴⁴

The critical texts that have been analysed markedly differed over the historical understanding of Bunyan's times. They also proposed two contrasting models to explain the influence of history over Bunyan's art. However, they all agreed in deeming it necessary to analyse the seventeenth-century historical context in order to understand Bunyan's work. While religious reading had always considered *The Pilgrim's Progress* an a-historical text – its essence being a metaphysical and eternal subject, untouched by contingency – nineteenth-century men of letters began to highlight its historicity.

Moreover, Bunyan's literary standing was improving, since he came to be compared – if not deemed superior – to a celebrated author as Spenser. As we have seen, Southey, Scott and Macaulay did all agree in considering *The Pilgrim's Progress* a classic, worthy of a place among the English literary

¹⁴³ Thomas B. Macaulay, “John Bunyan”, *cit.*, p. 139. Here the Romantic preference for a pure, national language clearly clashes with seventeenth and eighteenth-century preference for words of Romance origin.

¹⁴⁴ *Ivi.*

canon.¹⁴⁵ As a matter of fact, Bunyan's Englishness – whether this Englishness was identified in his language or in his being part of a common cultural background shared by the English – began to be asserted. But all this was still in the making. How Bunyan finally entered the English literary canon and acquired the mark of classic *English* work is the subject of the next section. We are now entering the Victorian Age.

5.4 The Victorian Age

The Victorian Age gets its name from Queen Victoria, whose lengthy reign lasted from 1837 to 1901. The cultural outputs that characterised so long a time span are obviously diverse. When one thinks of the Victorian Age, for example, the first thing that usually comes to mind is a strict moral code regulating social behaviour; actually, the final decades of the period were characterized by a lessening in moral standards.¹⁴⁶ Likewise, one thinks of the Victorian society as powerfully framed by Christianity; though the society was indeed steeped in Christian values, religious certainties were increasingly challenged throughout the whole age. As a matter of fact, during the Victorian Age doubts were raised – often unintentionally – by scientific discoveries and movements arising within the very Church.¹⁴⁷ Any label, then, seems to be reductive when applied to the non-homogeneous Victorian culture. Therefore, I will make an attempt at describing some aspects of the age by relating the self-image that the Victorians themselves built, selecting the values that were to

¹⁴⁵ See David Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

¹⁴⁶ See Harry Blamires, *The Victorian Age of Literature*, Beirut; Harlow : York Press, Longman, 1988, p. 11.

¹⁴⁷ See Maureen Moran, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, London, New York: Continuum 2006, pp. 30 – 32.

make up their culture's central core.¹⁴⁸ I will then add minor notes on the cultural challenges that the Victorian canon was indeed trying to keep at bay.

Christian religion held a significant place in Victorian society. Its values tightly structured social behaviour and were regarded as the basis of good citizenship.¹⁴⁹ Evangelicalism was the dominant approach to religion at the time and its character profoundly shaped Victorian life: the emphasis on sin, the emotional and imaginative dimension of spirituality and the evangelical drive towards the others influenced Victorian attitudes and imagination.¹⁵⁰ As a matter of fact, Evangelicalism had a considerable influence on Victorian literature, as many Victorian writers had begun as Evangelicals; though later on they would abandon this form of faith, its values and ideas retained their influence.¹⁵¹ This was indeed an ideal environment for the reception of Bunyan's work, given that *The Pilgrim's Progress* was structured on a pattern of evangelical spirituality.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ See Franco Marucci, *Il Vittoriano*, Bologna : Il Mulino, 1991, pp. 10 – 11.

¹⁴⁹ See Maureen Moran, *op. cit.*, pp. 24 – 25.

¹⁵⁰ See Maureen Moran, *op. cit.*, p. 25; George P. Landow, “The Doctrines of Evangelical Protestantism”, online source: <http://www.victorianweb.org/religion/evangel2.html>, accessed on 7th May 2013, 17.32.

¹⁵¹ The young Thomas Hardy held Evangelical beliefs, whose values were to form part of his lifelong preoccupations: “the emphasis on the law as curse, on suffering, and on the saving force of love”, as Pamela Dalziel puts it. John Ruskin had been raised an Evangelical, too. According to Landow, his early religious beliefs would be influential in shaping Ruskin's ways of reading the works of art. Among the other writers, Thomas Carlyle, George Eliot and Gerard Manley Hopkins had an Evangelical faith in their youth.

Pamela Dalziel, “Strange Sermon: the Gospel According to Thomas Hardy”, in “Times Literary Supplement” (17th March 2006), p. 13, in George P. Landow, “Thomas Hardy's Religious Beliefs”, online source: <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/hardy/religion1.html>, accessed on 22nd July 2013, 15.04. See also George P. Landow, “Ruskin's Evangelical Belief”, online source: <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/ruskin/atheories/4.1.html>, accessed on 22nd July 2013, 15.25; David Cody, “Evangelicalism”, online source: <http://www.victorianweb.org/religion/evangel1.html>, accessed on 7th May 2013, 17.34.

¹⁵² See Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan*, *cit.*, p. 58.

Religion entered literature in other ways as well, structuring both writing and reading habits. For example, it was a common practice for Victorian middle-class families to sit together for evening readings, one member in turn reading aloud for the others.¹⁵³ Books had thus to offer proper subjects; publications were strictly regulated, while people's reading tastes were inclined to moral texts – the Bible and our *Pilgrim's Progress* featured prominently in Victorian bookshelves and bedside tables.¹⁵⁴

Overall, literature had a didactic aim and was conceived as an effective promulgator of social behaviour and of moral codes and values. One has to bear in mind that the increasing literacy rate of the time was exposing previously illiterate masses to literature. This entailed a political danger, in a period of social turmoil that was affecting all Europe.¹⁵⁵ To prevent (further) political instability and the creation of an ungovernable society, the new reading public had to be educated and its ideas controlled; the Victorian writer often had a public role and cooperated in the creation of a social consensus among the lower classes. Religious propaganda had an equal role in shaping the figure of the ideal Victorian lower-class man.¹⁵⁶

Women, too, were the subject of idealisation. The ideal woman of the Victorian Age was a passive, pure and innocent creature, subjected to male figures and confined to the domestic realm¹⁵⁷ – the “Angel in the house”, as she was termed after Patmore's poem. Women were also expected to teach their

¹⁵³ See Harry Blamires, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

¹⁵⁴ See Maureen Moran, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

¹⁵⁵ See the brief part on Chartism in England at the beginning of this chapter.

¹⁵⁶ See Maureen Moran, *op. cit.*, pp. 10, 13; Franco Marucci, “I Testi nel Tempo: il Vittoriano”, in Franco Marucci (ed.), *Storia della Civiltà Letteraria Inglese 2*, *cit.*, p. 546.

¹⁵⁷ Obviously, this concerned middle-class women, whereas working-class women worked to contribute to family support.

children Christian morality, which was regarded as the basis of society. As Moran points out, religious teaching was once again a cooperating force in backing up and strengthening this ideal.¹⁵⁸ Given its popularity and its allegorical nature,¹⁵⁹ one may presume that our *Pilgrim* played a major role in the process of social control.

With regard to Victorian literary practices, poetry was the predominant form among the intellectual milieu. However, there were no new aesthetic theorisations in the field of poetic practice; the Victorians inherited and kept the Romantic theory of poetry as the product of genius,¹⁶⁰ an assumption that had been favourable to Bunyan. As for the works of prose, the realistic novel was the establishment's preferred narrative medium. Realism was usually conferred by the precise rendition of society and the characters' peculiar traits. Details were neatly observed and rendered. However, the moral and didactic aim of literature entailed a selection of items, at the expense of the crude and compromising ones; it probably also determined the Victorian preference for ideas and contents over the form.¹⁶¹ Moreover, Victorian “realism” did not impose a neglect of the imagination; on the contrary, as Blamires remarks, the Victorian Age was a period of “imaginative abundance”.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ See Maureen Moran, *op. cit.*, pp. 35 – 36; “The Angel in the House”, online source: http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/thackeray/angel.html, accessed on 19th May 2013, 14.23; “Note to *Women and Victorian Values 1837 – 1910*”, online source: http://www.ampltd.co.uk/digital_guides/women_and_victorian_values_parts_5_to_7/publications-note-part-5.aspx, accessed on 19th May 2013, 14.30.

¹⁵⁹ An allegorical work allows a certain degree of interpretation, so that its meanings may be the object of self-interested speculations.

¹⁶⁰ See Franco Marucci, *op. cit.*, p. 551.

¹⁶¹ See Franco Marucci, *op. cit.*, pp. 549 – 550, 552; John Holloway, “Generi, Sottogeneri, Motivi”, in Franco Marucci (ed.), *Storia della Civiltà Letteraria Inglese 2, cit.*, p. 588; Harry Blamires, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

¹⁶² Harry Blamires, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

As for language, we have already said that the Victorians did not pay meticulous attention to the texts' formal aspect and rather favoured the ideas. However, there's an interesting feature of Victorian narrative that must be mentioned, that is, the sociolects and sectorial languages' entrance in literary texts.¹⁶³ As a matter of fact, realistic requirements implied the recording of “actual” English language – one has to keep in mind, however, the distance between real data and their textual representation.

The social and political needs that brought about the demand for moral and didactic texts are also the main reason for the institutionalisation of English literature, which, as scholars have argued, occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁶⁴ As we have already said, literature could provide an effective means of social binding by championing fellow feelings among classes, getting readers accustomed to pluralistic thoughts and inspiring national pride; the ruling classes could thus take advantage of literature to exert ideological control over the masses.¹⁶⁵ It is no coincidence, then, that English literature was first recognised as an academic discipline not in Universities, but in working men's colleges. Decades were still to pass before English would not be frowned upon in Universities; on the contrary, it was immediately welcomed in Nonconformist Academies and working men and women's colleges.¹⁶⁶ English literature also featured in Civil Service entrance examinations, which were expressly designed to choose those who were more acquainted with national literary traditions; as Eagleton remarks, “the servants

¹⁶³ See Toni Cerutti, “La Questione della Lingua, 1850 – 1900”, in Franco Marengo (ed.), *Storia della Civiltà Letteraria Inglese 2*, cit., pp. 567 – 568.

¹⁶⁴ See Isabel Hofmeyr, “How Bunyan Became English”, cit., p. 107.

¹⁶⁵ See Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: an Introduction*, Minneapolis : The University of Minnesota Press, 2003, pp. 20, 22.

¹⁶⁶ See Terry Eagleton, p. 23; Isabel Hofmeyr, “How Bunyan Became English”, cit., p. 107.

of British imperialism”, equipped with an intimate knowledge of their national literature, “could sally forth overseas secure in a sense of their national identity, and able to display that cultural superiority to their envying colonial peoples”.¹⁶⁷ Bunyan's *Pilgrim* regularly featured both in colleges' syllabuses and in admission tests for the Civil Service.

So far we have discussed one side of the Victorian coin, however, as we previously stated, the age's status quo was far more complex. As for religion, it was indeed a significant presence in Victorian society; nonetheless, a process of social and cultural secularisation began in the very same years. Religious doubts slowly arised, fostered by scientific discoveries – i.e., geology opposed a new historical timeline to that previously deduced from the Bible, while the theories of natural adaptations that would eventually lead to Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) were challenging the idea of a providential plan designed by God. Doubts were also cast by Higher Criticism's historical approach to religion. By considering the Scripture as an ancient document – not God's Word – Higher Criticism implied a challenge to the Scripture's value and accuracy.¹⁶⁸ In this age of doubt, a significant attempt at saving at least the positive staples of Christian ethics was made with the theorisation of the Religion of Humanity. Comte's positivist religion, which had humanity as the object of worship, love and sympathy, influenced several Victorian men of letters, such as George Eliot and John Stuart Mill.¹⁶⁹ The process of

¹⁶⁷ Terry Eagleton, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

¹⁶⁸ See Maureen Moran, *op. cit.*, pp. 30 – 31.

¹⁶⁹ See Maureen Moran, *op. cit.*, pp. 32 – 33; “August Comte”, entry in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, online source: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/comte/>, accessed on 13th May 2013, 10.34.

secularisation suggested new readings of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which came up beside the usual religious ones.

In spite of the Victorian feminine ideal, gender expectations were a problematic issue, too. We have already touched on the demands women made for a change in gender ideologies. The first improvements in women's education and career prospects were indeed achieved in the Victorian Age. Feminist organizations were effectively disputing social expectations. They managed to attain, for example, the opening of new female colleges. As for universities, the University of London would be the first to open full degree courses for women, in 1878.¹⁷⁰ The opposition to the mainstream culture of the Angel in the House was obviously not general, but nonetheless serious and determined.

The example of the clash between different gender expectations – and, likewise, the clash between religious doubts and certainties – well describes the climate of the Victorian Age. The Victorian self-projection depicted her culture as stable and confident, but reality was far from that.¹⁷¹ Actually, the intellectual changes affecting the age resulted in doubts and uncertainties, whose streaks pervaded Victorian society – and its cultural outputs – at large.

5.5 The reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in the Victorian Age

As Mary Hammond remarks, the Victorian reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was as diverse and plural as nineteenth-century reading public

¹⁷⁰ See Maureen Moran, *op. cit.*, p. 35 – 38.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

itself.¹⁷² This should not come as a surprise, given the contradictory and multifarious cultural climate we have just described. The adaptability of the *The Pilgrim's Progress* resulted in the production of a variety of meanings and publications aimed at meeting the different needs of the Age.

The reception among the Victorian writers

“Bunyan [...] is not only endlessly quoted by the Victorians, he also haunts the plot-lines, pedagogies and affective subtexts of their literature”.¹⁷³

The Victorian men of letters widely considered Bunyan as a literary genius,¹⁷⁴ thereby demonstrating their inheritance of Romantic assumptions; as a matter of fact, the Victorians inherited both the Romantic aesthetic category of genius and the particular appraisal of Bunyan. Moreover, Bunyan had also been an important presence in the religious formation of many Victorian writers;¹⁷⁵ several of them paid homage to his name – amongst them, George Eliot, Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray and Charlotte Brontë¹⁷⁶ – embedding clear reminiscences of Bunyan's text in their own works. Besides proving the Victorians' acquaintance with the text, these allusions may be taken

¹⁷² See Mary Hammond, “*The Pilgrim's Progress* and its Nineteenth-century Publishers”, in W. R. Owens and Stuart Sim (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 101.

¹⁷³ Emma Mason, “The Victorians and Bunyan's Legacy”, in Anne Dunan-Page (ed.), p. 159.

¹⁷⁴ See Richard L. Greaves, “Bunyan through the Centuries: Some Reflections”, *cit.*, p. 115.

¹⁷⁵ See C. Stephen Finley, “Bunyan Among the Victorians: Macaulay, Froude, Ruskin”, in “*Journal of Literature & Theology*”, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 77 – 93, (March 1989), p. 77.

¹⁷⁶ See, for example, Eliot's *Adam Bede*: “Besides all this, [Adam] had read his Bible, including the apocryphal books; *Poor Richard's Almanac*, Taylor's *Holy Living and Dying*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, with Bunyan's *Life and Holy War*”, “Hetty looked at her much in the same way as one might imagine a little perching bird that could only flutter from bough to bough, to look at the swoop of the swallow or the mounting of the lark; but she did not care to solve such riddles any more than she cared to know what was meant by the pictures in *The Pilgrim's Progress*”, George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, London and Glasgow : Collins, 1969, pp. 193 – 194 and p. 133; see also Dickens: “There had been an old copy of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, with strange plates, upon a shelf at home, over which she had often pored whole evenings”, Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Oxford, New York : Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 122; see also N. H. Keeble, *op. cit.*, p. 256 – 257.

as a proof of Bunyan's outstanding presence and significance among the common readers, as these novels' realistic depiction of life features *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a close companion of their characters.

Bunyan's influence on Victorian writers, however, is far more profound and is not confined to a mere mentioning; his work is, on the contrary, a structuring presence of Victorian narrative. As a matter of fact, N. H. Keeble goes so far as to claim that “it is possible to read nineteenth-century novels [...] as rewritings of Bunyan which trace the progress of their [...] protagonists through trial and adversity”.¹⁷⁷ Both the structure and the themes of several Victorian novels may be traced back to *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

The structural pattern of progress-through-adversities, particularly in its Bildungsroman variation, characterises many Victorian novels. Barry Qualls identifies the Victorian Bildungsroman as the merging of the original German form and the seventeenth-century religious tradition.¹⁷⁸ The latter placed the emphasis on practical life and its investigation, the questions “Who am I?” and “What shall I do?” ringing in the mind of both the believer of the Puritan tradition – trying to assess his spiritual life – and the common man of Victorian novels.¹⁷⁹ The novels' depiction of man's progress seems also to be indebted to the tradition of Puritan meditation, which championed the observation of one's life in order to understand the workings of God.¹⁸⁰ Being one of the most prominent and popular representatives of seventeenth-century religious tradition, Bunyan would be an obvious reference point in structuring a literary work rooted in such cultural heritage. Sometimes, the title of a book or a telling

¹⁷⁷ N. H. Keeble, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

¹⁷⁸ See Barry Qualls, *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 10.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁸⁰ *Ivi.*

quote show Bunyan's structural influence on one's work. The title of Dickens's bildungsroman *Oliver Twist, or the Parish Boy's Progress* (1837 – 1839), for example, suggests that its pattern of progress-through-adversities comes from Bunyan. In *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840 – 1841), once again Dickens mentions Bunyan's *Pilgrim*. While pursuing her way towards the Midlands, Nell relates herself and her grandfather to Bunyan's Christian:¹⁸¹

As she looked back upon the place they had left, one part of it [a copy of *The Pilgrim's Progress*] came strongly on her mind. "Dear grandfather," she said, "only that this place is prettier and a great deal better than the real one, if that in the book is like it, I feel as if we were both Christian, and laid down on this grass all the cares and troubles we brought with us; never to take them up again."¹⁸²

The structure of *The Old Curiosity Shop* indeed recalls that of Bunyan – a journey-through-adversities from London, a City of Destruction, where Nell's grandfather has lost his shop. The quote seems just to disclose Bunyan's underlying influence on the structure of the work.

As for the novels' subject matter, the quest and the conversion themes that feature in some Victorian works plainly show their deriving from Bunyan's *Pilgrim*. Writers could take advantage of the stock of images Bunyan had provided them with. See, for example, the glimpses Jude catches of Christminster in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, which recall Bunyan's description of the Heavenly City: "some way within the limits of the stretch of landscape, points of light like the topaz gleamed", and again, "he had likened [Christminster] to the new Jerusalem". Jude believes to hear "the sound of bells, the voice of the city, faint and musical, calling to him, 'We are happy here'". Just like in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyanesque trumpets will sound at

¹⁸¹ See Vincent Newey, "Bunyan's Afterlives: Case Studies", in W. R. Owens and Stuart Sim (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 35.

¹⁸² Charles Dickens, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

the end of the novel, though they will not blare for the dying Jude.¹⁸³ One must not conclude, however, that Victorian writers entirely endorsed Bunyan's views and fully drew upon his work; actually, Bunyan's text underwent a process of appropriation, so that it could address the peculiar needs of the Age. Most significantly, in the Victorian Age the patterns of quest and conversion / regeneration made famous by *The Pilgrim's Progress* got secularised.¹⁸⁴

The process of secularisation implies a displacement: while Bunyan demanded that men sought the *heavenly goal* of a divine reward *in the world to come*, Victorian writers often depicted men pursuing an *actual goal, in the actual world*. The *Parish Boy's Progress* is prompted by the necessity to survive and live a better life, and so is Nell's;¹⁸⁵ Jude's goal is a secular admission at the university of Christminster. Not only is the goal earthly, but it sometimes reveals itself to be unattainable in spite of all the character's positive efforts: Little Nell dies miserably for the journey's hardships; Jude does not manage to enter university, which has moreover proved itself to be different from the ideal he had believed in. Their goal had acquired the nature of a vision, directing their path; the fact that their visions are depicted as being

¹⁸³ Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, London : Penguin, 1998, pp. 21, 23, 22. See Bunyan's description of the Heavenly City: "they had the City it self in view, and they thought they heard all the Bells therein to ring"; "the City shone like the Sun, the streets also were paved with Gold". John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, pp. 152, 153. See also Vincent Newey, "The Disinherited Pilgrim: *Jude the Obscure* and *The Pilgrim's Progress*", in "The Durham University Journal", vol. 75, pp. 59 – 61, (1987), pp. 59, 61.

With regard to Bunyan providing images to the Victorian novelists, see also Qualls's *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction, cit.*, pp. 89 – 110, where he highlights the presence of religious emblems, which Bunyan had helped popularising, as working metaphors in Dickens's novels.

¹⁸⁴ For an in-depth exploration of the matter, see Barry Qualls, *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction*.

¹⁸⁵ As a matter of fact, Qualls notices how the "incorruptible, undefiled" and spiritual inheritance that Bunyan speaks of [John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 13] seems to become the literal inheritance of Dickens's novels. See Barry Qualls, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

ultimately unattainable seems to be the fiercer criticism the Victorian novels addressed to the assumptions of the religious tradition.

As for the pattern of regeneration and reformation of the self, a considerable influence on Victorian secular adaptations of Bunyan came from Comte's writings on Positive philosophy and on the Religion of Humanity. Indeed, by theorising man's *humanist* development, Comte offered the Victorians a way out of the literary tradition of spiritual regeneration, which did not suit an increasingly sceptical age as the XIX century any longer.

Bunyan's *Pilgrim* would have been listed by Comte among the aesthetic expressions of the Theological stage of human development, as the work is grounded on the idea of a "sovereign direction of events by an arbitrary will"¹⁸⁶ – that is, the workings of divine providence – an idea that Comte sees as characterising the first stage of man's evolution. Bunyan's work seems also to agree with the social design Comte assigns to the Theological stage, a design that is "unfavourable to the rise of purely disinterested affections",¹⁸⁷ given the catholic single-mindedness about "considerations of personal safety",¹⁸⁸ namely, the "selfish [...] aim"¹⁸⁹ of saving one's soul.¹⁹⁰ The Positive stage, which Comte saw as forthcoming, would be markedly different. First of all, man would not search anymore for the absolute causes of phenomena, ascribing them to supernatural or abstract powers; rather, he would attempt to establish the natural laws that govern them according to a cause and effect

¹⁸⁶ August Comte, *The Positive Philosophy of August Comte*, London : John Chapman, 1853, II Vol., p. 170, online source: http://books.google.it/books/about/The_Positive_Philosophy_of_Auguste_Comte.html?id=PB8RAAAAYAAJ&redir_esc=y, accessed on 13th July 2013, 9.34.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 554.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 554 – 555.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 553.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 554. With regard to this, take into consideration Christian's fleeing from his family to pursue his own salvation. See John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

relationship.¹⁹¹ The transcendental realm, thus, would get replaced by the actual world as the subject of men's intellectual and emotional efforts. Most interestingly for our present concerns, the conceptualisation of an organic world ruled by the phenomena's interconnection includes human society, as well:

Can we conceive of a more marvellous spectacle [...] than the regular and constant convergence of an innumerable multitude of human beings, each possessing a distinct and, in a certain degree, independent existence, and yet disposed [...] to concur in many ways in the same general development, without concert, and even consciousness on the part of most of them [...]?¹⁹²

It is precisely the acknowledgement of this “universal social interconnection”¹⁹³ that came to be the centre of the regeneration pattern as adapted by the Victorians. The characters of the religious literary tradition underwent a conversion that turned them towards *God*; the Victorian characters, in a sceptical age, experienced a Comtian process of regeneration that turned them towards *man*. Not only, then, did Victorian writers depict men pursuing their own *actual goal in the actual world*, but often asked them to do good in order to be rewarded in the actual world by the sympathy and goodness of heart of people who are connected to us and act in the same way.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, the belief in an eternal afterlife being doubted, the only way to satisfy one's natural desire for eternity was taking part in the earthly social life – that continuous progress of human development of which we are all a part.¹⁹⁵ While the path of Christian's progress is spiritual and exclusive, that of the Victorian characters is

¹⁹¹ See August Comte, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 140.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹⁹⁴ “Positive morality will tend more and more to exhibit the happiness of the individual as depending on the complete expansion of benevolent acts and sympathetic emotions towards the whole of our race”. August Comte, *op. cit.*, p. 555.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 555.

secular, humanist and inclusive of all men.

An interesting example of the Victorian remodelling and secularisation of the pattern of regeneration can be found in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871 – 1872). The secular regeneration affects the character of Dorothea Brooke. At the beginning of the novel, she is very much like Bunyan's Mercy: an ardent woman who focuses her mind on a “spiritual life involving eternal consequences”.¹⁹⁶ Indeed, there is a striking resemblance between her “love of extremes, and her insistence on regulating life according to notions which might cause a wary man to hesitate before he made her an offer”¹⁹⁷ and Mercy's intimidating faith. As a matter of fact, when Mr. Brisk – Mercy's suitor – is put off by Mercy's acts and beliefs, Prudence (one of the maidens at Palace Beautiful) tells her: “Mercy in our days is but little set by any further than as to its name: the practice which is set forth by thy conditions, there are but few that can abide”.¹⁹⁸ In spite of the initial likeness, however, Dorothea and Mercy's paths will eventually divide: Mercy will achieve her ideal in the world to come; Dorothea will attain it in the actual world.¹⁹⁹ Moreover, while the path of the former is cast in a religious framework, the latter's gets secularised.

Vincent Newey brings chapter 80 into the spotlight; the momentous scene of Dorothea's conversion to a sense of unity and harmony with the others distinctly recalls Bunyan's pilgrims.²⁰⁰ After a night spent in despair over what she perceives to be Ladislav's falseness, Dorothea awakens, recognizing the

¹⁹⁶ George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, London : HarperCollins, 2011, p. 4.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁹⁸ John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

¹⁹⁹ See Sara Moore Putzell, “The Search for a Higher Rule: Spiritual Progress in the Novels of George Eliot”, in “Journal of the American Academy of Religion”, Vol. 47, No, 3, pp. 389 – 407, (September, 1979), p. 402.

²⁰⁰ See Vincent Newey, “Bunyan's Afterlives: Case Studies”, *cit.*, pp. 37 – 39; Vincent Newey, “Dorothea's Awakening: the Recall of Bunyan in *Middlemarch*”, in “Notes and Queries”, Vol. 31, Issue 4, pp. 497 – 499, (December 1984), pp. 498 – 499.

obligation of doing good towards the people that are connected to her: “What should I do? – How should I act now”,²⁰¹ she cries. As Newey claims, there is a clear and strong parallel between Dorothea's episode and the scene where Christian spends a night in “sighs and tears” and ends up crying: “What shall I do to be saved?”.²⁰² However, the similarities end here. What follows in *Middlemarch* is quite different from the events narrated in *The Pilgrim's Progress*: the pilgrims are focused on the future life, they want to gain the eternal life in the New Jerusalem, while Dorothea is focused on the present, on the actual world – as a matter of fact, she wonders what she should do *now*.²⁰³ The pilgrims' regeneration is personal and individual (as we have said, Mercy and Christian even leave their family behind to seek the eternal life), while Dorothea's “conversion” is acted out within – and is connected to – the community of human beings, as in Comte's Positive stage. The pilgrims fly the secular world; Dorothea takes part in it. Unlike Bunyan, George Eliot does not think that “one individual can realize an absolute 'perfect Right’”²⁰⁴ alone. Rather, each and every man is part of a great web of humanity, where one's actions affects other people, as Comte had theorised; the spiritual progress is unavoidably communal and secular. Thus, the religious pattern popularised by *The Pilgrim's Progress* has been taken up and reshaped by Victorian secular humanism.

Middlemarch's chapter 85 recalls Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, as well.

As a matter of fact, the chapter opens up with a lengthy quote from Faithful's

²⁰¹ George Eliot, *op. cit.*, p. 905.

²⁰² John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, pp. 10 – 11.

²⁰³ See also Charles Kingsley lamenting Bunyan's “single-minded concentration on the world to come” and neglect of action in the actual world. Norman Vance, “Pilgrims Abounding: Bunyan and the Victorian Novel”, in W. R. Owens and Stuart Sim, *op. cit.*, pp. 74 – 75.

²⁰⁴ Sara Moore Putzell, *op. cit.*, p. 402.

trial at Vanity Fair. The epigraph has a twofold role: it takes the reader right at the centre of the narrative unfolding,²⁰⁵ it offers a narrative counterpoint, which enables Eliot to further explore the views of secular humanism. The epigraph suggests a direct parallel between the trial and sentence passed on Faithful and that pronounced on Mr. Bulstrode; nonetheless, as with the Mercy/Dorothea parallel, Eliot draws conclusions that are quite different from Bunyan's.

Besides the epigraph, the chapter's opening paragraph directly mentions Bunyan, too:

When immortal Bunyan makes his picture of the persecuting passions bringing in their verdict of guilty, who pities Faithful? That is a rare and blessed lot which some greatest men have not attained, to know ourselves guiltless before a condemning crowd – to be sure that what we are denounced for is solely the good in us. The pitiable lot is that of the man [...] who knows that he is stoned, not for professing the Right, but for not being the man he professed to be.²⁰⁶

Faithful and Bulstrode's predicaments are clearly different: Faithful is guiltless, Bulstrode is not; after the trial, Faithful will be judged and rewarded by God, while Bulstrode is judged only by his fellow citizens. Nonetheless, it is on the grounds of these differences, and the ensuing dialectic clash, that Eliot manages to explore her ideas and justify her assumptions.

As Eliot claims, Faithful is a good man subjected to an unfair conviction, but we do not really pity him. His is a *rare* lot, “to know [himself] guiltless before a condemning crowd”. The sentence seems indeed to imply that erring is a much more common fate for men; the world is full of Mr. Bulstrodes, not Faithfuls. It is this very knowledge that should kindle the flame of human sympathy in our judging – the “sympathy for our erring and

²⁰⁵ The chapter deals with the Bulstrodes' departure from Middlemarch and Nicholas Bulstrode's inner turmoil after the scandal over his past life has broken out in town.

²⁰⁶ George Eliot, *op. cit.*, p. 944.

imperfect neighbors which is the basis of all right-doing and of all community cohesion”.²⁰⁷

The stress is once again on the necessity of a human communion. It is no coincidence that Eliot describes Mrs. Bulstrode's cry when acknowledging that her husband will be cut out of the community: “the mention of Mrs Casaubon's loan seemed a reflection of that public feeling which held it a matter of course that every one would avoid a connection with her husband. She was silent for some time; and the tears fell one after the other”.²⁰⁸ Moreover, though such differences are also due to the nature of their trial – Faithful is judged in court, while Bulstrode is “unofficially” judged by public opinion – the clamour of Faithful's condemning jury clashes with the social silence surrounding Bulstrode, which highlights even more his estrangement from the community.

In a sense, both Faithful and Bulstrode suffer from social estrangement. However, the social estrangement has a different value in Bunyan's and Eliot's texts: it is a punishment for Bulstrode, who is doomed to end his life among “the indifference of new faces”,²⁰⁹ it is a reward for Faithful, who is indeed killed by unjust men, but has “a chariot and a couple of horses waiting for [him]”, which will eventually carry him away from unrighteous men, “through the clouds with sound of trumpet, the nearest way to the celestial gate”,²¹⁰ where the holy dwell. A most significant difference emerges here and it regards

²⁰⁷ J. Hillis Miller, “*Middlemarch*, Chapter 85: Three Commentaries”, in “Nineteenth-century Fiction”, Vol. 35, No. 3, Special Issue: George Eliot, 1880 – 1980, pp. 432 – 453, (December 1980), p. 444. See also Karen Chase, *George Eliot: Middlemarch*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1991: “community for George Eliot depends most importantly not on principle, doctrine, or law, but on the binding ties of sympathy”, p. 43.

²⁰⁸ George Eliot, *op. cit.*, pp. 945 – 946.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 944.

²¹⁰ John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

the nature of ethical judgement:²¹¹ on the one side, we have a divine judicial authority, on the other, man's authority. The perfect and supreme authority of God could righteously judge. However, the by-now doubted God has begun to fall and has been replaced by the generally erring man, whose judicial authority cannot be based on righteousness but on the knowledge of human erring fate, that is, on sympathy. Obviously, a mischief is still recognized as such. As Chase remarks, “sympathy is understood not as thoughtless emotionalism, but as a union of thought and emotion – feeling regulated by ideas, ideas animated by feeling”;²¹² righteousness must be coupled with sympathy. What really changes, then, is the trial's aftermath. There are not chariots waiting for the accused anymore – whether they are aimed at taking the convicted in heaven or hell – rather, it is the human sympathy that awaits him (or *should* await him)²¹³ now. In Eliot's works, Victorian disbelief has replaced God with human sympathy.²¹⁴

There is a last interesting passage in *Middlemarch's* chapter. J. Hillis Miller properly defines it as a “devastating rejection of Bunyan's religious allegory”:²¹⁵

the duteous merciful constancy of his wife had delivered him from one dread, but it could not hinder her presence from being still a tribunal before which he shrank from confession and desired advocacy. His equivocations with himself about the death of Raffles had sustained the conception of an Omniscience whom he prayed to, yet he had a terror upon him which would not let him expose them to judgement by a full confession to his wife: the acts which he had washed and diluted with inward argument and motive, and for which it

²¹¹ See J. Hillis Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 443.

²¹² Karen Chase, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

²¹³ Mrs. Bulstrode, after all, ignores that her husband *is* indeed a thief and a murderer. Whether she would still faithfully stand by his husband's side having knowledge of his faults is questionable. As a matter of fact, Karen Chase points out that the community depicted in *Middlemarch* is an unsuccessful community because of its very failure in sympathizing. See Karen Chase, *op. cit.*, pp. 48 – 51.

²¹⁴ See Kerry McSweeney, “Middlemarch: Art, Ideas, Aesthetics”, in *Middlemarch*, edited by John Peck, Basingstoke, London : MacMillan Press, 1992, pp. 19 – 20.

²¹⁵ J. Hillis Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 445.

seemed comparatively easy to win invisible pardon – what name would she call them by? [...] Murder.²¹⁶

In Eliot's words, God appears as a mere personal projection,²¹⁷ whereby even guilty or unrighteous people may put on a hypocritical show to acquit themselves. This undermines the very grounds of Bunyan's allegory. The unreal projection that enables Mr. Bulstrode to define himself as an innocent man is just the one and the same process that ensures that Faithful is faithful, that is, an artificial naming that we have already seen characterising the allegorical process.²¹⁸

This essential exploration of Bunyan's presence in nineteenth-century literature deals extensively with just one specific text, and gives some minor notes on a handful of other Victorian novels; nonetheless, I feel the text touched upon may provide a meaningful insight into the Victorian ways of appropriating and adapting Bunyan to suit the age's ideas and purposes.

When dealing with the eighteenth-century reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, we have suggested a link between eighteenth-century rational faith and the character of Ignorance. Interestingly, in his *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction* Barry Qualls equally calls attention to Ignorance. When speaking of Dickens, Qualls highlights the reminiscences of Bunyan that are to be found in his texts. He then claims that Dickens is nonetheless distant from the traditional Christian perspective; rather, in urging men to do good deeds he often seems to be endorsing the Comte's Religion of Humanity's views. According to Qualls, the characters of Dickens that champion these views very

²¹⁶ George Eliot, *op. cit.*, p. 944.

²¹⁷ See J. Hillis Miller, *op. cit.*, pp. 444 – 445.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 444.

much resemble Bunyan's Ignorance; in a reversal of position, then, Dickens's Christian (but it could have been Eliot's Christian, as well) "often comes speaking the language of – guess who – Ignorance".²¹⁹ If eighteenth-century men of letters could mirror themselves in Ignorance's rational faith, then, Victorians might find themselves in Ignorance's emphasis on the goodness of heart: "[my heart] is a good one",²²⁰ Ignorance claims after the description of his good deeds, which, in his view, settle the relationship between God and his soul. It seems that Ignorance lends himself to adequately represent the stages of increasing secularisation that have characterized the English attitude towards religion: from the eighteenth-century rationalism that cooled off spiritual enthusiasm to the nineteenth-century feeling of a humanist obligation towards others that is tinged with Christian ethics.

The fact that Victorian writers could take images and themes from *The Pilgrim's Progress* and use them in their works – albeit remodelled – implies that Bunyan was by then an acknowledged part of England's literary heritage.²²¹ Writers could now mention him without the need to defend oneself like Cowper had previously done. Probably the most explicit recognition of Bunyan's growing importance in the literary canon was the publication of Froude's study on Bunyan for the "English Men of Letters" series (1880).²²² Froude once again endorsed the Romantic view of Bunyan as an unlearned "man of natural genius".²²³ He nonetheless scorned Bunyan's religious

²¹⁹ Barry Qualls, *op. cit.*, p. 136. See also Vincent Newey, "Bunyan's Afterlives: Case Studies", *cit.*, p. 36.

²²⁰ John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

²²¹ See N. H. Keeble, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 258.

²²³ James Anthony Froude, *Bunyan*, London : Macmillan and Co., 1909, p. 55.

enthusiasm,²²⁴ just like Coleridge had done before, the Victorian Froude accorded his preference to the Bunyan of Parnassus.

In the age of the realistic novel, Bunyan's genius became apparent in what was considered as a realistic description of characters and incidents; indeed, when praising the accuracy of Bunyan's narrative, Froude claims that “the Pilgrim though in a Puritan dress is a *genuine man*. His experience is so *truly human experience*, that Christians of every persuasion can identify themselves with him”.²²⁵ We have seen before that during the Victorian Age allegory was still under the negative light that the Romantics had put over it a few decades before. It is no coincidence, then, that in applauding Bunyan's novelistic genius Froude commends the realism of the characters, especially given that they are allegorical abstractions: “abstract qualities of character were never clothed in more substantial flesh and blood”.²²⁶ As it had already been with the Romantics, the realism of Bunyan's characterisation probably saved his allegory from being disregarded on the basis of an anti-allegorical bias – a bias that was born out of a distaste with eighteenth-century allegorical works.

Victorians could also appreciate the realism of the conversations that the characters have along the pilgrimage; what previously had been considered a vulgar and unrefined language could now be praised for his realism in portraying common people's vernacular. Moreover, in the wake of a trend that had begun with Southey's review, Bunyan's language was commended for its Anglo-Saxon purity.²²⁷

²²⁴ See N. H. Keeble, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

²²⁵ James Anthony Froude, *op. cit.*, p. 154. Italics mine.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 166. This remark indeed recalls the Coleridge's observations we have previously examined.

²²⁷ See Isabel Hofmeyr, “How Bunyan Became English”, *cit.*, p. 110.

Indeed, other men of letters would follow in Coleridge's footsteps and separate the Bunyan of Parnassus from the Bunyan of the Conventicle, in the process according their preference to the former. Roger Sharrock's *Casebook Study on Bunyan* features Ruskin's remark on *The Pilgrim's Progress*:

I had Walter Scott's novels and the *Iliad* [...] for constant reading when I was a child, on week-days: on Sunday their effect was tempered by *Robinson Crusoe* and the *Pilgrim's Progress*; my mother having it deeply in her heart to make an evangelical clergyman of me. Fortunately, I had an aunt more evangelical than my mother, and my aunt gave me cold mutton for Sunday's dinner, which – as I much preferred it hot – greatly diminished the influence of the *Pilgrim's Progress*; and the end of the matter was, that I got all the noble imaginative teaching of Defoe and Bunyan, and yet – am not an evangelical clergyman.²²⁸

Ruskin's remark has a twofold interest. First of all, it shows that the Victorians considered *The Pilgrim's Progress* apt for didactic purposes; despite the hint of irony, Ruskin's remark clearly implies that the text was regarded as a positive and morally enriching reading. We will see how this belief was indeed widespread. Secondly, it confirms the appreciation for the imaginative aspect of the text – that is, for the Bunyan of Parnassus.

So far we have discussed the Victorian men of letters' reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, that is, the middle-class reception of the text. We have seen an increasing secularisation of the text's reading and an ever growing preference for its literary value over the religious one. However, we began the discussion by highlighting the multifarious readings of Bunyan's work in the Victorian Age. The role Bunyan's text performed among the common readers had its peculiar features.

²²⁸ John Ruskin, *Praeterita: Outlines of Scenes and Thoughts Perhaps Worthy of Memory in my Past Life* (1886) in *The Works of John Ruskin*, edited by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, vol. xxxv (1908), p. 13, in Roger Sharrock (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 54 – 55.

The reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress* among Victorian common readers

Among common readers, *The Pilgrim's Progress* had a predominantly didactic use. Indeed, from the 1840's to the 1880's the market of the text's didactic editions flourished.²²⁹ As we previously said, the establishment could capitalise on the texts' didactic value and use them as a means of social control; *The Pilgrim's Progress* was no exception. With regard to this, one has to keep in mind that *The Pilgrim's Progress* was at the time socially widespread. Almost all Victorian religious practices had acquired an evangelical character; Bunyan's text closely follows evangelical patterns, which enabled it to extend its social reach.²³⁰ Probably, this in turn made *The Pilgrim's Progress* an ideal text to exert social control. A large body of footnotes and didactic commentaries was indeed added to the editions of Bunyan's work, possibly in order to control readerly interpretation.

Christian's meeting with By-Ends and the ensuing conversation between By-Ends and his friends, for example, had become a problematic passage with the advent of the Industrialization;²³¹ it therefore needed a codified and safe interpretation. The passage directly tackles the issue of the co-existence of material and spiritual wealth. Given that England was becoming increasingly devoted to the accumulation of capital – and the mass of working-class people had to work hard to provide the wealth of a few industrialists – the question was acquiring growing importance. The problematic passage is the one where Mr. Mony-love explores the relationship between material and spiritual wealth:

²²⁹ See Mary Hammond, *op. cit.*, pp. 103 – 104.

²³⁰ See Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan, cit.*, p. 58.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 106; 110 – 111.

Suppose a Minister, a worthy man, possessed but of a very small benefice, and has in his eyes a greater [...]; he has also now an opportunity of getting of it; yet so as by being more studious, by preaching more frequently, and zealously [...] for my part I see no reason but a man may do this (provided he has a call). [...] For why,

1. His desire of a greater benefice is lawful [...] since 'tis set before him by providence [...].
2. Besides, his desire after that benefice, makes him more studious, a more zealous preacher, &c. and so makes him a better man. [...]

And now to the second part of the question which concerns the *Tradesman* you mentioned: suppose such an one to have but a poor imploy in the world, but by becoming Religious, he may mend his market [...]. For my part I see no reason but that this may be lawfully done. For why,

1. To become religious is a vertue, by what means soever a man becomes so.
2. Nor is it unlawful to get [...] more custome to my shop.
3. Besides the man that gets [this] by becoming religious, gets that which is good, of them that are good, by becoming good himself.²³²

When he is asked his opinion, Christian seems to claim categorically that a genuine believer should disregard worldly riches to pursue spiritual wealth: only “Heathens, Hypocrites, Devils and Witches [...] are of [your] opinion”.²³³ According to Mary Hammond, the last edition to provide a commentary that completely disapproved of worldly wealth was an 1857 reissue;²³⁴ from that moment on, the issue became thorny, to say the least. Hammond examines an edition produced by Reverend James Black in 1873.²³⁵ The amount of editorial explanations is staggering, the First part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* consisting of more than a thousand pages. As for what regards By-Ends's passage, the editorial commentary manages to integrate the material and spiritual realms that Bunyan had put in opposition. In doing so, Black advanced a solution to the clash between Victorian values and the seventeenth-century Puritan values of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

According to Black, material wealth is not to be disregarded, provided that it is sought out and used for the right motives – the same applies to the

²³² John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, pp. 101 – 102.

²³³ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

²³⁴ See Mary Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 107 – 111.

secular power of the clergy. In his views, worldly riches are a fundamental contribution to social welfare; on the contrary, those who reject material wealth to pursue the spiritual one are selfish people:

[they] have no-one's welfare at heart except their own. If their example were followed to a large extent, how could benevolent institutions for the poor, the diseased, and the blind be supported, church ordinances be maintained [...]?²³⁶

As Hammond remarks, Black takes for granted that the public displays of good works implies true devotion, which, in turn, justifies wealth.²³⁷ If need be, God alone would judge human hypocrisy – as for the present time, it seems that working-class people must be content to contribute with their work and overlook social inequality. As a matter of fact, Black's commentary, which we could sum up as “the end justifies the means”, very much resembles Monylove's reasoning. Thus, a paradoxical situation arose – by reinterpreting the text's Puritan values to fit industrial England, Victorian commentators ended up siding with By-Ends and his friends' opinions.

The didactic use of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was not aimed only at working-class people; actually, the Second part of the text could be used with women, too. Indeed, given the Victorian debates around the women question and Bunyan's popularity, *The Pilgrim's Progress* could be rummaged in search of possible solutions. Apparently, the Victorians were enthusiastic about the book's contribution to the gender issue.²³⁸ We have already said that the Victorian ideal woman was confined to the domestic realm; she had to wholeheartedly support her husband and take care of her children's moral

²³⁶ James Black, *The Christian Life: an Exposition of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress*, London : James Nisbet, 1873, II Vol., p. 176, in Mary Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

²³⁷ Mary Hammond, *op. cit.*, pp. 110 – 111.

²³⁸ See Michael Mullett, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

upbringing. Indeed, the second part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* provides examples of feminine behaviour that perfectly suit Victorian expectations.

With regard to this, the clearest example is that of Christiana. Having “hardened [her] own heart” against her husband in the First part, she repents in the Second – “I have been sorely afflicted since my husband’s departure from me”, she claims, “but especially since he went over the river. But that which troubleth me most is, my churlish carriage to him when he was under his distress”.²³⁹ She therefore converts herself and dutifully follows in her husband's steps. When at the Interpreter's, she significantly introduces herself by saying “I am that woman that was so hard-hearted as to slight my husband’s troubles, and that *left him to go on in his journey alone*”;²⁴⁰ not only did she refuse the ways of the pilgrims, but she did not follow her husband.

Michael Mullett describes Christiana as a dynamic character, when it comes to matters of faith.²⁴¹ However, as he points out, her dynamism is restricted to the spiritual field; for all the other tasks, she heavily relies on men. As for women's teaching responsibilities, Christiana is the ideal woman – she is even praised for her teaching the Christian doctrine to her children: “You are to be commended for thus bringing up your children”,²⁴² Prudence tells her after an examination of their Christian knowledge. Overall, therefore, Bunyan's work could be used to teach Victorian women their role (as this was conceived by Victorian culture).

The Pilgrim's Progress was also used by Protestant missions abroad to convert the “heathens” subjugated by the British colonial rule. Sometimes it

²³⁹ John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, pp. 169, 173.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 187. Italics mine.

²⁴¹ See Michael Mullett, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

²⁴² John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

also made its way into colonial school syllabuses.²⁴³ Bunyan's text thus enjoyed a wide international circulation. The didactic role of the text was here twofold, namely, religious and social: its moral values were imparted to convert people to Christianity; at the same time, the imposition of English culture on foreign people was an act of social and cultural subjugation.

Given that *The Pilgrim's Progress* was used in British colonies, it was natural for the text to feature in Civil Service entrance examinations. This in turn ensured that Bunyan featured in the multitude of textbooks on English literary history that were produced at the time.²⁴⁴

However, *The Pilgrim's Progress* was diversely used by the Victorians: on the one hand, as we have just seen, it was a didactic text,²⁴⁵ aimed at exercising social control; on the other, it was read by political radicals, who found in Bunyan a friend and companion.²⁴⁶ As a matter of fact, E. P. Thompson claims that

Pilgrim's Progress is, with *Rights of Man*, one of the two foundation texts of the English working-class movement: Bunyan and Paine, with Cobbett and Owen, contributed most to the stock of ideas and attitudes which make up the raw material of the movement from 1790-1850.²⁴⁷

Activists could easily identify with the heroic struggle of a man who fiercely fights to accomplish his aim, whether this is a religious or a political utopia. The outcast status of the pilgrims could well reflect that of one who

²⁴³ See Isabel Hofmeyr, "How Bunyan Became English", *cit.*, p. 95.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

²⁴⁵ A curious note on *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a didactic text. In 1876, Benjamin West published *The Illustrated Polyglot Pilgrim's Progress*. The edition was in English and French and its aim, according to the editor's words, was favouring the acquisition of modern languages. See Renée J. Fulton, "The Polyglot Edition of *Pilgrim's Progress*: a Historical Note on Modern Language Methodology", in "The Modern Language Journal", Vol. 34, No. 5, (May, 1950), pp. 381 – 383.

²⁴⁶ Bunyan's work was even serialised in *The Northern Liberator*, a Chartist journal, as *The Political Pilgrim's Progress*. See Emma Mason, "The Victorian and Bunyan's Legacy", in Anne Dunan-Page (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 153.

²⁴⁷ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex : Penguin 1981, p. 34.

fought against an established social order. As an example, consider the passage where Christian and Faithful walk in at the Vanity Fair:

[Christian and Faithful] were brought to examination; and they that sat upon them, asked them whence they came, whither they went, and what they did there, in such an unusual garb? The men told them that they were pilgrims and strangers in the world, and that they were going to their own country.²⁴⁸

I deem it probable that passages like this might have suggested a personal reading to political activists – their radicalism being an *unusual garb* to the eyes of the political establishment, a garb that makes them *strangers* to contemporary society and pushes them to seek *their own utopic country*. Moreover, as we have already seen, radical politics and religious enthusiasm had often been aligned since the Civil War,²⁴⁹ hence, a political reading of a religious dissenting text probably would have not seemed weird as it might seem to us nowadays.

Consider also the passage where Christian and Hopeful trespass Giant Despair's private property:

there was, not far from the place where they lay, a castle called Doubting Castle, the owner whereof was Giant Despair; and it was in his grounds they now were sleeping: wherefore he [...] caught Christian and Hopeful asleep in his grounds. Then, with a grim and surly voice, he bid them awake [...]. Then said the Giant, You have this night trespassed on me, by trampling in and lying on my grounds.²⁵⁰

It is quite probable that this passage called to many readers' mind the increasing practice of enclosure by private landlords of what had previously been common ground, a practice which had become customary at the time and

²⁴⁸ John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, pp. 87 – 88.

²⁴⁹ See also David Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 57, 59. As a matter of fact, E. P. Thompson claims that “one feels often that the dormant seeds of political Radicalism lie within [the intellectual history of Dissent]”. E. P. Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 39. Quite interestingly, Thompson suggests that Dissent – Methodism in particular, in spite of its leaders' conservatism – greatly contributed to the growth of working people's self-confidence and organisational skills. See E. P. Thompson, *op. cit.*, pp.44 – 51.

²⁵⁰ See John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, pp. 109 – 110.

had made it more difficult for poor people to have access to agricultural land.²⁵¹

Political radicals could also identify with Bunyan himself, given that he had been imprisoned for his beliefs. The Chartist leader John James Benezet, for example, re-read *The Pilgrim's Progress* while in prison for his political actions;²⁵² he wrote in his autobiography: “Glorious Bunyan, you too were a 'Rebel', and I love you *doubly* for *that*”.²⁵³

In conclusion, *The Pilgrim's Progress* easily lent itself to the construction of different meanings, even opposing ones – as we have seen, it could be used and read as a means to either control or liberate society. People or organisations might use Bunyan's work to champion their own causes: the temperance forces, for example, read some passages as an attack against alcohol consumption; nationalists praised Bunyan's use of Saxon English, while in 1853 the text was even revised for the publication of an Anglican version.²⁵⁴ Hofmeyr talks indeed of a Bunyanmania spreading through nineteenth-century England.²⁵⁵ Besides the readings of *The Pilgrim's Progress* – be they household, silent or Sunday school readings – and the literary market of study guides, Bunyan was consumed through a flourishing merchandise, which comprised such items as Bunyan teacups, portraits and jigsaws for children.

²⁵¹ See *infra*, p. 109; Sharon Ruston, *op. cit.*, p. 17; Roger Pooley, *op. cit.*, pp. 87 – 88.

²⁵² See W. R. Owens and Stuart Sim, “Introduction”, *cit.*, pp. 18 – 19.

²⁵³ John James Benezet, cited in *Testaments of Radicalism: Memoirs of Working Class Politicians 1790 – 1885*, edited by David Vincent, London : Europa, 1977, p. 167, in W. R. Owens and Stuart Sim, *op. cit.*, p. 19. The link between political radicalism and christianity previously mentioned is plainly evident in Benezet's autobiography; published in installments in “The Christian Socialist”, the autobiography opens up with a quote from the Bible. See John James Benezet, *The Autobiography of One of the Chartist Rebels of 1848*, online source: http://gerald-massey.org.uk/bezer/b_autobiography.htm, accessed on 25th May 2013, 11.47.

²⁵⁴ See Richard L. Graves, “Bunyan through the Centuries: Some Reflections”, *cit.*, p. 115 – 116.

²⁵⁵ See Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan*, *cit.* pp. 59 – 61; Anne Dunan-Page, “Introduction”, *cit.*, p. 3.

5.6 The pilgrim gets secularised

The general picture of the Victorian reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress* is complex. The width of the work's appeal during the nineteenth century amply demonstrates the popularity it enjoyed and the recognition it finally attained among the men of letters; they both helped in pushing Bunyan's work in the limelight of Victorian culture.

Indeed, the Victorian Age awarded *The Pilgrim's Progress* with the entrance in the canon of English literature. The reasons for this acknowledgement are manifold: *The Pilgrim's Progress's* broad social reach ensured that Bunyan got remarkable attention with regard to its place in English literature;²⁵⁶ the text was also helped by its being a structuring presence in Victorian literature; further recognition came also from a growing literary market that featured *The Pilgrim's Progress* in its series of classics.²⁵⁷

In spite of the multifariousness of Bunyan's reception, a common trend did emerge during the Victorian Age, that is, the secularisation of the text's readings; not only was the *Pilgrim* secularised in the works of Victorian authors, as we have already seen, but it was growingly appointed secular features by its common readers. Indeed, the increasing secularisation of British culture was bringing about a general change in reading habits, which affected *The Pilgrim's Progress*, as well.²⁵⁸ As a matter of fact, the gradual establishment of *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a classic of English literature signals the shift from a religious to a secular reading of the text, which

²⁵⁶ See Isabel Hofmeyr, "How Bunyan Became English", *cit.*, p. 109.

²⁵⁷ See Mary Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 112 – 113.

occurred in the last decades of the XIX century. We have previously said that didactic editions flourished until the 1880's; from that moment on, their presence in the market faded, while *The Pilgrim's Progress* was increasingly sold and read as literature, rather than as a theological work.

This shift can be instantly noticed in late criticism of the text. In 1887, for example, *The People of the Pilgrimage: an Expository Study of 'The Pilgrim's Progress' as a Book of Character* by the reverend J. A. Kerr Bain was published; Kerr Bain analyses the characters as exemplifications of moral virtues, but throughout his exploration he also uses them as a means to analyse the narrative structure of the text.²⁵⁹ Quite tellingly, in the introduction Kerr Bain claims that “character is not an ornament merely [...] but a constituent substance. [...] The creation and management of character [...] is a foremost aim of the book as *work of art*”.²⁶⁰ As Hammond highlights, Kerr Bain's text is overall less concerned with theology than with literature. It is seemingly the same with Charles Firth's introduction to the 1898 edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.²⁶¹ Firth's essay significantly opens up by tracking the *literary* reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Soon after, he tries to explain the reasons for the text's “immediate popularity”; in doing so, he quickly touches on the religious value of the work and immediately turns to its narrative fabric, that is, to *The Pilgrim's Progress* “considered *simply as a story*”.²⁶² Firth's introductory essay is mostly interested in the textual structure of Bunyan's work; it therefore neglects its religious aspects but for a few minor remarks.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 113 – 114.

²⁶⁰ J. A. Kerr Bain, *The People of the Pilgrimage: an Expository Study of 'The Pilgrim's Progress' as a Book of Character*, 2 Vols., Edinburgh and London : Macniven and Wallace and Hodder and Stoughton, 1887, I, p. 22, in Mary Hammond, *op. cit.*, pp. 113 – 114, italics mine.

²⁶¹ See Charles Firth, in Roger Sharrock (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 81 – 103.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 82. Italics mine.

There is another interesting point in Firth's introduction. A consistent part of it is devoted to an analysis of the authors and works that might have influenced Bunyan in the writing process.²⁶³ The interest in Bunyan's possible sources of influence was, as Greaves points out, a peculiar aspect of nineteenth-century reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.²⁶⁴ It seems to me that such a widespread concern with the sources of the texts clearly showed Bunyan's admission in the English literary canon, that is, in an established and recognised flow of literary heritage.

Kerr Bain and Firth's essays on Bunyan well show the shift from a religious interest to a literary one, which had started in the Romantic Age²⁶⁵ and finally became predominant at the end of the nineteenth century. The secularisation of culture and the establishment of *The Pilgrim's Progress* as an English classic went at the same pace. In the process of cultural transition, *The Pilgrim's Progress* took the first steps into a new era of its critical reception; from that moment on, it would not anymore be read predominantly – when not uniquely – as a religious work, but for its artistic value. Indeed, one could wonder whether a text that is so much soaked with religious doctrine did manage to resist the impact with an increasingly secularised society. This indeed will be the underlying issue of the next chapter. Before moving on to the twentieth century, however, we will briefly take into consideration the nineteenth-century dissemination of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in British colonial countries.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 82 – 83; 88 – 89.

²⁶⁴ See Richard L. Greaves, “Bunyan through the Centuries: Some Reflections”, *cit.*, p. 117; see also N. H. Keeble, *op. cit.*, pp. 259 – 260.

²⁶⁵ See Coleridge's remarks and his praise of the Bunyan of the Parnassus, *infra*, p. 120 – 121; Southey's edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress* and the ensuing reviews by Scott and Macaulay, *infra*, pp. 133 – 146.

5.7 The missionary pilgrim (may end up as a revolutionary)

When discussing the eighteenth-century Evangelical revival, we have briefly touched on the Protestant mission movement the revival would promote some decades later. The Evangelical creed, coupled with the gradual expansion of the British empire, wove a web of missions in the colonised countries. Driven by the Evangelical imperative of proselytising, believers set up voluntary missionary societies to bring the word of the Gospel to the heathens outside Europe.²⁶⁶ Apparently, Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* was a key text in mission proselytism and was often the first book to be translated by missionaries.²⁶⁷

The reasons for Bunyan's appeal are fairly understandable. As we have already said, the narrative of *The Pilgrim's Progress* follows an evangelical pattern, and comprises the key concepts of Evangelicalism; hence, it was the ideal text to promote the evangelical belief. Moreover, as Hofmeyr points out, its very allegorical form made the text's cultural translation easier. The ambiguity of the interpretative act ensured that the text could be made to fit the native culture's beliefs, though still “apparently remaining the same book”.²⁶⁸

Although evangelical Protestants assumed it to be a universal text²⁶⁹ – a text whose evangelical value could be understood by everyone – *The Pilgrim's Progress* was actually modified and adapted in order to be accessible to its new

²⁶⁶ See Hilary M. Carey, *God's Empire: Religion and Colonialism in the British World, c. 1801 – 1908*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 75.

²⁶⁷ As a matter of fact, the text was often considered a substitute Bible. See Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan, cit.*, pp. 62, 78.

²⁶⁸ Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan, cit.*, p. 18. It must be highlighted, however, that adaptations and influences were obviously mutual: while the text was interpreted by the culture on which it was being imposed, the latter embraced practices found in the text. See, for example, Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan, cit.*, pp. 90 – 91.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.15.

readers. The text was abridged, summarised and dismembered. It took on different shapes, as it was transformed into postcards and posters. It was adapted as drama and hymn text.²⁷⁰ It was dispersed in bits and pieces, as missionaries wanted to establish which parts would appeal the most to the text's new audience.²⁷¹

Most of all, the translation process was a place of cultural hybridisation. The text was usually translated by a team formed by a first-language convert and a second-language missionary.²⁷² The first-language convert produced the cultural adaptation of the text, often selecting specific parts of the text to support the local interpretation of Christian religion.²⁷³ Indeed, besides a superficial indigenisation – i. e., landscapes and geographical references were usually made to agree with the local environment²⁷⁴ – the text underwent more considerable modifications so that it could suit the local peculiar circumstances. Local data entered *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which could then be easily experienced by his new readers.²⁷⁵

The Pilgrim's political readings are an interesting aspect of the local interpretations the text was given while travelling in the British colonies. Hofmeyr highlights the radicalism characterising certain African egalitarian versions of Christianity, whose newly converted believers were often part of social groups that were devoid of authority.²⁷⁶ As a matter of fact, African chiefs sometimes banned or persecuted the Christians, as they perceived them

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

²⁷¹ See Isabel Hofmeyr, “Evangelical Realism: the Transnational Making of Genre in *The Pilgrim's Progress*”, in W. R. Owens and Stuart Sim (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 132.

²⁷² *Ivi.*

²⁷³ See Isabel Hofmeyr, “Bunyan: Colonial, Postcolonial”, in Anne Dunan-Page (ed.), p.164.

²⁷⁴ See Isabel Hofmeyr, “Evangelical Realism”, *cit.*, p. 132.

²⁷⁵ See Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan*, *cit.*, pp. 84, 87.

²⁷⁶ See Isabel Hofmeyr, “Evangelical Realism”, *cit.*, p. 134.

as a threatening force. *The Pilgrim's Progress* could well be adapted and applied to these peculiar situations. As an example, Hofmeyr takes into consideration an Ila translation of the text, Ila being a language spoken in Zambia.²⁷⁷ The translation of the passage concerning Faithful's trial slightly modifies the original meaning of the text, adapting it to the local circumstances. As Hofmeyr remarks, in the Ila translation particular stress is put on Faithful's seditious activities: the indictment accuses him of bringing division where formerly none existed, with the explicit aim of humiliating the Chief and create a different political order; seemingly, the Zambian Faithful wishes to attract people to his ideas in order to subvert the current state of affairs, whereas Bunyan's Faithful disturbs the current state of affairs and only because of his behaviours ends up attracting people to his ideas. The shift in focus seems to be due to the influence of local political circumstances on the text's narrative, that is, the perception of Christians as a threat to the existing order.

There is evidence of a double reading of Bunyan in the Caribbean context of black Dissenters, where *The Pilgrim's Progress* was read as an allegory depicting both religious and racial persecution.²⁷⁸ Christopher Hill highlights the political value that the text acquired in China, where the leader of the Taiping movement,²⁷⁹ Hong Xiuquan, professed *The Pilgrim's Progress* to be his favourite book along with the Bible. Hill traces an enlightening

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 133 – 135.

²⁷⁸ See Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan, cit.*, pp. 88 – 90.

²⁷⁹ The Taiping rebellion was a political upheaval taking place in China (1850 – 1864). The rebellion was staged by the God Worshippers' Society, a radical religious group based on the ideas of Hong Xiuquan. Land expropriation and radical social reforms were the central features of their political agenda. See the *Encyclopædia Britannica's* entry for "Taiping Rebellion", online source: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/580815/Taiping-Rebellion>, accessed on 15th June 2013, 13.33.

parallel between the Taiping political purposes and the passage where Pickthank accuses Faithful during the trial at Vanity Fair:²⁸⁰ “he hath said [...] that if all men were of his mind, if possible, there is not one of these Noblemen should have any longer a being in this Town [...] he has bespattered most of the Gentry of our Town”.²⁸¹ The Taiping rebels may well mirror themselves in Faithful’s alleged hostility towards Vanity Fair’s noblemen.²⁸²

We have briefly touched on the political readings acquired by Bunyan’s text in the British colonies to suggest how it may be used by the people who received it via Protestant missionary efforts. Surely the “carriers” of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* had brought the text with them for purposes that differed from those of the receivers: the carriers’ purpose could be moral, as the missionaries aimed at saving the souls of the heathens abroad; it could be political, as the institutions “at home” might have been interested in fostering a process of cultural subjection. Quite ironically, though, the process had sometimes an opposite result. On the one side, the text influenced the receivers, on the other, the receivers influenced the text as they appropriated it and cast on it a personal reading; in this hybrid space, the *Pilgrim* was adopted and put to work according to the receivers’ needs.

The hybridisation of the text raised burning questions about the nature of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. The fact that it was being “contaminated” by foreign cultures disturbed several men of letters, who professed Bunyan’s text

²⁸⁰ See Christopher Hill, *A Turbulent, Seditious and Factious People, cit.*, pp. 375 – 376.

²⁸¹ John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

²⁸² As a matter of fact, the allegorical names of Vanity Fair’s noblemen relate to moral faults, rather than strictly political ones – i.e., “the Lord *Carnal Delight*, the Lord *Luxurious*, the Lord *Desire of Vainglory*” [John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 92]. However, as Hill claims, “books create their own audiences, and readers transform what they read [...] *The Pilgrim’s Progress* did not convey the same message to [its] Taiping readers as [it] did to the missionaries who had [it] translated”. Christopher Hill, *A Turbulent, Seditious and Factious People, cit.*, p. 376.

to be a marker of white Englishness rather than a universal text, as Evangelicals had it to be.²⁸³ Indeed, as we have previously seen, the rising subject of English literature was being increasingly employed at the time as a “marker of racial and cultural distinctiveness for those in the empire”;²⁸⁴ the role of English literature as a national badge was to be even more emphasised with the outbreak of the First World War. In such a nationalistic climate, Bunyan’s transnational position was to prove uncomfortable for certain men of letters at home; hence, attempts were made to bring the *Pilgrim* home. The twentieth century was to witness a clash between racial, exclusive readings of Bunyan and universal, inclusive ones.

²⁸³ See Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan, cit.*, p. 96.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Chapter 6. The twentieth century

6.1 The United Kingdom in the twentieth century

The historical context

The twentieth century witnessed the outbreak of catastrophic events that were to change completely the social and cultural climate of Europe. The First and Second World Wars (1914 – 1919; 1939 – 1945) deeply marked common experience. A huge mass of the population was activated to take part in the war crisis, in the very years when the enlargement of enfranchised people was giving life to mass democracy.¹ The First World War's mass mobilisation hastened the process of social change that the Industrial Revolution had begun in the previous century and that would lead to the birth of mass society.² A considerable effort was exerted to blend society in a single, close-knit community, which was much needed for the purposes of mass mobilisation.³ Literature was a means to create the sense of a community. Not only did the war affect the structure of society, but it had a strong effect on people's inner experience; indeed, the shock of war's large-scale destruction was so big that those who had experienced it often professed the event to be beyond words and comprehension.⁴

¹ See Leigh Wilson, *Modernism*, London, New York : Continuum, 2010, p. 46. We have already mentioned the 1918's Representation of the People Act that extended the franchise to all men over the age of 21 and all women over the age of 30. See the *Encyclopædia Britannica*'s entry for "Representation of the People Acts", online source: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/498472/Representation-of-the-People-Acts>, accessed on 18th June 2012, 10.14; see also the paragraph "The Election of 1918", online source: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/615557/United-Kingdom/274523/Lloyd-George>, accessed on 18th June 2013, 10.11.

² See Marica Tolomelli, *Sfera Pubblica e Comunicazioni di Massa*, Bologna : Archetipolibri, 2007, p. 1.

³ See Peppino Ortoleva, *Mediastoria. Mezzi di Comunicazione e Cambiamento Sociale nel Mondo Contemporaneo*, Milano : Net, 2002, p. 85, in Marica Tolomelli, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁴ See Leigh Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

The wars also brought about an acute economic crisis; it is estimated that around one person in four was unemployed during the interwar years.⁵ The economic depression had major repercussions on the very existence of the British Empire. As a matter of fact, Great Britain had to withdraw from the colonies due to its lack of economic and military authority: Britain left India (1947), Palestine (1948) and Egypt (1956); the 1950's and 1960's witnessed Britain's withdrawal from Africa.⁶

The cultural context

The term "Modernism" identifies a period of experimental writing that stretched from the late 1890's to the first half of the twentieth century. Its roots went back to the Industrial Revolution and the considerable changes this had produced, i.e., increasing urbanisation and industrialisation and a growing dependence on machinery.⁷ The First World War had a significant influence on the development of Modernism, as well, as it further undermined the already-shaken faith in God and human reason. Freud's conceptualisation of the unconscious was a further blow to the idea of man as a rational being able to know himself and the external world.⁸ By rejecting past Victorian conventions, moral standards and optimism,⁹ Modernism structured itself as a new response

⁵ See the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, online source: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/615557/United-Kingdom/274529/Baldwin-and-the-abdication-crisis>, accessed on 18th June, 10.18; see also Leigh Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

⁶ See the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, online source: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/615557/United-Kingdom/274536/Economic-crisis-and-relief-1947>, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/155242/decolonization>, both accessed on 18th June 2013, 10.20.

⁷ See Leigh Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.p. 29 – 31.

⁹ The unifying conventions of Victorian literature, for example, came to be generally rejected by modernists: characters and chronology were fragmented to depict the Modernist

to the changing world.¹⁰ As can be easily conceived, the modernists rejected the didactic value of art, which had had cardinal importance in the Victorian Age – as doubts were being raised as for man’s ability to comprehend the world, any absolute assumption on the nature of the world and man himself seemed to be a downright lie.¹¹

Though the first decades of the twentieth century were indeed a time of formal experimentation, conventional narrative forms continued to be produced. Most notably, writers recovered the genre of romance, emphasising its dreamy and imaginary features. C. Pagetti indeed highlights the break that separated a consumer-oriented narrative from the experimental one – a break characterised both by differences in formal features and commercial success.¹²

perception of the self as something that lacked stability; the structure of the sentences got (more or less) shattered, usually to represent the flow of the characters’ inner life; the narrator ceased to be a guide who provided reliable and enlightening comments. The very value of language as a channel through which truth could be conveyed came to be challenged. Indeed, the modernists started doubting of the words’ ability to transfer meaning and thematised their doubts in their writings’ language – the obscurity of the texts depicting also the elusive character of reality.

Modernism disrupted also the set of assumptions regarding the writer-reader relationship that had been largely shared up to then. The realistic novels of the Victorian Age depicted a common experience that the readers could recognise, at the same time grasping the moral truth that was encoded within them. We have seen in the previous chapter how the Victorian writer was invested with a social role and often compelled to create morally-oriented art; this meant avoiding the treatment of several subjects – predominantly those related to the sexual sphere. Distress grew at this limitation, fostered by emerging divergent views on art and the artist’s role, whereby art started reflecting upon itself rather than on the external reality. Rather than searching for social consensus, artists started to challenge their public’s expectations, and the values held by society. Eventually, the modernist open treatment of sex (when not obscenity), coupled with the texts’ difficulty and ambiguity, separated the modernist writers from the reading public. See Leigh Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 9, 17, 20 – 22, 76; Marcello Pagnini, “Difficoltà e Oscurità: il Linguaggio del Modernismo”, in, *Storia della Civiltà Letteraria Inglese 3*, edited by Franco Marengo, Torino : UTET, 1996, pp. 26, 30 – 31; Peter Faulkner, *Modernism*, London and New York : Routledge, 1977, pp. 1 – 2, 4 – 6; Geoffrey Hughes, “Lingua e Letteratura nel Novecento”, in Franco Marengo (ed.), *Storia della Civiltà Letteraria Inglese 3, cit.*, p. 437.

¹⁰ See the entry for “Modernism” in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, online source: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/387266/Modernism>, accessed on 20th June 2013, 13.31.

¹¹ As a matter of fact, the didactic value of art had already been challenged by nineteenth-century Aestheticism. See Peter Faulkner, *op. cit.*, p. 4; Marcello Pagnini, “Difficoltà e Oscurità: il Linguaggio del Modernismo”, *cit.*, p. 29.

¹² See Carlo Pagetti, “Contemporanei’ e *Romancers*: gli Altri Volti del Romanzo Novecentesco, 1900 – 1939”, in Franco Marengo (ed.), *Storia della Civiltà Letteraria Inglese 3, cit.*, pp. 112, 114 – 115, 119.

Indeed, the obscurity, difficulty and structural complexity of Modernist narrative experimentations were to polarise literature between elite/high literature and low literature, the former being relegated to a small number of readers.¹³

The Modernist drive towards literary experimentation gradually waned; more conventional literary forms gained the upper hand. The neglect of Modernism occurred on the grounds of a renewed political commitment on the parts of the intellectuals.¹⁴ During the 1930's, allegories, futuristic romances, utopian and dystopian fiction came back to the centre of the cultural scene; metropolitan chaos and urban landscapes on the brink of an impending catastrophe entered the literary domain.¹⁵ Pagetti casts the retrieval of dystopian and allegorical forms in a post-war scenario, arguing that such literary modes were a response to the impossibility of adequately representing the violence and destructiveness people had witnessed during the war.¹⁶ Indeed, Bunyan's *Pilgrim* was to be revitalised by WWI, as its allegorical images lent themselves to describe the apocalyptic scenarios of the war's years.

According to Pagetti, the first expressions of Post-Modernism are to be identified precisely in the dismissal of Modernism in favour of a socio-political engagement, and in the resulting active and thorough reformulation of the inherited concepts; as a matter of fact, the formal innovations of Modernism did not vanish, rather, they were adopted, adapted and applied to spheres of public interest.¹⁷

¹³ See Geoffrey Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 439.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 440; Jean-Michel Rabaté, "Letteratura e Conflitto: gli Anni '30", in Franco Marengo, *Storia della Civiltà Letteraria Inglese 3, cit.*, p. 376.

¹⁵ See Carlo Pagetti, *op. cit.*, p. 126; Jean-Michel Rabaté, *op. cit.*, p. 379.

¹⁶ See Carlo Pagetti, "I Percorsi del *Romance Contemporaneo*", in Franco Marengo (ed.), *Storia della Civiltà Letteraria Inglese 3, cit.*, p. 645.

¹⁷ See Jean-Michel Rabaté, *op. cit.*, p. 376.

Scholars sometimes expose the lack of a precise definition of Post-Modernism, nonetheless, the push towards processes of reformulation – namely, intertextuality and conscious reconfigurations of previous works – is indeed listed among the peculiar features of what is regarded as “post-modern”.¹⁸

As for language, Hughes highlights the constant process of linguistic levelling that marked the twentieth century, whereby the literary language gradually became more and more similar to the common speech: “la distinzione tra «alto» e «basso», tra «serio» e «popolare», si fa sempre meno netta”.¹⁹

We have seen how religious doubt had been haunting the Victorians. The process of secularisation continued to unfold up to and during the twentieth century. Nonetheless, probably as a reaction to this very process, people started turning to other modes of metaphysical satisfaction. The Christian belief did not leave an empty space behind, as it was *replaced* with other forms of faith; as an example, spiritualism, which had arrived in England from America in 1852, was still popular in the first decades of the twentieth century, while some people developed an interest in eastern religions.²⁰

A further feature of twentieth-century culture that deserves to be mentioned for the purposes of this thesis is the decisive establishment of

¹⁸ See Geoffrey Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 451; see Gary Aylesworth, entry for “Postmodernism” in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, online source: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/postmodernism/>, accessed on 26th June 2013, 10.55.

¹⁹ Geoffrey Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 429.

²⁰ See Georgina Byrne, *Modern Spiritualism and the Church of England: 1850 – 1939*, Woodbridge, Suffolk : Boydell & Brewer, 2010, p. 2, Googlebooks online source: <http://books.google.ca/books?id=tN0sgghm79oC&printsec=frontcover&hl=it#v=onepage&q&f=false>, accessed on 26th June 2013, 15.35; Leigh Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

English literature as an academic subject. We have seen how English literature had risen in importance during the nineteenth century. Its institutionalisation as a respectable field of study occurred in the first decades of the twentieth century and is closely related to the unfolding of political events of the time. With the outbreak of WWI, philology – which was not only literature's academic rival, but an accepted area of study – fell in disgrace as a result of its fatal link to Germany.²¹ On the contrary, literature was helped by the upsurge of patriotic nationalism that marked the years following the war. Literature was held to bear the cultural heritage of Britain, an assumption that promoted the value of literature among the academic establishment. Moreover, it was still considered as a possible means to unite the nation and solve class-division.²² A committee was thus appointed, in order to report on the practicability of English teaching. The investigation's results were to be exposed in the Newbolt Report (1921), which encouraged the study of English language and literature in both elementary and secondary schools. According to the results of the Report, English literature would indeed promote a sense of national dignity and self-confidence, which in turn would help to cement society together:²³

the English people might learn as a whole to regard their own language, first with respect, and then with a genuine feeling of pride and affection. [...] Such a feeling for our own native language would be a bond of union between all classes and would beget the right kind of national pride. Even more certainly should pride and joy in the national literature serve as such a bond. This feeling [...] would [...] furnish a common meeting ground for great numbers of men

²¹ See Terry Eagleton, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

²² See Geoffrey Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 422; Leigh Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 126 – 128.

²³ See Louise Poulson, *The English Curriculum in Schools*, London : Cassell, p. 24, Googlebooks online source: http://books.google.it/books?id=nA7W54zj43wC&dq=newbolt+report&hl=it&source=gbs_navlinks_s, accessed on 27th June 2013, 10.09; Brian Doyle, *English and Englishness*, London : Routledge, 1989, p. 41, Googlebooks online source: http://books.google.it/books?id=SH87YUJ3nGcC&dq=newbolt+report&hl=it&source=gbs_navlinks_s, accessed on 27th June 2013, 10.21.

and women who might otherwise have never come into touch with one another.²⁴

The Pilgrim's Progress was one of the literary works brandished by the champions of English literature. Frank Raymond Leavis and his wife, among the others, would then be decisive in promoting its academic study;²⁵ as Eagleton puts it, while “in the early 1920s it was desperately unclear why English was worth studying at all; by the early 1930s it had become a question of why it was worth wasting your time on anything else”.²⁶

6.2 The reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in the twentieth century

The Victorian Age had seemed to canonise Bunyan's text once for good, nonetheless, harsh criticism against it was revived during the first years of the twentieth-century. A sudden help came from WWI, which revitalised Bunyan, inspiring both adaptations of his themes and allusions to his works to describe the climate of those years. From that moment on, in spite of some scattered and hostile critics, the text would retain its grip on academic studies.²⁷

Hostile criticism at the turn of the century. Robert Bridges's essay (1905)

After the laurels of honour he had received from the Victorians, during the first decade of the twentieth century Bunyan had to face severe criticism once again. Critics focused on some of the *Pilgrim's* behaviour – i.e., his

²⁴ Board of Education, 1921, pp. 22 – 23, in Louise Poulson, *op. cit.*, pp. 24 – 25.

²⁵ See Leigh Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 129 – 130; Terry Eagleton, pp. 26 – 28.

²⁶ Terry Eagleton, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

²⁷ See Richard L. Greaves, “Bunyan through the Centuries: Some Reflections”, *cit.*, pp. 117 – 120.

leaving behind his family to pursue his own salvation – which were felt to be “a blasphemy against certain fundamental ideas of right and wrong which our consciences most instinctively approve”.²⁸

Sharrock's *Casebook* on Bunyan features an essay by Robert Bridges, which I feel could work as a summary of early twentieth-century negative criticism on Bunyan.²⁹ Bridges opens his essay precisely by pointing out Christian's behaviour, namely, the fact that he flees from the City of Destruction and “leaves his little family to their fate”³⁰ – something that in Bridges's views shows the narrowness of Bunyan's theology. At the turn of the century, the religious enthusiasm of *The Pilgrim's Progress* seemed at least outdated. Most significantly, Bridges claims that “the notion that any sound educational use could be made of [*The Pilgrim's Progress*] seems to me wrong [...] [as] it neglects the practical side of morals”.³¹ This claim marks indeed a turning point in Bunyan's reception, as we have seen how *The Pilgrim's Progress* had been considered an apt text for educational purposes up to the nineteenth century. Bridges himself recognizes this change in the history of the text's reception: “in this regard his book is like Milton's epic, which was at first esteemed for its plot and theological aspect, and is now read in spite of them”.³²

In spite of the alleged educational value of Bunyan's text, Bridges asserts that he has never put to use anything from his work. According to him, Bunyan has indeed seized great human topics, but he has stopped to mere

²⁸ See H. F. Jones (ed.), *The Note-Books of Samuel Butler*, London, 1897, pp. 188 – 189, in Richard L. Graves, “Bunyan through the Centuries: Some Reflections”, *cit.*, p. 117.

²⁹ See Robert Bridges, “Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*”, in *The Speaker*, 1905, in Roger Sharrock (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 107 – 115.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 107. Later on he would add: “Christian, as we see him, is selfishly seeking his own salvation; he cares of nothing else. [...] Though he receives help from many, he helps nobody; he finds fault with everybody”, p. 112.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 115.

nomenclature – albeit an effective one, “the value of which it is sometimes difficult to exaggerate”³³ – rather than exploring them as they would have deserved. To him, this wipes out any usefulness the book might have had: “Most men must have waded in the Slough of Despond [...] but it has not escaped my attention that I never in my despondency found any assistance from Christian's adventure”.³⁴

Bridges's essay does not spare his attacks to the very form of the text, that is, the allegorical mode: “the limitations of human knowledge suggest that the *υπόνοια* [hidden thought, true intent] should be subordinated to the story. Here would appear the real artistic opportunity, and the reason for the form. Bunyan's self-security of opinion led him to the contrary method”.³⁵ It seems to me that Bridges is still under the influence of the Romantic disregard for allegory. We have seen how allegory works, that is, the allegorist places an idea/ideal – whose value is determined by a cultural authority – at the very centre of his allegorical building; the ideal then determines his interpretation of the factual world. The idea that a work of art grows (or should grow) only organically, out of its meaning – that is, without a mechanical intervention from the outside – was an aesthetic theorisation of Coleridge. Its long-lasting effects were still visible a century after.

It is only Bunyan's prose style that gets Bridges's praise. The situation is thus quite ironic. While the religious and educational value of *The Pilgrim's Progress* up to then had generally been admired, its language and style had often been scorned as homely. In Bridges's essay, it is the very opposite – the

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

³⁴ *Ivi.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

text's educational value is neglected, its direct and colloquial language is commended: "his prose style [...] is admired by all who prefer the force of plain speech to the devices of rhetoric".³⁶ Bridges's appreciation of Bunyan's language should not surprise us, given that 8 years after this essay he would be a co-founder of the Society for Pure English (1913). The Society's first tract claimed that the association "would aim at preserving [...] [our vocabulary's] traditional idioms", thereby supporting English common speech against the "schoolmasters and grammarians' [...] enforcing of [...] 'rules' based [...] on what has come to be considered 'correct' usage".³⁷ Hughes's remark on the twentieth-century process of increasing non-discrimination between common speech and literary language may also explain this change in attitudes towards Bunyan's prose from a broader point of view, regardless of Bridges's personal beliefs.³⁸

The last interesting point in Bridges's essay regards the beginning of the historical contextualisation of Bunyan's work. When dealing with the Bunyan's alleged realistic depiction of his characters' nature³⁹ – specifically, Talkative's temperament – Bridges claims "that [Talkative] existed in *Bunyan's time* I believe, and that he is drawn from the life; but there is hardly such a man

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

³⁷ Society for Pure English, *Tract No. 1*, Clarendon Press, 1919 (reprint of the original prospectus, first published in 1913), online source: <http://archive.org/stream/societyforpureen12358gut/12358.txt>, accessed on 31st July 2013, 14.51.

³⁸ See *infra*, p. 188. In any case, take also in consideration the legacy of nineteenth-century appreciation for realistic diction.

³⁹ The idea of Bunyan's characters as providing realistic portrayals of men had grown in importance at the end of the nineteenth century. There is ground for thinking that the nineteenth-century turn towards realistic fiction paved the way to extensive realistic readings of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. See, for example, J. W. Hales claiming that "the secret of [Bunyan's] success [...] is that he deals with realities. He could dispense with books [...] because he could paint straight from nature". J. W. Hales, *Folia Literaria*, 1893, p. 255, in Roger Sharrock (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 80.

nowadays – a Ruffian who discusses Justification [...] on the ale-bench. He was a monster *of his day*, sectarian, not human 'in the large wide spirit of humanity'".⁴⁰ And again, as a final remark, "[Bunyan's] theology needs so much allowance that anything which dislocates him from his time does him vast injury".⁴¹ Actually, this is not the first time that critics of Bunyan urge a contextualisation of the discourse. We have already seen how Southey, Scott and Macaulay had already cast their criticism in a historically conscious dimension. However, they had not been generally followed by the ensuing critics.⁴² Seemingly, the thread was to be picked up by twentieth-century criticism. Some instances of this trend may already be found in the first years of the century – as Bridges's essay shows – but other and more thorough studies would follow in paying attention to Bunyan in relation to his times. The attack on Bunyan's "narrow theology", which we have discussed at the beginning of our analysis, marks the distance between Bunyan and twentieth-century critics' sensitivity – a distance that gets acknowledged by the critics' drive towards contextualisation.

⁴⁰ Robert Bridges, *op. cit.*, p. 109. Italics mine.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁴² As a matter of fact, Bridges has a dig at those who "Victorianise [Bunyan's] spelling", thereby dislocating Bunyan's language. See *ivi*.

A positive evaluation from the 1910's. T. R. Glover's "On the
Permanence of *The Pilgrim's Progress*" (1915)

While some⁴³ criticised the paradoxical immorality of Christian's behaviour as depicted by Bunyan, T. R. Glover mentions Christian's family abandonment to support some of the views he expresses in his essay, "On the Permanence of *The Pilgrim's Progress*".⁴⁴ Glover's defence of Bunyan's work rests very much on ethical and philosophical considerations, as well as on aesthetic motives. Moreover, as we will see, his philosophical considerations seem to be linked to England's historical and political situation at the time of the essay's publication, that is, its involvement in WWI.

As for the aesthetic features of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Glover praises Bunyan's style and extols its spontaneity and homeliness; Bunyan's talent for reporting the spoken language, thus, seemed by then a nearly indisputable fact, as well as commendable, given that appreciations for it came from both positive and otherwise hostile criticism.

What is more interesting, though, is Glover's "philosophical" defence of Bunyan's text. Glover wonders whether its theme – "the adventures of a soul stirred by the fear of hell"⁴⁵ – is a noble or true theme, where the term "true" seems also to entail a question regarding its being a valuable one up to our own days.⁴⁶ "Today, under the influence of a rather unreflective charity and

⁴³ See Robert Bridges and Samuel Butler, cited before. See also Richard Dowling, *Ignorant Essays*, London : Ward and Downey, 1887, p. 72, online pdf file: <http://ia600308.us.archive.org/15/items/ignorantessays00dowluoft/ignorantessays00dowluoft.pdf>, accessed on 15th June 2013, 10.54.

⁴⁴ See Roger Sharrock (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 120 – 127.

⁴⁵ T. R. Glover, "On the Permanence of *The Pilgrim's Progress*", in Roger Sharrock, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

⁴⁶ Just like Bridges, Glover recognizes the temporal gap – hence the need to contextualise Bunyan's work – when writing that "Satan and Apollyon were among the necessary

of scientific conceptions [...] there is a tendency for men to underestimate the power of evil as a force in human affairs”,⁴⁷ he claims. The fact that “the power of evil” is “underestimated”, however, implies unwariness towards an actual concern. Glover seems thus to be claiming that the conceptions and concerns that can be found in Bunyan – though expressed in the cultural terms of his own time – are indeed “up to date” with the current problems of man, and the truth of his experience; rather, it is the contemporary people that are not attuned to the laws and events of life. Bunyan is here attached a value that goes beyond time, as his work can speak to both past and present people.

Glover resolves the debate around Christian’s family abandonment in the same way: the charges of immorality are peculiar to a blind criticism, which overlooks the “historical as well as philosophic reason” that proves that “sometimes a family has to be forsaken”,⁴⁸ in spite of all the pain involved in so doing. Once again, in Glover’s views, Bunyan has understood and depicted an ethical point that people seem to be ignoring, or belittling. If we keep in mind the date of the essay’s writing and publication – the essay was published in 1915 – we cannot but take into consideration the possibility of a subtext running throughout Glover’s criticism of Bunyan. The reference to the “power of evil as a force in human affairs” may have called to the reader’s mind the wartime events that were unfolding in Europe, while the war could well be considered as a valid “historical reason” to forsake one’s own family. If we are to hold the probability of a wartime subtext in Glover’s essay, we cannot avoid interpreting the following passage as an allusion to WWI and the necessary

preconceptions of a writer in Bunyan’s day [...] however grotesquely they may strike a modern ear”, *ibid.*, p. 122.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 120 – 121.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

engagement in it, the final quote being there as a reference to voluntary enlistment:

Above all [*The Pilgrim's Progress*] is a book of Victory. There is the Celestial City, with its bells ringing, at the end, but what is more to the point for us just now, we see Christian wounded, shamed and fallen [...] and yet there and then consciously 'more than conquerour through him that loved us'. [...] And, when the last page is read, how often has the word of the 'Man of a very stout Countenance' come to the reader's lips – 'Set down my name, Sir'?⁴⁹

We have seen before how English literature came to be linked to politics and the sense of English identity in the years of, and following, the war. It would not be improbable for Glover to have put an underlying motive in his criticism. The glowing praise he gives Bunyan is worth mentioning, too:

The *Pilgrim's Progress* is one of those permanent books which survive their own theories. Paul, Augustine, à Kempis, and Bunyan had their views of the world natural and spiritual, and many of these views are no longer held. But they put more into their books than views – they worked life and experience into them in such a way that no re-modelling of Theology or Philosophy will take away their value. They stand as part of the great inheritance of our race.⁵⁰

This remark has a twofold interest. Firstly, by acclaiming the ability of Bunyan in rendering the staples of human experience, Glover explains the reason for the everlasting value of his work – that is, the text's resources for its own appropriation and adaptation in spite of cultural changes.⁵¹ Secondly, the use of the ambiguous word "race" widens the issue. In relation to Bunyan's *Pilgrim*, the term could be used to refer to the English race, thereby suggesting a possible involvement in the debates around literature and the English national identity, which took place during the years of the war;⁵² it does not seem to be the case with Glover, however, since he lists non-English men of Church along with Bunyan. It could be used to refer to a *white* and *Christian* race, as opposed

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁵¹ In this case, the cultural changes taken into consideration are those which regard religion, as Bunyan is mentioned among other men of the Church.

⁵² If we assume that the wartime subtext was put there on purpose, this would be a highly likely option.

to the centrifugal dissemination of the text in the colonies. Lastly, it could be used to allude to the human race, thus bestowing a universal value to the *Pilgrim*.⁵³ As we will see, in the 1920's and 1930's these two last views would be the opposing terms of a debate concerning the value of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. However, the wartime readings of Bunyan should not be overlooked, either. We have proposed an underlying wartime theme in Glover's essay. His criticism was probably aimed at intellectuals, rather than general readers; nonetheless, during WWI the latter equally appropriated Bunyan's text and used it as a means of personal expression in such a tragic situation.

The pilgrim goes to war

According to Richard L. Greaves's claim, in the first decade of the twentieth century some critics observed that Bunyan was no longer read.⁵⁴ In the essay we have previously analysed, Robert Bridges carried out a poll that ascertained the modest success of *The Pilgrim's Progress* among the common readers.⁵⁵ However, Bunyan's allegory *of the world to come* came to be helped by the events happening in *this* world, namely, the outbreak of WWI. We have said before that WWI was an experience that many found indescribable; if the First World War was beyond words, then those who took part in it could avail themselves of Bunyan's text to express the inexpressible.⁵⁶ The horrific scenes of war were described by the soldiers in Bunyanesque terms, the analogy building up a frame wherein the new experience could be cast and described.

⁵³ This option would be a favourite one for evangelical readings of the text, as we have seen when dealing with the dissemination of the *Pilgrim* via the Mission Movement.

⁵⁴ See Richard L. Greaves, "Bunyan through the Centuries: Some Reflections", *cit.*, p. 117.

⁵⁵ See Robert Bridges, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

⁵⁶ See Richard L. Greaves, "Bunyan through the Centuries: Some Reflections", *cit.*, p. 118.

Bunyan's Slough of Despond and the Valley of the Shadow of Death featured prominently in the soldiers' accounts.⁵⁷ As an example, one Major Pilditch mentions Bunyan's Valley of the Shadow of Death to describe the wartime landscape:

The bare poles and brick heaps of Souchez looked perfectly weird and unnatural as the sun came out and threw it all up into a livid pink-hued distinctness. I knew I should never be able to describe its sinister appearance, but that I should never forget it. It reminded me of an old wood-cut in my grandfather's "Pilgrim's Progress", of the Valley of the Shadow of Death where Christian met Apollyon.⁵⁸

The burdened soldiers – carrying a heavy military equipment with them – would often call to mind Bunyan's opening image of Christian carrying the burden upon his back.⁵⁹ It is quite probable that E. E. Cummings's autobiographical novel, *The Enormous Room* (1922) – where allusions to *The Pilgrim's Progress* abound – further popularised the association between the burdened Christian and the loaded soldier of WWI, given Cummings's obsessive focus on the loading and unloading of his equipment throughout the journey towards the French prison.⁶⁰

The image of the burden – or better, the image of the deliverance from the burden – was used to describe the feelings felt at peace's restoration; the day after Germany signed the armistice with the Allies (11th November 1918) a columnist of *The Daily Express* quoted Bunyan to express his relief at the war's end: "Like Christian, I felt a great burden slip from off my shoulders".⁶¹ Quite

⁵⁷ See Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1975, pp. 137 – 144.

⁵⁸ From the Archives of the Imperial War Museum, in Paul Fussell, *op. cit.*, pp. 139 – 140. Actually, Christian meets Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation, not in the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

⁵⁹ See Paul Fussell, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

⁶⁰ See E. E. Cummings, *The Enormous Room*, online source: <http://net.lib.byu.edu/estu/wwi/memoir/cummings/room1.htm>, accessed on 25th June 2013, 12.24.

⁶¹ "Orion", in *The Daily Express*, 12th November 1918, in Paul Fussell, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

significantly, as Fussell remarks, the columnist did not feel the need to specify that he felt like *Bunyan's* Christian – seemingly, the work and its usage in the context of WWI were so popular that references could be made without detailed and precise annotations. References to *The Pilgrim's Progress* continued, as twelve days after the signature of the armistice the BBC broadcast a musical adaptation of Bunyan's work. The creation of a symphonic drama based on the *Pilgrim* was also taken into consideration, though the project came to nothing.⁶²

WWI brought Bunyan once again to the limelight. This was to foster a revival of interest in him. S. A. Leonard's *Essential Principles of Reading Teaching and Literature* (1922), for example, listed the first part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* among the “fundamentals from which class readings will oftenest be selected”.⁶³ The Newbolt Report, urging the teaching of English literature to create social harmony, helped Bunyan, too, as the text's wide social reach made it an ideal book to be used for such purposes. As a matter of fact, Newbolt was a fan of Bunyan⁶⁴ and devoted several pages of his *English Anthology of Prose and Poetry Showing the Main Streams of English Literature from the Fourteenth to the Nineteenth Century* to him (1921).⁶⁵

⁶² See Richard L. Graves, “Bunyan through the Centuries: Some Reflections”, *cit.*, p. 118.

⁶³ Sterling Andrus Leonard, *Essential Principles of Teaching, Reading and Literature in the Intermediate Grades and the High School*, Philadelphia, London, Chicago : J. B. Lippincott Company, 1920, pp. 402, 404, online source: <http://archive.org/details/essentialprincip00leon>, accessed on 25th June 2013, 13.07; see also Richard L. Greaves, “Bunyan through the Centuries: Some Reflections”, *cit.*, p. 118.

⁶⁴ See Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan*, *cit.*, p. 219.

⁶⁵ See also the second volume of the anthology, where Newbolt claims that Bunyan is “the third, with Langland and Spenser, of the great English allegorists”. Henry John Newbolt, *An English Anthology of Prose and Poetry Showing the Main Streams of English Literature from the Fourteenth to the Nineteenth Century. Part II. Notes and Indices*, London & Toronto : J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1922, p. 40, online source: <http://ia600500.us.archive.org/10/items/englishanthology00newbiala/englishanthology00newbiala.pdf>, accessed on 6th July 2013, 17.11.

The revival coincided with the Tercentenary of Bunyan's birth (1928), which witnessed an effusion of publication celebrating the tinker from Bedford.⁶⁶ The chorus of praise for Bunyan, however, was disturbed by the heavy criticism of Alfred Noyes's articles – "Bunyan – a Revaluation" and "Mr. Alfred Noyes's Rejoinder" – published on *The Bookman* in the very same year. Noyes's criticism of *The Pilgrim's Progress's* aesthetic and moral qualities bears some similarities with previous evaluations of the text. Nonetheless, the article is worth analysing for its drawing on questions of race and social darwinism to discredit Bunyan's work. Moreover, this will enable us to discuss the opposition between two already-mentioned different conceptions of Bunyan – that is, Bunyan as a "universal" writer and Bunyan as an English writer.

Alfred Noyes's "Bunyan – a Revaluation" and "Mr. Alfred Noyes's
Rejoinder" (1928)

Alfred Noyes conceived his article as "a crowbar through all [the critics'] blind wheels",⁶⁷ that is, the praises and commendations lavished during the Bunyan Tercentenary. Answering back to the positive remarks that had been expressed on Bunyan,⁶⁸ Noyes described him as an overrated writer whose theological beliefs were both obsolete and loathsome; driven by his narrow Puritanism and his fanaticism, Bunyan had written a "piously

⁶⁶ See a complete list of the publications in James F. Forrest, Richard L. Greaves, *John Bunyan: a Reference Guide*, London : MacMillan, 1982.

⁶⁷ Alfred Noyes, "Bunyan – a Revaluation", in "The Bookman", Vol. 445, No. 75, pp. 13 – 17, (1928), p. 13.

⁶⁸ Bunyan was even celebrated by the Archbishop-designate of Canterbury at the Queen's Hall. See Richard L. Greaves, "Bunyan through the Centuries: Some Reflections", *cit.*, p. 118.

repulsive” book that depicts a “revengeful old Deity” that does everything to entrap those who believe in him.⁶⁹ As for Bunyan’s artistic skills, they are virtually non-existent, as “Bunyan borrowed most of the phrases that have been admired [from the Bible], and spoiled everything that he borrowed”.⁷⁰ Moreover, though Bunyan had been praised for his ability in characterisation, in Noyes’s view he was good only in labelling his characters, rather than describing them as types or individuals.⁷¹

The main interest of the article, however, lies in Noyes’s usage of racial terms of comparison to disfavour Bunyan.⁷² When disapproving Bunyan’s fanaticism and superstitious beliefs, Noyes claims that *The Pilgrim’s Progress* is “on the lowest and most squalid levels of the primitive races of Africa”,⁷³ while his degradation of the Biblical language is “a little Hottentottish”.⁷⁴ Somewhere else in the article he summarises Bunyan’s work as “a revelation of something dreadful and primitive and insane, something that has only half emerged from the squalor of the sub-human. Caliban crying for the Celestial City may be a subject for great literature, but he is not a maker of it”.⁷⁵ Hofmeyr has noticed that one would expect Noyes – the “writer of intensely patriotic “English” verse”⁷⁶ – to celebrate Bunyan and his Englishness; and yet, he does the very opposite, that is, he distances Bunyan from the English tradition and shoves him into a savage culture he identifies with Africa.

⁶⁹ Alfred Noyes, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15. Alfred Noyes, “Mr. Alfred Noyes’s Rejoinder”, in “The Bookman”, Vol. 445, No. 76, pp. 104 – 106, (1928), p. 105. This remark recalls the Robert Bridges’ negative evaluations seen before.

⁷² See Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan, cit.*, pp. 74 – 75, 225 – 226.

⁷³ Alfred Noyes, “Bunyan”, *cit.*, p. 14.

⁷⁴ Alfred Noyes, “Mr. Alfred Noyes’s Rejoinder”, *cit.*, p. 106.

⁷⁵ Alfred Noyes, “Bunyan”, *cit.*, p. 16.

⁷⁶ Isabel Hofmeyr, “How Bunyan Became English”, *cit.*, p. 116.

Hofmeyr suggests that Noyes's rejection of Bunyan was rooted in his over-association with the colonies of the Empire.⁷⁷ The manifold translations, adaptations and remodellings the text had undergone during its dissemination through the Protestant missions had "corrupted" it, blackening its Christian whiteness; the ambiguous position of the *Pilgrim*, thus, did not allow it to be part of a white English tradition. Be this the case, however, Noyes could have bashed the very custom of missionary adaptations, rather than the text itself.

Hofmeyr's second suggestion, namely, that Noyes was racializing England's superstitious and fanatic past to prevent any connection between England and a pre-modern culture, seems to be more probable,⁷⁸ though the two are obviously connected. Indeed, throughout his articles Noyes drops some hints about a past he seems to be all too eager to disown: "we all know how much harm was done to religion in former generations by the crudities of popular fanaticism",⁷⁹ he argues, while elsewhere he criticises the superstition and "the cruder colours of the Puritan's reading"⁸⁰ of the Holy Writ. Bunyan lent himself to be described as the spokesman of a fanatic and irrational past, whose beliefs had been superstitious and magical.⁸¹ Moreover, his book was strongly linked to Africa.⁸² This made him a convenient scapegoat for the construction of England as a rational and modern country: by comparing the *Pilgrim* to African society, Noyes transferred and exorcised a pre-modern past into the "periphery" of the Empire;⁸³ the "centre", in turn, could be "purified"

⁷⁷ Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan*, *cit.*, p. 74.

⁷⁸ *Ivi.*

⁷⁹ Alfred Noyes, "Bunyan", *cit.*, p. 14.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁸¹ Noyes describes Bunyan's enthusiastic irrationality in his desire to "pray to broom-sticks, to a bull, and to Satan", *ibid.*, p. 17.

⁸² See the first appendix in Hofmeyr's *Portable Bunyan* (pp. 240 – 242), which lists 80 translations of the text in African countries.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

through the estrangement of its irrational element. As Hofmeyr remarks, however, Noyes's attempt at expelling what Bunyan represented to him was bound to failure; the "irrational" Bunyan was a necessary term of comparison for the concept of "modernity" and "rationality" to exist.⁸⁴ Moreover, the very action of estranging something entails – and, in a sense, highlights – the previous presence of what got estranged; it is a confirmation by denial.

Noyes's criticism is linked to an issue that Bunyan's fans and scholars had at stake during the first decades of the twentieth century, namely, the value and identity of the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*: the dissemination of the text abroad and its evangelical promotion claimed the universality of Bunyan; the nationalist nature of the rising subject of English literature declared Bunyan's Englishness. The clash and fusion of these views is the subject of the next section.

A "universal" or an English pilgrim?

The dissemination of the *Pilgrim* through the Protestant missions abroad had helped building the image of a "universal" Bunyan. As we have seen, the missionaries in the colonies frequently produced translations of the text to promote the Christian conversion of the "heathens". To the missionaries, the reason for Bunyan's success among the newly converts was his evangelicalism,⁸⁵ which could appeal to every man receiving God's grace. The *Pilgrim* was beyond the barriers of language, culture and race; everyone

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 75. As an example, when extolling the "common sense" of the eighteenth century, Noyes does need Bunyan as a foil to praise it. See Alfred Noyes, "Bunyan", *cit.*, p. 15.

⁸⁵ See Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan*, *cit.*, p. 221.

could find himself in it. The missionaries' promotion of Bunyan as a writer enjoying “universal” success had affected the opinion of the English public, too.⁸⁶ In his “Advertisement” for *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, for example, George Offor wrote that “[Bunyan's] 'Pilgrim's Progress' [...] has been, and now is, a guide to Christian pilgrims of all nations, kindreds, tribes, and people”.⁸⁷ By the celebrations for his Tercentenary Bunyan's universality and popularity abroad was regarded as a commonsensical fact.⁸⁸ However, a different opinion on Bunyan gradually came up beside it – an opinion that was fostered by the champions of English literature.

The English Association and several scholars who were associated with the emerging subject of English literature⁸⁹ began to stress Bunyan's Englishness. We have already touched on the possible reasons for Bunyan's appeal to English literature's enthusiasts. To those who sought to promote social harmony and unity through literature, the *Pilgrim* was an ideal text both for its wide social reach and its language, which was accessible to people from any step of the social ladder.⁹⁰ The *Pilgrim* had also featured as a structural motive in some of the nineteenth-century English novels – we have seen, for example, how it was woven into George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. In his influential *The Great Tradition* (1948), F. R. Leavis indeed would list George Eliot

⁸⁶ The publicity about Bunyan's successes was frequent in England, as Nonconformist used it to add value to Nonconformism “at home”. See Isabel Hofmeyr, “How Bunyan Became English”, *cit.*, pp. 87 – 88.

⁸⁷ George Offor, “Advertisement” in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, comprised in *The Works of John Bunyan*, online source: <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext04/jbunc10.txt>, accessed on 9th July 2013, 17.15.

⁸⁸ See Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan*, *cit.*, p. 217.

⁸⁹ Among them, John Henry Newbolt, S. A. Leonard, F. R. Leavis. See Isabel Hofmeyr, “How Bunyan Became English”, *cit.*, pp. 86, 110.

⁹⁰ See Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan*, *cit.*, p. 220. Bunyan's language, which had already been praised for his Anglo-Saxon purity during the Victorian Age, continued to be recommended as a model of genuine English style. *Ivi.*

among the “great English novelists”.⁹¹ As we have seen, George Eliot had mentioned Bunyan and his *Pilgrim* in her works – albeit not endorsing his peculiar views. Thus, an interest in Bunyan could have also been fostered by his featuring in the narrative of an author that was part of an acknowledged literary tradition. Moreover, in spite of the increasing secularisation, its being part of a Puritan heritage that had been characterising England for centuries was probably still an important feature.

Compared to the inclusive view of the “universal” Bunyan, the notion of an English Bunyan was exclusive and narrow. Moreover, the mode of reading *The Pilgrim's Progress* got modified as a result of the attempt to define its Englishness:⁹² the abstract characters of the work were increasingly compared to typical English men of the XVII century; the landscapes, which are sparsely described and follow a standardised biblical characterisation, came to be regarded as typically English.⁹³ As a matter of fact, several guide books were published in the first half of the century, describing the Slough of Despond, the Hill Difficulty etc. as specific sites around Bedford.⁹⁴ The passage to a localised reading of the *Pilgrim's* landscape may be seen in the illustrations accompanying the text.

⁹¹ Frank Raymond Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, London : Chatto & Windus, 1948, p. 1.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 220 – 221.

⁹³ See for example Charles Firth's essay, mentioned in the previous chapter. As for the landscapes, Firth claims that “the road to the Celestial City [...] is very like a common English seventeenth-century hogh-road”, where “dog barks at the travellers as they pass by [...] other travellers overtake them or meet them on the road [...] sometimes 'a fine pleasant green lane' comes down into the road; on one side of it there is 'a meadow and a stile to go over into it', or a by-path”. When writing about the characters, he writes that “[the pilgrims] are [...] flesh and blood Englishmen of the seventeenth century”. Charles Firth, *op. cit.*, pp. 85 – 86, 97.

⁹⁴ As an example, see Albert J. Foster, *Bunyan's Country: Studies in the Bedfordshire Topography of the Pilgrim's Progress* (1901); Charles G. Harper, *The Bunyan Country* (1928).

The view of a universal Bunyan – read and felt by a wide variety of people and nations – co-existed with that of an English Bunyan until the 1920's. As an example, in the space of a single page of his *John Bunyan. His Life, Times and Work* (1902), John Brown wrote that *The Pilgrim's Progress* has been “truly described as one of the few [books] which act as a religious bond to the whole of *English* Christendom, as one which [...] contributed to the common religious culture of the *Anglo-Saxon race*”; immediately after, Brown states that *The Pilgrim's* evangelicalism and accurate depiction of common life has made it “one of the few books that can easily make themselves at home among nations the most *diverse*”, “it lends itself so readily to idiomatic thought and dialectic variety, and so lovingly touches the universal heart beating under *all nationalities*”.⁹⁵ The global and the local dimensions of Bunyan are here seen as peacefully coexisting. Firth's essay,⁹⁶ too, ended with a declaration of Bunyan's local and international importance: “the *Pilgrim's Progress* is the prose epic of English Puritanism; it contains much that is only temporary and *local* in its application, but [...] it can be understood *everywhere*”.⁹⁷

During the celebrations for Bunyan's Tercentenary both views were still presented as equally true, as seemingly they were not felt as contradicting one another.⁹⁸ As a matter of fact, literature professionals often solved the contradiction by considering the text's universal appeal and admiration as based on an alleged superiority of the English people. “The nobility of the

⁹⁵ John Brown, *John Bunyan. His Lives, Times and Work*, London : Isbister, 1902, vol. 1, p. 57, online source: <http://archive.org/details/johnbunyanhislif01browuoft>. Italics mine.

⁹⁶ We have mentioned it in the previous chapter, see *infra*, p. 177 – 178.

⁹⁷ Charles Firth, *op. cit.*, pp. 102 – 103. Italics mine.

⁹⁸ See Isabel Hofmeyr, “How Bunyan Became English”, *cit.*, p. 87, and *The Portable Bunyan, cit.*, p. 217.

English spirit”⁹⁹ as displayed in one of its products – in this case, Bunyan’s text – could not but win the admiration of people abroad. With regard to this, there is an interesting point in Firth’s remark we have quoted. Firth uses a passive form when praising the text: the text “*can be understood everywhere*”, that is, “universality” seems to be a property of the text; the readership is not explicitly referred to in the phrasing of the statement, as if it were not taken into account. If not as a subject (“*everyone* understands the text”), foreign readers of Bunyan could have been mentioned as agents in the passive voice (“the text can be understood by *everyone*”). Still, the universality of the text is implied by the means of a place adverb, “everywhere”, which virtually keeps out foreign subjects from clearly participating in the text’s world-spread. Though Firth was probably not espousing the cause of Bunyan’s success as due to the superiority of the English, the emphasis on Bunyan and his text as the only participants in the universality of the *Pilgrim*, its readers being omitted in the statement, seemed to forebode it.

These opposing views on Bunyan, however, were eventually to clash with one another. The situation changed with the increasing de-Christianisation of society and the emergence of more aggressive racist convictions:¹⁰⁰ on the one hand, the wider and inclusive view of a “universal” Bunyan lost its grip when the evangelicalism of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* declined in importance within the cultural agenda; on the other one, racial ideas influenced English literature, which came to be considered the means to express “the indigenous

⁹⁹ Franklin Court, *Institutionalizing English literature*, p. 137, in Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan*, *cit.*, p. 222. See also Isabel Hofmeyr, “How Bunyan Became English”, *cit.*, p. 86.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 87; Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan*, *cit.*, p. 222.

spirit of the English racial inheritance”.¹⁰¹ The idea of literature as a racial marker asserted itself over the old inclusive view. Thus, Bunyan came to be in a problematic position, as it had been linked to colonised countries and people; his work’s whiteness and Englishness had to be reaffirmed. Let us take into consideration, for example, C. Bernard Cockett’s preface to *John Bunyan’s England* (1928), once again a tour of the Bedfordshire area in search of the pilgrim’s footsteps:

England is a garden, and the wild flower in Bunyan’s genius is blossoming into strange beauty in 1928, his Tercentenary, for the whole world honours his memory. Visitors from the Dominions coming ‘Home’, Americans of British ancestry and pilgrims of all nationalities long to drink at the ancient springs of life and literature in these sea girt isles. John Bunyan [...] is one of the great names of our race.¹⁰²

Though mentioning the “pilgrims of all nationalities”, Cockett actually narrows the value of his own claim by using the terms “ancestry” and “race”, which seem to limit the statement to white settlers of the British dominions “coming ‘Home’”.

With regard to this, Hofmeyr also quotes a MacMillan edition of the text that was used in Indian schools. The text’s “Introduction” goes to great length to free Bunyan’s *Pilgrim* from any connection with Indian native culture: “the pilgrim called ‘Christian’ is not a fakir or ascetic, as the Indian youth is apt to suppose; he is every ordinary Christian man”.¹⁰³ We have seen how missionaries abroad had fostered indigenised translations of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, so that the text could best suit the local cultures and be more

¹⁰¹ Franklin E. Court, *Institutionalizing English Literature*, p. 131, in Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan*, cit., p. 222.

¹⁰² C. Bernard Cockett, *John Bunyan’s England*, London : Homeland Association, 1928, in Isabel Hofmeyr, “Evangelical Realism”, cit., p. 143.

¹⁰³ John Morrison, *Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress in Modern English*, London : MacMillan, 1896, p. vii, in Isabel Hofmeyr, “Evangelical Realism”, cit., p. 144.

evangelically effective.¹⁰⁴ The increasing racialisation of literature changed this trend – the text had to be guarded from cultural hybridisation.

The passage from the MacMillan edition we have just quoted well explains the solution found to erase Bunyan's connection with the colonised countries. The quote ends with the claim that Bunyan's Christian is "every ordinary Christian man". As Hofmeyr highlights, the universal nature of *The Pilgrim's Progress* acquired an abstract value: while in the past Bunyan's "universality" had referred to the actual circulation of the text, in the twentieth century it pointed to Bunyan's alleged ability in capturing and portraying the human nature, or the nature of "every ordinary Christian man".¹⁰⁵ This change in the notion of Bunyan's universality, along with the emphasis on his Englishness, managed to jettison *The Pilgrim's* transnational presence.¹⁰⁶

The pilgrim in context

"The view still prevails – in some quarters, at least – that John Bunyan, as a mechanick preacher, was an altogether exceptional figure, and that as a writer he stood in literary isolation from his age".¹⁰⁷

We have seen how Bridges's criticism from 1905 urged the contextualisation of Bunyan's work. This indeed seems to be a general trend of the twentieth-century approach to *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Though there is a feeling that Bridges was proposing a contextualised reading of the text mainly

¹⁰⁴ See the previous chapter, pp. 180 – 181.

¹⁰⁵ See Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan*, cit., p. 226.

¹⁰⁶ That Hofmeyr's work, *The Portable Bunyan* (2004), should be the first thorough exploration of *The Pilgrim's* transnational life is proof enough of the effectiveness of this cultural strategy.

¹⁰⁷ Lowry Charles Wimberly, "John Bunyan, Mechanick Preacher (Review)", in "Modern Language Notes", Vol. 52, No. 1, pp. 64 – 66, (January 1937), p. 64.

with a mind to devaluing some of the positive criticism Bunyan had received,¹⁰⁸ he was also championing the necessity of casting Bunyan's theology into the cultural framework of his own time, so that his belief could be better understood. Underlying this idea is an opinion on Bunyan that is quite different from the previous century's one. The nineteenth-century men of letters had generally considered Bunyan as a peculiar genius; the twentieth-century men of letters put his work into perspective, and regarded his literary achievements as linked to the common sentiments and convictions of his times.¹⁰⁹

William York Tindall's work, *John Bunyan: Mechanick Preacher* (1934), was the first to thoroughly explore the issue of Bunyan's affinities with the religious culture of his times.¹¹⁰ In 1949 Maurice Hussey, too, highlighted the necessity of a contextualisation: "The doctrines that are involved in the interpretation of the book are those of Reprobation and Election. To attempt to comprehend it without knowing how the original public felt about these points is to make a puerile affair of it".¹¹¹ Later on in his article, he draws attention to the similar handling of the religious hypocrites in the works of Bunyan, Arthur Dent and Thomas Taylor,¹¹² concluding: "Such collusion in three writers suggest a common traditional interpretation of human character".¹¹³ Hussey's contextualised reading of Bunyan is mainly concerned with theological issues

¹⁰⁸ For example, a contextualisation of Bunyan helped Bridges discrediting the view of Bunyan's alleged ability in depicting the very essence of humanity. See *infra* pp. 193 – 194.

¹⁰⁹ See N. H. Keeble, "'Of Him Thousand Daily Sing and Talk'", p. 261.

¹¹⁰ *Ivi.*

¹¹¹ Maurice Hussey, "Bunyan's 'Mr. Ignorance'", in "Modern Language Review", XLIV, 1949, in Roger Sharrock, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

¹¹² Arthur Dent and Thomas Taylor were sixteenth/seventeenth-century Puritan preachers. The former was the author of *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* (1601), a popular work pertaining to the guide book tradition. Bunyan himself claimed it had been pivotal for his conversion.

See "Arthur Dent" in the Digital Puritan website: <http://www.digitalpuritan.net/arthurdent.html>, accessed on 10th August 2013, 15.27.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

that were common among seventeenth-century religious men, whilst it has only a marginal interest in the *Pilgrim* as a *literary* creation. On the contrary, a 1964 essay by F. R. Leavis, “Bunyan’s Resoluteness”, touches upon the literary dimension of Bunyan’s work in relation to seventeenth-century culture, and is thereby much more interesting to us.

The question underlying Leavis’s essay is a long-time issue in the reception of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, that is, the supposed opposition between the Bunyan of Parnassus and the Bunyan of the Conventicle: “how could this fanatical treadmill-concentration [the Calvinist preoccupations] issue in or be compatible with a generous humane art [as that of Bunyan]?”¹¹⁴ And yet, Leavis claims that these very two dimensions – the religious and the literary – are conjoined in Bunyan’s literary output: “although (finding [...] the associated bigotry repellent) one may be unable to regard the doctrine with any sense of attraction or enlightenment, it is hardly possible to admire *The Pilgrim’s Progress* as a creative work without being moved by its religious quality and seeing that this inheres in the power of the art”¹¹⁵.

Leavis’s assumption seemed to aim at closing a diatribe that had been going on since the eighteenth century. The solution he proposed was grounded on a distinction between *theology* and *religion*, as it is apparent in the passage quoted above. Being a body of fixed principles, theology must of necessity be abstract and released from context. On the other hand, religion, though necessarily linked to theology, is a belief put into practice¹¹⁶ – an ethos – and is thereby in context: “Bunyan’s religion, like his art, comes from the whole man.

¹¹⁴ F. R. Leavis, “Bunyan’s Resoluteness”, in Roger Sharrock, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

¹¹⁶ *Ivi.*

And the man [...] belonged to a community and to a culture, a culture that could not be divined from the theology”.¹¹⁷ Leavis then claims that “seventeenth-century Puritanism considered in the context of English life from which in the concrete it was inseparable looks very different from an abstracted Puritanism”.¹¹⁸ The religious ethos in Bunyan's time, Leavis argues, was far from being a “morose, repressive, anti, human” attitude, “the enemy of happiness [...] art, and life”,¹¹⁹ as Puritanism has been successively depicted, on the ground of its abstract doctrines. The vitality of Bunyan's prose, then, is not antithetical to his religious belief, as it has been claimed. Rather, it is the very expression of a contextualised religious ethos, one that is just a part of a broader popular culture that comprises both religious belief *and* the warmth and vivacity of human society.¹²⁰ The “religious quality that inheres in the power of the art” of Bunyan is precisely the Puritan ethos seen at work in the living culture of seventeenth-century people: their bearings, their ways and habits. Bunyan shows the abstract Calvinist creed as it was lived out in the actual world – “the earthly life [is put] in relation to the eternal”.¹²¹ The representative significance of *The Pilgrim's Progress* and its artistic value come precisely from Bunyan's ability in evoking the whole truth of seventeenth-century living experience – a “creative presentment of human life”¹²² that transcends the borders of an abstract doctrine. The Bunyan of Parnassus is *also* the Bunyan of the Conventicle. The two cannot be disjoined.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

¹¹⁸ *Ivi.*

¹¹⁹ *Ivi.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 212, 214.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 211.

Seventeenth-century spirituality, Leavis seems to claim, was far more linked to earthly life and culture than we expect it was, on the grounds of our abstract preconceptions;¹²³ when contextualised, the Conventicle reveals itself not to be life-rejecting as we suppose it was. Kaufmann's *The Pilgrim's Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation* (1966) exposes the link between earthly life and the eternal realm within a particular development of seventeenth-century Puritan devotional practices, namely, the tradition of heavenly meditation.¹²⁴ This form of devotion considered the secular world as a repository of images and experiences that were to be gazed upon as a term of comparison with heavenly things, so that the believer could better conceive of the latter. The Puritan devotee had thus a genuine interest in earthly things, which were approached and sensed. Take for example the scene at the House Beautiful, when the pilgrims are welcomed with music. Mercy exclaims: "Wonderful! Musick in the House, Musick in the Heart, and Musick also in Heaven";¹²⁵ an earthly pleasure is enjoyed and used to create an image of the heavenly pleasures to come. Kaufmann's contextualisation, then, reveals the connection between the earthly and the divine that was an undercurrent of certain forms of Puritanism, and influenced the structure of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. By tracing some of the sources of Bunyan's techniques, Kaufmann's work shows that several of the *Pilgrim's* literary features, far from being peculiar to Bunyan, were common elements of certain developments within seventeenth-century religious aesthetic.¹²⁶

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

¹²⁴ See U. Milo Kaufmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 133 – 150.

¹²⁵ John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

¹²⁶ As an example, besides the influence it had on Bunyan's inclusion of the earthly reality in his work, the heavenly meditation probably determined also Bunyan's habit of fleshing out landscapes and episodes of *The Pilgrim's Progress* on the basis of a scriptural metaphor. Moreover, Bunyan's bent for the spiritualisation of natural phenomena was possibly shaped

Genius has never been discontinuous with its historical setting, and perhaps determinative influences ought to be sought within Puritanism, on the assumption that every genius will turn out to be a *genius loci*, strongly attached to a local habitation which disciplines his peculiar energies.¹²⁷

As a consequence, Bunyan's genius gets redefined. Formerly, Bunyan was regarded as an unconventional genius, so much so that in writing *The Pilgrim's Progress* he had allegedly baffled his own orthodox intentions and expectations, as expressed in Coleridge's famous remark. In the twentieth century, scholars see Bunyan's genius in his ability to create a work that stands apart from the others, with which it nonetheless shares themes and techniques. Rather than a singular exception among the uniformity of seventeenth-century culture, *The Pilgrim's Progress* is now considered one of the most refined products of a culture of which it is but a constituent, though a luminous one.

6.3 A twentieth-century pilgrim: Louis MacNeice's *Prisoner's Progress*

In the previous chapter we have wondered whether a deeply religious text as *The Pilgrim's Progress* could still be significant in a secular society as that of the twentieth-century. As a matter of fact, not only could Bunyan's work resist, but it could also be used as a foil to depict the very scepticism of the age. Indeed, the 1954 radio play *Prisoner's Progress*, by Louis MacNeice, structured itself around Bunyan's *Pilgrim*,¹²⁸ involving it in the representation of a secular and sceptical time.

by the well-established Puritan tradition of occasional meditation. See U. Milo Kaufmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 151 – 174 (“Meditation and Bunyan's Imaginative Realism”); 175 – 195 (“Occasional Meditation and *The Pilgrim's Progress*”).

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹²⁸ Though the text does not mention Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, its very title is sufficient to recognise the latter as a structuring influence.

It is MacNeice himself that highlights his universal and secular reading of Bunyan: “provided he will forget his sectarian or anti-religious prejudices, anyone ought to be able to identify with Christian. For Christian is Everyman again, and *his quest can stand for any quest that begins in anguish and ends in self-conquest*”.¹²⁹ Do not worry about Bunyan’s theology, he seems to be claiming, what matters to us is the existential pattern he depicts – the journey of “an unheroic figure” who “finds himself at the end”.¹³⁰ *The Pilgrim’s* and the *Prisoner’s Progress* share indeed the same pattern of the existential journey ending with death; however, the representations of the journey are markedly dissimilar, the difference being the sign of a cultural distance between the texts.

Broadcast on 27th April, 1954, *Prisoner’s Progress* is superficially centred on an escape attempt from a Brown prison-of-war camp, during an unspecified war between the Browns and the Greys – the former being identifiable with the Germans and the latter with the English. To escape from the camp, the prisoners must climb a mountain, which stands between the camp and the alleged “freedom”; their getaway will eventually end with their death. At a second level, however, the story depicts a man’s journey from alienation towards the assertion of selfhood; as MacNeice himself stated, “the imprisonment and the escape in *Prisoner’s Progress* are intended to stand for all kinds of imprisonment and escape – moral, intellectual, spiritual”.¹³¹ The protagonist of this existential progress is Thomas Waters, a newly captured

¹²⁹ Louis MacNeice, *Varieties of Parable*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1965, p. 29, in Richard Danson Brown, “Everyman’s Progresses: Louis MacNeice’s Dialogues with Bunyan”, in W. R. Owens and Stuart Sim (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 151, italics mine.

¹³⁰ Louis MacNeice, *Selected Plays of Louis MacNeice*, edited by Alan Heuser and Peter McDonald, Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1993, 151. MacNeice’s statement referred to his works, *Prisoner’s Progress* and *The Dark Tower* (1946); nonetheless, I feel MacNeice himself would include *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in his broad definition.

¹³¹ Louis MacNeice, “Author’s Introduction Note: Tunnelling into Freedom”, in *Radio Times*, 7th January 1955, p. 5, in A. Heuser and P. McDonald (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 151 – 152.

prisoner and “a very strange bird indeed”,¹³² obsessed both by his imprisonment and by the possibility of escaping.

Several passages from the text do highlight the broader value of Waters’s imprisonment. When talking with the camp chaplain, for example, Waters metaphorically claims he has already been in a prison before, meaning that the feeling of entrapment and alienation is nothing new to him: “I’ve been here long, long, before [the starting of the camp] – almost before I can remember. And what’s more, I’ve never really left here. That mountain up there, it’s always been between me and the sun”.¹³³ Consider also the conversation about issues of identity and free will he has with a fellow prisoner: “Regan, when you think of yourself [...] what exactly do you think of? [...] I call myself I. [...] But you call yourself I too. Then what is either of us meaning? Do I really know who ‘I’ am?”,¹³⁴ and again:

Supposing I was a hunchback, well, I’d never know what it meant not to be born a hunchback. So whatever I did or said or felt or thought, would always be all of a piece, all of a piece with my hump. [...] Whoever you are, you’re conditioned to be what you are and you can’t be anyone else.¹³⁵

Waters is haunted by the Cartesian-rooted “preoccupation of modernity – the alienated self”,¹³⁶ a self that is separated from the external world and imprisoned by an overwhelming consciousness. Moreover, the sceptical twentieth-century culture is deprived of any value-giving transcendental realm, so that man is eventually left alone facing what he feels to be a meaningless

¹³² Louis MacNeice, *Prisoner’s Progress*, in A. Heuser and P. McDonald (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 158.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

¹³⁵ *Ivi.*

¹³⁶ Terence Brown, *Louis MacNeice: Sceptical Vision*, Dublin; New York : Gill and MacMillan, Barnes & Noble Books, 1975, p. 61.

world.¹³⁷ Like other characters in MacNeice's works, Waters is a victim of his times, "racked by doubt and scepticism".¹³⁸

Both MacNeice's and Bunyan's pilgrims, hence, start their progresses with a sense of alienation.¹³⁹ However, while the alienation of the latter gets soothed and is eventually erased by his joining God's grace, the former does not find any transcendental reassurance; rather, MacNeice proposes a secular assertion of meaning in death. I shall analyse the texts' shared features by grouping them around three main topics, which will hopefully help us to discern MacNeice's work of secular and sceptical adaptation of Bunyan, namely: the mountain, the "Comin' Round the Mountain" song and the usage of Biblical references.

Any prisoner fancying to escape from camp must climb the mountain which keeps it isolated: "Everyone calls it the mountain. If you wanted to escape from here, that's what you'd have to get over".¹⁴⁰ MacNeice's mountain recalls both Bunyan's Delectable Mountains and the Mount Sion, where the Heavenly Jerusalem is located: Waters must climb the mountain to escape from the camp; Christian must pass through the Delectable Mountains and climb the Mount Sion to attain Heaven. Mountains cut off from freedom and joy both Waters and Christian. The similarity, however, is merely structural. Bunyan's pilgrim does reach the Heavenly City, which is truly on top of Mount Sion. The meaning of Christian's journey is determined by the value of a transcendental reality.¹⁴¹ On the contrary, Waters's case is quite ambiguous. Regardless of the

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 59, 61, 68.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹³⁹ Christian's alienation is shown both by his initial gnawing doubts [John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, pp. 10 – 11] and by his being often misunderstood and scorned by the human, earthly society.

¹⁴⁰ Louis MacNeice, *Prisoner's Progress*, *cit.*, p. 159.

¹⁴¹ See Terence Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

actual end of Waters's escape – he gets shot down by Brown guards – there is ground to doubt of his breakout from the very beginning. Any escape from the camp leads to an earthly world shaken by war; there does not seem to be a safe place where to go. This idea seems to work on both the play's literal and metaphorical levels:¹⁴² there is not a safe haven in a war-troubled world; there is not a safe haven in a secular Age that has lost its spiritual certainties, and has managed to replace them with nothing but doubts. The characters themselves, when reaching the top of the mountain, tellingly claim: "We can see beyond it. Freedom is *somewhere over there*".¹⁴³ The statement's vagueness seems to underline the unsolvable nature of man's doubts.

Several musical motifs accompany the radio play. One of them is closely connected to the mountain theme. The crucial importance of the "Comin' Round the Mountain" motif is stressed by its being first heard at the very beginning of the play. Superficially, it seems to be a mere hint at the mountain the prisoners must climb. Surely the song serves to remind the prisoners' predicament. In the opening scene, for example, Catsmeat's singing¹⁴⁴ gets stopped by Emsley's protest, as the song recalls to his mind the mountain isolating the camp: "Stop that! I really loathe that song. [...] Why sing about mountains when we've got one here on our doorstep?".¹⁴⁵ However, I feel the song may play a more significant role in the text – one that is enhanced by its history.

¹⁴² Interestingly, the mountain lacks a name – it is simply called 'the mountain' – which seems to assign an absolute and abstract value to it: it is not just a mountain, rather, it is a barrier between man and existential self-assurance and peace.

¹⁴³ Louis MacNeice, *Prisoner's Progress*, *cit.*, p. 196.

¹⁴⁴ Catsmeat is the camp's black cook. He will be shot dead immediately after the escape. Emsley's an imprisoned "effeminate athlete". *Ibid.*, p. 154.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

“Comin’ Round the Mountain” – or “She’ll Be Comin’ Round the Mountain” – was originally “an old-time negro spiritual [called] When the Chariot Comes”.¹⁴⁶ The old spiritual sang of Jesus’s coming and the ensuing Rapture.¹⁴⁷ “O who will drive the chariot when she comes? [...] King Jesus, he’ll be driver, when she comes. She’ll be loaded with bright angels, when she comes. [...] She will take us to the portals, when she comes”.¹⁴⁸ It was then remade “by mountaineers”¹⁴⁹ into a work song. It is true that the mountain allusion would be sufficient to explain MacNeice’s choice in featuring “Comin’ Round the Mountain” in his play. Nonetheless, I find it a remarkable coincidence – if coincidence it was – that he should choose precisely an *ex-spiritual* song that had lost, by MacNeice’s time, all its spiritual value to a secular, modern remake. Furthermore, the original theme of the spiritual was the believers’ Rapture, that is, a death in Christ and a resurrection to eternal life in Heaven, just like what happened to Bunyan’s pilgrim. The remade tune, on the contrary, is a secular song that does not concern images of transcendental reassurance,¹⁵⁰ just like MacNeice’s play.

¹⁴⁶ Carl Sandburg, *The American Songbag*, New York : Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1927, p. 372, online source: <http://archive.org/details/americansongbag029895mbp>, accessed on 5th August 2013, 15.13.

¹⁴⁷ See the “First Letter to the Thessalonians”, 4:16 – 17, online source: <http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/book.php?book=1+Thessalonians&chapter=4&verse=17>, accessed on 5th August 2013, 15.56.

¹⁴⁸ Carl Sandburg, *op. cit.*, p. 373. See also William Eleazar Barton, *Old Plantation Hymns: a Collection of Hitherto Unpublished Melodies of the Slave and the Freedman, with Historical and Descriptive Notes*, Boston, New York : Lamson, Wolfe & Co., 1899, p. 44, online source: <http://archive.org/details/cu31924066563655>, accessed on 5th August 2013, 15.38.

¹⁴⁹ Carl Sandburg, *op. cit.*, p. 372.

¹⁵⁰ The integral text is as follows: “She’ll be comin’ round the mountain, when she comes. / She’ll be comin’ round the mountain, when she comes. / She’ll be comin’ round the mountain, / She’ll be comin’ round the mountain, / She’ll be comin’ round the mountain, when she comes. / She’ll be drivin’ six white horses, when she comes. / She’ll be drivin’ six white horses, when she comes. / She’ll be drivin’ six white horses, / She’ll be drivin’ six white horses, / She’ll be drivin’ six white horses, when she comes. / Oh we’ll all go to meet her, when she comes. / Oh we’ll all go to meet her, when she comes. / We will kill the old red rooster, / We will kill the old red rooster, / And we’ll all have chicken and dumplin’, when she comes”. *Ibid.*, p. 373.

This leads us to the third and last feature I have singled out – the references to the Bible. Like Bunyan, MacNeice uses the Holy Writ as a device to construe and deliver his work’s meaning; still, the text he employs marks the distance between his pilgrim and Bunyan’s. When trying to explain his sense of alienation to the chaplain, Waters extensively quotes from the Book of Job: “Why died I not from the womb? Why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly? [...] Or as an untimely hidden birth I had not been; as infants which never saw light”.¹⁵¹ Job’s curse – Job not being a champion of reassurance – is never quoted by Bunyan.¹⁵² At Waters’s preference for the Old Testament, Bunyan would have probably exclaimed “Oh, the Old Testament? That’s not quite as soothing, you know?”,¹⁵³ like the chaplain does.¹⁵⁴ Once again, MacNeice has used the same techniques as Bunyan – quoting the Bible to construe the text’s meaning – though he has done so to achieve a different result.

A last detail that Bunyan and MacNeice share deserves consideration. As Richard Danson Brown remarks, the tunnel that the prisoners pass through before attempting to climb the mountain is akin to Bunyan’s “narrow way” leading “to possible redemption”:¹⁵⁵ a Christian redemption for Bunyan’s pilgrim; an existential redemption for MacNeice’s.¹⁵⁶ Waters’s redemption seems to come through an assertion of his selfhood and will over existential doubts. In the last passage, surrounded by the chasing guards, he and his fellow

¹⁵¹ Louis MacNeice, *Prisoner’s Progress*, *cit.*, pp. 162 – 163.

¹⁵² See Richard Danson Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

¹⁵³ Louis MacNeice, *Prisoner’s Progress*, *cit.*, p. 162.

¹⁵⁴ For the essential exploration of Bunyan’s preference for the New Testament over the Old, see *infra*, pp. 55 – 56.

¹⁵⁵ Richard Danson Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 156. “Look before thee; dost thou see this narrow way? That is the way thou must go”. John Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

¹⁵⁶ Actually, a religious redemption is indeed an existential redemption for the believer, whose existence is cast into a religious framework.

runaway / lover decide to make a final, mad dash, which will eventually end with death:

ALISON: [...] I suppose we've a chance in a hundred.

WATERS: Chance in a thousand, darling.

ALISON: All right, then. Let's run for it.

WATERS: Pretty well suicide.

ALISON: Maybe. With a joy of life thrown in.¹⁵⁷

The characters find themselves at the end by attempting a heroic action that is “begotten by despair upon impossibility”, as they say of their love with Marvell’s words. On the surface, they are simply trying to escape from a prison-of-war camp. On a secondary level, they are asserting their human integrity in spite of the “moral, intellectual [and] spiritual” imprisonment of a world that lacks meaning: “You call it a world? You flatter it. This mad machine we all live in”,¹⁵⁸ says Waters. Theirs is a humanistic redemption and rebellion against an existence that threatens to be meaningless. Nonetheless, the outcome of this rebellion is ambiguous. Some claim that the characters’ final assertion of selfhood is indeed positive: “psychologically the result is salvation, although physically the action appears to end in defeat and death”.¹⁵⁹ Brown holds an optimist view, too, and describes MacNeice’s “sceptical faith”, where a secular dialectic – death and non-being as opposed to life and being – is precisely what confers value and meaning to man’s existence:¹⁶⁰ “life [is] limited and therefore valuable”.¹⁶¹ However, I cannot avoid feeling that a climate of general disbelief regarding human existence prevails on any hopeful view of things. The bleak picture of a secular redemption attained only through

¹⁵⁷ Louis MacNeice, *Prisoner’s Progress*, *cit.*, p. 197.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹⁵⁹ See Margaret Callender Moss, “B.B.C. Demands the Muse: a Study of the Radio Plays of Louis MacNeice”, Ph. D. thesis, Rice University, Houston, Texas, May 1971, pp. 181 – 182, online source: <http://scholarship.rice.edu/bitstream/handle/1911/14761/7126326.PDF?sequence=1>, accessed on 4th August 2013, 13.28.

¹⁶⁰ See Terence Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 85 – 86.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

death seems to confirm, rather than oppose, the feeling of existential discomfort Waters voices throughout the play. There is a troubling aspect in the play's end, where Waters's suicidal act can be read as the ultimate escape attempt made by a man tracked by existential doubts. It is as MacNeice's scepticism were directed against his own solution to the age's scepticism – a squared scepticism.

Bunyan could rely on a transcendental reality that would give a direction to his pilgrims' quest. MacNeice tries to find a humanist solution to the loss of values and directions that followed the Nietzschean death of God, however ambiguous the outcome of his attempt might be.¹⁶² Anyhow, seeing how Bunyan's symbols once again lent themselves to be adapted is what concerns us the most. MacNeice took hold of Bunyan's rhetorical devices and symbols and invested them with a radically different value, managing to convey his own views on man's sceptical and secular progress.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Conclusions

One would expect the reception of a religious allegory to be determined by both its aesthetic qualities and its religious value. We have seen how the religious and the aesthetic dimensions of *The Pilgrim's Progress* have been indeed the recurrent preoccupations of the work's critics, from the moment of the *Pilgrim's* publication on; each age's peculiar attitudes towards religion and art have shaped the reception of Bunyan's work. Not only can this process of cultural assessment and ensuing adaptation be examined through the men of letters' off-hand remarks, or through an investigation into the editions printed so far, but also via an analysis of those literary works that drew on Bunyan's *Pilgrim*. As a matter of fact, a text's allusions to *The Pilgrim's Progress* may well describe the culture of the writer who adapted Bunyan's text. They may also reveal the way in which the text was read in that particular time.

Besides the considerations of how proper it is to use Anglo-saxon words or an allegedly comely style in a work of art (which were, nonetheless, usual issues in Bunyan criticism), the responses to the aesthetic dimension of the text have also been markedly influenced by the ages' different opinions on the allegorical mode. The flexible nature of allegory has also enabled readers to bypass those features of Bunyan's religious belief that could no longer fit the culture of their own time. With regards to allegory, it is also interesting to notice how the allegorical mode – being a matter of discussion in both the religious and the aesthetic fields – seems to contradict Coleridge's famous statement about Bunyan. By linking art and religion – the Parnassus and the

conventicle – allegory provides a common interest for Bunyan the artist and Bunyan the preacher.

Nonetheless, as this work has showed, anyone who conceived of the reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress* as being determined mainly – when not only – by the ages' attitude towards art and religion would overlook an important and persistent stream of interest that has characterised the readings of Bunyan's text, namely, the politically-oriented perusal of the *Pilgrim*. If we take Stuart Sim's suggestion of Bunyan as one who "speak[s] most powerfully to those who have a fundamentalist streak in their character, [...] who [...] feel themselves to be in possession of the ultimate truth",¹ we may include the political and the religious readings of the text in a broader category comprising both, as those who believe in a religious and in a political utopia seem to share the same fundamentalist characteristics. In a time of political and religious fundamentalisms as ours – from any side, of any colour – it is precisely this aspect of the book that may provide interesting hints for reflection to both contemporary readers and authors.

¹ Stuart Sim, "Bunyan and his Fundamentalist Readers", in W. R. Owens and Stuart Sim (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 215.

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