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Introduction

In November 1817, *Ladies' Monthly Museum* informed its readers that 'the celebrated John Bunyan, author of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, at one period of his life, kept a public house in the neighbourhood of Turvey, in Bedfordshire, and, perhaps, in commemoration of the profession of his father, and his own in his youth, put up the sign of the Tinker of Turvey'.¹ It comes as a surprise to discover that the reputation of John Bunyan (1628–88), Puritan minister and author of a religious classic, could encompass the innkeeper's trade in the nineteenth century, often regarded as the era of his greatest fame as a spiritual writer. The story of Bunyan the taverner provides a welcome reminder that nothing can be taken for granted about this established and canonical author of the English-speaking world. To explore the Bunyan tradition is to encounter centuries of accumulated legend, polemic and prejudice that began to spread even during his lifetime, for Bunyan was accused of being a witch, a highwayman, a Jesuit, a gypsy and a whoremaster. Some even said he had murdered the father of Agnes Beaumont, falsely charged with being his mistress. Several of these accusations are recorded in his spiritual autobiography *Grace Abounding* (1666), and were evidently well known to him. They bury the traditional picture of Bunyan the stern and puritanical minister as surely as the image of the tinker of Turvey serving ale obscures the religious allegorist of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678).

Hence it is right that the works of this contentious figure are still widely read and taught. With this in mind, the present *Companion* has been designed to serve three major purposes for a broad constituency of readers. It explores how Bunyan's writings inspired readers, commentators and translators to reshape his legacy during three centuries, it provides up-to-date readings of Bunyan's major works, and it reassesses his place as one of the greatest early-modern authors, whose life and writings were embroiled in the upheavals of his time. This *Companion* is the first accessible collection of essays seeking to introduce Bunyan's life, works and posterity to students, scholars and the general reader in the light of the most recent scholarship.

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After the Authorised Version of the Bible and the plays of Shakespeare, Bunyan's writings have been foremost among the major books of the Anglophone world. In the nineteenth century, ships left the port of London for the British imperial colonies freighted with as many copies of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678 and 1684) as the Bible. The pictures in the many illustrated editions shaped the imagination of generations, as revealed by literary works as diverse as George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and M. R. James's *Oh, Whistle and I'll Come to you, my Lad* (1904) where the frightened narrator ponders the description of Apollyon coming over the field to meet Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a passage 'which catches most people's fancy at some time of their childhood', according to James.² Despite such horrors, the most devout or diligent pupils in Victorian Sunday schools were rewarded with copies of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, whence the many nineteenth-century editions now to be found in second-hand bookshops with florid and gilded bookplates announcing 'First Prize for Scripture Knowledge' or 'Prize for Regular Attendance'. Many were family gifts and are sometimes supplied with manuscript admonitions from the giver such as 'mark, read and inwardly digest'. (George Eliot's account of Maggie Tulliver's reading suggests that the attraction for many young devotees lay mostly in the adventures of the pilgrims, rather than in the teachings, not to mention the opportunity to colour the line-drawings.) Spreading Bunyan's message orally also mattered. In 1862, Archdeacon Jones from Liverpool recalled that he had 'read [*The Pilgrim's Progress*] publicly, with a running commentary, to a large Sunday evening congregation in [his] National Schoolroom', the assembly listening to the recital with 'fixed attention and deep interest'.³ Schoolmasters with a special commitment to *The Pilgrim's Progress* as an extra-curricular means to educate the minds and spirits of the young can be traced in oral tradition to at least the 1950s, but perhaps no further.

If no readers celebrated Bunyan's life and works better than the Victorians, no Victorian embodied this better than George Offor (1767–1864). Offor was a critic and patron of the arts who published Bunyan's works in the 1850s, an edition not superseded until the Oxford Bunyan was completed in 1994 under the general editorship of Roger Sharrock.⁴ An avid collector, Offor claimed to possess (in addition to copies of Bunyan's works by the thousand) an iron pencecase made by the author, his buckles, two pocket knives, his apple scoop, a seal and his box of scales and weights, all of which were lost in the fire that destroyed Sotheby's auction-rooms prior to the sale of his collection in June 1865. Not everything disappeared in that blaze, however. The Bunyan Museum in central Bedford remains a true *cabinet de curiosités* for all Bunyan enthusiasts, showing how assiduously

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relics of Bunyan have been treasured or (as is often the way with relics) manufactured. There one may see Bunyan's pulpit, his chair, his flute (supposedly cut from the leg of a chair while in prison) and the jug that was used to carry broth to him in prison or his Sunday dinner in the meeting-house, according to a different account. There is also a chest adorned with representations of musical instruments. All these things rub shoulders in the Museum with copies of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, translated into hundreds of languages in the course of three centuries. Compared to Bunyan, who is associated with so many and varied mementoes in addition to his literary works, Shakespeare seems almost to have vanished from the earth without trace.

As this hoard of memorabilia suggests, Bunyan was ubiquitous in nineteenth-century culture. Wallpapers, picture-puzzles and board-games depicted characters and scenes from his works, and a whole attic of material was released by canny merchants that included busts, medallions, statues, prints and facsimiles.⁵ The term 'Bunyaniana' was coined to refer to this unprecedented body of artefacts. Bunyan enthusiasts and collectors formed a formidable network of correspondents through the pages of *Notes & Queries* and *The Times* advertisements. This interest did not subside in the early twentieth century. British soldiers in the trenches of 1914–18 used material from *The Pilgrim's Progress*, notably the Slough of Despond and the Valley of the Shadow of Death, to express the inexpressible in letters and other writings which reveal the importance of the book to an entire generation on the verge of both Modernism and their own City of Destruction.⁶ In later decades, an opera by Vaughan Williams and writings by C. S. Lewis, Iain Sinclair, Samuel Beckett and Peter Ackroyd (to look no further) show the long-lasting influence of Bunyan's most famous works. American presidents from Abraham Lincoln to J. F. Kennedy have proclaimed their life-long attachment to him. As Isabel Hofmeyr shows in the last chapter of this *Companion*, Bunyan's name was even mentioned in the wake of Barack Obama's presidential election in 2008.

This wave of interest, with some readers praising Bunyan for his religious principles, some for his literary merits and most of them for both, obscures some very inauspicious beginnings. As Neil Keeble shows in [chapter 1](#), it was a challenge for the son of a Bedfordshire tinker with little education to make his mark in the world of books, and perhaps no other decades than the 1640s and 1650s could have nurtured and authorised Bunyan's intrusion into the public sphere. However, Bunyan was not praised in his own day as a writer of literature in any sense of that word now immediately familiar, and his fame suffered in the eighteenth century when polite taste shunned the vulgarity of the tinker while admiring the faith and energy of the evangelical preacher.

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Only during the Romantic revival was Bunyan's racy and homely genius rediscovered and popularised.

'That John Bunyan was a tinker, a poor man, and a lay preacher has been generally known, but insufficiently pondered.'⁷ That might have been the case in 1934 when William York Tindall wrote his socially oriented study of the author's life and works, but in recent years Bunyan the 'poor' man, the radical champion of the oppressed, has attracted much attention, notably in Christopher Hill's work of 1988 (*A Turbulent, Seditious, and Factious People: John Bunyan and his Church, 1628–1688*) which remained the standard biographical account, together with John Brown's Victorian biography, until the publication of Richard Greaves's *Glimpses of Glory* in 2002.⁸ The material is rich, for Bunyan's life spanned the major historical events of the seventeenth century. He spent most of his years in and around Bedford and its prison, where he was held for a total of thirteen years for refusing to conform. He was evidently a talented, charismatic and at times a fearless preacher who was not prepared to compromise his nonconformist position for the sake of an easy life or accommodation with the authorities. He managed to attract the attention of prominent London nonconformists such as George Cockayne and John Owen, who were among his many admirers and invited him to preach in the capital. In 1678, and therefore already late in his career, he published *The Pilgrim's Progress* to instantaneous acclaim. Within a year there was a second and then a third edition, testifying to the flair of its editor, Nathaniel Ponder. An unwelcome measure of its success can be seen in the appearance of pirated editions, spurious sequels and imitations that embroiled Ponder in legal wranglings. Today, *The Pilgrim's Progress* is still Bunyan's best-loved work, for most people associate him with the fate of Christian the pilgrim, with the monster Apollyon (as did M. R. James) and with the pleasures of a Vanity Fair that Bunyan bequeathed to W. M. Thackeray. In the wake of a renewed interest in spiritual autobiographies and conversion narratives, *Grace Abounding* has also found many admirers.

These works are of outstanding interest and have continued to inspire debate. Pioneering work by scholars such as Stuart Sim, Michael Davies and the late Richard Greaves has reassessed the relationship between Bunyan's fiction and his Calvinism. They have provided subtle discussions of Bunyan's predestinarian theology, greatly modifying the stereotypical picture of the severe preacher condemning his hearers to eternal hell-fire.⁹ These theological readings of Bunyan have gone hand in hand with an interest not only in Bunyan's spiritual conditions but also in his psychological state. Following William James's seminal *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) and later works on Puritan spirituality such as John Stachniewski's

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The Persecutory Imagination (1991), it is now widely recognised that Bunyan's oeuvre cannot be read without taking into account the internal conflicts that he termed despair or melancholy, and that we term depression.¹⁰ In [chapter 4](#), Vera J. Camden explores a new direction in psycho-analytical approaches to Bunyan's work.¹¹

Yet an emphasis upon *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *Grace Abounding*, the two works that dominate the way Bunyan is read and taught today, necessarily narrows our sense of his scope. To these two books one should add *The Life and Death of Mr Badman* (1680), *The Holy War* (1682), the Second Part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1684) and scattered works of poetry from *Profitable Meditations*, a prison poem published in 1661, to his famous collection of verse for children, *A Book for Boys and Girls* (1686). Even this simple list can give some insight into Bunyan's literary and stylistic experiments. There is an autobiography, two strikingly different allegories (*The Pilgrim's Progress*, on the pilgrimage of the soul, and *The Holy War*, on the Fall and redemption of Mankind, couched in military terms); there is a proto-novel in dialogue (*The Life and Death of Mr Badman*) and a didactic verse collection that resembles books of emblems or occasional meditations (*A Book for Boys and Girls*).

Bunyan's fiction appeared at regular intervals for only eight years and does not represent a major proportion of his work. Of the fifty-eight writings that form the Bunyan canon as it is received today, five are larger works of fiction and seven are verse collections, leaving forty-six non-fiction writings. One of the challenges faced by this *Companion* is therefore to provide readings of the major fictional works in dialogue with Bunyan's other generic experiments. He produced extended sermons, a conduct book, a catechism, a map of salvation, a versified church-order, various pamphlets directed against the Quakers, the Seventh-Day men (who worshipped on Saturdays) and the Anglicans; there are also works on church discipline (most notably on the validity of adult baptism and the suitability of women's assemblies), works of practical or pastoral theology and a series of epistles later released as *A Relation of the Imprisonment of Mr John Bunyan* (1765). We have probably lost a pamphlet supporting accusations of witchcraft against the Quakers and two works, 'A Christian Dialogue' and a pocket concordance, were never published. To sample these writings in all their diversity is to find dreams, allegories, exempla, poems, letters, emblems, dialogues, hymns, marginalia, aphorisms, conversion narratives, judgement stories, millenarian and typological commentaries. Bunyan had an obvious appetite for words that the present chapters explore by foregrounding this unique body of prose and verse against key issues in current scholarship. These include the publication of dissenting works, the history of the book, questions of gender and

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psychoanalysis, the relationship between literature and religion, between literature and early-modern radicalism, and the 'reception, appropriation and recollection' of seventeenth-century texts, to paraphrase the title of a recent collective volume on Bunyan's afterlife.¹²

As a theologian, Bunyan was a Calvinist evangelist who accepted the doctrine of double-predestination. As Roger Pooley remarks, the journey Christian takes in *The Pilgrim's Progress* 'is not that of an Everyman figure, but of an elect Christian'.¹³ Bunyan's world is peopled with Elect who reach heaven and Reprobates who are condemned to an eternity of suffering. Mr Badman never mends his ways, Ignorance is sent to Hell while in sight of the Celestial City and the Diablonians in *The Holy War* are crucified in scenes that can still shock by their violence, whatever their theological intent.¹⁴ Coleridge proclaimed that Bunyan's piety 'was baffled by his genius, and the Bunyan of Parnassus had the better of the Bunyan of the Conventicle', but this is to make a misguided distinction between theology and literature, as if Bunyan's Calvinism hindered the work of his Muse.¹⁵

Bunyan has often been considered within the context of seventeenth-century radical sectarianism, although he hardly fits the picture of a dissenting radical, if such a thing can even be defined. In print, he kept silent about the main political events of his day and never took an active part in any insurgency other than the Great Rebellion.¹⁶ Recent interpretations of his works have shown how misguided it may be to assume that Bunyan never altered his spiritual or political positions in the course of his career, but they have also revealed how he may, in general, have been far more conservative than formerly supposed.¹⁷ Presented in this light, Bunyan appears as a quiescent advocate of political non-resistance and religious orthodoxy, perhaps opposing the execution of Charles I and later favouring the policies of James II, who stigmatised the enthusiasm of the Quakers and Ranters as much as the pious moralism of the Anglican church.

At the heart of this *Companion* are readings of Bunyan's six major works of fiction that take into consideration the above issues, while being sensitive to questions of genre. We have assumed that readers may have an interest not only in dissenting literature in general but more specifically in seventeenth-century allegory, life-writing and early novels or children's literature, for which Bunyan's writings offer key points of entry. These chapters are framed by an introductory section on Bunyan's place within seventeenth-century culture, both literary and religious, and a section on aspects of his readership and reception. The volume does not give a complete panorama of Bunyan's varied and extensive writings, for that would be impossible in the space available; for the same reason, it cannot acknowledge every direction taken in the ever-growing corpus of Bunyan scholarship. We have attempted to

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present readings that avoid the complacency and hagiography of Whiggish criticism, and which are inspired instead by a desire to reflect upon one of the most fascinating literary achievements of the seventeenth century. It is one in which modern readers will find much to ponder and question.

Unlike his contemporary John Milton, John Bunyan never quite reached the status of Puritan bard. Some commentators found it hard to accept that a tinker could deliver what is arguably the finest allegory in the English language. Bunyan's pride in a poor education that pitched the Holy Spirit against human learning, his 'plain' style designed to appeal to the greatest number and his profound attachment to both a predestinarian theology and a congregational church ensured that the course of his fame rarely ran smooth with either readers or scholars.¹⁸ Bunyan scholarship today is much indebted to those who have laboured to rediscover and reassess the Puritan and dissenting literatures of the Civil War and Restoration periods, moving them inwards from their marginal position in seventeenth-century culture.¹⁹ All the following chapters draw upon this wave of innovative literary-historical work among seventeenth-century specialists worldwide. The Bunyan that emerges from them is neither the dangerous Anabaptist firebrand of seventeenth-century polemic nor the tolerant champion of tender consciences. He is not the supreme pastor who inspired the dissenting and missionary zeal of later centuries. He appears instead as a man barely enlightened, as we may now judge it, upon many subjects. A political conservative and an indifferent poet, he made enemies both within and without the dissenting community with his fiery temper and lack of poise. He was a witch-monger, sometimes a hypocrite towards women and an ardent believer in a theology not always associated today with tolerance. That is what makes him the writer he is. George Eliot, a most incisive observer of dissent, captured this as the true complexity of the man:

The blessed work of helping the world forward, happily does not wait to be done by perfect men; and I should imagine that neither Luther nor John Bunyan, for example, would have satisfied the modern demand for an ideal hero, who believes nothing but what is true, feels nothing but what is exalted, and does nothing but what is graceful.²⁰

Bunyan did indeed help the world forward by leaving some of the most poignant pages of seventeenth-century literature. Our purpose is to guide the reader to the many graceful – and not so graceful – aspects of his life, his works and his heritage.

NOTES

1. *The Ladies' Monthly Museum*, 1 November 1817, p. 249. An anonymous work called *The Tinker of Turvey* was published in 1630.

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2. M. R. James, *Count Magnus and Other Ghost Stories*, ed. S. T. Joshi (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2005), p. 87.
3. *The Whole Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor, 3 vols. (1852–3; London, Glasgow and Edinburgh: Blackie, 1862), 1:3, ‘Opinions recommendatory of this edition’.
4. The Oxford Bunyan began with *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in 1960, followed by three separate volumes, *Grace Abounding* in 1962, *The Holy War* in 1980 and *The Life and Death of Mr Badman* in 1988, continuing with Bunyan’s other writings, which appeared in thirteen volumes between 1976 and 1994 under the general title *Miscellaneous Works*.
5. A good selection can be found in the late Victorian and Edwardian scrapbook of George Potter of Highgate, ‘An Album Containing Material Relating to John Bunyan’, now in the British Library (RB.31.C.52). The scrapbook was arranged thematically in 1892, with additions made in 1901, 1905 and 1907. The main themes are: Bunyan’s portraits and frontispieces, Elstow and Bunyan’s cottage, Bunyan in prison, meeting-houses and schools, Bunyan’s tankard, his tomb and statue, his pulpit, his copy of Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments*, his will, book reviews and articles, auction and sales catalogues.
6. Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975; Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 137–44.
7. William York Tindall, *John Bunyan: Mechanick Preacher* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), p. vii.
8. See Brown, *Bunyan*.
9. Stuart Sim, *Negotiations with Paradox: Narrative Practice and Narrative Form in Bunyan and Defoe* (Savage, Md.: Barnes and Noble, 1990); Michael Davies, *Graceful Reading: Theology and Narrative in the Works of John Bunyan* (Oxford University Press, 2002); Greaves, *Glimpses*.
10. See my *Grace Overwhelming: John Bunyan, ‘The Pilgrim’s Progress’ and the Extremes of the Baptist Mind* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006).
11. For psychoanalytical approaches, see for instance W. N. Evans, ‘Notes on the Conversion of John Bunyan: A Study in English Puritanism’, *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 24 (1943), 176–85; Andrew W. Brink, ‘Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* and the Secular Reader: A Psychological Approach’, *English Studies in Canada*, 1 (1975), 386–405; Ivan Leudar and Wes Sharrock, ‘The Cases of John Bunyan, Part 1. Taine and Royce’ and ‘The Cases of John Bunyan, Part 2. James and Janet’, *History of Psychiatry*, 13 (2002), 247–65, 401–17; John Sneep and Arlette Zinck, ‘Learning to Read Salvation: Psychological and Spiritual Change in Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding* and *The Pilgrim’s Progress*’, *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 24.2 (2005), 156–64.
12. W. R. Owens and Stuart Sim (eds.), *Reception, Appropriation, Recollection: Bunyan’s ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007).
13. See below, p. 86.
14. On the darker side of Bunyan’s œuvre, see Beth Lynch, *John Bunyan and the Language of Conviction* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004).
15. Quoted in Roger Sharrock (ed.), *‘The Pilgrim’s Progress’: A Casebook* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1976), p. 53.
16. Richard F. Hardin, ‘Bunyan, Mr Ignorance, and the Quakers’, *SP*, 69 (1972), 496–508; Dayton Haskin, ‘The Pilgrim’s Progress in the Context of Bunyan’s

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- Dialogue with the Radicals', *Harvard Theological Review*, 77 (1984), 73–94; Ted L. Underwood, '“It pleased me much to contend”: John Bunyan as Controversialist', *Church History*, 57 (1988), 456–69.
17. Michael Mullett, *John Bunyan in Context* (Keele University Press, 1996); Vera J. Camden (ed.), *Trauma and Transformation: The Political Progress of John Bunyan* (Stanford University Press, 2008).
 18. See Roger Pooley, 'Plain and Simple: Bunyan and Style', in Keeble (ed.), *Conventicle*, pp. 91–110.
 19. Very selectively, see N.H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Leicester University Press, 1987); Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion, 1640–1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627–1660* (Cambridge University Press, 1999); Sharon Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent in Milton's England* (Cambridge University Press, 2003); Nicholas McDowell, *The English Radical Imagination: Culture, Religion, and Revolution, 1630–1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003); Joad Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).
 20. George Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858), ed. Thomas A. Noble, Oxford World's Classics (1988; Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 228–9.

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PART I

John Bunyan in his
seventeenth-century context