

Bunyan and the physiognomy of the Wor(l)d

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In the “Apology” that prefaces *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Bunyan defended himself against those who criticized him, on religious grounds, for the use of lively fictions by pointing out that the Bible itself is full of figurative elements. This is more than just a defence, however, for the Bible, to Bunyan, is actually a manual for reading the world figuratively. There is an iconic relationship between the Book of Books and the Book of Nature; an object found in the world becomes a sign when it is used figuratively in the Bible. Bunyan’s own allegorical fiction serves to point up this relationship and is an example of such a combinatory reading. Christian has to read the faces, names and utterances of the people he meets on his road in order to discover their meaning. In this process, indexical signs, such as a person’s blushing, are discovered to be part of an iconic concept; a case in point is Mercy, whose face, regarded in the mirror of Scripture, makes manifest its divine likeness.

1. Poetry versus piety?

Considering *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in the light of ‘iconicity’ is not simply one of those recipes that are to advance literary scholarship by applying a set of abstract terms to a text. On the contrary, I am quite convinced that the principles on which the semiotic concept of iconicity is based, i.e. similarity and analogy, are to be found in Bunyan’s work itself and actually form the basis of his attitude to language and the representation of speech. In particular, it will be seen that it provides a key to his representation of fictional characters.

This is not a matter of course. Since Coleridge’s frequently quoted remarks on *The Pilgrim’s Progress*¹ it has become quite common to regard its author as a self-divided artist, for

1. See e.g. Sharrock (1965: 12–13), Swaim (1993: 199), Luxon (1995: 159), Davis (2000: 217), Davies (2002: 4).

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 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 his characters as real persons who had been nicknamed by their neighbours (Coleridge 1976:53).

Even though Coleridge esteemed Bunyan highly as a theologian and a master of style,² in these remarks he seems to be unable to reconcile “the allegoric purpose” with the “illusion” of “real persons”. The former is associated with “piety” and the latter with “genius”, and somehow they do not come together. Such a view does not encourage any emphasis on the likeness between concept and word, meaning and sign, which has come to be called iconic.

Influential as it has been, however, this reading of *The Pilgrim's Progress* does not quite do justice to Bunyan's text.³ For in *The Pilgrim's Progress* poetry requires piety and vice versa, if poetry is to include the energetic representation of human speech and conversation and, accordingly, of ‘character’, and if piety is to include what Bunyan, in *Grace Abounding*, describes as “trembling under the fear of this, that no word of God could help me” (Bunyan 1998:58, no. 159). For piety, in this sense, is marked by the concern for the meaning and effect of God's message. In order to answer the question which lies at the heart of Bunyan's theology, namely “How can you tell that you are Elected? and what if you should not? how then?” (Bunyan 1998:20, no. 47), it is necessary, in the first place, to be able to “tell” — i.e., to read and interpret the word of God and feel and give evidence to its effect. But if communication and the reading of signs are quintessential for Bunyan's religion,

2. “I know of no book, the Bible excepted, as above all comparison, which I, according to my judgment and experience, 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 rhythmic flow” (Coleridge 1976:53).

3. Attempts at reconciling the two have been made, e.g. by Davies (2002). He argues against the critical tradition represented by F. R. Leavis, who did not understand how Bunyan's “damnation-dispensing theology” could be “conducive to a generous creative power”, and suggested setting aside his “allegorical intentions” (Leavis 1967:37, 48; Davies 2002:225). Davies argues against this by pointing out that Bunyan's work need not be saved from theology as it does not advocate a strict predestinarian creed but rather strives to lead its reader into “spiritual comfort” (224; see e.g. the convincing discussion of Ignorance, 239). Davies does not, however, address the question of allegory in relation to Bunyan's representation of the real world.

his poetry is surely not to be separated from it. Coleridge himself, in fact, suggests the perspective in which the connection may be made, as he refers to the “strange names” of Bunyan’s characters which indicate his “allegoric purpose”. But at the same time, seen in the light of “Parnassus”, these very names indicate real people who have been “nicknamed by their neighbours”. Signs and names therefore deserve some closer inspection.

2. God’s Word and human verbal images

Coleridge’s division actually takes up what Bunyan himself, in “The Author’s Apology for his Book” which serves as a preface to the first part of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, addresses as a possible objection to his work. Bunyan, using the device of *prosopopoeia*, has, as it were, members of the Conventicle respond to the inhabitant of Parnassus:

*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:
Some said, John, print it; others said, Not so:
Some said, It might do good; others said, No.* (Bunyan 2003: 4)

It is obvious that the objections raised were concerned with the “style” and “method” of the book, and Bunyan defends himself by pointing out that he who wants to be a fisher of men (Mt 19:1) must engage “*all his Wits*”: “*They must be grop’d for, and be tickled too, / Or they will not be catcht, what e’er you do*” (Bunyan 2003: 5). Poetry must be alluring and attractive if it is to do a service to piety. This argument, pursued along the lines of Horace’s *prodesse et delectare* or rather Sidney’s “delightful teaching” and “teaching delightfulness” — expressions to be found in another “Apology” written in defence of poetry against Puritan objections (Sidney 2002: 87, 113), is countered by objections to “feigning words”. Bunyan, more learned than he may have appeared to his critics, knows that *factio figura veritatis* (Kantorowicz 1957: 306)⁴ and points out that those feigning words may “*Make truth to spangle, and its rayes to shine*”. The critics, however, do not give up and keep harping on those feigned words. “But they want solidness: *Speak man thy mind: / They drown’d the weak; Metaphors make us blind*” (Bunyan 2003: 5). Bunyan’s

4. Kantorowicz (1957) quotes Augustine, *De quaestionibus Evangelistarum* II, c. 51, who emphasizes that fiction need not be a lie but may speak truthfully; for otherwise the Lord himself must be called a liar.

wit sparkles quite brightly here as those who object most vehemently to the use of metaphor are made to use three metaphors in the twelve words they speak. To the reader of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the image of weak people being drowned by feigned words or metaphors is particularly ironic, for it points ahead to Christian's nearly being drowned in the Slough of Despond, which, by contrast, does not consist of words but is quite 'real'.

Bunyan, quite tolerantly and patiently, does not leave the objection to answer itself by its own absurdity but responds to it by pointing out that the Book of Books itself is full of "*Types, Shadows and Metaphors*" as well as "*parables*" and "*Dark Figures, Allegories*" (Bunyan 2003: 5–6). To him, this argument clinches the debate, for no right-minded Jew or Christian can object to those devices:

Yet loth
 Will any sober man be to find fault
 With them, lest he be found for to assault
 The highest Wisdom. No, he rather stoops,
 And seeks to find out what by pins and loops,
 By Calves, and Sheep; by Heifers, and by Rams;
 By Birds and Herbs, and by the blood of Lambs;
 God speaketh to him: And happy is he
 That finds the light, and grace that in them be. (Bunyan 2003: 5–6)

In the present context, Bunyan's argument is interesting not just because it serves to defend figurative speech but because it implicitly says something about the nature of metaphor. For in the passage just quoted, a curious fusion of tenor and vehicle or represented and representing sign takes place, as Bunyan describes the sober man's reaction to Biblical metaphor by means of a metaphor: "*No, he rather stoops, / And seeks to find out what by pins and loops, / ... / God speaketh to him.*" The pins and loops "refer to details of the furnishing of the tabernacle" and were interpreted typologically (e.g. as the "ministry of Gods Word fastening" the Church).⁵ But

5. Owens' note in Bunyan 2003: 292, quoting Ainsworth (1639); the reference is to Exod. 26: 4–5 and 27:19; the quotation is to be found in Ainsworth's *Annotations vpon the second booke of Moses, called Exodus* 108–109 (on Exod. 27:19). Johnson (1989) points out that to Bunyan "tenor and vehicle are intrinsically connected, because God has made the world in such a way that these connections exist. In the Bible, word and meaning meet" (p. 123). For the Puritan emphasis on the predominance of words over things in Biblical hermeneutics, see Kaufmann (1966). In fact, the Puritan insistence on the literal meaning of the Bible, as exemplified by John Owen, encourages reading real things allegorically rather than inventing allegories. Referring to Gal. 4:21–26, Owen points out that "[Paul] doth not call the things themselves an allegory, for they had a reality, the story of them was true; but the exposition and application which he makes of the Scripture in that place is allegorical, — that is, what was spoken of one thing he expounds

as Bunyan represents these items, they are not just words (signs referring, in the Peircean definition of metaphor, to other signs (Johansen 2003:383)⁶ but things: the sober (and indeed thrifty) man stoops and picks them up from the ground, as it were; he neither ignores them nor throws them away but considers their use and meaning. Thus the iconic relationship is a special one here since there is a congruence or similarity between the Book of Books and the Book of Nature, both giving evidence to the same divine author.⁷ The object has a meaning (becomes emblematic, as it were) when it is found in the world because it is used metaphorically in the Bible. The objection to fiction is that it is not confined to solid reality, and since only such a reality is to be equated with truth, it is dangerous. Bunyan's answer is that fiction and metaphor are not to be separated from reality, for they may show, on the basis of the Bible, that reality is meaningful. Or to put it differently: he defends the kind of fiction which represents a reality that is a sign of truth.

In fact, life itself presents lines which are less easy to read than the lines in Bunyan's fictional "*Dark Figures, Allegories*". This is pointed out in the author's response to his critic: "*Come, let my Carper, to his Life now look, / And find There darker Lines, then in my Book / He findeth any*" (Bunyan 2003:6). The Book of Nature, here considered as the book of human life, is much more difficult to decipher (and more sombre) than the fictional representation of it. Perhaps we are to regard the lines marking the life of the carper as the indexical signs of a sadly querulous temper which he may discover when he looks at himself, but as he only belongs to the prefatory "Apology" and not to the allegory itself, we do not really learn their meaning. Nevertheless, these "darker Lines" already suggest that Bunyan will be very much concerned with the meaning of people's lives, reading them (and this is where Parnassus and Conventicle meet) as signs of the divine will. If Bunyan takes up the tradition of reading the world as a book, the text he reads is primarily

of another, because of their proportion one to another, or the similitude between them" (*An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, quoted by Kaufmann 1966: 37). Allegorical interpretation thus amounts to establishing iconic relationships.

6. Johansen refers to Peirce's "rather convoluted" definition of metaphors: "those signs which represent the representative character of a representamen by representing a parallelism in something else, are *metaphors*" (Peirce 1932:227).

7. On the analogy between the Book of Nature and the Bible, see Leimberg (1996:54–86) who, referring to Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*, points out that reading the Book of Nature means discovering the signature of its author and thus approaching the truth which is more directly expressed in the Book of Books (55). Beierwaltes provides insight into the tradition of this concept; in particular the notion of the world as *divina metaphora* which can already be found in Johannes Scotus Eriugena (Beierwaltes 1976:243; for the function of Scripture in this respect see 255).

a book of human intercourse and conversation. There are quite a few objects to be interpreted, such as the burden upon Christian's back, and there are all those meaningful places such as the Slough of Despond or the House Beautiful, but in most cases meaning is to be discovered in persons, and in what these persons say.

This meaning of persons is just as real as the meaning of places and objects. Bunyan's famous account, at the beginning of his "Apology" of how he, when "*writing of the Way / And Race of Saints in this our Gospel-Day, / Fell suddenly into an Allegory / About their Journey*" (Bunyan 2003: 3) does not oppose the real and the allegorical. He does not speak about his representing allegorically the search for (and the knowledge of) God as a "*Way / And Race of Saints*"; he speaks about the "*Way / And Race of Saints*" which are then represented allegorically. The way and race are not an allegory, they are real. The saints are actually on the move, walking through the wilderness of this world, and this actual journey is simultaneously an antitype of Exodus and a spiritual journey to God. The relationship between these levels is an iconic one; in the Peircean sense an iconic image or diagram (Peirce 1955: 104); a metaphor only in so far as there is nothing that is not a sign. In a world in which everything has a figurative, typological, and analogical meaning, falling into an allegory is the most natural event.

Bunyan's technique has been described as a way of making inner, psychological forces appear as external agents. Thus Dorothy van Ghent maintained with regard to one of the most attractively dangerous characters Christian meets on his road: "Clearly, Mr Worldly Wiseman is inside Christian himself, a counsel of softness in the soul" (30). But I am not sure that such a psychological approach to Bunyan's allegory is the most appropriate one. Whereas, in *Grace Abounding*, the speaker reflects on the process of conversion that is going on in his soul, or whereas, in *The Holy War*, the central location, Mansoul, clearly indicates that the battle is a *psychomachia*, it is the point of *The Pilgrim's Progress* that the natural and in particular the human and social world are to be read and understood by the protagonist. Places such as the Valley of Humiliation or the Valley of the Shadow of Death indeed represent the protagonist's inner state of affliction but they simultaneously indicate external scenes and situations in which he is put to the test of his faith. Mr Worldly Wiseman is not "inside Christian himself" but Christian, a reader, is to learn what he means when he meets him, and to learn by experience what it means to believe him.

Occasionally, there is actually a quite obvious and readable sign, as in the case of the old man met by Faithful, who calls himself Adam the first.

Faith. Why, at first I found my self somewhat inclinable to go with the Man, for I thought he spake very fair; but looking in his forehead as I talked with him, I saw there written, *Put off the old Man with his deeds.*

Chr. *And how then?*

Faith. Then it came burning hot into my mind, whatever he said, and however he flattered, when he got me home to his House, he would sell me for a Slave. (Bunyan 2003:70)

Faithful might have been more sceptical at once, since Adam the first comes from the Town of Deceit, but even such obvious signals may at times be overlooked. There is also the case of a man whom Hopeful and Christian see carried away by seven devils. Christian does “not perfectly see his face” and therefore does not know for sure whether he is “one *Turn-away* that dwelt in the *Town of Apostacy*”, but then Hopeful sees a piece of writing on his back “with this Inscription, *Wanton Professor, and damnable Apostate*” (Bunyan 2003: 121). This is just a glimpse, a very brief scene, an extreme case: the man exists, as it were, only with regard to this piece of writing, but it is nevertheless an effective one. The very frightfulness of this scene, which makes Christian and Hopeful tremble, prevents us from regarding it ‘merely’ as a metaphor or allegory. If we accept the reality of Christian, even though he is part of a dream, this is a moment of real fear. He has not just been instructed by an invented case; he has read, so to speak, an inscription in the Book of Nature.

This effect is enhanced by Bunyan’s strategy of inserting allegories into the allegory, for example the scenes Christian witnesses in the house of the Interpreter, where he is shown a man “a rising out of bed” who trembles because of the dream he has had, a vision of the day of judgement. By this dream-within-the-dream or allegory-within-the-allegory technique Bunyan furthers his readers’ insight into the allegorical or sign-like quality of life itself and at the same time ensures that Christian and his journey are not just regarded as allegorical constructs but as images of life. Bunyan may have learned this method from Shakespeare, who, by presenting, in the Forest of Arden, the “woeful pageant” of Orlando bearing a character named “Adam” in his arms (2.7), makes us realize, with Jacques, that “all the world’s a stage” while at the same time he ensures that we firmly believe the characters and actions of the play to be part of this very world. In *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, a similar effect is achieved, for example, when Great-heart, in Part II, speaks metaphorically about Mr Fearing: he is asked by Honest why “*such a good Man should be all his days so much in the dark?*” and answers that in God’s orchestra “Some must *Pipe*, and some Must *Weep*: [...] He and his fellows sound the *Sackbut*, whose Notes are more doleful than the Notes of other Musick are” (Bunyan 2003:237). A little later, he adds: “I make thus bold to talk thus Metaphorically, for the ripening of the Wits of young Readers, and because in the Book of the Revelations, the Saved are compared to a company of Musicians”. I just wrote “he adds”, but who does actually speak here? Does Great-heart, within the story, suddenly address the “young Readers” of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*? Or is it the narrator, the Dreamer,

who suddenly takes over the part of Great-heart within his own story? Whatever may be the answer, the momentary fusion of different narrative levels shows their similarity: metaphor is as much a part of reality as reality is part of the allegory.

3. Names and faces

Coleridge, we remember, emphasizes that “we go on with [Bunyan’s] characters as real persons who had been nicknamed by their neighbours”. This is an important observation, as it points to the fact that Bunyan was concerned with the representation of human beings and social intercourse, and not just with personifications of abstract religious, moral, or psychological notions. At the same time it points to a particular function of language in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*: the name is to represent the thing or person not just in a coincidental or conventional but in a telling way; Coleridge’s term “nickname” puts this in a nutshell. Mr Worldly-Wiseman, as many critics have observed, characterizes himself by the way he speaks, beginning with his jovial opening remark to Christian, “How now, good fellow, whither away after this burdened manner?” Bunyan has Mr Worldly-Wiseman deviate from the established use of language by changing the participle into an adjective, for of course it is Christian and not the manner by whom a burden has to be carried.⁸ The grammatical and rhetorical operation can be seen as a case of (diagrammatic) iconicity since it corresponds to a similar subtle shift of perception or evaluation on Mr Worldly-Wiseman’s part. By turning Christian’s heavy burden into a mere mood or attitude Bunyan lets us know that existential grievances do not have a place in this man’s life. But we also know that such an attitude may be most welcome in a situation when we feel the weight of a burden all too severely. And it must be said in defence of Christian that Mr Worldly-Wiseman does not introduce himself by name; the reader has the advantage over him in this respect. Even though Bunyan shows that he knows all about the morality play and about the realism of comedy in which *sermocinatio* is practised, i.e. “The attribution to an individual of language in harmony with his age, birth, country, life, spirit, and behaviour”,⁹ Mr Worldly-Wiseman is neither a personification nor a comic

8. In the *OED*, “burdened, burthened, *ppl. a.*” is, in the 16th and 17th centuries, only documented for the meaning “†a. Imposed as a burden (*obs.*).” The first examples of Bunyan’s use of the word, i.e. “b. Heavily loaded, encumbered, oppressed”, are “1725 POPE *Odyss.* XVII. 413 Constrained to wield..the scythe along the burthened field. 1818 *Parl. Deb.* 1409 The present burdened state of the country”.

9. Sonnino (1968: 168), quoting Erasmus (1963: 33).

stereotype but rather a person who presents a complete image of himself as an individual by the way he speaks.¹⁰

In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, knowing and reflecting on a person's name means knowing about a person. Thus Christian and Hopeful are invited by the "Gentleman-like" Demas to turn out of their way and provide for themselves in his silver-mine. But he blushes when he is asked whether this is a dangerous place and Christian suddenly knows his name, "saying, *Demas*, Thou art an enemy to the right ways of the Lord of this way" (Bunyan 2003: 104). Demas admits that this is his name, whereupon Christian identifies him, probably because of the silver, as the son of Judas. Demas is a biblical name but he is just briefly mentioned in the second epistle to Timothy.¹¹ This is an example of Bunyan making the biblical ground shine through the transparent surface of reality. Moreover, it is one of the aspects of his work which are defended in the "Apology", for even though Judas and Demas are biblical, Demas as the son of Judas is not. While the Book of Books makes it possible to interpret the Book of Nature, including human life, the two books are by no means identical. Reality can and must be read metaphorically and allegorically because it is used figuratively in the Bible. But once this principle has been established, our reading of the world may even provide us with meanings not expressly mentioned in the Bible. Bunyan uses the Bible quite creatively,¹² for Demas is a person who may be identified by a name which imaginatively unfolds a biblical point of reference. If, in the Bible, being God's Word, there is the same agreement between names and things (and persons) as in the Book of the World through which he wanders, Christian can discover "Demas" to be the

10. Cf. van Ghent (1953: 29) and Seed (1980: 81) on characterization through speech in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Davis (2000: 220) develops their approach, considering passages in which "style of speech and theology are at one". In particular, he tries to identify the "Language of *Canaan*" spoken by those on their way to God (221). An example is the use of the personal pronoun: "Charity comes to recognise that Christian is a true pilgrim, who forsakes the things of this world for those of the world to come [...]. Her change from addressing him in the worldly plural, 'you', to calling him 'thee' in the pure and plain singular, is the linguistic sign of that recognition" (223). Matters are not quite so easy, however. Mr Wordly-Wiseman, for example, jovially addresses Christian as "thou", whereas Christian calls him "you". In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, language is shown to be indicative of the right meaning only if it is used in the right spirit. On the "language of *Canaan*", so also Swaim (1993: 72).

11. 4:10: "For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world"; just the name is mentioned in Col. 4:14 and Philem. 24.

12. Sharrock (1965: 25) points out that Bunyan sometimes "develops a very slight metaphorical hint in Scripture into a fully-realized allegorical episode" and cites the Valley of the Shadow of Death as an example.

mine-owner's name once he has realized that he is the person St. Paul refers to as the one who loves "this present world". The word of the Bible thus makes Christian know his face when he meets him even though, of course, St Paul did not insert a picture into his epistle.

The world in *The Pilgrim's Progress* is definitely a fallen one, but its course is determined by God, and this is why language, at least potentially, still has the power it had when God brought every creature to Adam "to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that *was* the name thereof" (Gen 2:19). Bunyan, in his *Exposition of the First Ten Chapters of Genesis*, comments on this verse by emphasizing that the way someone is called (by Adam and his antitype, Christ) is identical with what God appoints him or her to be: "So Christ nameth the world; whom he will he calleth saints; and whom he will he calleth the world, 'ungodly,' 'serpents,' 'vipers,' and the like" (Bunyan 1875:427). In the biblical past, it may have been easier than in the present to recognize a person's nature (or calling) in their names, "for names of old were ofttimes given according to the nature and destiny of the persons concerned. 'Is he not rightly called Jacob?' Gen. xxvii.36. And again, 'As his name *is*, so *is* he.' 1 Sa. xxv.25" (Bunyan 1875:495). But to Bunyan the principle still holds in the present. Accordingly, when he shows us, in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, "real persons who had been nicknamed by their neighbours" he is by no means at odds with his allegorical teaching. To Christian and his companions, who want to find out how someone is truly called by Christ, Scripture gives instructions. In a post-lapsarian world, it is not nature (i.e. reality itself) that may inspire the wanderer with the true names of the people he meets but God's Word, which he has read in the Bible.

This does not mean, however, that errors are impossible when reading a face. The case of Mr Honest or "Father Honest" (Bunyan 2003:231) in Part II of *The Pilgrim's Progress* deserves a closer look in this respect. When he first meets Great-heart and the women and children he guides, he mistakes him for one "of those that some time ago did rob *Little-faith* of his money";¹³ the marginal gloss to this passage reads "*One Saint sometimes takes another for his Enemy*". When Great-heart tells him his name, he immediately begs his pardon; he obviously does not even consider it possible that the name is inappropriate or a lie. Both his error and his immediate trust may have to do with the fact that Mr Honest, as we learn a little later, comes from the "Town of *Stupidity* [which] lieth about four Degrees beyond the City of *Destruction*" (Bunyan 2003:231–232). We should hasten to add, however, that the place of origin in *The Pilgrim's Progress* does not necessarily determine a person's character, as is made evident by Christian and his family, who were born

13. I.e. Faint-heart, Mistrust and Guilt, in Part I.

in the City of Destruction. If the “Town of *Stupidity*” is to indicate Mr Honest’s character at all, it makes us see that he is one of the poor in spirit who are blessed (Mt 5:3). Mr Honest’s own name is, in the fashion of epic poetry, not revealed for some time. The reason is, paradoxically and appropriately, that Mr Honest, being such a good man, is an example of modesty and does not even know (or admit to know) his name. When Great-heart asks him about his name and place of origin, he only says where he comes from but maintains “My name I cannot”. According to the *OED*, the last example of transitive “can” in the sense of “know” is from 1649.¹⁴ The archaism is iconic of Mr Honest’s nature, even though — and this is where the paradox comes in — one might say that this is the one point he is *not* quite honest about. For when Great-heart, with the acumen of the elect, says “Oh! [...] *I deem I have half a guess of you, your Name is old Honesty, is it not?*”, the “old Gentleman” blushes and replies “Not Honesty in the *Abstract*, but *Honest* is my Name, and I wish that my *Nature* shall agree to what I am called”. Bunyan here ingeniously includes a metapoetical statement in his dialogue. For he has one of the characters point out that he is not a personification; he is not “Honesty in the *Abstract*” but he is a human being who hopes that his life will be true to his name.¹⁵ This ‘inverted iconicity’, as one may call it, as life here imitates the name, meets with the Puritan practice of nomenclature, where such names as “Sin-deny” occur quite frequently (Bardsley 1880: 162).¹⁶ There are other examples of this kind of naming in 17th century religious practice even outside Puritanism, such as the community at Little Gidding, whose members gave themselves names like “Patient” or “Obedient”, i.e. adjectives like Bunyan’s “Honest”; they expressly did so in order to indicate a quality they lacked and strove to attain rather than a quality they were proud of possessing.¹⁷

The blushing of Mr Honest shows that he is true to his name; the sign of his face is in keeping with the verbal sign. Honesty here even overrules modesty.

14. †1.a. and b.; c. “can skill of” was used a little longer.

15. Kaufmann (1966) points out that Bunyan’s characters “are real individuals who do not incarnate but exemplify a particular quality”. Their names, “like that of Honest, are more often than not adjectival in nature rather than substantival, and hence hit at attribute rather than essence” (90).

16. Bardsley (1880: 199) points out with regard to the names in *PP*: “But, in a large proportion of cases, these names already existed.”

17. See Nicholas Ferrar’s account, reprinted in Williams (1970: xxix), of the names adopted by the members of the Little Gidding community: “their intents were not [...] when they took theses specious titles of virtues and abilities with which they were first stiled, to procure honour in others’ esteem, but rather to animate themselves in the pursuit and practice of those things which were most necessary and proper for them; [...]”.

Bunyan, however, was not so naïve as to deny the possibility of ambiguity. The language of the face is an example, for we have seen that Demas blushes, too — in his case, this is not a sign of honesty, for he never admits his true project, but of lying and shame. The very word “honest” may be misused and therefore mistrusted. Mr Worldly-Wiseman, for instance, promises Christian and his family a good life “by honest neighbours” in the village of Morality, and Christian, blinded for the moment, calls Mr Civility, who lives there, an “honest man”. In *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan uses the word in an even more openly ironical way, when he says of himself, “now I was become a right honest man” and soon comes to equate this with “a poor painted Hypocrite” (Bunyan 1998: 13, no. 27). Now we know why Mr Honest hesitates to tell Great-heart who he is. “Who is the honest man?” asks George Herbert in his poem “Constancie” and makes clear that only the absolute standard, the “Mark-man” on the Cross, i.e. Christ himself, deserves this name. Mr. Honest is aware of the dangers of false honesty when he reports Mr Selfwil’s opinion that it “seems abundance more honest” to be convinced it is right “to have to do with other mens Wives” than “to do it, and yet hold contrary to it in Opinion” (Bunyan 2003: 239–240). The rejection of double standards may be just the mask of dishonesty.

Names and persons are never linked coincidentally, but sometimes names are misleading, as when Faithful remarks to Christian: “I met with *Shame*, But of all the Men that I met with in my Pilgrimage, he, I think, bears the wrong name” for he quite shamelessly, as Faithful points out, “objected against Religion it self” (Bunyan 2003: 72). Sometimes the names of two persons are very similar but the persons’ fates quite dissimilar. Timorous, for example, apparently does not make it to the Celestial City for he wants Christian, whom he meets on the Hill Difficulty, to go back for fear of the lions (Bunyan 2003: 42). Similarly, Mrs Timorous, his daughter, whom we meet in Part II, regards Christiana’s desire to follow her husband as “*madness*” (Bunyan 2003: 173) and actually reviles her when Christiana asks her to be gone. There is a very similar name, Fearing, which belongs to a man who, in the words of Mr Honest, “was one of the most troublesome Pilgrims that ever [he] met with in all [his] days” (Bunyan 2003: 233). But he nevertheless “had the root of the matter in him,” as Mr Honest points out. Subtle semantic distinctions are to be taken into account. *Fearing* points to the fear of God and turns out, though troublesome to the other pilgrims, to be an important member of the divine orchestra. “*Fearful*” would have been another matter.¹⁸ Furthermore, we are probably justified in noticing the distinction between the “English” (or Germanic)

18. “Fearful” is the adjective applied to the man in the iron cage in the Interpreter’s house, who despairs of his salvation.

word “Fearing” and the French (or Latin) word “Timorous”, the latter being obviously closer to Pope and Pagan than the former. The point should not be overstated, however, for both Despondency and his daughter Much-afraid will arrive at the Celestial City in Part II — which shows that the motivation of the names is never based on schematic rules.

The examples furthermore show that with all the implicit trust in the ability of words and names to designate people correctly, it still needs the right faculty and spirit in the reader if one is to arrive at the correspondence of name and person. Sir Thomas Browne, who had studied della Porta’s *De humana physiognomia* (1586),¹⁹ was congenial to Bunyan in stressing that this is not an academic qualification. It may even be a gift owned by a beggar in the street:

there is surely a Physiognomy, which those experienced and Master Mendicants observe, whereby they instantly discover a mercifull aspect, and will single out a face, wherein they spy the signatures and markes of mercy. For there are mystically in our faces certain characters which carry in them the motto of our souls, wherein he that cannot read A. B. C. may read our natures. [...] The finger of God hath left an inscription upon all his workes [...]. (Browne 1964: 57; section II.2)

Bunyan’s Mercy, the young neighbour of Christiana who accompanies her on her way in Part II of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, confirms Browne’s perception, as she, too, combines what is common and what is mystical.²⁰ Apart from the fact that Mercy is another of those ‘real’ Christian names that can be found in Puritan circles before and after Bunyan (Bardsley 1880: 142), the character in Bunyan’s book is probably not exactly what every member of the Conventicle would have expected from a representation of mercy as a quality. She is derived from the King James Bible in a quite unconventional way, namely by literalizing a metaphor. When Mrs. Timorous reviles Christiana and tells “neighbour Mercy” to “leave her in her own hands, since she scorns our Counsel and Company” (Bunyan 2003: 174), Mercy does not follow her because “her bowels yearned over Christiana”; she has, as we might say, a gut feeling that Christiana is right and Timorous wrong. We know that Bunyan adopts a familiar biblical expression but there is nevertheless some element of surprise in the way in which Colossians 3:12, for example (“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, ... bowels of mercies”) is shown to be part of emotional reality. In the Authorized Version, the expression “bowels” mostly goes together

19. See Martin’s notes (Browne 1964: 310 and 372). On the theory and tradition of physiognomy relevant to the Early Modern period, see ch. 1 in Baumbach (2007).

20. Cf. Browne’s famous collocation, “common Hieroglyphics” (Browne 1964: 15; I.16); see Leimberg (1996: 70–71) and Bauer (1999: 227).

with “mercies”, in the plural, as a synonym of “kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering” (Col. 3:12). Mercy in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* is all this but she is more; she is perhaps more expressly human (in the sense of not being always and completely rational) than any other virtuous character, and her emotion is generally praised by Christiana when she says that “Bowels becometh Pilgrims” (Bunyan 2003: 177). We, the readers, must become like Sir Thomas Browne’s mendicants and spot Mercy’s divine quality in her very humanity.²¹ For the young girl is more divine than most others (even among Bunyan’s many saints), as she not only shows “mercies” but “Mercy”, a quality that “droppeth like the gentle dew from heaven” (*The Merchant of Venice* 4.1.180). Young Mercy, the girl in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, laughs in her sleep because she dreams (Bunyan 2003: 210) of silver, gold, and ear-rings — surely a questionable occupation in the eyes of a Puritan but here a sign of divine favour.²² She is “of a fair Countenance, and therefore the more alluring” to Mr Brisk (213) but she also undergoes a singular change towards the end of the book: she is not summoned like Christiana, Mr Honest and others to cross the river of death and enter the gate of the Celestial City but disappears as a human character altogether. The change is a verbal one: whereas “Mercy”, for much of the second part of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, refers to the human character, in the end it exclusively refers to the divine quality (as when the dying Christiana says to Mr Despondency and his daughter, “The effect of that Mercy is, that you are brought with Safety hither”).

The last scene in which we see her strongly underlines this fusion and transformation of the human and the divine, as well as of person and word. It also shows once more that poetry and piety cannot be separated in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Mercy, who is pregnant (she has preferred to marry Christiana’s son Matthew rather than Mr Brisk), is reported to have a strong craving. What she longs for is a looking-glass in the dining-room of the shepherds’ palace on the Delectable Mountains. Her crudely natural desire turns out to be a spiritual one, for the mirror, which she obtains, is “one of a thousand. It would present a man, one way, with his own Feature exactly, and turn it but an other way, and it would shew one the very Face and Similitude of the Prince of Pilgrims himself” (Bunyan 2003: 268). The passage describes an important element in Bunyan’s concept of iconic representation, for it joins together the human face in the mirror and the face of God,

21. Cf. Bunyan (1875: 422): “And as there is passions of pity, compassion, affections, and bowels in man; so there are these in a far more infinite way in God”.

22. The marginal gloss serves to identify Mercy here with Jerusalem, as it refers to Ezek. 16:8, 9, 10, 11. Luxon (1995), by contrast, thinks that Bunyan denies this spiritual transformation to Mercy, and to women altogether (204–205).

who appears, in correspondence with the “mind” of the human onlooker, either “with the very Crown of Thorns upon his Head”, or “in his Exaltation, [...] coming to Reign” (Bunyan 2003:268). The trust in God’s having created man in his image (Gen. 1:26) is here linked with the conviction expressed in 1 Cor. 13:12, “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face”. Bunyan echoes Herbert’s “The Elixer” in which the speaker prays, “Teach me, my God and King / In all things thee to see” and goes on “A man that looks on glasse / On it may stay his eye; / Or if he pleaseth through it passe, / And then the heav’n espie”. Bunyan’s magic mirror, like Herbert’s,²³ is a riddle reflecting on language, to which the marginal gloss provides the clue: “*It was the Word of God*”. The divine physiognomy which is discovered when one looks at the image of oneself and then slightly shifts the mirror is presented by the “Word of God”. Again Scripture provides the basis for Bunyan’s scene, even though the emphasis in one of the passages he indicates, James 1:23, is a somewhat different one: in James’s epistle, looking at oneself in a mirror is compared to just hearing the word of God but not minding it.²⁴ Bunyan apparently ignores the negative implications of this verse and solely focuses on the connection between mirror and word. By linking this connection to 2 Cor. 3:12 (“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory”) he succeeds in establishing the Book of Books as the text which enables us to read faces, including our own, as divine likenesses. As Calvin put it, “we recognize him in his image, that is, in his word” (Calvin 1989:86; I.ix.3).²⁵

This is exactly what is going on throughout *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. The images of the human beings, presented iconically by their names and the words they speak, are to be recognized as images of God, for their reality is discovered to be a metaphorical transformation of Scripture. I think this includes, perhaps paradoxically, even those persons like Demas who do not arrive at the Celestial City. Even they, being part of the physiognomic text to be read, bear witness to the divine author to be seen in the mirror, who is either in a state of misery or a state of glory.

23. See Leimberg (1996:88).

24. “For if any be a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was” (James 1:23–24).

25. Forrest (1963) considers Mercy’s wish in the context of the iconography of the mirror, especially its connections with the Virgin Mary, the representation of truth, and Puritan introspection. He cites a marriage sermon by Thomas Gataker (1637) in which the passage from James is evoked to link, in a positive way, the motif of looking at oneself in a mirror with reading Scripture (124).

But thus we are made aware of the fact that Bunyan's book itself is meant to be such a magic mirror, in which his readers discover themselves, or as he puts it at the end of his "Apology":

*Would'st read thy self, and read thou know'st not what
And yet know whether thou art blest or not,
By reading the same lines? O then come hither,
And lay my Book, thy Head and Heart together.* (Bunyan 2003:9)

In this passage, Bunyan evokes the Calvinist notion of searching for signs of divine election in the world. But how is such a discovery to be brought about by "reading the same lines"? The notion of the text as a mirror in which "lines" are to be read provides a clue to the answer. The "lines" of the human face are indexical signs which are not merely indicative of certain inner attitudes but also give evidence to the fact that the world as a whole is a set of signs. As John White has pointed out, the question of whether a sign is an index or an icon is largely a matter of interpretation or reading (White 1999: 84); in both cases the reader must have an idea of what makes them signify anything. This idea is what Bunyan wants to establish. *The Pilgrim's Progress* imitates the Bible in showing a world that is to be read figuratively. Bunyan's work thus becomes an icon of a relationship between God and human beings that is based on likeness. The human text must be made in the likeness of the divine text if the author of the one is made in the likeness of the other. Accordingly, the reading process itself is the reason for hope. Using the word of the Bible in order to discover meaning in the world, the reader is to see an iconic relationship between the two. In the end, there is the hope that "the sign vehicle evinces an existential connection with its object" (Nöth 2001: 18), i.e. that the signs we read as icons will turn out to have been (divine) indices all along.

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