

Cities of Destruction

Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* in the Dystopian Visions of Huxley and Orwell

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Erika Gottlieb and E. J. Brown have both argued that Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) owe varying degrees of debt to Zamyatin's dystopian novel *We* (1921). In the following article it will be argued that the narrative structures and characters of both these British novels constitute more fundamentally a secular transformation of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), but incorporate elements of futility and pessimism not present to the original religious allegory, due to liberal humanist and democratic values replacing the religious vision.

Introduction

The utopian novel is frequently a secular version of the allegory of paradise, rooted in works such as the medieval poem *The Phoenix* or Chaucer's *Parlement of Fowlys*. Similarly to these texts, it invariably includes the device of the dream narrative. Morris's protagonist Will Guest in *News from Nowhere* (1890) falls into the dream of an Edenic, medieval-style society without mass production or cityscapes (Morris 6). H. G. Wells's unnamed protagonist in *A Modern Utopia* (1905) finds himself, after falling asleep on a bus (246), in an alternative world which manages to integrate technology effortlessly with nature while maintaining an aesthetic quality, reflecting a greater optimism towards industrialization than professed by Morris and his ilk (72). Like the dream allegory, both these books employ paradisiacal and biblical imagery, as a pointed and self-conscious transformation of prelapsarian conditions to the secular and political.

The generic origin of the British dystopian novel is somewhat harder to locate, due to its belatedness as a subgenre, the more necessary portrayal of conflict, and complex relation to the realities of its contemporary world—its absurdities frequently being, as Zamyatin noticed when writing of H. G. Wells, a hyperbolic presentation of contemporary ills as much as a futuristic warning (Zamyatin, "Wells" 270). Erika Gottlieb has argued that

Brave New World (1932) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) are both influenced by Zamyatin's *We*—an opinion shared by E. J. Brown (Gottlieb 6–7; Brown 163). She notices that *We* is itself based on the Christian allegories of salvation and damnation, the belief that Messianic societies turn into dictatorships (Gottlieb 6, 10, 49, 62), and the curious story in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) of the “Grand Inquisitor” (51), in which the head of the Inquisition in Seville, while “trying” Christ Himself as a heretic in his cell, admits that He is no longer really followed by the Church, with freedom having been taken away from the faithful to ensure their happiness (Gottlieb 49–50). She argues that *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* contain these three elements of Zamyatin's novel through close comparisons, understanding the confrontations of the main characters with their own “Grand Inquisitors” (the Benefactor, Mustapha Mond, and O'Brien), as “trial” scenes, which alternately enlighten and then condemn and sentence the rebel figure (59, 65, 78). While many of Gottlieb's observations appear accurate—especially since Orwell reviewed the English translation of *We* for *The Tribune* before writing *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (4 January 1946)—it must be remembered that Huxley himself denied all knowledge of Zamyatin's *We* prior to writing *Brave New World* (Russell 13). Furthermore, D-503 in *We* does not begin the novel as a committed dissident, but is drawn to rebellion slowly by lust, and alternates between two oscillating selves, questioning and cautioning his fellow rebels until late in the book. This makes him a very different sort of rebel from Bernard Marx or Winston Smith, whose disenchantment leads them to question from the start. In both the British novels the presumed “Inquisitor” figures of Mond and O'Brien observe or guide clandestinely the questers through their rebellion towards the inevitable confrontation in a way that is entirely absent in *We*. Finally, as Craig L. Carr has noticed, the state in Zamyatin's *We* appears to be tottering at the end of the book (5), with an assertion of free will on the part of the populace against the government unthinkable in the two British novels. It is primarily the lack of the main character's sense of a purposeful quest in Zamyatin's novel, and the lack of either guidance or observation by the “Inquisitor” figure, combined with the greater optimism for successful political action against the state, which suggest that the two, later, British dystopian novels may take elements of both their narratives and their curiously fatalistic ideologies from another source.

While Gottlieb sees Winston Smith as akin to “Everyman” in the “medieval morality play” of that name (4), it seems more likely that the structure of most British dystopian novels, in particular *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, is either implicitly or explicitly modeled on another religious allegory:

Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), in which the enlightened individual realizes that he inhabits the "City of Destruction" and begins an introspective journey in order to find salvation in the "Celestial City." In the dystopian novel it is the values of democratic freedom, combined with the liberal humanism of Matthew Arnold (Huxley's great uncle), which replace the Particular Baptist, Calvinistic theology of Bunyan as the path to salvation. As Arnold writes in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), religion is no longer effectively the correct salve for society's problems, and:

Culture [... is] the great help out of our present difficulties; culture being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world. (5)

It is these values that the British dystopian novel seeks to defend, rather than religion. Nevertheless, it retains the importance of introspection, written culture, and personal interpretation crucial to Bunyan's original, religious vision.

In the following article I shall be observing the path of the quester in *Brave New World* and in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. There will first be a description of *The Pilgrim's Progress* itself, combined with a discussion of the history of its interpretation and significance, followed by an examination of Huxley's own interpretation of the allegory and how this interpretation is prevalent in both the narrative stages and the ideology of *Brave New World*. Next, there will be an analysis of Orwell's own interactions with Bunyan's text in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, his translation of the narrative stages to the path of Winston Smith coupled with investigations of Orwell's own highly sophisticated reaction to the Augustinian theology of the Calvinist tradition. It will finally be shown how Huxley's and Orwell's "secularization" of *The Pilgrim's Progress* effectively denies any grace or salvation for the quester, unlike the original text, in a major departure from previous English radical interpretations of the Calvinist doctrine of grace.

Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and English Radicalism

In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, we are presented with the dream of Bunyan's narrator, who sees Christian weeping as he realizes that he is living in the "City of Destruction," from which he feels none can be saved. Christian is reading a book (the Bible), which has awakened him to the weight of "a

great burden upon his back” (Bunyan 11). Evangelist approaches him and shows him the way to the “*wicket-gate*,” where are written instructions for leaving the City and finding Mount Zion (14). Having been abandoned by Pliable (17), and having borne the inducements of Worldly Wiseman—who claims that Christian can reach paradise by following the strictures of a man named “Legality” (22–23)—Christian passes through the wicket-gate, which is manned by the gate-keeper Goodwill. Christian next receives instruction from the Interpreter, whose teaching includes the picture of a pastor and his holy book, whom the Interpreter informs Christian should be his only “guide” (29, 31–33). He then stays at the Palace Beautiful with its study full of “records of the greatest antiquity” relating to the history of the Bible (57), and is equipped with armor from its armory (58). Next Christian endures a long fight with Apollyon (61–65), walks through the valley of the shadow of death, and is comforted by the voice of another who precedes him (69). He then ignores the false Talkative (83–88), escapes from jail having been accosted at Vanity Fair, and flees from the dungeons of Doubting Castle, owned by the Giant Despair (91, 116–121). Then, with his friend Hopeful, Christian walks through the “Country of *Beulah* [...] where they heard continually the singing of birds, and saw every day the flowers appear on the earth,” and where “the sun shineth night and day” (156), before crossing the river of death and entering the palace atop Mount Zion. Only a few will find this Kingdom of Heaven who come from the “City of Destruction,” the allegory representing the stages of reflection and revelation involved in the Calvinist path to attaining a state of grace.

The allegory of redemption is not unique, and indeed there are previous Christian allegories of salvation such as *Piers Plowman* (c. 1370–1390) and the late fifteenth-century *Everyman*, about which Bunyan may possibly have known.¹ However, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* stands as the preeminent evangelical allegory in the English language and enjoys certain doctrinal and cultural references that separate it from other religious allegories that literate people of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras would have read—and which, as shall be demonstrated, make it a more likely template for the later, British, dystopian novel than earlier religious allegories. To begin with, the revelation comes from Christian reading the Bible and in doing so creating a personal relationship with God, which he improves through discussions with Evangelist and the Interpreter. Conscience, and the ability to read and understand the Bible for oneself, with the underlying stress on the importance of the individual, is more important than conformity to the external dogma of a Church. Secondly, unlike in *Everyman* and the earlier Catholic allegories,

salvation does not depend on good deeds but on the pure grace of God, as Hopeful understands when he recounts that “without the Righteousness of this Christ all the world could not save me [...] and I can but die at the Throne of Grace” (144); and as Ignorance fails to understand, when, believing he will find salvation having “been a good Liver” and that he does not suffer from original sin, he attempts to enter the “Celestial City” and is refused (127, 164). Although Bunyan mentions the doctrine of election briefly in his introduction, when describing how his narrative illustrates “the Way/and Race of Saints” (3), in the allegory itself there is almost no explicit acknowledgment of this doctrine compared to the references to grace and the futility of action. As Benjamin Lyle Berger has written, the reason for not mentioning election and predestination is the fact that this is “off-stage,” with Christian not realizing he is one of the elect until he enters the Celestial City itself. This illustrates an important element of Calvinist doctrine that “[a]n elect individual is never aware that he is elect” (Berger 28). Nevertheless, predestination and the separation of the elect from the reprobate is still an important, implicit element to the narrative, which refutes the Pelagian beliefs that the soul can determine its own destiny through free will and is not born into a state of original sin, as Augustine had argued it actually is.² Above all, however, the importance of individual conscience, introspection, reading, and the doctrine of grace are the most prominent ideas in this Puritan work, making the allegory speak for a new generation of Protestant dissenters, and framing this otherwise seemingly regular portrayal of a religious quest for salvation with concepts which were to prove important in the British dystopian novel.

In the Victorian era, when non-Conformists and Dissenters in Britain began to demand political reform and a greater accountability on the part of government, Bunyan’s allegory was not simply popular on account of its theology, but its potential for political radicalism as well. The historian Thomas Macaulay praised the work’s social commentary, while Samuel Bamford, the radical leader, understood the writer as “championing working-class militancy” (Mason 154). The Chartist leader John James Bezer also acknowledged Bunyan as a fellow “Rebel” and expressed great admiration for his most famous book (Haywood 150). In the 1930s the Communist Party of Great Britain, in keeping with Comintern’s desire to promote “People’s Radicalism,” began to present Bunyan and his work as proto-Communist, when various intellectuals published works proposing this view, effectively resuscitating the attitudes of radicals like Bamford in the previous century. One such was the ardent Stalinist Jack Lindsay (Bounds 91–92, 203), who wrote a study portraying Bunyan as a rebel against the Royalist, aristocratic

state (1937), with the doctrine of election in *The Pilgrim's Progress* representing the working man's restoration of the "birthright" taken from him by both the feudal order and its complicit, established church (Lindsay, *John Bunyan* 72–73).

In most British dystopian fiction, including Orwell's novel, the importance of a quest for grace, involving a movement from the city to the countryside, individualism, conscience, reading and writing versus the conformity of the many, are continual themes and owe much to a more secular interpretation of Christian's quest in the face of the multitude. However, as shall be argued, that quest is presented as completely self-defeating in the British dystopian novel: a self-defeat which results partially from the translation of the religious to the secular, the allegorical to the more literal, and—most paradoxically—the incorporation of the heretical belief in free will and the efficacy of action (represented by the character Ignorance) into the beliefs of the dystopian quester.³

Bunyan and Huxley's *Brave New World*

Huxley does not appear to have been aware of the tradition of political interpretation surrounding Bunyan's allegory but was certainly conscious of its potential conversion to a modern, secular story. Such an opinion of the story finds ironic expression in his 1925 collection of travel writings *Along the Road*. In a piece condemning the act of traveling itself called "Why not Stay at Home?," Huxley describes the elusive rewards of travel, which he calls "a besetting vice," by comparing the results of a "vicious life" with Bunyan's quester:

There is no greater mistake than to suppose that a vicious life is a life of uninterrupted pleasure. It is a life almost as wearisome and painful—if strenuously led—as Christian's in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The chief difference between Christian and the vicious man is that the first gets something out of his hardships—gets it here and now in the shape of a certain spiritual well-being, to say nothing of what he may get in that sadly problematical Jerusalem beyond the river—while the second gets nothing, except, perhaps, gout and general paralysis of the insane. (*Along* 7)

The reference to *The Pilgrim's Progress* is ironic, translating the spiritual quest of Christian (whose goal the atheist Huxley admits to being "problematic"), into the determined quest through vice. However, what is interesting is the

total futility of the quest once translated to the secular sphere, in this case the pursuit of pleasure. The essay deals with the unedifying nature of traveling and the fact that tourism is for most people an unenjoyable ritual, supposedly to enlarge their minds, but really to improve their status amongst others at home, who have not been to where they go. Huxley notes also that these travelers, who may be compared to Christian ironically in their quest for vice, are “serious young compatriots of Emerson and Matthew Arnold, earnestly engaged in trying to see life, neither very steadily nor whole, through the ever-thickening mists of Heidseck and Roederer” (4). In stating this, his essay implies the hypocrisy of the traveler, claiming education and self-improvement as their motives for travel (as suggested by the link with liberal humanist educationalists such as Emerson and Arnold), but descending into an orgy of sensual pleasure once they are on the road—a fact which allows us to see the allegory of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* as representing both a quest for educative enlightenment and for the vice, pure and simple, to which Huxley actually compares traveling.⁴

In a later essay from the same collection, Huxley describes a visit to the Italian mountain-top monastery of Montesenario, making a “pilgrim’s progress” to a “heavenly city” and “chilly little New Jerusalem” (*Along* 47), to find there the remains of “seven pious Florentines who, in the thirteenth century, fled from the city of destruction in the plain below” (48). He discovers that “[h]ere at the heart of it, I thought, a man might begin to understand something about that part of his being which does not reveal itself in the quotidian commerce of life,” a part revealed by “solitude” (49), but he admits that the monastery has few freedoms for its novitiates, who “lived under a tyrannous rule” and “were taught to believe in a number of things manifestly silly.” Nevertheless, he reflects that the people in the valley below also live under a “tyrannous rule” of slavery to commerce and social values (49).

Thus the atheist Huxley uses Christian’s quest to illustrate the following ideas: the understandable urge in modern times to isolate oneself from the “City of Destruction” and seek a “New Jerusalem” (even if the goal of spiritual enlightenment is false and the regime for those who find salvation is “tyrannous” and “manifestly silly”); the futility of the traveler’s “vicious” questing for ensuring happiness, as opposed to the secondary “spiritual well-being” that Christian himself might at least enjoy in a similarly futile, religious venture; and the inevitability of the collapse of high, Arnoldian ideals into carnal pleasures while the traveler makes their quest. Elements of these varied qualities of Huxley’s own interpretation of Bunyan’s allegory inform *Brave New World*, in which the allegory’s literalized retelling becomes

a quest to flee a city of destruction ruled by inadequate carnal pleasures; which quest also proves to be foredoomed and futile; and during which the attempt to replace pleasure with more Liberal Humanist values is impossible, as the questers cannot escape their conditioning.

In *Brave New World*, Bernard Marx and Helmholtz Watson live in a London that has been built entirely on Taylorite and Fordian lines. Frederick Windsor Taylor (1856–1915) had effectively proselytized for “scientific management,” arguing for a careful division of labor around repetitive tasks which rendered the worker’s individual skill useless, while his devotee, Henry Ford, had put these efficiency-related drives to use in “rationalized production” with moveable assembly lines and the reduction of unnecessary physical movement (Peller 66–67). He had furthermore enraged Huxley by his dismissal of the utility of the arts and literature (Peller 64), leading Huxley to extrapolate the import of Ford’s ideas in this novel.

In Huxley’s ambiguous dystopia, manufacture and ratiocination extends to the production of life itself. The Hatcheries where the Bokanovsky process creates new people are based in Bloomsbury, the very center of London, thus replacing the contemporary intellectual center of the capital with a factory for creating human beings. The abortion clinic is in Chelsea, the film studio—an entire town—in Hounslow, the obstacle golf club at Stoke Poges (Huxley, *Brave* 53–54). London is effectively divided up as neatly according to assembly-line principles by the World Controllers, as are its uniformed and conditioned castes, who are also arranged demographically in separate parts of the city, with Alphas in Westminster and lower castes in successive suburbs emanating from the center (52). The economic structure of the society is a form of state-controlled capitalism, in which wealth depends upon continued production and consumption (“The more stitches the less riches” [44]), driven by a conditioned desire for pleasure on the part of its populace. This desire for pleasure is itself sated by sports like obstacle golf and the sensual overload of scent organs and “feelies” (145–147), while great works of literature such as *Othello* are both forbidden and redundant due to their inability to communicate in a world that cannot accommodate pain any more than it can passion and more complex emotional experiences (193–194). It is as though in a thoroughly Taylorized world of moveable assembly lines and ratiocination, the utilitarian morality which declares the good to be whatever causes “happiness” predominates entirely (200). However, rather than being the “Greatest Happiness Principle” claimed by Bentham and then refined by Mill to mean “higher pleasures” (Mill 9–10, 14), such as aesthetic contemplation, “happiness” has reached unforeseen extremes, now being a form of

carnal cheapening of human experience into the most basic primal urges, or “ignoble pleasures,” as John the Savage understands them (Huxley, *Brave* 179), like the fall of the traveler’s goal from the ideals of Matthew Arnold to Roederer champagne in Huxley’s earlier text “Why Not Stay at Home?”

Bernard Marx and Helmholtz Watson are beginning to doubt the values of this world, the one partly through his own physical mishap and inability to command instant respect, the other through a more thorough disdain for the easy victories and pleasures which he attains (58). Bernard seeks another dimension by visiting a North American reservation where aging and pain, including certain ritualized forms of agony reminiscent of Christ’s crucifixion, still occur (95, 98–99)—a movement reminiscent of Huxley’s earlier description of the path from the “City of Destruction” (modern life) to the secluded “New Jerusalem” of Montesenario (*Along* 47). Bernard returns with John the Savage and his mother—as much to embarrass his boss with illegitimate progeny as to make a case-study of a man infused with pre-Fordian values (*Brave* 130–131)—and a symbiotic learning process takes place in which John, initially keen to immerse himself in the controlled world, becomes disillusioned with its easy thrills, lack of moral commitments and philistinism towards high culture, while Helmholtz and Bernard become ever more enlightened as to the problems of their own society in following him, and to their own inability to break their own conditioning. One important epiphany for Helmholtz is induced by John quoting *Romeo and Juliet*, a play whose passion and suffering the former finds absurd:

“No,” he concluded, with a sigh, “it won’t do. We need some other kind of madness and violence. But what? What? Where can one find it?” He was silent; then, shaking his head, “I don’t know,” he said at last, “I don’t know.” (*Brave* 162)

The text provides the first intimation here that there is no way out for the quester, and that the perverse substitute religion of “Fordism” has created a society that so conditions its inhabitants that no psychic escape is really possible. All of them are “fore-doomed” (196), as Mond states, not simply by their decanting, controlled—in almost Calvinistic fashion—by an “Assistant Predestinator” (37), but by their conditioning. It is this lack of effective free will which points to *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, with its basis in the doctrine of both predestination and the futility of action, as exerting an intellectual as well as a narrative influence on *Brave New World*, once translated to the type of secular quest for fulfillment to which Huxley had already compared it in “Why Not Stay at Home?”

The book's finale, however, has the firmly disillusioned John the Savage exercising his own, unique free will and retreating to a wilderness in Surrey where he reverts to his former practices, and this movement again echoes Huxley's interpretation of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Newly penitent, he prays and purifies himself using the excruciating techniques learned on his New Mexico reservation (including prayer, self-flagellation, and a self-crucifixion) to obtain a state of renewed grace; and, like Christian, climbs a hill, to occupy a lighthouse which he hopes will afford him escape from the "civilized" world. One of the reasons why he chooses to live there is because "from his vantage point, he seemed to be looking out on to the incarnation of a divine being" (216), thus signifying a degree of similarity with the Celestial City atop Mount Zion to which Christian travels, although it is a destination chosen by free will rather than predestined by election. John's movement and motives again recall Huxley's allusions to *The Pilgrim's Progress* in "Montesenario" as he describes his own journey from the "City of Destruction" to the "chilly little New Jerusalem" when visiting the mountain monastery (*Along* 47), where the monks were allowed to free themselves from the "quotidian commerce of life" (49). However, here even the purified John, like them imposing his own "tyrannous rule" on himself (49), cannot avoid the reporters and the intruders from that other tyranny in the outside world, from which the monks of Montesenario had succeeded in freeing themselves, and the reporters' harassment leads to John's suicide, his "divine" abode totally traduced by their presence.

The ironic and dialogical tone of the work pits the potential triumphs of Taylorism, eugenics, and consumption very much against its drawbacks in a hyperbolic environment, so that Erika Gottlieb has described it as being like Menippean satire, in which the society's pros and cons are juxtaposed through both the structure of the narrative and the final conversation between John the Savage and Mustapha Mond (Gottlieb 64). Nevertheless, while the novel actively engages with the ideology of Fordism and Taylorism, at both a narrative and philosophical level it draws from *The Pilgrim's Progress* in several ways: first, in that it contains questioning individuals breaking the conformist norm; second, through Bernard's literal movement from a frivolous "City of Destruction" to a rural idyll of moral gravity on the Malpais reservation, and John's later escape to the lighthouse in Surrey, with in both cases echoes of Huxley's earlier essay describing his own movement up to the "New Jerusalem" of Montesenario (*Along* 47); third, in the importance of written culture in the individual's quest for self-realization, since John the Savage's major advantage over his fellows is that he has read Shakespeare

and can instruct Helmholtz on the moral and emotional vacuum in his own literary creations (*Brave* 194); fourth, in the fact that in coming to resolution the characters are guided and then enlightened by an Interpreter figure; fifth, in that the ends of all except John are predestined—although in this case only failure is possible, as there are no “elect,” only the reprobates who are “fore-doomed” (196) thanks to conditioning and their original decanting by a “Predestinator” (37); and finally—at a philosophical level—in that there is a complete futility to action and attempts to break the mold of conditioning, ironically importing into the questers’ paths the heretical belief in action to determine salvation, which Christian’s own theology of salvation condemns. That the issue of free will, choice, and its denial is important to the novel was registered in Huxley’s later preface to the second edition of *Brave New World*, when he admitted that John the Savage was given two impossible choices—between the “maniacal self-torture” of “*Penitente*-ism,” and accepting the maxims of the Taylorized world (*Brave* xlii)—an either/or choice pointedly not available to the two main questers, Bernard and Helmholtz.

In keeping with its ironic structure, however, it is the weaker of the questers, Bernard—a Pliable rather than a Christian—who is the major, continual center of perspective, and not Helmholtz or the unconsciously dissatisfied Lenina (although once John the Savage is in London it is Helmholtz whose resolve to change intensifies, effectively replacing Bernard as the more serious quester). The moral lesson meted out to Christian by Evangelist and the Interpreter is facilitated initially by Bernard and Helmholtz’s interaction with John the Savage, but ultimately by the ambivalent World Controller, Mustapha Mond, who begins to instruct them in the reasons why the society has banished art and sacrificed freedom for happiness towards the end of the novel. After excoriating John the Savage for attempting to sabotage the society’s happiness “in the name of liberty,” he explains: ““You’ve got to choose between happiness and high art. We’ve sacrificed high art. We have the feelies and the scent organs instead”” (194).

The Arnoldian ideas which dominated the curriculum when Huxley was young, and to which he alludes in pieces like “Why not Stay at Home?” (*Along* 4), have been forcefully eviscerated. This lesson from the World-Controller is a feature typical of the dystopian novel, where those who repress also control knowledge, effectively acting as both the perverters of truth and instructors into reality. Both Marx and Helmholtz also do manage a partial escape from dystopia—despite the obvious problems of their own conditioning—in being sent to perform experiments in Iceland (Huxley, *Brave* 199–200), but again this is a salvation which is caused by the oppressor Mond—the “City of

Destruction” itself designating the fate of the individual rather than the forces which oppose it. While the structure of quest and desired salvation is the same as in Bunyan’s allegory, the political repression of democratic and humanist values ultimately allows no genuine escape for the inhabitants of this perverse utopia, or even possibility of heroism. This pessimism is reinforced by a climax in which the conditioning of Helmholtz and Bernard makes them incapable of reaching the end of their quest—a fact underlined by their absence during the final part of Mond’s instruction, with only John being capable of refuting the Controller’s argument. While other hero/quest myths like *Everyman* or the various legends of the Holy Grail have similar structures, the futility of action and predetermination of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, which is converted to a complete denial of salvation when reinterpreted as a secular equivalent (a possibility which Huxley had already noted [*Along* 7]), are some of the major features which make it the most likely template for the failed struggles of Helmholtz and Bernard in *Brave New World*.

Bunyan and Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Orwell refers to Bunyan’s most famous work only once in his published writing. In a review of C. S. Lewis’s *Beyond Personality* (1944) for *The Tribune* (27 October 1944), a book about how to be a good Christian, he remarks on W. J. Turner’s comparison of Lewis’s style with that of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, and how absurd this comparison is. He declares instead that “I think most of us would hesitate a long time before equating Mr. Lewis with Bunyan” (Orwell, “As I Please” 440). His overt reasons are stylistic, citing Lewis’s “Edwardian slang”; however, since the quoted extract from Lewis is one promoting the outward assumption of virtues in order to make them permanent, there is perhaps a recognition of the insincere nature of Lewis’s “silly-clever religious book” (440), which tries to make atheism appear illogical, compared to the passion and self-searching of Bunyan.

However, Orwell was also aware of the comparisons made by contemporary Socialists in Britain between the radical Protestant tradition, from which *The Pilgrim’s Progress* derives, and their own political views. Indeed, as Paul Gillen has written, Orwell’s 1941 polemic “England, Your England” (the first part of a three-part essay, “The Lion and the Unicorn”), which raised patriotism over socialism as a motive for defending the country against Nazism, was very probably a terse response to Jack Lindsay’s *England, My England* ... of two years earlier (Gillen 68–69): a polemic that had considered

the English tradition of radical dissent as being forged after the Peasant's Revolt through the "Protestant movement" (Lindsay, *England* 14), and as being a precursor of modern Communism (20). In his own essay Orwell denied this view, claiming that "the Nonconformist sects only influenced minorities" (Orwell, "Lion" 141).

This view certainly seems to have been revised entirely by the time Orwell contemplated writing *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, since in his introduction to Reginald Reynolds's anthology *British Pamphleteers* (1948) he praised the radical spirit of Protestant groups like the Levellers, and considered them as being worthy rebels against the feudalism imposed by Catholicism (Orwell, "Introduction" 109), as well as being the ancestors of the far leftists of his own day:

The most encouraging fact about revolutionary activity is that, although it always fails, it always continues. The vision of a world of free and equal human beings, living together in a state of brotherhood—in one age it is called the Kingdom of Heaven, in another the classless society—never materialises, but the belief in it never seems to die out. The English Diggers and Levellers, represented by three pamphlets in this series, are links in a chain of thought which stretches from the slave revolts of antiquity, through various peasant risings and heretical sects of the Middle Ages, down to the Socialists of the nineteenth century and the Trotskyists and Anarchists of our own day. One thing that can be detected here and there in these pamphlets is a half-belief that the ideal society has existed at some time in the past, so that a true revolution would really be a return. [...] Their programme, unless one thinks a low standard of living desirable in itself, is out of date. But their essential predicament is that of any intelligent democratic Socialist to-day. (109)

Not only does Orwell understand the radical Protestant groups to which adherents like Bunyan belonged as being the ancestors of revolutionary socialism, but he also notices that they believed in a utopia that could be attained, albeit then as the reprisal of a mythical, prelapsarian era, as a "Kingdom of Heaven" rather than as a necessary phase in human progress. Furthermore, he wryly remarks that, as happened after the Civil War with Cromwell's own ascension, this potential utopia had never been realized. He thus concludes that the marginal, radical opinions of these groups were always doomed to failure, since mainstream elements in rebellion would finish by replicating the abuses of the earlier regime (107). This fatalism and sense of doom are, of course, not shared by the pamphleteers themselves, but in quashing centuries of optimism, Orwell ominously points to the futile nature of both rebellion and conformity, which ironically perverts the Calvinistic

sense of predestination and belief in grace when translated to a political level. Thus the Calvinists' sense of quest and the attempt to attain a Heavenly City, which appears in Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, as well as the political dimension that can be read into that type of quest, were elements of which Orwell was certainly wryly aware.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* we have a similar presentation of the quester seeking salvation by exploring his own inner life to escape the "City of Destruction," like in *Brave New World*. The London which Winston Smith inhabits is one where all actions, all thoughts have to be surrendered to the scrutiny of the state. All expressions of individuality are frowned upon as "*ownlife*" (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 94), the reading of unapproved books and the keeping of diaries are illegal, and the old language is being slowly replaced by Newspeak, which will make all dissent impossible. It differs from the rationalized, consumption-driven London of *Brave New World* in being largely broken and rundown by recent war, with only the technology of observation being of science-fiction caliber. Otherwise, the society is kept artificially impoverished by the inner party. According to O'Brien/Emmanuel Goldstein in the brilliant but "double-think"-engendered "*the book*"—a pamphlet which, according to Orwell's own description of that subgenre must be fake, since totalitarian regimes with their intense control simply do not permit such types of literature (Orwell, "Introduction" 107)—this impoverishment results from the need of the few to keep power by humiliating and occupying the masses with desperate work, thanks partly to the consumption of overproduction through warfare. The theory constitutes a brilliant inversion of the Marxian concept of the exploitation of labor: the few allow production to be wasted in order for them to maintain their power by occupying the poor with useless toil (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 219–220), rather than the few using their control over production to increase their wealth by the same exploitation (Marx 646). As "Goldstein" writes: "[...] compared with their opposite numbers in past ages, they [the inner party] were less avaricious, less tempted by luxury, hungrier for pure power" (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 235). Power is the end, and the control of wealth the means, not the other way round.

Winston Smith, haunted by his childhood memories and the duplicity of his work at the Ministry of Truth, seeks "*ownlife*" through keeping a diary. Winston's inquiry is accompanied by dreams in which he hears a comforting voice and has visions of a beautiful landscape called "the Golden Country" (30). He searches for further enlightenment in the city itself by exploring the working-class districts north of what had once been called Saint Pancras Station, where reside the "proles": 85 percent of the population (80). Failing to

make sense of an old man's conversation (102–106), he returns to a beautiful old antique shop owned by a Mr Charrington, where he had earlier bought the diary, and he now buys an old paperweight, which helps him to connect with an abolished past (109). His quest now turns to a risky affair with his young workmate Julia. Leaving the city of London on a summer's day he encounters both a rural idyll and a new stage in the direction towards a possible salvation. Winston finds Julia at the entrance to a hazel wood (136). He follows her then to a fallen tree before some bushes that she parts to take him onto "a tiny grassy knoll," beyond which lies a stream full of fish. As he enters, he recalls the city he has just left "with the sooty dust of London in the pores of his skin. It occurred to him that till now she had probably never seen him in broad daylight" (137). Here she begins his symbolic initiation into the laws of rebellion. Calling the landscape "the Golden Country" (142), the same place he has seen previously in dreams (possibly suggested through the telescreen's directed, subliminal messages), there is an allegorical connection between the pastoral landscape of fallen tree, grassy knoll, stream, Golden Country and Christian's movement in *The Pilgrim's Progress* from the "City of Destruction," through the wicket-gate and then through the perpetual sunlight of the Country of *Beulah*, before finally going across the river of Death to the palace atop Mount Zion. Here Smith receives his first major revelation from Julia:

"You like doing this? I don't simply mean me: I mean the thing in itself?"
 "I adore it."

That was above all what he wanted to hear. Not merely the love of one person for another but the animal instinct, the simple undifferentiated desire: that was the force that would tear the party to pieces. (144)

The understanding that irrational lust is a force that the party cannot contain is a point that Thomas Horan understands as foundational to rebellion against the regime, and it certainly acts as an epiphany to Winston.⁵ After this episode they both meet O'Brien, an Interpreter, who gives Winston "*the book*" by Emmanuel Goldstein to facilitate further steps in rebellion (197), which Winston begins to read alongside Julia in an apartment above Mr Charrington's antiques shop (231).

Later, once he has read some of "*the book*" and been captured and interrogated by O'Brien in the Ministry of Love (295), Winston's mind still turns for solace to the "Golden Country," which combines with his memories of childhood (316), until he is taken to Room 101 and finally betrays Julia. Ironically, his faith in dreams corresponding to reality actually has no more

substance than O'Brien's theories of "collective solipsism" from which he vainly tries to protect himself, a mark of the degree to which he has already been divested by the party of the chance of perceiving objective reality, even when attempting to escape their control. His own rebellious path to truth, when he first walks up onto the grassy knoll with Julia, is based upon an uncanny correspondence between dream and reality, which two ontological categories O'Brien tells him the Party can easily reverse (319). This hope for truth in falsity should be no surprise given that O'Brien has been guiding his path of rebellion in order, through a process of doublethink, to lead him more resolutely back to the Party's strict ideology. When Winston complains that O'Brien is responsible for reducing him to the state he finds himself in, O'Brien declares: "No, Winston, you reduced yourself to it. This is what you accepted when you set yourself up against the Party. It was all contained in that first act. Nothing has happened that you did not foresee" (312-313). While O'Brien asserts that Winston has brought his state upon himself by his own action, effectively his comment that Winston *did* "foresee" his end reinforces the idea that his rebellion was futile, that his "damnation" is an inevitable result of seeking to find escape, and that he could not finally assert his free will so as to gain freedom from the political state. Indeed O'Brien is surely right concerning Winston's foresight, since when Winston first meets and exchanges addresses with him he reflects on the stages of the path he has chosen and briefly acknowledges the inevitability of his doom despite his hopes:

The first step had been a secret, involuntary thought, the second had been the opening of the diary. He had moved from thoughts to words and now from words to actions. The last step was something that would happen in the Ministry of Love. He had accepted it. The end was contained in the beginning. (184)

Thus, despite his hopes, Winston has himself always known the inevitable, predestined end, despite doing all he can to repress this knowledge and embrace action.

The stages of Winston's path are very similar to those of Christian, if not entirely in the same sequence. Like Christian, he begins a process of introspection with access to written words. Like Christian, who takes solace from the voice of an unseen fellow pilgrim in the dark valley of the shadow of Death that he shall "*fear none ill*" due to Christ's company (Bunyan 69), Winston hears the comforting words of a voice in dreams which assures him they will meet "in the place where there is no darkness" (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 30). Just as Christian finds rooms with "records of the greatest

antiquity” relating to biblical history in the Study of the Palace Beautiful (Bunyan 57), and dons armor there for the fight with Apollyon, Winston’s path towards discovery involves acquiring an antique object from an old house to connect him with a forgotten past (the paperweight at Mr Charrington’s shop). Like Christian, he has moved from the realization that he may be damned, to introspection and self-discovery. Like Christian, he has begun the major stage of his journey through a small opening with Julia towards a paradisiacal landscape and has made his first contact with the Interpreter, which continues when the two meet O’Brien again in his office later. Just as the Interpreter shows Christian the image of the parson holding a holy book, which person he informs him should be his only guide, so Winston’s own interpreter, O’Brien, provides him with “*the book*” from their ultimate guide, Emmanuel Goldstein.

Unlike Christian, however, in this literalization of Christian’s allegory, Winston puts his faith, like Ignorance, in “actions” (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 184), but despite his hopes acknowledges that his path will end in doom, with no potential for salvation. The most obvious representation of the fact that his doom was predestined is in the fulfillment of O’Brien’s prophecy that they will meet again “in the place where there is no darkness” (30). Although Winston first hears this disembodied voice in his dream, he later identifies the voice as O’Brien’s. For Winston this “place” corresponds to “the Golden Country,” and other fantasies of constant sunlight, which he interprets as an “imagined future, which one would never see, but which, by foreknowledge, one could mystically share in” (118). As stated earlier, such a place is similar to the paradisiacal landscape before the heavenly city in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*: where “the sun shineth night and day,” the “Country of *Beulah*” (Bunyan 156). What is most unexpected is that the “imagined future” becomes a realized nightmare in Orwell’s novel. The fusion of the ideal with the nightmarish is made ironically clear when the narrator relates that:

He had long grown used to sleeping with a strong light on his face. It seemed to make no difference, except that one’s dreams were more coherent. He dreamed a great deal all through this time, and they were always happy dreams. He was in the Golden Country, or he was sitting among enormous, glorious, sunlit ruins, with his mother, with Julia, with O’Brien (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 316)

That his path to rebellion has been steered by the agents of the City of Destruction is reinforced by the fact that Winston’s ideal of escape, his own version of Christian’s nightless “Country of *Beulah*,” is fostered and

maintained by the site of his doom. This site, the Ministry of Love, is the genuine “place where there is no darkness,” since artificial lights are never turned off, now aiding and abetting his previous mystical fantasy, and finally replacing it: the City of Destruction containing and ultimately substituting his dream of escape and salvation. Even more ironic is the fact that the “Country of *Beulah*” in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* is the land where “the Contract between the Bride and the Bridegroom was renewed” ([Bunyan 156]; “Beulah” literally means “married” in Hebrew—here probably representing the relation between Christ and his devotees), whereas in its Orwellian alternative it is where the pilgrim couple, Winston and Julia, both betray one another.

Indeed, since both conformity and “escape” are circumscribed and determined by the Party, one can even go further and see *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, more so than *Brave New World*, as presenting a secular society infused with a political Augustinianism which also permits no “grace” of any kind, condemning all, and rendering all actions futile. This quality is similar to the perverted, Messianic ideal mooted by Gottlieb as being the atmosphere of the Dystopian society (6–7), with the paradisiacal rhetoric masking an experienced hell, but is in fact closer to a perverted and secularized form of Bunyan’s Calvinism. Furthermore, Ignorance’s belief in the efficacy of action is adopted by all the characters to some degree, whether rebels or conformists, and is shown to be pointless in all cases. While Julia and Winston attempt a futile escape, guided by the false “Interpreter” O’Brien, Syme, Ampleforth, and Parsons all attempt to be loyal to the state, or at least avoid its attention. Syme, the lexicographer who expresses his zeal for Newspeak to Winston at lunch, is vaporized (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 171), even though he expresses such enthusiasm for his work (perhaps, like Talkative, his “Religion” is understood by the inner party as in “word or tongue, and *not in Deed and Truth*” [Bunyan 87]). Ampleforth, a poet, is carted off to Room 101 for leaving the word “God” in a poem (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 265). Parsons, a naïve adherent to the Party’s ideology, like Ignorance involves himself strenuously in approved activities, but is still denounced by his daughter and arrested (267). Winston’s meeting with these two latter characters at the Ministry of Love is like an Infernoesque reunion of the guilty, or a simultaneous refusal of all at the gates of the Celestial City, as everyone is damned by the regime whatever their intentions, and all are guilty of one and the same crime: “thoughtcrime.”

The reality of a state where one can break the law simply through thought and not just action constitutes a political Calvinism in which everyone is considered culpable and inescapably bad, and thus is compelled to align their

thoughts, not simply their actions, to the all-seeing state itself. As Christian expresses to Ignorance in *The Pilgrim's Progress*:

“Why, the word of God saith, That man’s ways are crooked ways, not good but perverse; It saith, they are naturally out of the good way, that they have not known it. Now, when a man thus thinketh of his ways, I say, when he doth sensibly and with heart humiliation thus think, then hath he good thoughts of his own ways, because his thoughts now agree with the judgement of the word of God [...] he knows us better than we know our selves, and can see sin in us when and where we can see none in our selves [...] our heart, with all its depths, is always open unto his eyes.” (Bunyan 148–149)

The ideology of the Party is close to this Calvinist doctrine in three major ways: firstly, that thought in itself must be the same as that of the Party, not simply action, just as a Christian should make “his thoughts [...] agree with the judgement of God”; secondly, in that this itself justifies Big Brother’s omnipresence, since Big Brother, like God, can see things in us which we cannot see, and so we must admit his vision into our lives, be always “open unto his eyes” (149), through thought police, telescreens and interrogation (as O’Brien tells Winston: “We shall squeeze you empty, and then we shall fill you with ourselves” [*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 293]); and finally, that the citizens of Oceania are, like Calvinists, “naturally out of the good way” (Bunyan 148), with none of them worthy, and thus always potentially damnable. Where the “City of Destruction” also controls the false path of escape to the Celestial City, it matters little whether the individual is Christian, Ignorance, Worldly Wiseman, or Talkative; whether they seek to obey the laws of the City of Destruction or break free from them. Damnation, and a perverse reinduction into the values of the “City of Destruction,” guided by an Interpreter provided by the state, is the inevitable end.

Therefore, as in *Brave New World*, Orwell’s dystopian novel repeats aspects of *The Pilgrim's Progress* through the quester seeking salvation from the “City of Destruction” and its values. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* these include: the importance of written culture and individual introspection in the path to salvation;⁶ the journey of discovery moving from a city to a pastoral landscape and a land that knows no night; a disembodied voice encouraging the quester, and a house full of antiques “arming” the quester for his quest; and, finally, the instruction from an interpreter figure. As in *Brave New World* there is a reversal of optimism to pessimism in the conversion of the search from religious allegory to a literal, political narrative as the “Interpreter” figure is also the oppressor who conditions and thwarts the quest for salvation, with

the “City of Destruction” itself setting the limits for rebellion. As in *Brave New World*, there is an ironic incorporation of the heretical and futile belief that action is important for securing salvation into the path of the quester, so that the quester possesses neither free will nor the potential for receiving grace/escape, making the “Christian” figure as hopeless as Ignorance.

Conclusion

The impossibility of escape from the City of Destruction in both novels marks a major difference from Bunyan’s original allegory, in its translation to a secular, political world in dystopia. However strait the gate may be in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, God’s Grace makes salvation possible. Once this religious journey has been substituted by the less spiritual battle between democratic, humanist values and conformity to the state, the state has no opponent except the individual, whose rebellion, by its private and singular nature, is too small. While Arnold and Leavis may have believed that literature and high art could replace religion as a tutor of morals and guardian of humanistic principles, in the dystopian novel this belief is shown to be laudable but unfounded. Hence the destiny of the quester simply becomes the inevitability of failure in these secularized versions of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*—the guardians of the state never relinquish their control and steer the quester through a perverted form of truth-seeking under repressive tolerance, which returns them to where they began. This is of course doubly ironic, since Bunyan’s City of Destruction is called such because it will eventually be destroyed by God’s wrath and thus must be left, while in these two novels the dystopia cannot in any way be escaped.

This interpretation of predestination also marks a major difference from that of writers such as Bamford or Jack Lindsay, who admired the potential for working-class radicalism in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. While they saw in Christian’s sense of quest for salvation the potential for rebellion and dissent from the mores of an “*ancien régime*” imposed from the top, the restoration of a “birthright” which was codedly social and economic in Lindsay’s view (*John Bunyan* 72–73), such a political angle on the narrative also ignores the futility of action contained in the doctrines of election and of grace. Huxley and Orwell, however, appear to have been more impressed with the denial of free will and the doctrine of grace for salvation which the work portrays, and the perversion of this theological opposition when applied to rebellion against a Messianic, totalitarian, and secular state—the very type of state

that Lindsay and his comrades wished to create—armed only with the equally secular weapons of faith in literary culture and cultural tradition.

In summation: what distinguishes these two early British fictions of dystopia from Zamyatin's *We* is the transmutation of Christian's quest in *The Pilgrim's Progress* to one of secular and humanist revelation, so that the questers in both cases begin a journey of salvation more concerted and self-conscious than Zamyatin's hero D-503. In doing so, the works take features from Bunyan's allegory such as the importance of written culture, the journey into a pastoral landscape for illumination and self-discovery, and instruction by an interpreter who explains to the questers the society and the values that they seek. Unlike *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the search is doomed once translated to the political and secular since the "Interpreter" figure is also an oppressor provided by the state from which they wish to escape, and there is a translation of the heretical doctrine of free will and the efficacy of action into the questers' paths. Unlike in Zamyatin's *We*, the "City of Destruction" cannot be escaped in these two novels, thanks to the state's conditioning of its citizens and ability to modify that conditioning at any time.

Notes

- 1 Jack Lindsay denies that Bunyan was aware of the tradition of "medieval homiletic allegory" found in works like the early fifteenth-century *Way to Paradise*, and argues that the reason for the parallel is simply that "the stream of imagery had flowed undisturbed down to Bunyan's own day in the popular pulpit" (*John Bunyan* 166).
- 2 In his consideration of his own youthful obsession with "concupiscence," Augustine had argued that man was driven naturally to sin, and dependent upon God's grace (Augustine 9, Bk. II. pt. 2). In response, Pelagius had argued that "it is impious to say that sin is inherent in nature, because in this way the author of nature is being judged at fault" (168). For a full précis of the Pelagian position against Augustine's, including his belief in free will and grace through merit, see Parsons 703–711.
- 3 Zamyatin was himself influenced by late Victorian and early Edwardian sf, particularly H. G. Wells, whose works of fantasy he praised in a long article on the writer (see Bibliography). In his satirical novel *The Islanders*, one of the most repulsive characters, the Reverend Dewley, represents the type of the hypocritical, low-church Anglican vicar, proving that Zamyatin had become acquainted with both the Church of England and the Protestant evangelical tradition while in Newcastle-upon-Tyne (*Islanders* 15–17), and may have known of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Nevertheless, the lack of an effective sense of quest and determination to undo the society in the central character, filled instead by an uneasy attraction

to a beautiful revolutionary and an oscillating attempt to repress his less rational self, shows that Zamyatin's narrative is not based on a tradition of either puritan allegory or the English sf which he admired, and was more likely influenced by Russian writers such as Dostoevsky in his depiction of the main character's unavoidably divided self.

- 4 He also worked consistently in the late 1920s for the magazine *Vanity Fair*, a publication named highly self-consciously (and somewhat ludically) after a location in *The Pilgrim's Progress* by its founding editor in New York, Condé Nast—a fact which may not have been lost on the young journalist given the moral tenor of his own journalism for this outlet. Martha Banta writes on Huxley's journalism that, “[s]ince his mode of address approached that of the Rugby College Homilies delivered by his great-grandfather, Dr Thomas Arnold, his essays shared the same moral intensity of Bunyan's sermons” (148).
- 5 Thomas Horan notices that in the dystopias of Orwell, Huxley, and Zamyatin, sex is a problematic force for the state, which seeks to control it, and also that the principal character's rebellion begins with a sexual encounter. Horan highlights the pink tickets system in *We* as a means of making sex “harmless” and “meaningless” (320), as well as the sublimation of sex into other activities in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (325). However, while I accept that sexual activity is certainly regulated in all three novels and is a potential danger to the regimes, I would also argue that the nature of the threat to the regime is different in each case. In Zamyatin's *We* the threat is sexual desire for one person, and thus individual attachment, while in Orwell's novel the threat of sex, as understood by Winston, is that of “undifferentiated desire” rather than personal attachment (144). In *Brave New World* the threat is a return to viviparous relations and the sorrow and pain of romantic love.
- 6 According to Richard L. Greaves, English Presbyterians in the seventeenth century encouraged the keeping of a spiritual diary somewhat like Winston's to develop “spiritual self-examination” on the way to salvation (194–195).

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