Reformation, Revolution, Restoration: The Texts and Contexts of Bunyan's England
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The third triennial conference of the International John Bunyan Society convened in Cleveland, Ohio under the auspices of Kent State University. The conference was a rich intellectual and cultural experience envisioned by Vera Camden, President of the Society, and brought into being with the superb assistance of Kimberly Hill and others.

A remarkable range of perspectives marked the presentations, but several distinct themes and prominent issues emerged. Margaret Ezell's opening plenary address, "Bunyan's Women, Women's Bunyan" established gender as a key issue for the conference. Tom Luxon developed this in the second plenary address, "Friendship, Marriage, and the Puritan Self," a paper that focused on relations between marriage and male friendship in Paradise Lost. Gender issues remained a strong focus for a number of panels, including the special panel convened by the Brown University Women's Writing Project (panelists Julia Flanders, Teresa Feroli, Sylvia Brown, Kimberly Hill) and chaired by Margaret Breen. Doctoral candidate Kelly Laycock offered a challenging new reading of Bunyan entitled "Gendering Mansoul: Bunyan and the Female Body in The Holy War," presented in a panel on "Gendering Bunyan" with papers by Michael Davies, David Hawkes, and Jean Graham. A session on "Women as Context and Content" included papers on Mary Rowlandson (Katherine Gillespie), Jane Turner (Arlette Zinck), Quaker women preachers (Maryanne Cole) and women's literacy (Maxine Hancock). David Norbrook's plenary helped to link this focus to a range of other political and cultural themes by comparing Milton's Paradise Lost with Lucy Hutchinson's Order and Disorder in the context of republican writing and epic poetry.

Several memorable papers explored Bunyan's presence in a range of historical contexts and time periods. Robert Collmer documented evocations of The Holy War in the context of three crises from the nineteenth century to the First World War. Dayton Haskin uncovered Bunyan's place in "English 15," the first seventeenth-century English course offered at Harvard in the 1880's, a course that would be taken by T.S. Eliot in later decades. Sharon Achinstein's closing plenary, "Bunyan and the Politics of Remembrance," reflected on aspects of Bunyan's legacy with attention to the memorial in Bunhill Fields.

Further, linked themes included the relationship between psychology and literary history. Peter Rudnytsky, a distinguished historian of both psychoanalysis and seventeenth-century literature, spoke on the subject of trauma in seventeenth-century literature, with emphasis on the civil wars and regicide in a paper entitled "Dissociation and Decapitation."
David Norbrook, his respondent, replied with a critique of the notion of a "dissociated sensibility" separating the literary cultures of the period. This session was an extraordinary meeting of disciplines and professions as it was attended by many of Vera Camden’s fellow practitioners from the Cleveland Psychoanalytic Society.

Nigel Smith's plenary address, "Living in the 70's," extended the issues of trauma and crisis from the standpoint of social history by mapping the opening of The Pilgrim's Progress onto the great Fire of 1666. Nigel elucidated some memorable connections between the fires that swept through London and the image of fire in literature and its associations with the power of language and with rebellion.

His address resonated with other presentations emphasizing social history, including those by Katsuhiro Engetsu, Kathleen Lynch, and others. The three broad categories of the conference title also served to focus key issues. If Revolution offered a context for the political dimensions probed by David Norbrook and Nigel Smith, Reformation framed studies of rhetoric and biblical interpretation by Jameela Laires, Hannibal Hamlin, and Linda Mitchell as well as studies of Quaker and other dissenting literature by Galen Johnson, Sylvia Brown, Rhoda Cairns, Dana Och. Roger Pooley’s probing examination of antinomianism in Bunyan and the period can also be set within this context. Restoration framed treatments of Royalist iconography by Elizabeth Skerpan-Wheeler, and interdisciplinary treatments of literature, science and visual art by Matthew Hunter and Angelica Duran. Papers by U. Milo Kauffman and Maryanne Cole examined the theme of travel in Bunyan and in the journey narratives of Quaker women preachers.

The cultural experience of the conference was as rich as the conference program. Delegates toured the city of Cleveland, making memorable stops at the Cleveland Museum of Art and at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, the latter a natural site of pilgrimage for all scholars of nonconformity. Apollo's Fire, an early music consort, presented a narration of The Pilgrims Progress in reverse order from the Celestial City (with sacred music) to the Vanity Fair and the City of Destruction (with the more "profane" ballads of the period). An excursion to the campus of Kent State University included a moving visit to the site where four students were killed in a confrontation with the National Guard in 1970 at the peak of the anti-war protest movement. A display of rare editions of Bunyan, augmented by Robert Collmer's exceptional personal collection, and including many fine illustrated editions, was presented in the Special Collections Room at the university library.

In a final session on the future of Bunyan in teaching and research, Tom Corns, whose paper was read in absentia, issued a provocative challenge to Bunyan scholars set against various trends in seventeenth-century literary scholarship. Tom's attention to the role of Bunyan in literary anthologies stimulated some important reflections on how and where Bunyan appears in undergraduate teaching. While the discussion Tom encouraged focused rightly on Bunyan and his works, the broad perspective created on Bunyan and his times by the conference as a whole implied the potential strengths of scholarship that takes Bunyan as a center within a widening and inclusive compass. All three of the conferences held so far have emphasized Bunyan's England, and this inclusiveness has strengthened the community of scholars who find Bunyan in their field of critical vision. For that strength and inclusiveness, we are indebted to Vera Camden and her able supporters. Professor Camden is planning a volume containing plenary addresses and selected papers, and a special issue of Bunyan Studies on Bunyan and gender. Bob Owens, a distinguished Bunyan scholar and editor, succeeds Vera as President. We will all look forward to the next conference in England in 2004.