

## Reviews

**Michael Davies**, *Graceful Reading: Theology and Narrative in the Works of John Bunyan*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 393, hb. £55, ISBN: 0199242402

Michael Davies' fine study demonstrates the vigour of the new Bunyan scholarship emerging from the ferment of recent decades. Arguing that Bunyan has been misread as a writer who, with his readers, was motivated by anxiety over a hyper-Calvinist doctrine of double predestination, Davies insists that, instead, he should be seen as a moderate English Calvinist who offers a theology 'inherently accommodating, comforting, and reassuring' (pp. 42–3).

In his invaluable first chapter, 'Bunyan's Theology of Grace', Davies illustrates his point admirably through drawing on many of Bunyan's tracts and polemical works. In the subsequent chapters, he offers readings of *Grace Abounding* (Chapter 3), *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Chapters 4 and 5), and what he terms 'sequels' to *The Pilgrim's Progress* – *Life and Death of Mr. Badman*, *The Holy War*, and *The Pilgrim's Progress, Part II* (Chapter 6). While the work is undoubtedly strongest in its first three chapters, becoming less precise in what sometimes seem to be rather superficial readings of Bunyan's later works, these three chapters alone would make the book a necessary part of any library's holdings on Bunyan.

At his best, Davies shows a wide reach in Bunyan and ancillary seventeenth-century writers and a satisfyingly close reading of specific Bunyan texts. Particularly able is his reading of Bunyan's *Mapp Shewing the Order and Causes of Salvation and Damnation*, where he argues that the problematic diagram is less a map showing a general view of 'the way things are' than a *periplus*, a map 'that projects the stages of a journey as they succeed each other for the traveler ... as opposed to a map that gives an image ... [of] the terrain' (p. 69). Davies makes an original and interesting contribution to the discussion of Bunyan's 'Apology' to *The Pilgrim's Progress* by denying that Bunyan's preoccupation in the 'Apology' is with making his literary method acceptable to the puritan reader, arguing rather that Bunyan is engaging a discussion about acceptable modes of theological discourse in the context of the new Anglican moralism.

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Davies places his study firmly in the context of seminal twentieth-century Bunyan and Puritan scholars, with the surprising exception of any serious engagement with Wolfgang Iser, despite Iser's anxiety-driven implied reader of *The Pilgrim's Progress* having been an extremely influential construct. Davies mounts a 'stout and valiant' defence against what he deems to be misreadings of Bunyan's texts. Not surprisingly, secularizing readings such as those offered by Perry Miller (p. 33, n. 26), Christopher Hill (p. 183), and Roger Sharrock (pp. 146, 179, 323) get knocked about; but Davies also takes exception to what he sees as oversights or misreadings in a range of readings which are respectful of Bunyan's theology, including readings by U. Milo Kaufmann (p. 125), John R. Knott, Jr. (pp. 243–5), and the meticulous Richard Greaves (p. 320, n. 33). This thorough engagement with the critical discussions of Bunyan make Davies' notes and bibliography an important part of the contribution of this work to a fuller reading of Bunyan.

While calling for a reading of Bunyan's works informed by a theology which can be deduced from Bunyan's own works rather than imposed upon it, Davies also sees what he calls 'an ur-post-modernism' in the complex metafictional narrative stance Bunyan takes in his major works. This keeps Davies attentive to the reader-foregrounding narrative elements which have drawn reader-response and other post-structuralist critics to Bunyan.

As important a study of Bunyan's narratives as I find this work to be, I do have some concerns. I find Davies' proposed contrariety between 'epistemological' and 'ontological' readings of Bunyan's works artificial and unsatisfying (p. 79). While certainly Bunyan invites his readers into a newly-oriented ontology, he everywhere proposes this by way of an epistemological undertaking – that is, his readers are keen to learn a new way of *knowing* in order to enter a new realm of *being* (as, for example, the House of the Interpreter demonstrates). Rather than opposing the idea of 'epistemology' with the idea of 'ontology', I think Davies would have been more accurate to oppose an 'empirical epistemology' (which cannot yield spiritual insight) to a 'pneumatological epistemology' (in which understanding is gained through the revelation of the Spirit). While Davies seems to be somewhat clearer about this later in his text (see, for example, a good discussion on p. 139), he does not clarify what seems to me to be an unfortunate and belaboured dichotomizing early in his work.

I am also jarred by several places late in the book in which he speaks of 'salvation through law and grace alone' (e.g. pp. 324 and 333) – quite at odds with his insistent presentation of Bunyan's view of salvation as being granted through grace alone, received by faith alone, in the earlier, more precise chapters. And finally, Davies' apparently intentional ironic designation of Christiana and Mercy as 'pilgrimettes' (pp. 335, 350) and as 'pilgrimesses' (p. 337) diminishes the women travellers far more utterly than anything implied by Bunyan's narrative. However weak and vulnerable women may be portrayed in *The Pilgrim's Progress, Part II*, they do emerge as *actants* in the drama of their own salvation. Although once on pilgrimage women do become part of a pilgrim community which is structured hierarchically and patriarchally, they are, like men, individually responsible for exercising saving faith. Davies' ironic diminutives fail to capture the modern sense of personhood for women as well as for men that was dawning even as Bunyan was writing.

Without doubt, Michael Davies' work is an important contribution to reading Bunyan in a way which refuses anachronistic psychologizing and resists any kind of patronizing of Bunyan's theology. Davies is utterly convincing in his argument that

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'Bunyan's books demand a kind of literary analysis that recognizes the doctrinally informed aspect of their rhetorical make-up, an analysis that is inherently historicist, in some respects, and practically post modernist on the other [sic]' (p. 355). All who seek to teach or read Bunyan in a way that is faithful to the text will welcome the way in which Davies renders Bunyan more accessible by giving equal respect to his theology and his narrative complexity.

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**Claire Tomalin**, *Samuel Pepys: The Unequalled Self*, London, Viking (Penguin), 2002, pp. 499, hb. £20, ISBN: 0670885681

This book deserves its high reputation as a synthesis of lively writing with heavy-weight research. It joins a number of hefty biographies (such as Ackroyd's More and MacCulloch's Cranmer) which make admirable shortcuts to the social and political history of their periods. Such works are often forced to rely on speculations on how the subject 'might have felt' in various circumstances and Tomalin's is no exception. These speculations do not advance our knowledge of Pepys, but they often make engaging historical snapshots.

The book can be recommended warmly to undergraduate students of the civil wars and Restoration. Professional historians are more likely to rely on the Companion Volume to Latham and Matthew's noble edition, while scholars of Pepys himself may find the book a little disappointing. This is because Tomalin offers little that is new in answer to two central questions: Why did Pepys write the diary? and, How should we interpret it? Her ideas on the first question might have been more convincing in the light of a greater knowledge of diary writing at the time. For example, it is claimed that Pepys could not have seen anyone else's diary because none were published at the time (p. 83). But while some diarists left instructions for the destruction of their diaries, there is evidence that certain kinds, including pious diaries, travel diaries and political diaries, were circulated in manuscript. Tomalin also states that 'From women [at this period] there are no known diaries' (p. 86), yet the standard reference work by Matthews, *British Diaries*, cited elsewhere by Tomalin, shows that this is not so.

In a work of this scope it would be superhuman not to err, but these are more than minor factual errors. They suggest a limited interest in diaries as texts bound by generic rules. In the absence of generic analysis, Tomalin tends to assume that diaries are transparent revelations of the diarist's character. Evelyn and Whitlocke, for example, are judged to lack 'Pepys's candour or immediacy' while Wallington is 'without Pepys's curiosity about himself' (p. 84). Josselin's diary is compared unfavourably to Pepys's not because Josselin was writing a different kind of text (one whose potential audience included his own family) but because Josselin was a duller man than Pepys. Josselin's diary is tedious because 'his language is weighed down with routine religious phrases'. Yet routine religious phrases were as inevitable in a pious diary as iambic pentameter in a sonnet. The mere fact of their existence says no more about the diarist's mind than the division of a novel into chapters says about the mind of the novelist.

Tomalin is not alone in treating the diary as a window into Pepys's soul or mind. Few of her predecessors have hesitated to pronounce definitively on the man's character on

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the evidence of the diary. The dangers of this approach are revealed in the wide range of characters on offer as the true Pepys. In 1880 Wheatley concluded that 'the most remarkable characteristic of the man was his total want of the imaginative faculty'. In J. B. Fagan's successful stage comedy, *And so to Bed*, of 1929 Pepys is a cowardly but loveable rogue, with an eye for the ladies and irresistible charm. In 1933 Bryant portrayed him as a noble patriarch of the British navy, whose sexual indiscretions were not to be enjoyed but could easily be forgiven in the light of his other virtues. For Ollard in 1974, Pepys is a kind of über-everyman, an otherwise ordinary person whose every perception was heightened and intensified. In 2000, Stephen Coote depicted a man whose defining characteristic was a growing reverence for work. Tomalin's Pepys is darker and nastier than any of these. Perhaps because she is the first serious female biographer, she can see the bullying and exploitation involved in his sexual life, and her admirably thorough examination of his letters shows Pepys to be an unblushing hypocrite in financial affairs. However, like many of her predecessors, Tomalin is anxious to insist that Pepys was an artist, almost in order to justify the existence of a biography. This is a fascinating book which needs no such justification. But it is not the last word on Pepys – the diaries still await a thoroughgoing analysis of their generic qualities and a reinterpretation in the light of that analysis.

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