Rebirth Through Narrative: John Bunyan's Autobiographies ("Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners").

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Rebirth through narrative: John Bunyan's autobiographies

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The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col., 1987
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Rebirth through Narrative:
John Bunyan's
Autobiographies

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
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by
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Abstract

John Bunyan, while in Bedford gaol, composed two autobiographical narratives, one published in 1666, titled *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, and a second, published posthumously in 1765, titled *A Relation of the Imprisonment of Mr. John Bunyan*. Since its recovery, the *Relation* has been published as the concluding section of *Grace Abounding*, seemingly suggesting that the doubting sinner of *Grace Abounding* demonstrates his assurance of salvation by becoming the confident spokesman for dissent in the *Relation*. In this study, however, I argue that the *Relation* is Bunyan's first self-construction from prison and *Grace Abounding* the second; thus the design of the two self-narrations reveals a surprising but significant movement from naive confidence to doubt and despair. When the self-construction of the *Relation* is lost, Bunyan must constitute himself anew through language; and, in doing so, he accomplishes the genesis of the self, a self whose rebirth has been achieved through narrative.

In Chapter One, I discuss the importance of the design of Bunyan's autobiographical act to the process of realizing and formalizing the truth of his life. In Chapter Two, I suggest that the naive, confident protagonist of the *Relation*, who first reports his story from Bedford gaol, has become by the narrative's end an isolated, frustrated, and
bitter figure whose efforts to win release have been foiled by duplicitous officials. The abrupt ending of the Relation marks the "death" of one self-construction, leaving the autobiographer silenced—both wordless and storyless. In Chapter Three, I suggest that after the accounts of the Relation end in 1662, Bunyan begins *Grace Abounding* in an effort to constitute himself anew through language, constructing in that narration a wordless and storyless child whose condition, representing the autobiographer's, must be remedied. Chapters Four and Five demonstrate that reading and writing become acts of life through which the storyless child becomes the man who discovers the creative power of language and through this search discovers, also, an ending to his personal story that leads to the genesis of a self who chooses to risk the life of faith.
Chapter One
Self-narration:
The Critical Context

At a critical juncture in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, John Bunyan reconstructs his encounter with Martin Luther's *Commentarie on the Galathians* where he discovers—to his great wonder—his own condition in Luther's experience. Reading Luther's *Commentarie*, Bunyan finds comfort not so much in the text's theology as in the autobiographical subtext that Luther interweaves with his comments on Paul's letter. Bunyan, exposed on every hand to the autobiographical writing of his fellow-sectarians with their conflicting and competing claims for authority, believes that discovering his and Luther's story to be the same story—finding Luther's book "written out of [his] heart"—authenticates the vicissitudes of his own spiritual experience. In Luther's self-narration Bunyan finds his own descent "into the deep," vulnerability to temptation, battles against despair, and search for certitude of salvation, causing the autobiographer to assert: "I do prefer this book of Mr. Luther upon the Galathians, (excepting the Holy Bible) before all the books that ever I have seen, as most fit for a wounded conscience."

When Bunyan places reading Luther second only to reading the Bible, he reflects the value and significance the seventeenth-century sectarian placed on narratives of personal experience. The drive toward telling the self's story produced what Paul Delany calls a "great outburst" of religious autobiographies from the presses in England after 1648. Delany has identified nearly two hundred seventeenth-century autobiographies, the majority written by sectarians—largely Ranters, Muggletonians, Baptists and Quakers—who evidently found an eager and appreciative audience for their narrations of personal religious experience. The believer's "inner anxiety" and a compelling desire for personal assurance of salvation created among the sectarians a need for mutual help and encouragement, prompting the writing and publishing of autobiographies in which spiritual battles were successfully resolved and doubts transformed into faith's certitude.

All subsequent references are to this edition and will be cited by paragraph number in the text; I have regularized italics throughout.

2 Paul Delany, British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969) 3, 81; subsequent references are to this edition and will appear in the text. Delany defines a "sect" as a religious group "which after 1642 grew up outside the Anglican or Presbyterian churches, and which laid claim to freedom from any central clerical or secular authority." The sect to which Bunyan belonged in Bedford has been identified both as Baptist (or Anabaptist) and Congregationalist. See also J. Gordon Kingsley, "John Bunyan and the Baptists." Baptist History and Heritage 13 (1978): 6-7.
Additionally, the believer's testimony with its intense moments of crisis and its joyous outcome often attracted the unconverted to the writer's faith (Delany 34-36, 81).

This impulse toward self-narration, shared by countless sectarians, became specific for Bunyan after 1660 when from Bedford gaol he wrote two autobiographical narratives: A Relation of the Imprisonment of Mr. John Bunyan, a text left unpublished until 1765, and Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, a text published in 1666 at the midpoint of his twelve-year imprisonment. The popular reception of Grace Abounding prompted the publication of five additional editions of Bunyan's autobiography by 1688, the year of the author's death, and Bunyan's ongoing investment in his text resulted in two extensive revisions, producing finally a work more than sixty paragraphs longer than the original text. From his first writing in the Relation of his arrest at Samsell in 1660 to the second and final authorial revision of Grace Abounding in 1680, Bunyan's autobiographical act extends over twenty years, encompassing his twelve years of imprisonment and many of his years of ministry through preaching and writing.

This sustained interest in self-narration suggests the significance of Bunyan's autobiographical act, but the critical response to Bunyan's act of self-construction and self-interpretation has produced confusing and even contradictory assessments of his autobiographical
enterprise. Historians have applauded the Relation's careful dating and detailing of event and lamented Grace Abounding's paucity of biographical fact. Literary critics have praised Grace Abounding's imaginative reconstruction of an inner world of doubt and terror while ignoring almost entirely the public scenes of the Relation. But even the literary critics have questioned the truth of Bunyan's story of childhood depravity and accounts of providential rescue in Grace Abounding while historians can scarcely fail to note the evidence of narrative design in the Relation.

Paul John Eakin suggests that autobiographers themselves--and Bunyan would be no exception--"are responsible for the problematic reception of their work, for they perform willy-nilly both as artists and historians, negotiating a narrative passage between the freedoms of imaginative creation on one hand and the constraints of biographical fact on the other." Critics of autobiography, following the autobiographer through this perilous passage, have been highly conscious of the threats from both the Scylla of "fact" and Charybdis of "fiction," fearing that imaginative creation introduces invention into a text that claims to tell a true story of the self. Roy Pascal's seminal Design and Truth in Autobiography has prompted

3. Subsequent references to Eakin's study are to this edition and will appear in the text.
critics to reconsider the interrelationship between fictive structure and biographical fact and to find in the dialectical interplay between fiction and fact a new conception of the dynamic of the autobiographical act, one that respects the referential dimension of an autobiographical text while re-interpreting the "truth" that emerges from the play of imagination and memory in self-narration.4

In the sub-genre of spiritual autobiography, the problems of fact and fiction emerge with the convergence of a conversion "design" and an individual religious experience presented as "truth." Early response to Grace Abounding focused on the narrative's biographical content as the "truth" of Bunyan's life; then comment shifted to the conversion "design," calling into question the truth of a life seemingly pre-shaped by Calvinistic formula; and only recently have critics begun to identify the interplay of memory and invention that makes Bunyan's autobiography a narrative of self-exploration and self-discovery. My study draws from recent autobiographical critical theory--James Olney's insistence that the autobiography is "a monument of

the self as it is becoming, a metaphor of the self at the summary moment of composition" and Eakin's emphasis on autobiography as self-invention⁵—to argue that Bunyan's two autobiographical texts are acts of self-constitution through narrative, producing a self born of writing: this genesis of the self—a story of life, death, and rebirth through narrative—is the achievement of the Relation and Grace Abounding.

From this perspective Bunyan's autobiographies are not recollections of a past and completed transformation of sinner to saint; rather they are episodes in an ongoing drama of self-discovery and self-definition. In his autobiographical act, Bunyan narrates two stories: the story of the struggles of the protagonist of the Relation and Grace Abounding and the story of the telling of the protagonists' stories. And the autobiographical act that tells the story of a changing protagonist also records a changing narrator who, exploring and growing through

⁵ James Olney, Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972) 35; Olney argues that "the self expresses itself by the metaphors it creates and projects . . . but it did not exist as it now does and as it now is before creating its metaphors" (34). Eakin argues that "autobiographical truth is not a fixed but an evolving content in an intricate process of self-discovery and self-creation" (3); Eakin suggests that the autobiographical text may not tell us as much about the writer's past history as about "the autobiographer in the moment of his engagement in the act of composition," and he credits Olney with orchestrating "this shift in our conception of the autobiographical enterprise" (22).
narrative experience, comes finally into possession of his own story. The "truth" of Bunyan's life-writing emerges from these interrelated narratives.

The achievement of Bunyan's autobiographical writing and the nature of the "truth" that emerges have been central to the criticism of Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* since William York Tindall argued in *John Bunyan: Mechanic Preacher* that Bunyan's autobiography is typical of many "anatomies of the soul" composed by innumerable enthusiasts or "mechanick preachers" in the seventeenth century to advertise the "author's experience and gifts" and to serve as "propaganda for rebirth."6 Assuming the role of iconoclast, Tindall takes a skeptical position toward the sectarian's testimonial to his "apostolic excellence": "The delicate surgery of soul for which Bunyan is known was the monotonous exercise of his contemporaries" (22). For Tindall Bunyan's decision to write his autobiography from prison was entirely predictable (he would produce an advertisement for himself, enhancing the account with the possibility of martyrdom); the form the narrative would assume was equally pre-determined (the author would give his "conversion, call, and apostolic pursuits" [25]); and the content of the narrative would include the conventional accounts of childhood

depravity, outward reformation, and struggles with depair. Bunyan, argues Tindall, informed by his experience and following the autobiographical tradition of his fellow sectarians, produced a conventional work, "representative but excellent in its kind. . . . Though it deviates in no important particular from the autobiographies of other preachers, it is superior to most in literary adornment and dramatic presentation of customary details" (31). Bunyan's text survives "for the general reader" while the innumerable "almost identical" texts of other enthusiasts do not because Bunyan's artistry supplies to the customary details of the formulaic conversion narrative a certain "splendor of art" (31).

Tindall's study seemed to contravene the assumptions of John Brown, who in writing what has become the standard Bunyan biography, John Bunyan: His Life, Times, and Work, gleaned historical and factual data from the Relation and Grace Abounding to chronicle the events of Bunyan's life, giving little attention to how Bunyan's purpose or his chosen literary form might have shaped, or perhaps distorted, the experience Bunyan records. While Brown's

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7 John Brown, John Bunyan: His Life, Times, and Work, revised, Frank Mott Harrison, tercentenary ed. (London: Hulbert, 1928). Brown links autobiographical fact to historical fact, assuming that Grace Abounding represents Bunyan's sincere effort to reconstruct as fact objectively reported the events of the past: Bunyan's autobiography is a "faithful transcript of the writer's soul," states Brown, and must be read to understand "the man as he was" (170).
work focused on Bunyan's "life," unconcerned about the form that might predetermine the autobiographer's perception of his experience, Tindall's study focused on the form or design—both the conventional nature of the structure of the sectarian conversion narrative and the common spiritual experiences that supplied its content. Tindall refused to grant originality to *Grace Abounding* and seemed to call into question the authenticity of the events of a life that had been shaped to conform to a prescribed convention. Brown's assumption that the experiences Bunyan records in *Grace Abounding* are referentially true and Tindall's assumption that the narrative's design calls that truth into question focus the problematic convergence of a religious conversion paradigm and an individual religious experience in the genre of spiritual autobiography.

The tension that Pascal identified for the genre in 1960 between "design" and "truth" in autobiography has been primary in relation to *Grace Abounding* since the work of Tindall in 1934. Tindall assumed a pattern of influence for Bunyan's autobiographical narrative that has continued to shape much of the critical response to *Grace Abounding*, seemingly compelling those who follow to begin their studies by acknowledging the unoriginality of Bunyan's text and accepting the primacy of form in his spiritual autobiography. After that concession, critics generally attempt to revalue the text in some way, usually through
identifying aspects of Bunyan's skill in the artful shaping of his narrative.

Henri Talon, for example, in John Bunyan: The Man and His Works devotes two chapters to Bunyan's autobiography, reflecting the tension of the critic's dual responses to Grace Abounding. In the first chapter, "The Biographical Value of Grace Abounding" (17-30), Talon attempts to ameliorate Tindall's skepticism by suggesting that Bunyan's narrative is "faithful to the truth of life" (30) while conceding that "to a certain extent, the glance creates the thing seen" and that the "didactic intentions of the repentant sinner combined with the preconceived ideas of the theologian" may result in the transposition of "everyday reality": "We know that there is in art a kind of lie, but that this lie is the necessary condition for a higher truth" (28-29). Talon emphasizes the "mark of authenticity" of the tone of the narrative and offers the reassurance that the autobiography has biographical value in its ability to "reveal new depths not only in the man, but in the spiritual life itself" (30).

In a second chapter, "Poetry and Truth in Grace Abounding," Talon considers in some detail the style,

8 Henri Talon, John Bunyan: The Man and His Works (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1951); Talon objects to Tindall's "constant irony" through which he "insinuates that Bunyan . . . was a clever writer rather than a sincere autobiographer" (22). Subsequent references are to this edition and will appear in the text.
vocabulary, syntax, and Biblical imagery of Bunyan's text (131-40). Talon admires Bunyan's "homely" images ("My heart . . . was as a Clog on the Leg of a Bird to hinder her from flying" [77]) and the "rustic flavour" of his vocabulary ("This for that instant did benumb the sinews of my best delights" [21]). He finds particular value in Grace Abounding as preparation for The Pilgrim's Progress, noting that the Pilgrim with a "burden on his back" in the allegory is foreshadowed in Grace Abounding ("And so [I] went home with a great burden upon my Spirit" [20] . . ."I was a burden to myself" [149]) and suggesting that the dream-form of the latter work becomes apparent in the earlier, "for this confession makes it clear (even when it does not say so) that dreams are the writer's daily bread" (138).

Talon's effort at reclamation, though admirable, finally produces through his bifurcated response, a two-headed monster, making Bunyan's text wholly acceptable neither to the historian nor the literary critic.

Bunyan criticism begins to move past Talon's unhappy impasse, however, when Barrett John Mandel and Robert Bell reassess Tindall's assumption of influence in Grace Abounding and revalue the function of design in spiritual autobiography. In "Bunyan and the Autobiographer's Artistic Purpose," Mandel finds that Bunyan's work, as Tindall argued, is indeed unoriginal and conventional, but, asserts Mandel, "There is no reason to assume that Bunyan 'copied'
rather, the text's "dynamis" arises out of the "cultural forces" of the era: "Bunyan and other autobiographers all arrived at the same governing purpose for their literary pursuits because they all shared the same Puritan morality, Puritan doctrine, and relatively limited Puritan audience" (231). And though Bunyan, like other Puritan autobiographers, predictably chose the "most popular and successful form"—"the conversion pattern of spiritual autobiography"—as the appropriate shape for his experience, he was, nevertheless, free within the confines of the conversion paradigm to make artistic choices of self-representation (233-34). Out of this assessment, Mandel begins an engagement with the complexity of Bunyan's narrative that has yielded increasingly rich results for critics of Bunyan's self-narration.

Mandel finds three of Bunyan's narrative decisions noteworthy: the choices of "narrator," protagonist, and setting. For his narrator (the man he has become), Bunyan creates, largely through his self-portrayal in the preface, a conventional, ambivalent "cultural hero," who is "significant because humble, enviable because saved, imitable because, above all, human" (236). Bunyan's conventional protagonist (the man he once was) reflects his

9 Barrett John Mandel, "Bunyan and the Autobiographer's Artistic Purpose," Criticism 10 (1968): 234. Subsequent references to this article will appear in the text.
reader's own self-image in his faltering movement toward grace and the "mind-wrenching, heart-rending decisions" that pull him "down to the depths of despair" or hoist him "up to the pinnacles of inexpressible happiness" (238). Finally, Bunyan's setting shows the autobiographer to be unconcerned about "verifiable history"; rather, in Bunyan's hands "time is a literary property to be used or ignored as need dictates" (241). Evaluation of such a work, Mandel suggests, must rest on how well the autobiographer achieves his purpose, i.e., how well the writer uses the fixed conventions to prepare other Puritans for conversion. Using this standard of evaluation, Mandel argues that Grace Abounding accomplished "its didactic end as well as the best of its kind" (242).

Mandel's assessment of the interplay between cultural models of self-presentation and the autobiographer's literary self-invention informs Robert Bell's study, "Metamorphosis of Spiritual Autobiography," but Bell moves the argument from the consideration of Grace Abounding as one of many similar Puritan or sectarian autobiographies to an examination of the text's pivotal position in the historical line of classic spiritual autobiographies. For Bell Grace Abounding's "adherence to a stock pattern of conversion" is entirely appropriate since all spiritual autobiographers "imagine themselves re-enacting an age-old
passion, dying to life that they might live in God."10
"Ultimately," argues Bell, "all these lives are modeled upon
the great patterns of Christian sainthood, Christ and Paul," and thus "Bunyan's reliance on both literary and personal
models . . . is crucial to his development of a spiritual
identity and to his didactic purpose" (108).

Like St. Augustine, the initiator of the tradition of
spiritual autobiography, Bunyan uses conversion as the
"formal principle of organization," but, argues Bell, there
is a crucial difference: whereas Augustine in the
Confessions can clearly differentiate the narrator, "who
speaks from the level of grace," from the protagonist, who
is the fallen self, Bunyan's protagonist in Grace Abounding
"never turns a sharply demarcated corner" of conversion and
his narrator "is never afforded ultimate, abiding assurance
that he is indeed another man than the poor sinner" (114,
118). The conversion narrative possible for Paul and
Augustine where lives are "reshaped at once and forever"
(115) is no longer possible for Bunyan who finds redemption
to be a continuous, ongoing struggle (114). Bunyan writes
at a historical moment when "fervid spiritual ardour jostled

10 Robert Bell, "Metamorphoses of Spiritual
references to this article will appear in the text. Bell
accepts Tindall's argument that Grace Abounding closely
resembles other seventeenth-century conversion narratives,
but he insists that "originality was surely not Bunyan's
goal, nor could it be, because Puritan doctrine fixed the
structure and content of all such accounts" (108).
with doubts about its efficacy" (119); between Bunyan's birth in 1628 and his death in 1688, the assumptions men lived by began to shift. Thus Bunyan's inability to leave the city of man for the City of God marks a significant movement toward a "new state in which both nature and grace are characteristically defined in terms of this world" (118-19). *Grace Abounding*, Bell concludes, signals the exhaustion of the Augustinian tradition and marks the turn toward "new, secular modes of identity in first-person narration by such eighteenth-century writers as Franklin and Rousseau" (109).

When Bell contrasts the *Confessions* and *Grace Abounding*, he makes it clear that influence is not the primary critical issue of his argument; rather Bell insists that juxtaposing the two self-narrations serves to highlight the complexity of Bunyan's self-characterization—"to identify "what has been gained and lost" (109). What has been lost is the post-conversion narrator-saint who can confidently separate himself from the pre-conversion protagonist-sinner. Mandel had found evidence of the saintly narrator in the preface to *Grace Abounding*, but Bell, focusing on the text's long conversion segment and juxtaposing Bunyan's narrator with Augustine's, argues that the narrator who can speak from the level of grace has been lost. And it is this loss that places *Grace Abounding* in a pivotal position in autobiography's metamorphosis from sacred to secular premises.
William C. Spengemann in *The Forms of Autobiography* also places *Grace Abounding* at a significant juncture in the history of the genre. For Spengemann, as for Bell, St. Augustine's *Confessions* presents the originating, "formal paradigm" for the genre; Bunyan's text falls at the turning point when the "historical" autobiography of St. Augustine, Dante, and, to some extent, Bunyan, gives way to the "philosophical" autobiography of Rousseau, Wordsworth, and DeQuincey.¹¹ Thus Bunyan, according to Spengemann's argument, becomes one of the last writers of historical autobiography, a form of the genre that requires a "divine superstructure" to give shape to the Christian life (51). That "eternal structure" allows Bunyan to concentrate on "the content of his life" and thus to highlight his "individual uniqueness" (50-51). Thus in Spengemann's scheme Bunyan both appropriates and departs from the Augustinian paradigm, and, in doing so, changes the direction of the genre: "In giving more attention to the excitement of the soul's world pilgrimage than to its

¹¹ William C. Spengemann, *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1980); subsequent references are to this edition and will appear in the text. Spengemann proposes an evolution of autobiography from "historical" (autobiography of the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment that attempts self-explanation), "philosophic" (autobiography at the turn of the nineteenth century that attempts self-scrutiny), and "poetic" (modern autobiography that reflects the ideological upheavals of the nineteenth century and attempts self-invention). Spengemann suggests that these are the only formal strategies available to an autobiographer (xv-xvii).
heavenly destination, more importance to personal religious experience than to the doctrines which authorize that experience, and at least as much significance to the details of an individual life as to the universal truths which presumably govern that life, *Grace Abounding* appears to have abandoned the assumptions that make historical autobiography possible" (50).

Spengemann recognizes, also, the tension we have been tracing in the problematic convergence of universal form and individual experience; he argues that historical autobiography was "invented" to demonstrate "the consonance of an individual life with an absolute, eternal law already in force and known through some immediate source outside the life that illustrates it" (60). But the text obligated to these purposes could neither "make the conclusions of an individual life seem universally applicable without misrepresenting the individual life, nor represent that life accurately without compromising the universality of its conclusions" (60). Thus, though Bunyan does succeed to some extent in appropriating the "eternal structure" necessary for historical autobiography, 'he is one of the last who can do so, and his emphasis on the details of individual experience foreshadows the approaching collapse of that structure and the end of historical autobiography (51).

Felicity A. Nussbaum brings Bell's work with the narrator-protagonist to Spengemann's study of universal
structure and individual experience in *Grace Abounding* to identify "two impulses" inhering in Bunyan's self-presentation: the concept of the self in terms of a "universal allegorical ideal" and the concept of the self as the "particularized individual"; "these two ways of conceptualizing the self both compete with and complement each other in the text."12 Nussbaum posits two "narrative strains" interacting throughout the text: from one strain emerges a traditional providential description of the self but "pushing against" this strain is a second from which emerges a concept of the self as provisional in nature. These two narrative strains produce an autobiographical text that takes on the authority of God's Biblical text and creates a "self in continual process"--a self "not quite real, not quite fictional"--but one which becomes a center of authority and thus substitutes for God as authority in "disobedient dependence" (32-33). The "fragmented and idiosyncratic self" which Bunyan describes and his text ratifies, according to Nussbaum, emerges from her study of *Grace Abounding*'s multiple sections: the preface, conversion segment, ministry account, prison postscript, and conclusion. Earlier studies focusing only on the conversion segment describe the self that emerges from Bunyan's

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12 Felicity A. Nussbaum, "'By These Words I Was Sustained': Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*," *English Literary History* 49 (1982): 19; subsequent references to this article will appear in the text.
narration in simpler terms, but in her analysis of the full text, Nussbaum insists that the "self" created by Bunyan's complete autobiographical act in *Grace Abounding* never achieves a fixed state but assumes only a provisional nature subject to an ongoing process of change (20).

Nussbaum's emphasis on the changing nature of the self in *Grace Abounding* complements Elizabeth Bruss's earlier study of Bunyan's text in *Autobiographical Acts* in which she suggests that *Grace Abounding* is an "argument rather than merely an attractive rhetorical display" whose goal is "to convince the artist himself" and to "prove as much as to memorialize the touch of grace upon his life."13 By juxtaposing *Grace Abounding* with *Pilgrim's Progress*, "two works written in . . . close succession and with so many ties of theme and figure between them," Bruss differentiates between the significance of the autobiographical act for Bunyan and the work of writing fiction. She argues that the reader can observe "the silent discovery of meaning and meaningful form in the conversion narrative" (41) as the autobiographer moves toward the achievement of identity, which Bruss describes as the welding of the various levels of the "text, narrator, and narrated" into "the shape of a single personality" (51). Bruss calls attention to the

situation out of which Bunyan first writes *Grace Abounding* from his prison cell and the reawakened "guilt and terror" that accompany the revisions of his work (46). In this context she can argue that both *Grace Abounding* and *Pilgrim's Progress* "make use of actual events from the life of their author and both are religious teachings, but only the autobiography changes the value of that life and instructs the author as well as the audience" (37).

If Nussbaum's work focuses on the changing "self" of Bunyan's self-narration, Bruss's analysis emphasizes the dynamic quality of the process of "narrating" and, perhaps most significantly, its value for the autobiographer. Nussbaum, by stressing the modernity of the self or "selves" that emerge from *Grace Abounding*, sets that text, as do Bell and Spengemann before her, on the boundary between traditional modes of personal narrative and the modes of more recent autobiography with its concern for self-knowledge and self-invention. Bruss sends the reader back into the text to scrutinize what Eakin calls the self's "acts of self-expression," conscious that the reader may witness an autobiographer in the process of constructing a self "that would not otherwise exist" (Eakin 26). Both Nussbaum and Bruss, studying *Grace Abounding's* multiple sections and finding a process of self-construction occurring, prompt us to ask further questions of motivation and methodology. What prompts Bunyan to begin a quest for
the self through writing autobiography from Bedford gaol? How does the text he produces accomplish the search Bunyan undertakes?

We are still asking questions of "truth" and "design" in autobiography, but we can now restructure the questions Pascal's earlier study raised. As we examine Bunyan's self-narration, we are no longer asking, "Does the design compromise the truth?" Rather we now ask, "Does the design create the truth?"

The critical issue for Bunyan's self-narration is not that his text replicates the design of Paul's conversion narrative or Augustine's Confessions or Luther's self-narration or his fellow-sectarians spiritual testimonies. Bunyan's text does bear a similarity to existing models, for cultural models of selfhood (of whose influence the writer is partly aware, partly unaware) will always in varying degrees constitute the autobiographer's understanding of the truth of his life. Rather, the question central to Bunyan's autobiographical act is how the writer in responding to structural models of self-narration uses those models for self-exploration and in the process rewrites the structures and reforms the models to create his own story. In this context, I will argue that the design of Bunyan's autobiographical act reveals a self in the process of realizing and formalizing its truth—a truth partly discovered, partly created through self-narration.
It is in this context that I explore, in the chapters that follow, not just the text of *Grace Abounding* but the design created by Bunyan's two texts of self-narration—the *Relation* and *Grace Abounding*—arguing that both episodes of his autobiographical act work to create the truth of the self for the autobiographer. In Chapter Two, I argue that the *Relation* reflects Bunyan's first effort to constitute a self in narrative and that the naive, confident protagonist of the first "report," who is a heroic spokesman for dissent, becomes in the fifth and final report an isolated, frustrated, and bitter figure whose efforts to win release have been foiled by the officials and who thus finds himself "left in prison." The abrupt ending of the final narrative of the *Relation* marks the "death" of one self-construction, leaving the autobiographer silenced—both wordless and storyless. In Chapter Three, I suggest that *Grace Abounding*, begun after the accounts of the *Relation* end in 1662, serves as a wake to mourn the lost "I" of the *Relation* while simultaneously recording the waking of an "I" who, conscious of the threat death poses to life's structures of meaning, begins the task of constituting himself anew through language, attempting through self-narration to remedy the wordless and storyless condition of the child of *Grace Abounding*. To recover his own story, Bunyan finds he must retrace his entry into written texts, first the Bible and then other texts of self-narration; this process of
constituting the self through reading is the focus of Chapter Four. The passive process of reading the self becomes in Chapter Five the active task of writing the self and of searching for a narrative ending—one of grace rather than reprobation—to the self’s story. Together Chapters Four and Five demonstrate that reading and writing become acts of life through which the storyless child becomes the man who discovers the creative power of language and through this search discovers, also, an ending to his personal story that leads to the genesis of a self who chooses to risk the life of faith.

Bunyan's autobiographical act, finally, produces two texts that tell two stories: the story of a protagonist (the self he once was) and the story of the narrator (the self he is becoming). The first story records the transformation of the naive, confident protagonist of the Relation to the struggling, doubting protagonist of Grace Abounding who must journey "into the deep" of the self through re-enacting his "castings down and raisings up." The second story records the growth in consciousness of the narrator—a growth achieved through narrative experience and reflected in his increased propensity to take possession of his story in order to produce a coherent story—one whose ending accords with its beginning and middle. As the narrator appropriates his life-history into life-story, he accomplishes the genesis of a self, a self born of writing, a self whose rebirth has been achieved through narrative.
Through narrative Bunyan transforms his life into a plotted, patterned story of life-death-rebirth, a design that reflects the conversion paradigm and a design that creates the "truth" he can live by. But to recover Bunyan's process of self-constitution and to discover the "design" that creates his life's "truth," the reader must begin with the text that has traditionally been appended to the end of Grace Abounding but that is, I will argue, Bunyan's first autobiographical act, The Relation of the Imprisonment of Mr. John Bunyan.
Chapter Two

Bunyan's Relation:
Silencing the Autobiographical Voice

In November, 1660, six months after Charles's restoration to the English throne but eighteen months before Parliament passed the Act of Uniformity, John Bunyan was arrested for preaching to a small group of dissenters in a farmhouse in the hamlet of Samsell, about eighteen miles south of Bedford. In *A Relation of the Imprisonment of Mr. John Bunyan*, Bunyan reconstructs his arrest, examinations before the magistrates, and imprisonment. Bunyan begins the narrative:

Upon the 12th of this instant November, 1660, I was desired by some of the friends in the country to come to teach at Samsell, by Harlington, in Bedfordshire. . . . The justice hearing thereof, (whose name is Mr. Francis Wingate) forthwith issued a warrant to take me, and bring me before him, and in the mean time to keep a very strong watch about the house where the meeting should be kept, as if we that was to meet together in that place did intend to do some fearful business, to the destruction of the country.¹

The constable and Wingate's man, obedient to the Justice's orders, lay in watch and disrupted the meeting after the opening prayer; they found, however, not plotters of violence and treason, but a small group of Bedfordshire folk, as Bunyan reports, "with our Bibles in our hands, ready to speak and hear the Word of God" (105). Thus Bunyan begins to narrate his experience, for himself and his fellow dissenters, describing with economy the overzealous authority confronting a simple lay preacher whose weapon is not the sword but the word.

The scene is central to Bunyan's story of conflict with the establishment, for it is repeated in numerous forms throughout the Relation. The autobiographer recreates a protagonist who seriously and energetically aligns himself with a scriptural authority higher than that of the Bedford magistrates. Yet the writer refuses to be overserious, able to appreciate the irony in vigilant officials protecting the kingdom from dangerous plotters gathered to pray and hear the word. Bunyan undoubtedly knew his readers would share the humor inherent in the figural inversion of sword and Bible: the Christian's Bible is his sword, but here the suspected traitor's sword is a Bible.

105. Subsequent references are to this edition and will be made by page number in the text. Italics have been regularized.
In the Relation Bunyan begins with the arrest at Samsell, covers his first trials and efforts to win release, and ends almost one-and-a-half years later when he is "hindered and prevented" by the Clerk of the Peace from appearing before the judge at the Spring Assizes, 1662, and is, therefore, "left in prison" (131). Bunyan's narrative of his arrest and early months of imprisonment bustles with dramatically rendered scenes of lively exchanges between the nonconformist and the Bedfordshire justices. Roger Sharrock notes that it is from the Relation rather than the autobiography proper, Grace Abounding, that Bunyan's reputation as a heroic figure of "resistance for conscience's sake" has been derived. Because the Relation is "full of action and dialogue," Sharrock observes, "it has provided the Bunyan saga with a body of salient dramatic incidents," more so than Grace Abounding, "a work bare of external incident because of its overriding concern with the life of the soul" ("Origin" 250).

Biographers have regularly made use of the Relation to recover Bunyan's role as spokesman for dissent during the Restoration. Bunyan's careful dating of events and the

2 Roger Sharrock, "The Origin of A Relation of the Imprisonment of Mr. John Bunyan," R.E.S. 10 (1959) 250. Hereafter this article will be referred to as "Origin" and page numbers will appear in the text. Sharrock summarizes his research into the origins of the Relation in the Introduction to the Oxford edition of Grace Abounding (1962) xxiii-xxv.
detailed naming of places and persons has enabled the historian to reconstruct precisely the swiftly-mounted opposition of a newly empowered officialdom against nonconformity. But the Relation, published as it usually is in modern editions after Grace Abounding, has typically been neglected by students of autobiography, who prefer the spiritual struggles of Bunyan's conversion narrative.

And, admittedly, the student of Bunyan autobiography does seem to have justification for ignoring the Relation. For one thing, Bunyan published Grace Abounding in 1666, almost midway through the imprisonment, and he continued an involvement with his text in seeing it through five more editions and two revisions during his lifetime. In contrast, the Relation was left unpublished until 1765. Further, Grace Abounding does incorporate, albeit in a briefly summarized two paragraphs, the content of the Relation, for to Grace Abounding Bunyan appends two "Brief Accounts," one of his ministry and the second of his imprisonment. In "The Brief Account of the Author's Imprisonment," the final major section of Grace Abounding, the autobiographer summarizes in perfunctory fashion the events given in lively detail in the Relation.

Critics of Grace Abounding, then, have usually assumed that the conversion narrative contains Bunyan's significant autobiography and thus have disregarded the Relation. Melvin Watson, for example, focusing on the dramatic
structure of *Grace Abounding*, ignores the *Relation* and also insists that even the two "Brief Accounts" of the autobiography proper are irrelevant to the "really significant" materials of the narrative (476). John N. Morris, Barrett John Mandel, Robert Bell, and Elizabeth Bruss, all important contributors to the criticism of *Grace Abounding*, fail to mention the *Relation*. Critics who do not completely ignore the *Relation* usually offer brief comments on its appropriateness as a conclusion to *Grace Abounding*. Margaret Bottrall, for example, notes that modern editions of *Grace Abounding* generally "supplement" that text with the *Relation*. And, she asserts, "it provides an excellent conclusion to the conversion-narrative, if only because it testifies to the real change that a certitude of personal salvation wrought in John Bunyan's character."\(^3\)

In his 1954 biography *John Bunyan*, Sharrock, too, finds in the *Relation* "an appropriate final section to the spiritual autobiography* [*Grace Abounding*] since it presents a Bunyan further witnessing to his beliefs. "It has an artistic appropriateness, too," argues Sharrock. "After emerging from the struggles he had described, Bunyan put away entirely his morbid anxieties. He had not only a new

\(^3\) Margaret Bottrall, *Every man a Phoenix: Studies in Seventeenth-century Autobiography* (London: John Murray, 1958) 90. Bottrall makes only one other comment on the *Relation*: "The morbidly sensitive man [of *Grace Abounding*] . . . has been converted into a steadfast, not to say pertinacious, spokesman for the liberty of dissenters" (90).
birth, but a new personality." 4 But Sharrock follows his biography of Bunyan with a journal piece, printed in 1959, entitled "The Origin of A Relation of the Imprisonment of Mr. John Bunyan," in which he asserts, "The problem demanding attention, which has never really been considered by Bunyan scholarship, is why A Relation should exist at all as an independent autobiographical narrative?" Why didn't Bunyan simply incorporate the text of the Relation into the prison appendix of Grace Abounding? Certainly, Sharrock notes, it was not unusual for sectarian autobiographers to include lively accounts of arrest, trial, and imprisonment in their self-narrations; for example, the Baptist Vavasor Powell's exchanges with the justices in The Life and Death of Mr. Vavasor Powell illustrate this common feature of noncomformist autobiographies ("Origin" 250).

Sharrock has raised an important question. If Bunyan had written a narrative detailing his arrest, trial, and imprisonment, why did he not append this account to Grace Abounding, especially when these events were significant for the writer and his readers would expect such an account? Writers of spiritual autobiographies began to include trial and prison accounts in their narratives early in the formulation of the genre. Arise Evans's An Eccho to the

4 Roger Sharrock, John Bunyan (London: Macmillan, 1968) 67. Hereafter Sharrock's biography will be referred to as Bunyan and page numbers will appear in the text.
Voice from Heaven (1653), a narrative called by Paul Delaney "the first true autobiography to be published by an 'enthusiastic' preacher" (82), relates, "after the manner of the Apostle Paul," the imprisonment of Evans both in Newgate and Bridewell. Richard Coppin in Truth's Testimony (1655) devotes seven chapters to his various trials in Worcester and Oxford, recording in some detail the interrogations by officials and the able responses by Coppin. Lawrence Clarkson (or Claxton) records his arrest by Parliamentary officers for seducing men and women to "dipping," and he dutifully records his arraignment in his autobiography The Lost Sheep Found (1660). Finally, at the end of the century, Lodowick Muggleton continues the convention by recording his examination before the magistrates and his imprisonment in Darby gaol in The Act of the Witnesses (1699).

Bunyan follows many of the conventions of his fellow-sectarians in writing Grace Abounding, but for some reason in the case of his imprisonment account, he chooses to summarize briefly matters that others treat in detail. Sharrock, puzzled by this anomaly, asks, "Why isn't the Relation incorporated into Grace Abounding?" This question leads to his study of the history of the Relation manuscript and an analysis of its form. Sharrock's research attempts both to establish the authenticity of the manuscript and to date the composition of the Relation. His findings are
significant because he not only brings to light little-known information about the origin of the Relation but also through his conjectures concerning the date of composition opens the possibility of reassessing the Relation and bringing it into a potentially rewarding relationship to Grace Abounding.

The Relation manuscript evidently was passed down in the Bunyan family and remained unpublished until 1765, almost a hundred years after the 1666 publication of Grace Abounding. At that time, Thomas Gurney discovered the manuscript in the possession of Hannah Bunyan, the great-granddaughter of John Bunyan. Sharrock was able to uncover the story of the manuscript through a letter written by Thomas Gurney's son Joseph in 1813 to the Evangelical Magazine to testify to the authenticity of Bunyan's authorship of the Relation. In the letter, which Sharrock reprints, Gurney recalls a trip made with his father in 1765 to Bedfordshire where Thomas Gurney was informed that the "aged and infirm" Hannah Bunyan hoped to locate a publisher for her great-grandfather's narrative of his imprisonment. Gurney reports:

"My father and I went to her lodging and she delivered the manuscript to my father in my presence, requesting him to sell it. The manuscript was in Mr. Bunyan's handwriting. The copy was very fair; and it was sewd up in a little book." ("Origin" 252)
Gurney's letter concludes with the information that his father sold the manuscript for five guineas to a bookseller in London, a Mr. Buckland, who immediately printed it.

Thomas Gurney was an expert in shorthand, reports Sharrock, and therefore knowledgeable about handwriting; his conclusion that the document was authentic may have been based, at least in part, on a professional interest in handwriting. It is possible, also, that he could have seen a specimen of Bunyan's handwriting since he had "grown up in the Bedford neighbourhood and numbered among his friends and relations members of the separatist church to which Bunyan had belonged" ("Origin" 253). This information, argues Sharrock, increases the probability that Gurney could reliably validate the Relation as Bunyan's. And though Joseph Gurney's letter was prompted by his "having heard that some persons doubt the authenticity of the Relation" ("Origin" 252), it is important to note that such questions did not continue to arise.

But why had the Relation been prepared for publication and then left unpublished? Sharrock speculates that Charles Doe, Bunyan's first editor, may have intended to print the manuscript in the 1692 collected edition of Bunyan's works. In his prospectus for this edition, Doe lists a work that seems to be the Relation under the title An Account of His Imprisonment and places it sixtieth of the sixty works he hoped to publish; however, when what Doe called the "first
volume" appeared, it did not include An Account of His Imprisonment. Copyright problems with previously published works prevented Doe from bringing out the intended second volume. Sharrock speculates that Doe may have felt the Relation's natural place was with Grace Abounding and simply held it over until he could establish his right to print the autobiography ("Origin" 253).

Sharrock finds in the form of the Relation itself further clues about the history of the manuscript. The text is not a unified narration but instead seems to be five first-person reports, "each coming to a definite conclusion like a personal letter" ("Origin" 253). Four of the five reports, for example, end with "Farewell." The third report follows the "Farewell" with the initials "J. B.," and the fifth follows the closing with the full name "John Bunyan." The second ends in full: "Thus have I given you substance of my examination. The Lord make these profitable to all that shall read or hear them. Farewell" (Relation 123). Sharrock argues that "we should not expect 'read or hear' of a printed work in the late seventeenth century." He adds that the prayer, "the Lord make these profitable," seems particularly appropriate to "manuscript correspondence" ("Origins" 255). From such internal evidence, Sharrock infers that each first-person narrative may be a "letter or report," sent by Bunyan from prison to the Bedford congregation ("Origin" 255).
In an attempt to date the composition of the *Relation*, Sharrock draws attention to the contents of the sections, beginning with the heading of the first section,

The Relation of my Imprisonment in the Month of November, 1660, when, by the good hand of my God, I had for five or six years together, without any great interruption, freely preached the blessed Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . The Devil, that old enemy of man's salvation, took his opportunity to inflame the hearts of his vassals against me, insomuch that at the last, I was laid out for the warrant of a justice, and was taken and committed to prison. The relation thereof is as followeth: (105)

Sharrock conjectures that Bunyan's dating of his account by the month of his imprisonment rather than the month of his arrest "shows that it was still November when Bunyan composed this first report." "It would be a curious form of words to choose if he was writing after March 1662, the time of the lastest events described in the fifth section," argues Sharrock. Here Sharrock seems to infer that after the imprisonment has become an extended state, November, 1660, would be notable as a marker for arrest rather than imprisonment. Examining this heading further, Sharrock finds that Bunyan seems to be introducing the first narrative only and not to be providing a "collective
Sharrock notes, also, the ending of the first section, "Thus have I, in short, declared the manner and occasion of my being in prison; where I lie waiting the good will of God" (113). He finds in the phrase, "where I lie waiting the good will of God," a strong suggestion that Bunyan was writing very soon or "immediately" after the events he describes and before he wrote the other reports, "in fact before Bunyan had decided to continue his account at all" ("Origin" 254). In examining the language throughout the five sections, Sharrock finds details of direct speech "so full and so authentic that it would not seem possible for Bunyan to have written any of them very long after the incidents he is remembering" ("Origin" 255). Sharrock concludes that, taken together, the content of the Relation and its form seem to provide evidence that Bunyan's narratives were "letters written to the congregation after each crucial stage in his imprisonment, that is, after each opportunity for obtaining release had passed by ("Origin" 255).

Sharrock elaborates on the historical milieu of Bunyan's imprisonment in the years 1660 to 1662. The first four accounts of the Relation seem to cover a period when the Bedford Church Book speaks of meetings being neglected through "the increase of trouble." To such a group, Bunyan perhaps recounts his experiences in letters to be read aloud
at the church meeting, and, later, when the "sparse entries in the Church Book" indicate that open meetings have become dangerous, the letters may have circulated among individuals ("Origins" 255). Bunyan's narratives recreate the drama of the crises he is undergoing for a congregation that is also undergoing persecution. At such a time, Sharrock notes, Bunyan can share his frustrations, but he cannot openly display his fears before a fearful people. Later, in Grace Abounding, Bunyan does emphasize a fear of the gallows that he says haunted his early months of imprisonment, but, when writing from 1660 to 1662, it is unlikely that Bunyan would confess this fear to a "harried congregation at the beginning of an era of persecution," argues Sharrock; it is only after the threat has largely passed that he is free to write of his fear of death. Perhaps, Sharrock concludes, his theory of the origin of the imprisonment narrative explains why in Grace Abounding Bunyan substitutes a summary of his arrest and imprisonment for the detailed account of the Relation and introduces the emphasis on his fear of death ("Origin" 251, 256).

As for publication of the Relation, Sharrock conjectures that Bunyan may have considered publishing the five reports together, but it would not be surprising if the booksellers refused, for "it would be difficult to obtain a licence for a work of this character between 1660 and 1666" ("Origin" 256). Bunyan's report of Lindale as "an old enemy
of the truth" (Relation 112), his unsympathetic portrayal of Twisden, whom Elizabeth fears will strike her, and his unflattering description of Chester, who pulls off his hat "in a chafe" and scratches his head in anger (Relation 132), would perhaps have brought a reprisal from these important Bedford personages. Sharrock can only speculate about Bunyan's intention to publish the reports of the Relation and his failure to do so; at all events, the Relation went unpublished during Bunyan's lifetime.

I find Sharrock's research into the origins of the Relation convincing and significant in two respects. First, his recovery of the Joseph Gurney letter, a document apparently unnoted by "John Brown, his reviser F. M. Harrison, and other Bunyan biographers" (Introduction GA xxiv), supports the authenticity of the Relation: the manuscript had remained in the Bunyan family and the claim of the title page, "written by himself," was at the time of publication substantiated by Thomas Gurney, a man who grew up in Bedford and who, as the inventor of a system of shorthand, may have had the interest and skill to make him a reliable judge of Bunyan's handwriting. Secondly, Sharrock launches what I find to be a plausible argument that the Relation is a series of letters or reports written in the first months of Bunyan's imprisonment, recording the arrest, trial, and efforts to win release as these events occur. In my opinion, the strongest points of evidence Sharrock
advances are the epistolary form of the five sections, the references in the sections to a date by month or to events that would have been known to interested readers, and the suggestion in the first letter that the prisoner lies "waiting the good will of God." In addition, Sharrock's reminder that Bunyan's personal crisis occurred in the context of a larger persecution of the church makes plausible Sharrock's contention that Bunyan may have begun a series of letters to encourage a harried congregation.

What I find most valuable about Sharrock's conjecture is that it opens the possibility of reassessing the significance of the Relation and of bringing that text into a new and interesting relationship to Grace Abounding. To explore this possibility, I wish to align my study with Sharrock's and to propose that the Relation is Bunyan's first self-narration from Bedford gaol with Grace Abounding being a second personal narrative. My reading of Bunyan's two autobiographies will presume that the sections of the Relation are letters written from approximately November, 1660, through the spring of 1662. Although Sharrock's hypothesis cannot now be documented with certainty, the reading that emerges from this venture may itself become part of the evidence to support the validity of his claim.

Inevitably, however, to argue from Sharrock's hypothesis means to present an alternative to the position he assumes in his 1954 study John Bunyan. Rather than
viewing the protagonist in the *Relation* as a "new personality" who has put away the "morbid anxieties" of the protagonist in *Grace Abounding*, as Sharrock argued in *John Bunyan* (67), I propose that the protagonist of the *Relation* is a confident, almost stubbornly assertive "I" and that the protagonist of *Grace Abounding*, who is a struggling, anxious, doubting "I," is a second and later self-construction. Thus Bunyan's self-narrations move from certainty to uncertainty, a process that reverses the movement Sharrock finds in his reading of Bunyan's autobiographies. I am convinced, however, that what Bunyan's autobiographical narratives record are "first and foremost the period of the autobiographical act itself" (Eakin 22). Within that period, Bunyan is engaged in self-narration that reflects the writer's consciousness at the time of writing, a time when he moves from certainty to doubt. To trace that movement will, I believe, ultimately, help to explain the stature of *Grace Abounding* as spiritual autobiography. Through the autobiographical act, Bunyan, with increasing consciousness of the act he is performing, explores the self and produces in the *Relation* and *Grace Abounding* narratives that record a process of both self-discovery and self-invention.

Even within the *Relation*, Bunyan's self-portrayal changes. The protagonist of the first two narratives energetically engages numerous opponents, his performances
reaching a climax in the engagement with Sir John Kelynge, a prominent Cavalier lawyer and later Lord Chief Justice. Bunyan's reconstruction of his vigorous opposition to Episcopacy's forms before Justice Kelynge occurs at mid-point in the Relation and represents the moment of highest intensity in the narrative. In the last three narratives, Bunyan portrays a protagonist who is increasingly isolated, dependent, and betrayed. In the third narrative, for example, he argues, not publicly with a prominent justice of the nobility, but with Paul Cobb, the Clerk of the Peace, who beguiles Bunyan by calling him "goodman" and "neighbour" but whose report to the justices keeps Bunyan a prisoner. In the fourth narrative, Bunyan's hope for release rests, not in action and debate, but in his wife Elizabeth, a hope that ends in disappointment. The final narrative contains no dialogue, no reconstructed dramatic enactments, but rather a short account in which Bunyan portrays himself besieged by slander and legal trickery. Thus in the Relation there occur in the fortunes of the protagonist the "raisings up" and the "castings down" which will become the rhythm of Grace Abounding. And if Bunyan wrote each narrative as a report of a crisis during his first year and a half of imprisonment, the changing self-portrayal suggests a movement from innocence to experience, chronicling the transformation of the spirited public apologist and exemplary martyr to the frustrated lonely prisoner. In this
first autobiographical act, Bunyan must give up a cherished, chosen role to assume one imposed by deceitful oppressors. He must depict himself losing one identity and grudgingly accepting another. These changing self-constructions become central to the story that emerges from the five accounts that comprise Bunyan's first text of self-narration.

I. The Relation of my Imprisonment in the month of November, 1660, when . . . I was laid out for by the warrant of a justice, and was taken and committed to prison. The relation thereof is as followeth:

The initial narrative of the Relation begins with the intrusion of the representatives of civil authority, the constable and Justice Wingate's arresting officer, into the farmhouse meeting where Bunyan, the visiting preacher, has gathered with a few rural worshipers. Bunyan writes, "We had begun in prayer for the blessing of God upon our opportunity, intending to have preached the Word of the Lord unto them there present: But the constable coming in prevented us. So that I was taken and forced to depart the room" (105). At this point, rather than presenting the result of the arrest, Bunyan moves back to his earlier arrival at the farmhouse, the report of "whisperings" that he was to be taken that day, and the warnings of the "timorous" friend who fearfully suggests that Bunyan flee. What seems evident in Bunyan's relation of the crisis is its artful construction. Bunyan's delay seems to build suspense for an audience of readers or listeners, who may already
know his story, but who feel the tension of the impending arrest as the autobiographer delays the climactic moment.

But Bunyan narrates not simply to tell the story dramatically but to use the story to explain why he permitted himself to be taken when he could have escaped. Thus when the frightened farm owner suggests flight, Bunyan responds:

No: By no means, I will not stir, neither will I have the meeting dismissed for this. Come, be of good cheer, let us not be daunted, our cause is good, we need not be ashamed of it, to preach Gods word, it is so good a work, that we shall be well rewarded, if we suffer for that. (106)

The narrator undercuts the protagonist's rather bold speech, interestingly enough, by something of a disclaimer: "I said, No, by no means, I will not stir, etc.,'or to this purpose," suggesting a consciousness of the invention necessary in recreating dramatically these moments of crisis and a corresponding compulsion to record literally words that he cannot remember exactly. The autobiographer uses the narrator to comment on the reconstructed acts and thoughts of the bold protagonist, and this narrative technique recurs frequently throughout the Relation. In dramatically rendered scenes, the protagonist is the actor and the narrator is a sympathetic commentator who offers fuller insight into the reasons for the protagonist's actions.
Often the two are fully separate, but at times, because the two share the same perspective, they become indistinguishable.

The protagonist leaves the house to walk in the fields to "somewhat seriously consider the matter," and the narrative voice reports the internal tension:

I had shewed myself hearty and courageous in my preaching, and had, blessed be Grace, made it my business to encourage others; therefore, thought I, if I should now run, and make an escape, it will be of a very ill savour in the country. For what will my weak and newly converted brethren think of it? But that I was not so strong in deed, as I was in word. (106)

Bunyan's inner monologue continues at some length: God may have chosen him to be the first to be opposed for the gospel, he might discourage the whole body with his cowardliness, and he might not do honor to his profession. Finally, he reiterates:

I could have been gone about an hour before the officer apprehended me; but I would not; for I was resolved to see the utmost of what they could say or do unto me: For blessed be the Lord, I knew of no evil that I had said or done. (106)

Bunyan returns to the house, he reports the disruption of the meeting once again, he submits to the arrest, and he departs under custody.
This initial scene of the *Relation* reveals a number of motives that may have compelled Bunyan to begin his autobiographical act. For one thing, as Sharrock has suggested, he seems to hope to provide a courageous example to other separatists who themselves face persecution. And perhaps to those same separatists, he may feel it necessary to defend his decision to ignore warnings that would have kept him free. But I suspect these reasons, though undoubtedly important to Bunyan, do not fully explain Bunyan's reconstruction of the story of his arrest at Samsell. The actual disruption of the meeting, for example, is told twice. The event is important and thus the person to whom the event has happened has become a focus of attention. Bunyan seems to write in this first section of his narrative out of an awakened sense of himself as newly significant in the sectarian society: "I thought, that seeing God of his mercy should chuse me to go upon the forlorn hope in this country," and then he repeats, "that is, to be the first, that should be opposed, for the Gospel; if I should fly, it might be a discouragement to the whole body that might follow after" (106). The world itself, continues Bunyan, would think less of the gospel, of Bunyan himself, and of his profession if he should flee. He has been chosen. The hope rests in him. Being John Bunyan has become significant. And in the narrative Bunyan constructs to explore this new dimension of experience, the reader is
struck not so much by pride, for Bunyan struggles to avoid seeming proud (he is, after all, only the "forlorn" hope), but by his heightened awareness of himself. John Bunyan, tinker and itinerant preacher, has become a person others will be watching and he has had an experience others will want to hear and read. For Bunyan, there seems a new self-consciousness, and his arrest seems an "I-am-me" experience. In his sense of being chosen to be the "hope of this country" and the "first that should be opposed," Bunyan has become newly "I-conscious." This newly experienced self-consciousness may be a factor that prompts Bunyan to begin writing from Bedford gaol and, I would argue, it seems likely that Bunyan would recount such an experience in a letter to other dissenters, an audience who would know fully the significance of the events and would be intensely interested in reading Bunyan's story.

Ola Elizabeth Winslow writes that Bunyan's arrest came one month after the Bedfordshire magistrates had restored the body of the Liturgy to public worship, making the Book of Common Prayer a live issue in the parish. Only two weeks prior to Bunyan's arrest, Robert Lawrence had been installed as Bishop of Lincoln, a position that had been vacant for eighteen years. Francis Wingate was newly appointed Justice

Paul John Eakin discusses the "I-am-me" experience as an essential moment in a "history of self-definition" and defines the experience as a "self-conscious experience of self-consciousness" (218-219).
in Bedfordshire; he was thirty-two, just Bunyan's age, and his first case in his new "dignity" was John Bunyan.  

Bunyan portrays himself as respectful but unawed by Francis Wingate of Harlington House. When Wingate asks why the tinker did not content himself with following his calling, Bunyan replies that he can do both, follow his calling and "preach the Word," without confusion. Wingate, reports Bunyan, was in a "chafe" at these words and predicted he would "break the neck" of the separatists' meetings. A controlled Bunyan responds, "It may be so." Then, though sureties are present with bond for his release, Bunyan refuses to be "bound," that is, he refuses to stop preaching: "I answered ... that I should not leave speaking the word of God: Even to counsel, comfort, exhort, and teach the people among whom I came; and I thought this to be a work that had no hurt in it: But was rather worthy of commendation than blame" (107). Bunyan records that Wingate ordered the making of his "mittimus" so that he could be sent to jail, "there to lie to the quarter-sessions" (107).

Bunyan's portrayals of the two confrontations that follow—one with "an old enemy of the truth" Dr. Lindale, and the other with Mr. Foster of Bedford, a man who "leaps" on Bunyan's neck and kisses him with "seeming affection"—

increasingly take on Biblical overtones. Lindale, vicar of Harlington, "taunts" Bunyan with "many reviling terms," casting aspersions on his right to preach and connecting him with "Alexander a Coppersmith, who did much oppose, and disturb the Apostles." "Aiming 'tis like at me," complains Bunyan, "because I was a Tinker" (108). Then Bunyan "types" Lindale for his readers: "I answered that I also had read of very many priests and Pharisees, that had their hands in the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ" (108). And though Lindale turns the taunt on Bunyan, accusing him of being in the company of the scribes and Pharisees with his "long prayers to devour widows' houses," Bunyan triumphs with humor and discretion:

I answered, that if he had got no more by preaching and praying than I had done, he would not be so rich as he now was. But that Scripture coming into my mind, "Answer not a fool according to his folly," I was as sparing of my speech as I could, without prejudice to truth. (108)

If Lindale has become a pharisaic priest, Foster, a lawyer from Bedford, becomes the figure of Judas as he kisses Bunyan in greeting when they meet in the dark hall. Bunyan's nineteenth-century biographer John Brown comments that Foster, the harasser of the Noncomformists "from parish to parish and from year to year," had a "sort of sinister significance in his appearance. . . . Coming
through the open door, with uplifted candle and inquiring look, he might be taken as the incarnate spirit of that era of persecution which was now at the door" (136-37). And so Bunyan intends the portrayal, it would seem, because the testing from this "spirit of the darkness" encompasses and repeats the taunts cast earlier: Bunyan may go free if he will not call meetings, he must follow his calling as tinker rather than preach, and he must accept his ignorance of the original languages of scripture, such as Greek, as barriers to his understanding the Bible. Bunyan, much like Christ tempted by Satan in the wilderness, answers with scriptures, standing firm, finally, in his refusal to "leave off that work" which God had called him to.

Bunyan closes this section with an emphasis on his confidence and content in God's will, with a reminder of his hopes that his imprisonment might be "an awakening to the saints in the country," and with what seems a litany of Biblical verses interwoven with Bunyan's own text. And, while he muses, a word drops in upon his heart "with some life": "'For he knew that for envy they had delivered him'" (113). Such a word, used in Mathew 27:18, refers to the Jews who delivered Jesus to Pilate for trial and crucifixion.

In the first narrative of the Relation, Bunyan has not merely recorded his story for dissenter history, but he has shaped the story for effect. In the initial event, the
arrest, Bunyan's autobiographical act recreates his coming into a new awareness that he has been "chosen" to be the hope of the country. In the conflicts that follow, this significant self meets opponents whom the writer depicts as the Unjust judge, the hypocritical Pharisee, and the traitor Judas. The protagonist himself, like the Christ, is delivered to the persecutors by the envy of the people. Bunyan has deftly moved the events of Samsell, Harlington House, and Bedford into a divine context. He has made the conflicts with Wingate, Lindale, and Foster episodes in sacred history. Though imprisoned, Bunyan is at "home," for he meets his God "sweetly" there: "Let the rage and malice of men be never so great, they can do no more, nor go no farther, than God permits them" (113). What is unquestioned for Bunyan is the divine purpose directing the events. What has come as a surprise and has prompted the autobiographical act is that an itinerant preacher has been chosen to play so prominent a role in the drama.

II. Here is the Sum of my Examination, before Justice Keelin, Justice Chester, Justice Blundale, Justice Beecher, and Justice Snagg, etc.

Sharrock states that "Bunyan's examination before the magistrates is the central event of his active life" (Bunyan 40), and Bunyan himself, seemingly aware of the significance
of the event, records in detail the trial at the Chapel of Herne before Sir John Kelynge in the second narrative of the Relation. Although five justices are listed in the heading to the section, only Justice Kelynge's name occurs in Bunyan's assignment of speeches. According to Sharrock's research, Sir John Kelynge was a prominent Bedford Royalist who helped to prepare the Act of Uniformity, served as a member for Bedford in Charles II's first Parliament, and became Lord Chief Justice in 1665. Complaints against his "want of temper and discretion" eventually brought him before the bar of the House of Lords to answer for his conduct (Notes, Grace Abounding 160, 1. 23). Winslow adds that Kelynge had been counsel to the Crown in the trial of the regicides, and, as chairman of the five magistrates on the bench, was unlikely to "show mercy to a tinker who had refused to keep silence at a dangerous time" (96). In the scene Bunyan represents his cause well, and what seems most evident to the reader is the appealing self-satisfaction apparent in the writer's reconstruction of the confrontation between the nonconformist tinker and the high-born judge.

There is a comic overstatement underlying the high seriousness of the debate throughout the scene. The bill of indictment, for example, accuses Bunyan of "devilishly and perniciously" abstaining from coming to church to hear Divine service and of being a "common upholder of several unlawful meetings and conventicles, to the great disturbance
and distraction of the good subjects of this kingdom" (113); to juxtapose this description with Bunyan's depiction of the Samsell farmhouse worship service evokes a sense of the comic if not the absurd.

Bunyan answers the indictment with a defense of his absence from the parish church and his opposition to the Common Prayer Book by claiming membership in "the church of God" and prayer "begotten by the spirit" (114). The debate grows warm, and Justice Kelynge attempts to instruct the tinker:

'It is lawful to use Common Prayer, and such-like forms: For Christ taught his disciples to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And further, said he, cannot one man teach another to pray?" . . . One man may convince another of sin, and therefore prayers made by men, and read over, are good to teach, and help men to pray. (115)

For Bunyan, it would seem, the debate between Episcopacy and Dissent finds a focus in the argument over the efficacy of the Common Prayer Book between a learned judge and an uneducated tinker.

Those present that day in Bedford's Chapel of Herne now turned courtroom would have witnessed the conflict and heard the debate between Kelynge and Bunyan, but only the readers of Bunyan's narrative would know the drama occurring in Bunyan's mind simultaneously with the courtroom scene. For
while Kelynge speaks his defense of the Book of Common Prayer, a Biblical verse (Romans 8:26) springs to life in the tinker's mind, coming "so fresh" and "set so evidently" before him, reports Bunyan, "as if the Scripture had said, Take me, take me" (115). So prepared by God, because, as he says, "I thought not on it before," Bunyan answers the justice:

Sir, the Scripture saith, that it is the Spirit that helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: But the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us, with sighs and groanings which cannot be uttered. Mark, said I, it doth not say the Common Prayer-book teacheth us how to pray, but the Spirit. (115)

Here Bunyan constructs a variation on the tableau of the first account of the Relation where he stood, Bible in hand, opposing the constable and Wingate's arresting official. That rural service was disrupted and the conflict moved to officialdom's city and court, but Bunyan portrays himself continuing, even in the enemy's domain, to war against the Establishment's forms with his "sword," the Bible. Bunyan's stand forces Kelynge to defend Episcopacy's tradition with the absurd claim that "the Common Prayer Book hath been ever since the apostles' time, and is lawful . . . to be used in the church" (115). Brown, commenting on this scene, notes wryly that the Justice's claim was "a fact apparently not
known to any church historian previous to Kelynge" (144). Bunyan makes no comment on the distortion, but allows the "learned" Justice to expose himself.

Bunyan can recreate the Bible's active role in his defense because in the Relation he seems to have little difficulty placing his own order of experiences within God's order in the world. When he is in prison, words of scripture drop in upon his heart "with some life." At his trial, the scripture springs to life to aid in his defense. When he is opposed, his enemies are the Pharisees, Scribes, and Judas. In the experiences Bunyan narrates in the Relation, he seems to dwell comfortably within a dynamic order of Biblical story, character, images, and language. The Bible provides for Bunyan a microcosm in which his imaginative experience is contained, enabling him to use that text to encode his world.  

A primary difference in the Relation and Grace Abounding arises from the role the Bible plays. The scriptures of the Relation comfort, support, and defend the embattled tinker's resistance to his cultural oppressors: in the second report, before Kelynge, the scripture springs to life in Bunyan's mind, and in the third relation, when

7 See Northrop Frye, The Great Code: The Bible and Literature (San Diego: HBJ, 1982) on the Bible's "imaginative framework"—a "mythological universe"—within which Frye contends Western literature has operated "to the eighteenth century" (xi).
questioned by Justice of the Peace Cobb, the imprisoned preacher asserts confidently that the scriptures will "open themselves" to reveal to any interpreter the truth. In Bunyan's initial efforts to write his experience, the scripture guarantees the significance and meaning of each event. In contrast, the Bible in *Grace Abounding* has become the enemy, descending on Bunyan "like the Word of God . . . upon the Old Testament prophets (Sharrock, Introduction, *Grace Abounding* xxvi), or, as Joan Webber observes, the Bible, "and fragments of it, strike him like weapons, call upon him to do this or that, force him to respond, to move forward" (50). Stranahan finds that in *Grace Abounding* the scriptural appearances in Bunyan's mind have the nature of "events." Such events add "suspense and tension," he argues, because "we cannot tell when a new text will ambush the hero and produce either intense joy or despair."8 The scripture that in the *Relation* promised that "all things work together for good (111) seems in *Grace Abounding* to stand against him, "more than an army of forty thousand men," prompting him to cry, "Woe be to him against whom the Scriptures bend themselves" (246). And Bunyan's confidence in the *Relation* that the Scripture will "open itself" (121)

turns to confusion as conflicting Biblical texts battle in his mind. In *Grace Abounding* Bunyan remains determined to read his story in the Bible, even when the scripture no longer provides comfort. And even when he becomes convinced that the Bible offers only damnation for his sin, he continues a relentless effort to merge his life story with the Biblical narrative. Bunyan wrestles with the Bible for a blessing, and this struggle provides a primary tension of *Grace Abounding*.

Bunyan's discomfort with the Bible in *Grace Abounding* is foreshadowed in the *Relation* when he begins to lose confidence in his ability to set his prison experiences within a total coherent design known to God and encoded in the Bible; in the first two letters Bunyan interprets his arrest, arraignments, and imprisonment as though a meaningful pattern inheres in the events and can be made evident by the writer, but in the last three letters the events increasingly expose the autobiographer's limited knowledge and reveal his naivete as a dangerous ignorance.

Bunyan, the first to be opposed by the civil authorities, the hope of the country, does not become the impetus to "the awakening of the saints in the country" (113). Ironically, the outcome of Bunyan's examination before Justice Kelynge, the central event of the second account of the *Relation*, was probably influenced by the sensational uprising of another who perhaps also assumed his
actions would create an awakening throughout the country. Thomas Venner, a Fifth Monarchist, on January 7, 1661, led fifty followers through London, intending to overthrow the government and "set up the monarchy of King Jesus" (Winslow 95). After engaging in only a brief skirmish with the authorities on that day, the Fifth Monarchists returned two days later to confront the king's soldiers on Threadneedle Street. The engagement ended with most of Venner's men killed and with Venner himself captured. Venner's trial occurred on January 17th at the Old Bailey at which time he received the death sentence; he was hanged two days later and his body quartered. Winslow points out that Bunyan's trial at the Bedford January quarter sessions before Justice Kelynge came at "the peak of the new vigilance the Venner case had brought about" (96). Thus Bunyan appeared before Kelynge and opposed him in scriptural debate at the very time when Venner's actions had made all nonconformity highly threatening. Justice Kelynge may well have found Bunyan's civil disobedience particularly alarming because of the Venner uprising, and Bunyan's effort to assert his dedication to a higher biblical authority could only increase the Justice's fears. Bunyan can write the inner drama of his mind where scripture springs to life in his defense, but he cannot write the drama in Kelynge's mind where, possibly, Bunyan becomes a second Venner who must be returned to jail rather than set loose to "awaken the
saints" to treason. If Bunyan knows at all about the Venner affair at the January trial before Kelynge, he does not mention it, but he does know of Thomas Venner by the time he writes the third narrative of the Relation, and he makes an effort to differentiate his dedication to nonconformity and the militant revolution advocated by Venner.

Justice Kelynge's sentence sent Bunyan back to gaol for three months, at which time he was to "submit to go to church to hear divine service" (118) and leave his preaching or be banished the realm; further, failure to leave the kingdom upon sentence of banishment would mean death by hanging. To this, Bunyan responds, "If I was out of prison to day, I would preach the Gospel again to-morrow, by the help of God" (118). Someone answers, but, says Bunyan, "I could not tell what he said" because "my jailor [was] pulling me away to be gone" (118).

Bunyan comments, "Thus I departed from them; and I can truly say, I bless the Lord Jesus Christ for it, that my heart was sweetly refreshed in the time of my examination, and also, afterwards, at my returning to the prison" (119). "Thus," Bunyan adds, "have I given you the substance of my examination. The Lord make these profitable to all that shall read or hear them" (119). With the closing, "Farewell," Bunyan ends the second relation.

III. The Substance of some Discourse had between the Clerk
of the Peace and to myself; when he came to admonish me, according to the tenor of that Law, by which I was in prison.

The third account begins, "When I had lain in prison other twelve weeks, and now not knowing what they intended to do with me, upon the third of April [1661] comes Mr. Cobb unto me, (as he told me) being sent by the Justices to admonish me, and demand of me submittance to the Church of England" (119). Sharrock insists that "strictly Bunyan should have been released after three months, and then arrested again if he repeated his crime" (Bunyan 41). Evidently, the visit of Paul Cobb, the Clerk of the Peace, was, Sharrock assumes, a ploy by which Bunyan's release could be avoided, but at the same time, the authorities could avoid a harsher sentence of transportation.

If Bunyan writes his account of Paul Cobb's visit soon after the event, then the legal maneuvering that may have been occurring in connection with that visit cannot be apparent to Bunyan as he writes his third relation. So far as we know from Bunyan's writing, he never learns that the visit he records in this third account may have been arranged to circumvent the law. In Bunyan's reconstruction of the dialogue, Cobb insists repeatedly that Bunyan obey the law; the irony is heavy if Cobb himself is engaged in breaking the law, but this is an irony that remains, it seems, unknown to the prisoner.
However, between the third and fifth relations, Bunyan's response to Cobb undergoes a change. Bunyan ends the third account with a prayer of blessing for the Clerk of Peace: "When he had done, I did thank him for his civil and meek discoursing with me; and so we parted. O that we might meet in heaven!" (125). But in the fifth and final account of the Relation, Bunyan bitterly condemns the Clerk of Peace for machinations which have prevent Bunyan's case from being heard in the Spring Assizes of 1662: "The Clerk of the peace, did so work it about, that I, notwithstanding, was deferred, and might not appear [in court]: And though I say, I do not know of all their carriages towards me, yet this I know, that the Clerk of the peace did discover himself to be one of my greatest opposers" (130). If Bunyan's praise of Cobb's civility and meekness in the third relation is illusory, then his bitter denunciation of Cobb in the fifth relation marks a moment of painful disillusionment. When we read the third relation with knowledge of the fifth, we become aware of Bunyan's innocence and his vulnerability.

As Bunyan reconstructs the visit of the third relation, Cobb courteously begins the interrogation as though he were visiting with a good friend in the countryside: "Neighbor Bunyan, how do you do?" Throughout the scene, civility and decorum underlie the exchanges. Cobb calls Bunyan "neighbor" and "goodman," and he protests that he is not a "man that can dispute" (120). Both men set forth their
opposing positions reasonably and persuasively. Cobb makes no accusation that Bunyan is possessed with the spirit of delusion or of the devil as one of the justices charged during the confrontation between Bunyan and Kelynge over the Common Prayer Book. Cobb rather proceeds to mirror to Bunyan the interpretation that the law places on the tinker's behavior: the law forbids all conventicles or private meetings because the law cannot distinguish between those at which insurrection is planned and those at which the only intent is to worship.

"But my end," protests Bunyan, "in meeting with others is simply to do as much good as I can, by exhortation and counsel, according to that small measure of light which God hath given me, and not to disturb the peace of the nation" (120).

Cobb responds, "Everyone will say the same; . . . you see the late insurrection at London, under what glorious pretences they went; and yet, indeed, they intended no less than the ruin of the kingdom and commonwealth" (120).

Bunyan protests that he must be differentiated from a man like Venner; he cannot leave off calling meetings to preach, to "exercise the gift" which God had given him "for the good of the people" (122).

But, counters Cobb, could Bunyan not "forbear" his preaching awhile, attend public assemblies to hear and be taught, until he could further see "how things will go" (122).
Bunyan responds by quoting Wyclif: "He which leaveth off preaching and hearing of the Word of God for fear of excommunication of men, he is already excommunicated of God, and shall in the day of judgment be counted a traitor to Christ" (123); if a man has received a "gift of edification," argues Bunyan, it is a sin to fail to exercise that gift.

Cobb questions, "How shall we know that you have received a gift?" Bunyan responds that the infallible scriptures will judge; the scripture "will open itself" and cannot err (123). When asked if he would stand the judgment of the church, Bunyan asserts again the authority of the scripture. Cobb makes one last try by enlisting the scriptures to his side: "The Scripture saith, 'the powers that are, are ordained of God.' . . . The King then commands you, that you should not have any private meetings; because it is against the law, and he is ordained of God, therefore you should not have any" (124).

Bunyan responds, "Paul did own the powers that were in his day, as to be of God; and yet he was often in prison under them for all that. And also, though Jesus Christ told Pilate, that he had no power against him, but of God, yet he died under the same Pilate. . . . Sir, the law hath provided two ways of obeying: The one to do that which I in my conscience do believe that I am bound to do, actively; and where I cannot obey actively, there I am willing to lie down, and to suffer what they shall do unto me" (124-25).
In the second and third relations, Bunyan reconstructs his conversations with Kelynge and Cobb, and in so doing, he gives the dissenter's position on the Book of Common Prayer and on the law forbidding private meetings; both accounts function, then, to arm with clearly articulated positions of nonconformity others who might undergo arrest. In both accounts, Bunyan makes the Bible central to his argument. Before Kelynge, the scripture springs to life in his mind, and to Cobb, Bunyan asserts the Bible's sanction of his position.

In another way, however, the two accounts are studies in contrast. The second relation, presenting through dialogue the confrontation between Kelynge and Bunyan, has a theatricality, an emotional energy, and an underlying humor missing from the serious, thoughtful dialogue of the interview between Cobb and Bunyan. The autobiographer's self-portrayal has moved from battling hero to a more sedate, sober conscientious objector. Whereas Sir John Kelynge, the learned Justice, reveals his own ignorance in attributing the advent of the Book of Common Prayer to the era of the Apostles, Paul Cobb, the Clerk of the Peace, speaks with a solid understanding of law and of the current political climate, even while modestly professing an inability to dispute. Against the blustering Kelynge, Bunyan seemed heroic, perhaps invincible, but against the astute Cobb, Bunyan's position, while thoughtfully
presented, seems to offer much less defense. When Bunyan aligns himself with Wyclif, Paul, and Christ, he seems not only to be arguing the rightness of his cause but also to be pointing toward future suffering. The sober protagonist of the third relation stands between the earlier fiery debater and the later embittered victim.

Bunyan calls the Bible to his defense, arguing that the scripture provides an infallible guide to truth. But Cobb reminds Bunyan that interpreters of scripture may disagree, and he asks, "Who, then, shall judge?" Bunyan answers, "The scriptures will judge by opening themselves." Bunyan follows by demonstrating how one scripture often clarifies another, and he assures Cobb that the scriptures will open all things, even the "matter of meeting together" (123). The dissenter and the churchman reach an impasse with both claiming sanction for their views from the Bible. Bunyan's confidence remains unshaken and his doubts unawakened by Cobb's inference that human interpreters of an infallible Bible may have to settle for something less than certainty. Cobb suggests that the church arbitrates when interpreters disagree; Bunyan asserts that the Bible will "open itself." This confidence provides the background against which Bunyan struggles with conflicting scriptures in *Grace Abounding*.

Cobb leaves Bunyan to return a report to the officials that will not only keep Bunyan in prison but extend that imprisonment to twelve years. Bunyan concludes the third
relation with a prayer of blessing for Cobb, seemingly believing at this time that Cobb is not only a Clerk of Peace but also a man of peace.

IV. Here followeth a Discourse between my Wife and the Judge, with others, touching my Deliverance at the Assises following: the which I took from her own Mouth.

The fourth letter of the Relation begins by relating the omission of Bunyan's name from the general pardon that freed many prisoners on April 23, 1661, the day of the coronation of Charles II, the event occurring only twenty days after the April 3 interview between Cobb and Bunyan. Though "they let out thousands," Bunyan remained in prison, he relates, until the August assizes, at which time his wife made three attempts to present petitions to the judges for his release. Elizabeth, Bunyan's second wife, step-mother to his four children, first presented a petition to Judge Hale, "who very mildly received it at her hand" (125), but said he could do nothing. Then she determinedly threw a petition into the window of Judge Twisdon's coach, but he angrily told her that Bunyan "was a convicted person" and could not be released unless he promised to preach no more (126). Bunyan then narrates Elizabeth's third effort, her courageous intrusion into the Swan Chamber in Bedford to attempt once more to gain a hearing.

Bunyan presents the Swan Chamber scene dramatically, using dialogue to render Elizabeth's appeal to Judge Hale
and Judge Twisdon, along with other "justices and gentry" of the country. Bunyan, assuming the role of narrator, "types" Elizabeth's appeal to the justices as an event like the Biblical account of the poor widow's appeal to the unjust judge (126).

Elizabeth relates to the justices her difficulty in caring for her four step-children without their father: "My lord, I have four small children, that cannot help themselves, of which one is blind, and have nothing to live upon, but the charity of good people" (127-28). Moved, Judge Hale, exclaims at her youth: "Thou art but a young woman to have four children." Elizabeth explains that she has only been married for two years to Bunyan, that the children are his, and that she lost the child she was carrying when, "being smayed at the news" of his arrest, she miscarried. At Hale's "Alas, poor woman," Judge Twisdon snarls that Elizabeth makes "poverty her cloak," and accuses Bunyan of "running up and down a-preaching" rather than following his calling. Judge Hale asks what Bunyan's calling is, and Elizabeth cries, "A tinker, my lord.... And because he is a tinker, and a poor man, therefore he is despised, and cannot have justice" (128). Hale continues sympathetic but ineffectual; Twisdon snarls to the end of the scene. And though Elizabeth begs the judges to call her husband, Bunyan hears nothing from the court.
The fourth account ends with no "farewell" or signature, "John Bunyan." In this episode of his autobiographical account, Bunyan has moved from protagonist to recorder of the actions of others; he has no part to play, no voice to raise. His narration of Elizabeth's actions has great emotional power, but his own actions and knowledge have been greatly reduced. He ends the account by reporting Elizabeth's impression that the judges called for the Book of Statute as she was leaving, perhaps to review Bunyan's case. Bunyan writes, "But what they said of it I know nothing at all, neither did I hear any more from them" (129).

V. Some Carriages of the Adversaries of God's Truth with me at the next Assises, which was on the nineteenth of the first Month, 1662.

When Bunyan writes his fifth relation, the sentence that initially was to have kept him in jail three months has extended well beyond a year. He begins abruptly by declaring an intention to "pass by what bifel between these two assizes," suggesting that he writes with a sense of continuing the account of his imprisonment after some time has passed. Though he intends to "pass by" the months between the 1661 August and the 1662 March Assizes, he summarizes a rather active period in which, his jailor having begun to grant him more liberty than at first, Bunyan has been able to preach in Bedfordshire and has even
traveled, he says, to see Christians at London. This action, however, has brought the wrath of the officials, or his "enemies," as Bunyan calls them, upon the jailer, almost costing him his position. Bunyan has been charged with traveling to London "to plot and raise division," which, he says, "God knows, was a slander." But even so, the prisoner finds that his liberty has been "more straitened" than it was before, so that, he reports, "I must not look out of the door" (130).

After this summary of the events between the two assizes, which Bunyan says he will "pass by," the narration focuses on his surprise when his case was not brought up "when the next sessions came": "I did expect to have been very roundly dealt withal; but they passed me by, and would not call me," so that he was forced to wait until the next assizes (130). Bunyan prepared for the upcoming Spring Assizes by enlisting the jailer to put his name "into the Kalendar among the felons" and he "made friends of the judge and high sheriff," who promise that Bunyan will be called (130). "But," reports Bunyan, "all was in vain":

for when the assises came, though my name was in the kalendar, and also though both the Judge and the Sheriff had promised that I should appear before them, yet the Justices and the Clerk of the peace, did so work it about, that I, notwithstanding, was defered, and might not
appear: And, though I say, I do not know of all their carriages toward me, yet this I know, that the Clerk of the peace did discover himself to be one of my greatest opposers. (130)

Bunyan follows with a pieced-together summary of the plotting of the clerk of the peace: his efforts to intimidate the jailer so that Bunyan's name would be removed from the calendar, his deliberate blotting out of the "accusation" against Bunyan written by the jailer and entering a statement "That John Bunyan was committed to prison, being lawfully convicted of upholding of the unlawful meetings and conventicles, etc.", and, finally, his running to the "Clerk of the assises," the justices themselves, and then back to the jailer, to insure that Bunyan's name would not come up on the court docket.

Bunyan even discovers, to his chagrin, that the accusation the jailer had drawn up, the statement blotted out and rewritten by the clerk of peace, was itself "worse than in itself it was by far" (129). On every hand, Bunyan meets duplicity and deception. His plans fail; the clerk of peace's schemes succeed.

Bunyan does not name the clerk of peace, but he must have been the Clerk of the Peace Paul Cobb whose "civil and meek discoursing" Bunyan described in the interview of the third narration. If the clerk of the peace Paul Cobb who

9 Sharrock assumes that the clerk of peace in the final account is Paul Cobb: "At the Spring Assizes in 1662 he
conducted the interview with Bunyan in April of 1661 is the clerk of the peace who prevented Bunyan's case from coming before the court at the Spring Assizes of 1662, then Bunyan, who had judged Cobb to be courteous and responsive in their April interview, had come to know Cobb's duplicity and active malice a year later. But Bunyan refuses to name Cobb in the final report, perhaps because, by that point in his legal battle, the clerk of the peace could be any official of a political system that has set itself against a poor man who, as Elizabeth said, cannot have justice. Bunyan has no reason to continue to hope for release from imprisonment because with the Act of Uniformity of 1662 and the Conventicle Act of 1664 repressive measures against dissent become even more severe.

Bunyan ends the fifth narrative and the Relation with the cryptic comment: "And thus was I hindered and prevented at that time also from appearing before the judge: And left in prison. Farewell. John Bunyan" (131). His first autobiographical text ends in disillusionment and frustration. Though there may be some effort to repress his

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tried to arrange that he might be brought before the judge as a man who had served his sentence and was therefore qualified for release; but ... Paul Cobb, possibly acting as agent of the local squirearchy, had his name taken out of the list of felons and stopped his case from coming up" (Bunyan 42). Monica Furlong in Puritan's Progress (New York: Coward, McCann, & Geoghegan, 1975) also assumes that the man who struck Bunyan's name from the calendar was Paul Cobb, describing him as Bunyan's "bete noire" (171).
feelings for the sake of his readers, the tone of the narrative is, nonetheless, unmistakably bitter.

In the last account, the writer has abandoned the narrative devices that he used abundantly in the previous letters to shape each crisis story: there is no dialogue, no characterization, no inner dramas, no direct re-enactment of event, no scriptural personifications and no Biblical typology or imagery. Bunyan can no longer merge the text of the self with the Biblical text. Nor can he readily continue to locate his experience in sacred history, for the authoritative narrator no longer knows how the experiences of the protagonist serve a larger, divinely ordained purpose. At the end of the Relation, Bunyan seems painfully aware that the protagonist of the earlier letters, the John Bunyan who performed so satisfyingly at his arrest, at the arraignments of Harlington House, and at his trial in the Chapel of Herne in Bedford, acted out of a partial and incomplete knowledge. Later events have proven earlier interpretations to be invalid. How does such a fallible narrator continue a self-narration with so little knowledge of himself?

Bunyan seemingly begins his text of the self during the first weeks in Bedford gaol, and that text ends abruptly a year and a half after its beginning, leaving the autobiographer without words or story. If Grace Abounding follows the Relation, then Bunyan returns to the
autobiographical act, but the protagonist he constructs is no longer the confident spokesman for nonconformity but a poor sinner who must learn anew the language of the scripture and of the self; that protagonist must learn, once again, to read and write in order to construct a text of the self, and that text, I propose, is the spiritual autobiography that Bunyan publishes in 1666 as *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. Perhaps Bunyan has learned in the *Relation* that he cannot write the text of the self without going down himself "into the deep" (GA 129).

After Bunyan makes the descent into the depths of the self in *Grace Abounding*, he no longer finds the events of the *Relation*—the arraignment before Francis Wingate, the trial at Chapel Herne, or the interview with Paul Cobb—appropriate narratives to conclude his self-writing. Sharrock speculates that Bunyan chooses to substitute an account of his fear of death for the details of arrest, trial, and imprisonment because earlier such an account would have increased the fears of the Bedford congregation. I would add that the "death" of the protagonist of the *Relation* makes Bunyan's focus on death appropriate as he reconstructs in *Grace Abounding* his early months of imprisonment. From its beginning, *Grace Abounding* seems to be a death-focused text, perhaps because it had its origin in the death of the confident spokesman for dissent in the *Relation*. 
Chapter Three

**Grace Abounding:**

Waking Bunyan

Death is . . . a great reorganizer rather than a destroyer: it constitutes a total reordering of what we have been and done as well as what we are.

James Olney

I was also at this time so . . . possessed with the thought of death that oft I was as if I was on the ladder with a rope about my neck.

John Bunyan

Bunyan ends his first autobiographical act with a self-portrayal that reflects his isolation, dependency, and despair. The confident spokesman for nonconformity before Justice Kelynge in January, 1661, has become by the Spring Assizes of 1662 a poor, despised tinker who cannot have justice. Faced with the reality of his impotency before such opposition, Bunyan's autobiographical act ends and his voice falls silent. The concluding letter of the Relation becomes the epitaph to mark the death of a naively confident and aggressive spokesman for dissent; the silence that follows becomes a period of mourning, a wake, for that lost autobiographical "I."

Bunyan turns again, however, to self-narration in the months that follow, for the "death" of one self-construction seemingly compels the autobiographer to return to narrative to attempt once more to constitute the self through
language. The "I" whose story has ended in the Relation becomes the storyless child of Grace Abounding who has "forgotten" how to read and write and who must, therefore, begin a quest to recover his story and construct once again a self through narrative. The self-writing that emerges is necessarily a death-focused text, for its originating impulse arises in a context of death—both the "death" of the "I" of the Relation and the threat of death to the prisoner from the gallows—and its goal is to "write" the protagonist from death toward life. For Bunyan, then, to write Grace Abounding is to determine to live beyond his death and to seek an alternate ending to his life story. In his return to self-narration, he constructs a text that serves as both a wake for the loss of the self-assured protagonist of the Relation and a waking to consciousness of a self-doubting protagonist, one whose search for life's meaning has become more urgent because death has become more real.

The end of the Relation occurred concurrently with the beginning of a series of Parliamentary Acts, later called the Clarendon Code, designed to crush dissent. Under the leadership of Edward Hyde, the Earl of Clarendon, who was Charles II's Chancellor of the Exchequer, Parliament passed the Act of Uniformity of 1662 that mandated the use of the Book of Common Prayer in all worship services and required all ministers of the Established Church to receive Episcopal
Orders. Ministers who lost their places after passage of the Act of Uniformity began to form their own congregations, prompting Parliament to further suppression. The Conventicle Act of 1664 instituted a series of fines and the threat of transportation for any persons attending a nonconformist worship service. The Five Mile Act of 1665 banned those convicted of preaching in unlawful conventicles from appearing within five miles of any city. As Clarendon vigorously hounded the dissenting groups, the nonconformist church in Bedford, whose members had possibly been the audience for the reports of the Relation, felt the repression. John Brown reports that after the entry of the Bedford Church Meeting Book for March 26, 1663, "there comes a long and ominous gap of five years and a half" (188); the next recorded meeting occurs in September, 1668, after Clarendon's fall and the expiration of the 1664 Conventicle Act.

The reports of the Relation end as Clarendon, "the ruling spirit of persecution" (Brown 191), rages through the land. In Grace Abounding, Bunyan returns to this era in the "Brief Account of the Author's Imprisonment," the section that concludes the autobiography proper. After "five year and a quarter" of imprisonment, the autobiographer no longer dramatizes or heightens his heroic resistance to conformity. Instead, he recounts his arrest and arraignment in general terms, omitting all reference to specific places or names:
I was apprehended at a Meeting of good People in the Countrey, (amongst whom, had they let me alone, I should have preached that day, but they took me away from amongst them) and had me before a Justice, who, after I had offered security for my appearing at the next Sessions yet committed me, because my Sureties would not consent to be bound that I should preach no more to the people. (318)

The fullness of detail in the Relation which placed the arrest "at Samsell by Harlington in Bedfordshire" has become an apprehension "at a Meeting of good People in the Countrey." The arraignment that follows, once set vividly in Harlington House before Francis Wingate, has become an appearance before an unnamed justice who commits the protagonist to gaol.

Nor does Bunyan offer details of his trial before Justice Kelynge:

At the Sessions after, I was indicted for an Upholder and Maintainer of unlawful Assemblies and Conventicles, and for not conforming to the National Worship of the Church of England. (319)

In the Relation the protagonist answers this indictment with a challenge to the highborn judge, opposing Kelynge's argument for the "Common Prayer-book" with a scripture that urges prayer by the Spirit, a text that springs "fresh" into
Bunyan's mind, crying "Take me, take me." This lively scene in the Relation, however, becomes in Grace Abounding merely "some conference . . . with the Justices," and Kelynge is never named.

The focus of Grace Abounding is not the focus of the Relation. In Bunyan's second autobiographical act the heroic emphasis has been replaced by an emphasis on the fear of death. The narrator recalls that even before his arrest he "saw what was a coming" and attempted to prepare himself to encounter death. Out of this consideration, he determined to "pass a sentence of death upon everything that can properly be called a thing of this life," even to reckon himself and his wife, children, health, and enjoyments dead (325). This preparation for the worst, he believed, would fortify him should the worst come; death would not surprise him, Bunyan recalls, if he counted the grave his house and darkness his bed. He would say to "corruption," "Thou art my Father, and to the Worm, Thou art my Mother and Sister" (326). With these thoughts, he sought to familiarize himself with death.

But even with this preparation, he confesses to a period of great fear and anxiety after his imprisonment:

I will tell you a pretty business: I was once above all the rest in a very sad and low condition for many weeks, at which time also I being but a young Prisoner, and not acquainted with the Laws,
had this lay much upon my spirit, That my imprisonment might end at the Gallows for aught that I could tell.

Seemingly, no preparation beforehand can eliminate the fear of the gallows once Bunyan in prison must deal with the threat of death. Sharrock notes that Bunyan seems to have misunderstood the law under which he was sentenced, supposing himself subject to hanging when actually the law mandated the death penalty only if he returned unlawfully from banishment. This ignorance of the law in combination with his anticipations of death produces the "sad and low condition" of the prisoner who seems to believe that he lies under the very shadow of the gallows. After all, he has come to know the power of officialdom. He has seen the establishment unite to prevent his every effort toward retrial and release, and he may well suppose that the authorities may yet single him out as a further example to crush dissent. This fear may have become particularly acute when in 1662 Clarendon intensified his persecution of dissenters.

1 Sharrock explains that in November, 1660, the time of Bunyan's arrest, there was no new legislation against persons convicted of Nonconformity; thus Bunyan was sentenced under an old Elizabethan statute which imprisoned without bail a person attending an unlawful conventicle until he conformed. A third offense could result in transportation for seven years. If the banished person returned to England before that time, he could be put to death as a felon (Notes, Grace Abounding, par. 319, p. 157).
In a non-autobiographical publication, *Christian Behaviour*, a book written from prison and published in 1663, Bunyan refers to the possibility of death. In this conduct book for Christians, published the same year the Bedford Meeting records begin a five-year "silence," Bunyan outlines obligations in the relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants. He urges Christians to grow together like flowers in a garden that receive the dew of heaven and, if they are shaken by the wind [emphasis added], let fall their dew at each other's roots, "whereby they are jointly nourished, and become nourishers of each other" (Brown 165). The 1663 date of publication suggests that Bunyan may have written *Christian Behaviour* to encourage the dispersed members of the Bedford Church, a group already disturbed by a "wind" of persecution that threatened to destroy the dissenting community. In the closing sentences of *Christian Behaviour*, the possibility of death seems urgently present:

Thus have I in a few words written to you before I die, a word to provoke you to faith and holiness, because I desire that you may have the life that is laid up for all men that believe in the Lord Jesus, and love one another when I am deceased. . . . Farewell, From my place of confinement in Bedford this 17th of the 4th month [July] 1663. (G. B. Harrison Bunyan 82)
Death seemingly gives Bunyan's message an urgency and compels him to preserve for others the principles that he finds important and that he will not be able to teach through sermons if his life is cut short at the gallows.

The conclusion of this early prison book reveals something of Bunyan's mind during the period of nonconformist persecution of 1662 and 1663. In spite of his efforts to make death familiar before being taken, he struggles with anxiety after being imprisoned. Perhaps during these weeks of fear and depression, Bunyan turns again, as he had earlier in the reports of the Relation, to write of his own experiences, but this time the prisoner undertakes the autobiographical act, not to report his challenge to the Establishment, but to probe death's challenge to the very meaning and purpose of his life. The wake for the naive, confident Bunyan of the Relation has passed; a chastened, fearful Bunyan must wake to death's continuing threat. Under the shadow of the gallows, the prisoner begins anew the narration of his life.

In the imprisonment segment of Grace Abounding Bunyan recalls the threat of hanging and reconstructs his agonies of temptation:

Satan laid hard at me to beat me out of heart, by suggesting thus unto me: But how if when you come indeed to die, you should be in this condition; that is, as not to savour the things of God, nor
to have any evidence upon your soul for a better
state hereafter? (for indeed at that time all the
things of God were hid from my soul). (333)

Death poses questions that perhaps had seemed answered. The
tinker who was "chosen" to be the first opposed for the
gospel and who became the confident spokesman for
nonconformity finds in prison "all the things of God"
hidden, and with death imminent, his salvation uncertain.
The man who once thought he might well be God's chosen
instrument to awaken the saints of the country, the man who
vigorously argued scripture with Sir John Kelynge, and the
man for whom the Bible itself sprang to life in his defense,
could not, as he faced death, be certain he could provide
the evidence required to insure a "better state hereafter."

Placing his fears in the form of the "tempter's"
questions, Bunyan asks himself:

Whither must you go when you die? what will
become of you? where will you be found in another
world? what evidence have you for heaven and
glory, and an inheritance among them that are
sanctified? (336)

Certainly, these questions had long been significant for
Bunyan. He had, of course, the strict Calvinist's
consciousness of man's inability to fulfill divine law, but
he had, in addition, a new experience of judgment: he knew
only too well his own recent powerlessness before English
civil law. His failure to provide convincing evidence before the Bedford justices may well have, consciously or unconsciously, awakened a fear that he might be altogether lacking in evidence before a wrathful God of judgment. How could he know certainly that he was under grace when, as he asserts twice in the four paragraphs dealing with his fear of the gallows, "all the things of God" were hid from his soul and, again, "all the things of God" were kept out of his sight? (333, 336).

Bunyan straightforwardly confesses, "In the condition I now was in, I was not fit to die, neither indeed did I think I could, if I should be called to it" (334). Then he attempts to imagine his moment of death, picturing himself making a "scrabbling shift to clamber up the Ladder" to the gallows, his fear evident by his "quaking" and "fainting." Bunyan recoils in shame from the thought of making a failure of his martyrdom: the possibility of dying "with a pale face and tottering knees for such a Cause" (334) becomes intolerable.

Unable to loose his imagination from his moment of death, Bunyan continues, "I was . . . at this time so really possessed with the thought of death, that oft I was as if I was on the Ladder, with the Rope about my neck" (335). Fully absorbed in the scene he is creating, he imagines his attempts, before the noose tightens, to address the crowds gathered to witness the hanging: "I thought I might now have
an opportunity to speak my last words to a multitude which I thought would come to see me die" (335). Perhaps, Bunyan muses, if one soul should be saved by his last words, his life will not be counted "thrown away, nor lost." The complexity of the self-portraiture here seems significant, for the imaginatively created image of the martyr moves ambivalently between shame and vanity, humility and pride. Would death reveal Bunyan to be a cowardly embarrassment or a courageous witness? Would death expose ultimately a lost sinner or an elected saint?

Writing after the threat of the gallows has largely disappeared, Bunyan, in the concluding paragraphs of Grace Abounding, reenacts through these conflicting and ambivalent self-portraits the confusion of those weeks when death seemed present at every moment. Death emerges here as the "great primary source of life's meanings." For Bunyan death had the power to call into question both his identity and the meaning of his life. As autobiographer, he seems to assume what Eakin calls a "posture of proleptic death" (152). Through narrative, he designs and describes his moment of death before the actual event, and then seemingly

2 Eakin discusses death and the autobiographical act in relation to Sartre's The Words (151-52); he credits James Olney's "Experience, Metaphor, and Meaning: 'The Death of Ivan Ilych,'" Journal of Aesthetic Art and Art Criticism 31 (1972): 101-14, with deepening his understanding of death's relation to the meaning of life. Both Eakin and Olney have significantly influenced my discussion of the function of death in Grace Abounding.
moves from death backward to the beginning of life, searching in this way for his life's meaning.

This search takes him "into the deep" to reconstruct the pattern of his life and search his experience with increased consciousness and great urgency to discover who he has been. How can he face death if he does not know who he is? In his first effort to construct himself in narrative, he had begun by confidently asserting a design that subsequent events exposed as naive; those first autobiographical texts revealed his limited understanding of the duplicity and machinations of men like Paul Cobb, but, more significantly, they also revealed his limited knowledge of himself and his role in a divine plan. If at the time when he was so confident of being chosen to suffer for the gospel, he merely proved misconceiving and ineffectual, how could he now face death and judgment when all things of God seem so dark to him? Thus Bunyan returns to the autobiographical act in an attempt to "live backward toward meaning." His self-narration becomes a reenactment through language of the process by which he first struggled toward self-awareness. He will recount his agonizing search for assurance of identity. To go down into the "deep" for Bunyan is to discover in death a consciousness of the self that necessitates a search for meaning.

Viewed from this perspective, Grace Abounding functions for Bunyan as a significant episode in an ongoing "drama of
self-definition" and thus as an ongoing effort toward a fuller consciousness of the meaning of his life. Bunyan's narrative becomes an act of self-exploration. The "drama" of Bunyan's spiritual autobiography lies not only in the dramatic struggle of the young protagonist to find a certainty of election, a conflict that the narrator depicts as occurring largely in the past consciousness of the protagonist, but the drama also is occurring in the present consciousness of the autobiographer, who confined to Bedford jail awaiting death, summons memory and imagination to struggle dramatically with his identity and the meaning of his life. From this perspective Bunyan draws upon the "power of language" to move toward self-discovery through narrative experience and this act of autobiography becomes literally "life-sustaining" in the face of death (Eakin 191).

And that life is not only sustained but changed by the self-invention inherent in the autobiographical act. As G. B. Harrison notes, "Something clearly had happened in Bunyan's life" which gave him "immense self-confidence" and which "changed his relations with the rest of the congregation at Bedford," but "unfortunately" there is a "complete gap" in the records of Bunyan's life that coincide

3 Eakin argues that the writing of autobiography may be understood "not merely as the passive, transparent record of an already completed self but rather as an integral and often decisive phase of the drama of self-definition" (226).
with the silence of the Church Book, beginning in 1663 (95). That period of silence may well have been the time Bunyan faced his own death and wrote his autobiography, a time that Bunyan wrote his way from death to a life with new possibilities for meaning.

To see Bunyan's struggle with a fear of death as a significant originating impulse prompting his return to autobiography invests the autobiographical act with a measure of urgency and necessity. To answer the tempter's questions—"But whither must you go when you die? What evidence have you for heaven and glory?"—Bunyan writes the story of his earlier struggle toward conversion. The text becomes a testimony, not to his certainty of election, but to the author's commitment at the time of writing to search his experience through self-narration, a task undertaken with an urgent anxiety since death seems near. To write to produce "evidence for heaven and glory" for other sectarians would produce a document that paraded certainty and achievement. To write to produce "evidence" for oneself that one's life has a meaning and a place in a divine, eternal pattern may well produce a document that can only yearn toward certainty as it struggles with despair. Bunyan, so aware of time as days follow days in prison and yet also encountering the possible cessation of all time, seems compelled to bring together the experiences of a finite existence in time with timeless eternal being. To do
so, each moment of a life must be probed for its significance, for there, in just that moment, may lie the key to the whole pattern of being. The possibility of death heightens Bunyan's inner response to himself and his life. Bunyan writes for himself under the shadow of the gallows out of a desperate urge to live, to live beyond the end of life. In this return to autobiography the writing self is more highly conscious and the self written more highly significant because death is compellingly present.

The text that Bunyan produces in the context of death becomes, in the words of Olney, "a monument of the self as it is becoming, a metaphor of the self at the summary moment of composition" (Metaphors 35). Grace Abounding records a self in a process of "constant coming-into-being" (Olney "Experience" 105). And just as Bunyan's text becomes a metaphor of the self, so also the autobiographical act serves as such a metaphor because, for Bunyan, both the autobiographical act and the process of living involve bringing the self to language in the activities of reading and writing. The one who would live must read the scripture, for there lies the divine pattern for a life, and he must write his experiences, for in that writing lies the possibility of finding and recreating the divine pattern.

Reading and writing are, however, problematic, for both involve a self-consciousness as the reader-writer wrestles with the ambiguities of interpretation and the
responsibilities of creation. To risk reading and writing in the autobiographical act—to bring together "self" and "life" and "writing"—becomes the risk that Bunyan must take and becomes also the very process of the self wresting life from death. Reading and writing become a primary theme and, finally, a controlling metaphor in *Grace Abounding*, for those tools, valued supremely by the newly literate sectarian subculture of seventeenth-century England, enable Bunyan to engage death and to begin an effort to redeem life from death. His conversion narrative testifies, ultimately, to the "grace" necessary to constitute the self and sustain its life through language.

In *Grace Abounding*, the autobiographical act recommences with a promise. His relation, Bunyan asserts, will be about the working of God upon his soul, but first he will tell "in a few words" of his own "pedegree, and manner of bringing up" (1). Bunyan must find the words to tell two stories, one of a soul and the other of a man. One narrative must be shaped by a divine plan, but the other narrative can only exhibit the disorder of human event. The truth of one story lies in the mind of God, but the truth of the other must emerge from the lived experience of the man. In the pledge to tell the truths of God in the text of man lies the dilemma of Bunyan's autobiographical act. In the *Relation*, his first effort at autobiography, he had assumed that to tell his story was also to tell the story that God
had designed, but this assumed omniscience was painfully exposed as naive. Bunyan's own fallibility and vulnerability left him voiceless, without a story. In *Grace Abounding*, a chastened author prepares to begin his story again, less naive, more conscious of the gap between human language and the divine word. His must be a story of origins, an "in the beginning" of the soul that can be told fully only through the Word of God the Creator, but Bunyan, having no other choice, must use the language of man to write himself into being.

Bunyan's effort to produce a story of origins, however, has left historians frustrated and challenged the interpretive efforts of literary critics. The gaps in the relation of his childhood and adolescence have repeatedly drawn the comments of Bunyan biographers: "Of his childhood Bunyan says little; of his parents even less," notes G. B. Harrison (15). From the autobiography, we do not know the date of his birth, the names of his parents, brothers or sisters, or the school where he studied. From other records, we know that the year 1644 marked the end of his boyhood, for that summer, when Bunyan was only fifteen years old, his mother died in June, his sister died in July, and his father remarried in August. By the following November, the month of his sixteenth birthday, Bunyan left home to become a soldier in the Parliamentary army. Of these critical events, however, Bunyan says nothing; for, it
seems, this is not the story the autobiographer chooses to
tell.

And perhaps these omissions are the reason we continue
to read Bunyan's autobiography. For again and again, as Roy
Pascal notes, it is Bunyan's "mental inarticulateness" that
makes his story moving to the reader (33-34). This
inarticulateness compels Bunyan to seek not the facts of his
life but the words that give life. Toward the end of Grace
Abounding he cries, "A word, a word to lean a weary soul
upon that I might not sink for ever! it was that I hunted
for" (250). The self, for Bunyan, has emerged through
language, and, when he returns to "re-invent the self"
(Eakin 276), he re-enacts his movement from the child
without language to the adult who, challenged and threatened
by discourse, must write his own identity into a text in
which grace exists, even for the "chief of sinners."
Through narrative he must begin a quest for a "word" to lean
a weary soul upon.

Bunyan's narrative search for words to re-create and
transform the self becomes a movement into an increasingly
complex world of discourse. Structurally, the narrative
proceeds from a world of dreams and visions (childhood and
youth), through a world of voices (the early adult years),
into a world of texts that must be read and, finally,
written. The world of images leaves the child unconscious
of the promises of language, but each of the three "worlds"
of discourse—the spoken, read, and written word—seemingly brings fuller consciousness and each concludes with a climactic image that seemingly promises salvation. Each world of discourse, however, becomes in reality only a stage in the process of transformation, for Bunyan never achieves the assurance that the process has been completed. But in recording this process, Bunyan creates through narrative experience a transformed self, and Grace Abounding becomes itself the word of grace that certifies the salvation of its author.

The protagonist that Bunyan constructs in his second autobiographical act begins with an unawakened child and proceeds to a young man slowly awakening to voices that call him to a "new birth" and a "new world." This waking to new consciousness is the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

Childhood and Youth: The World of Images

The childhood world that Bunyan recovers from the past to begin his self-narration focuses on a child responsible for his own loss of words. Certainly, he had been given opportunity to gain the tools for life, for although his father's house was "the meanest and most despised of all the families in the Land," God had put it into his parents' hearts to send their son to school "to learn both to Read
and Write" (2-3). But, reports Bunyan with shame, "I did soon lose that little I learned, even almost utterly" (3). For Bunyan, the story of the journey toward grace becomes, in part, the story of re-learning to read and write. The tools of discourse that have been lost must be recovered before the protagonist of the narrative can understand the transforming power of words.

Out of young Bunyan's illiteracy, words become the markers of his ignorance of the holy and his abuse of the sacred, for from his childhood years, Bunyan reports, he cursed, lied, and blasphemed the name of God (4). This behavior so offended God that He "did scare and affright" the boy with fearful dreams and terrified him with "dreadful visions" in which, Bunyan vividly recalls, devils and wicked spirits seemed to labor to draw the child away with them (5). He was often greatly troubled by thoughts of the day of judgment and fears of the torments of hell (6). When he was but nine or ten years old, he was often "much cast down" and afflicted in his mind with distress over his sins, his "despair of Life and Heaven" being so great that he wished there was no hell or that perhaps he had been born a devil so that, if he indeed went to hell, he could be a tormentor rather than be tormented himself (7). If he saw one read a book on "Christian piety," that book seemed a prison to him (10). But, though a blasphemer himself, when he heard a religious man swear, he felt "so great a stroke upon [his] spirit" that his heart ached (11).
For Bunyan the past exists as an inner world of terror. Bunyan might well echo the words of autobiographer Jean-Paul Sartre who in his autobiography *The Words* said of his childhood: "Everything took place in my head" (Eakin 127). Sartre later suggests he wrote *The Words* to answer the question: "How does a man become someone who writes?" (Eakin 129). *Grace Abounding* too seems to attempt to answer that question, suggesting that a man becomes "someone who writes" to subdue the inner world of terror. For the child who "loses" the skills of reading and writing falls victim to the fears "in his head." For such a child the self can only be known passively and dumbly through unbearable images and thoughts. Without the ordering tools of language the child must remain the victim of the inner confusions produced by dreams, terrors, and tormenting fantasies. But this child has forgotten how to read and write. Therefore, where books exist for the child, they are prisons. Where words are spoken, they draw only retribution. The boy, however, must enter these prisons and risk retribution, for the pen and the text seem the only tools capable of ordering the riot of the mind. The tension of Bunyan's text of the self seems to lie from the beginning in the autobiographer's sense that the risk of language, though a tool that can be used for both evil and good, must be taken. One reads and writes, first, to subdue or, at least, endure the terrors of damnation that haunt the mind.
The child that Bunyan depicts in the opening paragraphs of *Grace Abounding* curses, swears, lies, blasphemes, and leads all others in vice and ungodliness. He thus seems an exemplum of the Puritan's depraved child, a type that Paul Delaney, in his survey of sectarian autobiography of the seventeenth century, identifies as common to the genre. According to Delaney, these texts frequently seem to compete with each other in "confessions of precocious wickedness" (89). Baptist Vavasor Powell, in an autobiographical account "written in his own hand" and published after his death as part of *The Life and Death of Mr. Vavasor Powell* (1671), found himself termed the "Captain or Leader of or in all evil" by his schoolfellows because he enjoyed "historical or poetical" books and profaned the sabbath by finding pleasure in watching others play at games (2). Richard Coppin in *Truth's Testimony* (1655) blames his childhood errors on episcopacy's priests who kept him in ignorance of his true condition, but he interweaves in his polemic against the church a reference to his wickedness in taking his "own pleasure in all manner of sports and delights for outward recreation of the creature, without any true knowledge of the Creator" (10). Edward Burrough, a Quaker involved in controversy with Bunyan in 1657, wrote in his autobiography, *Description of my Manner of Life* (1663), that in his youth he "was wanton and light and lived in pleasures... without the fear of God" (3). In Bunyan's
descriptions thus we recognize a convention of seventeenth-century autobiography that he followed and helped to perpetuate. But Bunyan's text differs from the conventional reference to childhood sin in its focus on the inner world of the child. While confession of wickedness and ignorance are common, these usually focus on specific sins such as Richard Baxter's list that includes lying, gluttonous eating of apples and pears, playing, coveting money, and idle chatter (5). Bunyan's vivid recreation of an inner world tormented by a fear of judgment and hell are less common.

In the childhood section, then, of Bunyan's narrative, the list of sins—cursing, swearing, lying and blasphemying the holy name of God—points to the child's inner world of torment that results from this shameful irresponsibility toward language. The awakening consciousness of the child is subjected "night and day" to the thoughts of "the fearful torments of Hell-fire," reports Bunyan; the child fears that he will "be found at last amongst those Devils and Hellish Fiends, who are there bound down with the chains and bonds of eternal darkness" (6). The child's response to these horrors is to wish for non-being. In his emerging self-awareness, he concludes that if the human must suffer such torments, he would prefer to be a devil so that he might torment rather than be tormented. To this child, responsible neither to life nor language, the autobiographer, now a man who reads and writes, brings the tools to order life.
He recapitulates these early moments of self-awareness and, in doing so, reconstructs the self through language. Does this act, in some way, "tutor" the boy who willfully and recklessly lost his ability to read and write? Can the autobiographer's discourse redeem the irresponsible child whose words were curses and blasphemy? And perhaps more significantly for the autobiographer, can language stay the fear of death and uncertainty of grace that are responsible for the autobiographer's "low and sad condition" (333) in Bedford jail with the gallows seemingly near?

The emphasis on the fear of judgment, damnation, and torment in the childhood section of *Grace Abounding* may have prompted the additions that appear in the later editions of the autobiography. Perhaps to balance the focus on the shaping terrors of his childhood, torments attributed in part to God's retribution, Bunyan added details of

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4 The history of the editions of *Grace Abounding* may be summarized as follows: the first edition (1666) is rare (only three copies have survived, two in America and one imperfect copy in the British Museum); no copies exist of the second edition and its date is unknown (Talon estimates it to be 1667 or 1668, p. 19, n. 10); the undated third edition (c. 1672) has an added fifty-seven paragraphs; only one copy exists in the Pierpont Morgan Library; no copies exist of the fourth edition; the fifth edition (with two copies in existence) belongs to 1680 and has an additional ten paragraphs; the sixth edition (1688) adds no new sections. See Henri Talon's *John Bunyan: The Man and His Works* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1951) 19, 25. See, also, Frank M. Harrison, "Notes on the Early Editions of 'Grace Abounding,'" *The Baptist Quarterly* 11 (1942-45): 162. In the Oxford edition of *GA* (1962), Sharrock draws attention to all of Bunyan's changes in the various editions.
providential actions to acknowledge God's design. These "Judgements" mixed with "mercy" include Bunyan's escape from drowning when he fell into a creek at one time and later into the Bedford River, his survival when he removed an adder's sting with his fingers, and, finally, his avoidance of death when another soldier volunteered to take Bunyan's place and in a siege was "shot into the head with a Musket bullet and died" (12, 13). Perhaps by 1667 or 1668, as Bunyan readied his narrative for a new edition, he no longer expected his imprisonment to end at the gallows; moreover, having lived with death so close, he knew more about life. This process of continued coming into new understanding prompted the autobiographical act to continue through new interpretation of events in his youth. The autobiographer, knowing much that the young protagonist did not know and the earlier narrator was only beginning to learn—that life must always be reclaimed from death—continues to discover that to live means far more than avoiding death. The child, a prisoner of his fears, scarcely lives. Nor can the youth, though he avoids death, be said to live. Death, the writer seems to suggest, always threatens life; and the fear of the child and indifference of the youth seem to stand as denials of life and thus to be merely other forms of death.

In this account of his earliest years, the autobiographer chooses to balance the child's fear of God against the youth's indifference. No fuller response to God
as enemy or friend comes from the reflecting writer. Gordon Campbell, discussing Bunyan's theology in *Pilgrim's Progress*, notes that in "theological writing" Bunyan "attempts to articulate divine truth; in *The Pilgrim's Progress* he eliminates truths that are set in the mind of God" (261). The limits that Bunyan sets in his allegory begin in his autobiography. God remains a mystery and his design can only be inferred in retrospect. As for man, more can be said. Neither the child who fears God, the youth who ignores God, nor the autobiographer who forgets, when he first writes, the judgments and mercies of God can be approved. They all fail in some way to choose life, and, in that failure, death continues to make its claims in the experiences of the unawakened child and youth and the still awakening adult.

Bunyan thus concludes the period of childhood and youth with this earlier self unreformed either by fears of "Hell-fire" or acts of "Judgements and mercy." The fears are lost in the pleasures and delights of sin; the providential acts go unrecognized. A naughty child, sometimes fearful, often greedily lusting after sin, he lives untouched by any significant self-awareness or self-responsibility. In this world of passions—terror, lust, greed—no words exist to order the riot of emotions. Until the young Bunyan regains the tools of language that he has carelessly "lost," he remains equally "careless" of his own lost soul (14).
Adulthood: A World of Discourse

The announcement of his marriage signals Bunyan's leaving behind the world of his youth to enter adulthood. And, significantly, Bunyan describes that transformation as a plunge into a world of life and language. The child's consciousness of self emerged from an inner world of dreams and terrors; the adult's consciousness of self emerges from a world of discourse. To constitute the self in autobiography through speaking and reading, through language, would be appropriate for Bunyan because he found those same skills essential in his role of sectarian minister. As Eakin suggests in his study of the "art of self-invention," certain "self-defining acts may be re-enacted as the autobiographical narrative is being written" (226). Reading and speaking defined Bunyan in his identity as sectarian minister and he repeats this earlier mode of identity formation in his autobiographical text, "not merely to recapture" this identity, as Eakin suggests, but also to reach forward "into the future to fix the structure of this identity" (226). For Bunyan the movement toward wholeness that the title of the autobiography promises and that the imprisoned autobiographer so desperately seeks must be accomplished through language.

Thus Bunyan, understandably, re-invents an earlier
self entering adulthood through language: Bunyan reads religious books and the scriptures; he converses with his wife, his father, a "loose, ungodly" woman of the village, and the women in the sun of Bedford; he hears a voice speaking from heaven and juxtaposes this divine voice with his own voice first cursing and swearing and later hypocritically boasting with pride of his godliness. For Bunyan, to create and discover the self of the past is to reenter the world of a self shaped by language.

To the marriage Bunyan's wife, who is unnamed, brings two books, which he does name, books that she inherited from her father. In those texts—The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven and The Practice of Piety—Bunyan sometimes reads with his wife and finds there "things that were somewhat pleasing" (15). Brown notes that both Arthur Dent, who wrote The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven (1601), and Lewis Bayly, who wrote the extremely popular Practice of Piety (1612), were Anglican clergy who encoded "in the language of the times" the rather "wearisome" rules of a religious life (Brown 53-55). Under the influence of these books and the narratives his wife often told of her father's piety, Bunyan begins to act in accordance with the model of a man of religion as he then understands it. Thus, he reports, he "fell in very eagerly with the Religion of the times" (10). Many sectarians report in their autobiographies of the necessity of rejecting the Established Church; Richard
Coppin in *Truth's Testimony* complains of living many years in a "state of ignorance under the Bishops and Prelatical Government." Coppin complains: "The Priests of those times . . . committed all manner of sin and wickedness, and . . . deceived both me and many thousands of souls by their delusions, but never taught us of a Jesus, all this while neither could they, because they knew him not themselves" (10-11). Bunyan, unlike Coppin, emphasizes his own vulnerability rather than the priests' wickedness: "I was so overrun by the spirit of superstition, that I adored, and that with great devotion, even all things, both the high place, priest, clerk, vestment, service, and what else belonging to the church" (16). In speaking of the priests, Bunyan reports that he loved and reverenced them so that he "could have lain down at their feet, and have been trampled upon by them" because their name, their garb, and work intoxicated him so completely (16). Coppin's disgust with Episcopacy sent him to Presbyterianism, then to Anabaptism, and finally to his own religion; Bunyan's desire for identification with a religious people sent him to the Bible.

In studying the Bible, Bunyan discovers that the Israelites were once "the peculiar People of God": "Thought I, if I were one of this race, my Soul must needs be happy" (18). To be an Israelite would mean to be chosen, to find a Biblical identity, a place in the sacred text. Brooding on
the question—Are we of the Israelites or not?—he at last asks his father, who bluntly responds, "No, we are not," nullifying the hoped-for identity. The father may be Bunyan's own parent, rejecting the foolish notion that the Bunyans might be Israelites. The father may be Episcopacy's priest, for this paragraph follows immediately Bunyan's description of his reverence for the Anglican clergy whose name, garb, and work intoxicate and bewitch him; the negation of his hopes may signify that the established church cannot be home for Bunyan. But, significantly, the father may be the divine Father, refusing a place to the hopeful son. Certainly, the story seems emblematic of the Calvinist desire for election, an identity and place that Bunyan seeks urgently. The father's blunt negation of the son's hopes reenacts the refusal of place that may ultimately come from the divine Father. Now more fully aware of his misguided longing for identity with the Established Church and after receiving the cold rejection from the father of a Biblical identity, Bunyan falls in his spirit and loses hope. "But all this while," says the narrator, "I was not sensible of the danger and evil of sin; I was kept from considering that sin would damn me, what Religion soever I followed, unless I was found in Christ" (19).

Religious but nonetheless damned, Bunyan's protagonist is ready for the most significant events of this section.
The autobiographer recreates the voices that, striking the ear of the young man, call him to new self-awareness: first, the parson speaks and awakens guilt; then a voice from heaven questions the sinner and reveals his sin. Both voices call Bunyan to a startlingly immediate consciousness of self.

These aural injunctions begin when the parson in a sermon warns of the evil of breaking the sabbath with either labor or sports. Bunyan feels personally addressed, "thinking and believing that [the parson] made that Sermon on purpose" to show him his sabbath "evil-doing." And though he at first falls "in his conscience" under the minister's words, his sensitivity lasts only through Sunday dinner. After he has dined well, his love of sports and gaming returns; therefore he "shakes the sermon" out of his mind and turns to a game of tipcat with "great delight" (20-21).

After striking the cat "one blow from the hole," he stands posed to strike a second time when another voice, far more extraordinary and arresting than the minister's voice in the Sunday sermon, darts "from Heaven into [his] Soul" to demand: "Wilt thou leave thy sins, and go to Heaven? or have thy sins, and go to Hell?" Bunyan records:

At this I was put to an exceeding maze; wherefore, leaving my Cat upon the ground, I looked up to Heaven, and was as if I had, with the eyes of my understanding, seen the Lord Jesus looking down
upon me, as being very hotly displeased with me, and as if he did severely threaten me with some grievous punishment for these, and other my ungodly practices. (22).

This moment of intense self-consciousness occurs, for Bunyan, as a conjunction of language (the voice from the sky) and self-awareness (It is an "I" that has been noted and addressed). What has been perceived through the fearful imaginings and dreams of the child (the "dreadful visions" sent as nightmares to punish offenses) and what has been heard but ignored in the Sunday sermon (the parson's words seemed "on purpose" to show Bunyan's evil doing) become explicit through the language from the heavens that arrests the man in the midst of play (Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven, or have thy sins and go to hell?). Bunyan has been recognized and addressed by the Other. That recognition marks the genesis of the self. And though that self comes fully into being only to be condemned, that condemnation seems momentarily obscured by the emerging new sense for the self that "I exist." 5

5 Eakin reports an intense experience of self-awareness of Paul Richter, who describes an "I-am-me" experience in language reminiscent of Bunyan's: "I shall never forget what I have never revealed to anyone, the phenomenon which accompanied the birth of my consciousness of self . . . . One morning, as a very young child, I was standing in our front door and was looking over to the wood pile on the left, when suddenly the inner vision "I am a me" [ich bin ein Ich] shot down before me like a flash of lightning from the sky" (Eakin 218).
Accompanying this moment of intense self-awareness is Bunyan's realization that he must accept responsibility for himself, for to know the presence of a self is to know also the possibility of loss. The fate of the newly-realized self lies in his own hands. And Bunyan's first response to this new responsibility is despair; his second is rebellion.

Having thus "conceived in [his] mind" the severe and threatening figure of Christ, Bunyan writes that his sins were "set again" before his face. Convinced that he has been "a great and grievous Sinner," he laments, "Christ would not forgive me, nor pardon my transgressions" (23). In despair he concludes, "I resolved in my mind I would go on in sin: for, thought I, if the case be thus, my state is surely miserable; miserable if I leave my sins, and but miserable if I follow them: I can but be damned; and if I must be so, I had as good be damned for many sins, as be damned for few" (23).

Nussbaum comments on Bunyan's troubled relationship to authority, suggesting that "the very idea of salvation seems to hold within it both the promise and the threat of loss of identity" (22). She notes that the "very act of writing Grace Abounding, a prison document, provided him a way to defy the very authorities who denied him a preaching voice" (22). Thus in a text that itself speaks rebellion, Bunyan recapitulates the initial act of rebellion that follows the discovery that "I exist, and I am condemned." In an act of
defiance, an act that privileges self-assertion over self-submission, Bunyan, still standing "in the midst of [his] play," returns "desperately" to the game of cat.

In what Eakin calls "a dialectical relationship between the autobiographical narrator in the present and the character of his earlier self in the past" (63), Bunyan relates the effect of his rebellion:

I well remember, that presently this kind of despair did so possess my Soul, that I was perswaded I could never attain to other comfort then what I should get in sin; for Heaven was gone already, so that on that I must not think: wherefore I found within me a great desire to take my fill of sin, still studdying what sin was yet to be committed, that I might taste the sweetness of it; and I made as much haste as I could to fill my belly with its delicates, lest I should die before I had my desire; for that I feared greatly. In these things, I protest before God, I lye not, neither do I feign this sort of speech: these were really, strongly, and with all my heart, my desires; the good Lord, whose mercy is unsearchable, forgive me my Transgressions. (24)

The interplay between present and past identities begins clearly enough, but the two states of consciousness, the contrite narrator and the rebellious earlier self, begin to
merge so that by the time the prayer of forgiveness is uttered, the identities are interchangeable. Bunyan protests that he can recall exactly the desires of the heart of the rebellious self—his greedy passion for consuming sin. The self so newly discovered and asserted seems hungry to satiate itself before death ends life and desire. With self so full of desire and death so threatening, the past consciousness seems powerfully present to the present narrator. The rebellion of the past becomes part of the truth of the text of rebellion the autobiographer pens. So that the prayer must finally cover both rebels or one rebel who exists in both the present and the past.

Robert Bell compares the youthful transgression, which he finds central to the conversion narrative, of Augustine's theft of pears to the "famous game of cat" of Bunyan's narrative. Whereas Augustine "sharply delineates a 'self' before and after conversion," Bunyan "is much less confident of his present authority." Bunyan's defense of his integrity ("I lie not") signifies, argues Bell, that he is far more vulnerable. For Augustine, then, there is a fully realized difference between the narrator (the autobiographer who writes) and the protagonist (the character portrayed as an earlier self). The fact that Grace Abounding does not depict "two different beings" suggests that for Bunyan, "the process of redemption is a continuous, ongoing struggle" (Bell, 114). Bunyan's inability to view the self of the
past with the acute irony of Augustine's narrator suggests an identification between the autobiographer writing from Bedford jail and the protagonist playing tipcat on the village green. His prayer of confession and forgiveness must include both rebellious strugglers because both are involved in an ongoing "encounter between humanity and divinity" (Bell 114).

Bunyan's effort to portray the earlier rebel focuses on the insatiable nature of the self. His "greediness of mind" cannot be satisfied without further sin (26). But after a month of indulging the newly-asserted self, Bunyan reports:

As I was standing at a Neighbour's Shop-window, and there cursing and swearing, and playing the Mad-man, after my wonted manner, there sate within the woman of the house, and heard me; who, though she was a very loose and ungodly Wretch, yet protested that I swore and cursed at that most fearful rate, that she was made to tremble to hear me; and told me further, That I was the ungodliest Fellow for swearing that ever she heard in all her life; and that I, by thus doing, was able to spoile all the Youth in a whole Town, if they came but in my company. (26)

Bunyan, though defiant before his minister and the vision of the stern Christ, is silenced and shamed by this "loose and ungodly Wretch" and her words of scornful condemnation. In
his response, Bunyan's focus falls on his irresponsible use of language:

At this reproof I was silenced, and put to secret shame, and that too, as I thought, before the God of Heaven: wherefore, while I stood there, and hanging down my head, I wished with all my heart that I might be a little childe again, that my Father might learn me to speak without this wicked way of swearing. (27)

What the father has not done, the mother, in the guise of a scolding ungodly wretch, accomplishes. Bunyan, though he protests that he knows not how, from that day gives up his swearing ("it was a great wonder to myself to observe it" [28]). Looking back, the autobiographer puzzled over his need to "put an Oath before, and another behind" to make his words have authority (28). Yet though he learns to speak better and with "more pleasantness" at this point, he continues to struggle to discipline his language. In a later section of his autobiography describing the temptations of his ministry, Bunyan confesses, "When I have been preaching, I have been violently assaulted with thoughts of blasphemy, and strongly tempted to speak them with my mouth before the Congregation" (293). But though Bunyan was never able to become a child to relearn the art of speaking without the "wicked way of swearing," he did learn to resist asserting authority through swearing and
blasphemy and to offer instead the "awakening Word" to bring forth children to God (284, 290). Though his own father failed to teach him responsibility to language, he has tutored himself, as the text Grace Abounding certifies. And when Bunyan readies his autobiographical text for publishing and pens a preface to the text, he dedicates his narrative of the self to "those whom God hath counted him worthy to beget [emphasis added] to Faith, by his Ministry in the Word" (Preface, 2). The responsible use of discourse enables Bunyan to assume the role of both father and mother to his children. Bunyan, after establishing his right to parent through his text, can tutor his children and perhaps compensate for the failure of his own father. And that becomes the mode of "begetting" for Bunyan: first he gives over his own irresponsible use of language; later he uses language to create himself as text and "beget" his children in the word.

The protagonist of Bunyan's autobiography, however, has just discovered the multiple ways words can be used to empower the self: "Before [giving up cursing] I knew not how to speak unless I put an Oath before, and another behind, to make my words have authority; now, I could, without it, speak better, and with more pleasantness than ever I could before" (28). Words serve to make him, for about a year, a much-admired professor of religion; Bunyan records: "My Neighbours were amazed at this my great
Conversion from prodigious profaneness, to something like a moral life" (32). His seeming "conversion" draws the villagers' approval: "They began to praise, to commend, and to speak well of me, both to my face, and behind my back. Now, I was, as they said, become godly; now, I was become a right honest man" (32). Bunyan is so pleased with this description of himself through words of others that he becomes what their words project—a seemingly righteous man. This self, constituted by the words of others, however, Bunyan cannot sustain, for "as yet," he reports, "I was nothing but a poor painted Hypocrite" (32).

At this juncture of the autobiography, Bunyan adds to the text in the third edition a portrait of the self of the past, trying desperately to enact the role of the "good man" created by others while fearing that his goodness must of necessity be only sham. This self-division appears in Bunyan's desire to ring the bells of the steeple house, an activity that had furnished him with "much delight," and his decision that such practice was "vain" and, therefore, must be renounced. Throughout the passage the vacillation is intense: he "forces" himself to give up the practice of ringing and also "forces" himself to continue to go to the steeple house "to look on still," though he does not dare to ring. What strikes the reader here is the intensity with which Bunyan invests himself in creating two opposing images of the self: the self yearning after pleasure and the self
yearning after a shallow goodness are both equally asserted. Such powerfully opposed selves court self-annihilation, and this fear of destruction emerges in the protagonist's mind as he stands inside the steeple house, looking up at the bells ringing: "I began to think, How, if one of the Bells should fall?" (33). He moves under the main beam, thinking that if the bell falls, it will hit the beam rather than himself. But, he thinks, the bell may well fall with a swing, bounce off the wall, and kill him still, even as he stands under the beam. Thus he moves to the steeple door, assuming he can slip out behind the "thick walls," but a new thought terrifies him: "How, if the Steeple itself should fall?"

And this thought (it may fall for aught I know) would when I stood and looked on, continually so shake my mind, that I durst not stand at the Steeple door any longer, but was forced to fly, for fear [the steeple] should fall upon my head. (34)

Looking back, as the autobiographer does, to this period when he attempted "some outward reformation" in his words and life, he does not condemn the protagonist, whose conscience is "beginning to be tender," for his delight in bell ringing or his superficial efforts to become a "godly man." His compassion for the earlier self's newly-awakened sensitivity seems evident in his effort to recreate a
complex of emotional states for the protagonist: his aggressive rebelliousness, the shame before the "ungodly Wretch" who castigates him, his pride in the good opinions of the villagers, and the heightened sense of guilt that accompanies his excessive attention to examining his behavior. The writer differs from the protagonist in his degree of awareness, but he identifies with the protagonist involved in an ongoing struggle with his own humanity. The writer who has found the incongruous intermixture of fear and pride in his response to the prospects of martyrdom can understand the divided self of both the man and boy, both prisoners of confusions inherent in the self struggling toward wholeness.

After his entry into the world of the spoken word, the protagonist has been shaped by the voice of his wife reading to him from her father's books of piety, the voice of the parson who awakens his guilt, the voice of Christ whose question awakens despair and rebellion, the voice of the wretched village woman who silences his cursing tongue, the voices of the neighbours who commend his outward reformation, and the inner voice of Bunyan scrupulously restricting his pleasures in an effort to be good. The climactic shaping event occurs when Bunyan, working on his calling in Bedford, overhears "three or four poor women sitting at a door in the Sun, and talking about the things of God" (37). In a description that emphasizes the power
and complexity of language, the autobiographer recreates the moment:

Being now willing to hear them discourse, I drew near to hear what they said; for I was now a brisk talker also myself in the matters of Religion: but now I may say, I heard, but I understood not; for they were far above out of my reach, for their talk was about a new birth, the work of God on their hearts. . . . They talked how God had visited their souls with his love in the Lord Jesus, and with what words and promises they had been refreshed, comforted, and supported against the temptations of the Devil. . . . They also discoursed of their own wretchedness of heart, of their unbelief; and did contemn, slight, and abhor their own righteousness, as filthy, and insufficient to do them any good.

And methought they spake as if joy did make them speak: they spake with such pleasantness of Scripture language, and with such appearance of grace in all they said, that they were to me as if they had found a new world. (37-38)

Discourse, much like the sun in the story, lights for Bunyan the inner world of the self and offers a glimpse of a new unknown world of possibility. It is only when he hears the Bedford women talk of "new birth" that he recognizes the
ineffectualness of his own religious "brisk talk" to create himself anew:

At this I felt my own heart began to shake, as mistrusting my condition to be naught; for I saw that in all my thoughts about Religion and Salvation, the New birth did never enter into my mind, neither knew I the comfort of the Word and Promise, nor the deceitfulness and treachery of my own wicked heart. (39)

Present in the discourse of the women is understanding, strength, honesty, and joy; the absence of these qualities in the prating of the religionist becomes evident. The words of the village neighbors who earlier had praised and spoken well of Bunyan ("Now, I was, as they said become godly; now, I was become a right honest man" ) reflected his goodness, or so he thought; but now the words of the poor Bedford women reveal his false pride and "wicked heart."

Knowing himself now to be malleable to the shaping power of words, Bunyan reflects on the conversation of the Bedford women: "I left them, and went about my employment again: but their talk and discourse went with me, also my heart would tarry with them, for I was greatly affected with their words" (40). The words have revealed what he lacks ("I was convinced that I wanted the true tokens of a truly godly man"), and the words have revealed what he needs ("I was convinced of the happy and blessed condition of him that
was such a one). The "new birth" and "new world" so vividly created by the words of the Bedford women become the obsession of the tinker's mind so that "it [his mind] lay," writes Bunyan, "like a Horseleach at the vein, still crying out, Give, give" (41).

Later, Bunyan records a "birth-dream" that suggests his protagonist's ability to envision what he cannot yet realize; he can "image" a "new birth", but he does not yet have the words to incarnate a new being. In his dream, the poor people of Bedford are set on the Sunny side of some high Mountain, there refreshing themselves with the pleasant beams of the Sun. (53)

The dream-protagonist, however, shivers and shrinks in the cold, "afflicted with frost, snow, and dark clouds." Between the villagers and him lies a wall that encircles the mountain, and his soul longs to pass through the wall so that he might go "even into the very midst" of the Bedford folk where he would also comfort himself "with the heat of their Sun" (53). Bunyan records the dream-protagonist's determined efforts to join the fortunate group:

About this wall I thought myself to goe again and again, still prying as I went, to see if I could find some way or passage, by which I might enter therein; but none could I find for some time. At the last, I saw, as it were, a narrow
gap, like a little door-way in the wall, thorow which I attempted to pass: but the passage being very straight, and narrow, I made many offers to get in, but all in vain. (54)

The struggler continues, however, and at last, "with great striving," he begins to force his way into the gap:

I at first did get in my head, and after that, by a side-ling striving, my shoulders, and my whole body. (54)

From the cold and darkness, he has emerged into light and heat of the sun, and "exceeding glad," he finds his place in the midst of the happy group.

In this recounting of the dream, Bunyan's text takes on a multi-layered density. The struggler who achieves the place in the sun exists only to image the person the protagonist has not become. The protagonist himself can only "hunger and desire" to be one of "the number that did sit in the sunshine" (56). Separate from both, the narrator assumes an interpreter's role and translates the birth-dream from allegory to concept: thus the mountain is the church, the sun is the face of God, the wall is the Word "that did make separation between the Christians and the world," and the gap is Jesus Christ, "who is the way to God the Father" (55). What the dream "shows," according to the interpreter, is that none could enter into life, but those that
were in down-right earnest, and unless they left this wicked world behind them; for here was only roome for Body and Soul, but not for Body and Soul, and Sin. (55).

But though this "resemblance" abides on the protagonist's soul, he must confess, "I knew not where I was" (56). And though the narrator seems to assume a fuller understanding than either the fictive dream-protagonist or the reconstructed protagonist, his text continues to assert, "I know not where I am." For though the struggler in the dream can leave the cold with its dark clouds for a place in the sun, this "new birth" remains in doubt for the protagonist of Grace Abounding and, it would seem, for the one who writes to answer the tempter's question: "Where will you be found in another world?" To that question, the writer dare not answer, "I know not where I am."

Though the words of the Bedford women have revealed the possibility of "new birth" and though the dream shows the way--only the man who leaves sin behind can struggle through the gap--the protagonist has not found the way to realize either the words or the vision in his experience. He has tried to be "good" by giving up cursing, bell ringing, and dancing; he has attended services and listened to the minister. He has listened to the people of Bedford and returns to them again and again. But to transform his life so that he can take his place on the mountain in the sun
seems beyond his power to accomplish. Separated by the "wall of the Word" from the place in the sun he now desires, he realizes that he needs more than the voices of Bedfordshire. Thus, the autobiographer relates, the searcher turns to the Bible to attempt to "read" his way "in down-right earnest" to the Son; only thus can he find the gap through which the seeker can struggle from the "wicked world" to "God the Father." In God's written text, the searcher seeks to discover the transforming word of grace; there perhaps he can find himself known and accepted, only by struggling through the "wall of the Word" can he hope to bask in the "comfortable shining of the merciful face" of the Father (55).
Chapter Four

Grace Abounding:
Reading Bunyan

Linda H. Peterson

I began to look into the Bible with new eyes, and read as I never did before.
John Bunyan

Worldly-Wiseman: How camest thou by thy burden at first?
Christian: By reading this book in my hand.
John Bunyan

To follow Bunyan through the central experiences of his life is to trace his progress from visions and voices to written texts. As a child and one who had "lost" the ability to read, books seemed prisons, but he now finds, as a young man searching for faith, that he must enter those prisons to find freedom. For the man seeking to join those who have found a place in the sun, the way must lie through the "wall of the Word":

I began to look into the Bible with new eyes, and read as I never did before; . . . and indeed, I was then never out of the Bible, either by reading or meditation, still crying out to God, that I might know the truth, and the way to Heaven and Glory. (46)
With this turn in the narrative, the autobiographer announces that the "down-right earnest" search for the meaning and shape of his life will lie in the journey he will make into the Biblical text.

As the protagonist of *Grace Abounding* begins to read, he discovers the complexity of the scriptural Word and the burden of interpretive effort. Bunyan's plight anticipates Christian's in *Pilgrim's Progress*, for Christian's awareness of the heavy burden on his back comes with his first reading of the Book. Christian, longing to rid himself of his burden, finds he can do so only by continuing in the way. Like Christian, the protagonist of *Grace Abounding* has no choice but to continue to read and interpret. Bunyan learns, as Mr. Worldly-Wiseman warns Christian, that "there is not a more dangerous and troublesome way" to learn the truth of the self, but, nonetheless, the way to self-knowledge for Bunyan necessarily lies through the Bible.

Bruss notes that the autobiographer's "obsessive attention to the naked Word of the scriptures" is one of the most prominent features of *Grace Abounding* (38). And such must be the case when the Word both separates man from life and also contains the way to "heaven and glory." Like the separating wall in his birth-vision, the scriptures loom as a barrier to the sinner yearning for truth and life. The Bible both demands and resists Bunyan's struggling efforts toward interpretation. Caught in the hermeneutic dilemma
described by Linda Peterson in her study of the tradition of self-interpretation, Bunyan finds himself "unable to resist interpretation" of both the scripture and himself, yet he always remains "uncomfortable with the results." ¹ The task of interpretation must be undertaken, however, because the "wall of the Word" also contains the "gap" of the vision, interpreted by Bunyan as "Jesus Christ . . . the way to God the Father"; to find that gap and discover if he himself is, indeed, in the way becomes the burden of the protagonist of *Grace Abounding*. To the Biblical text of threat and promise, Bunyan inevitably responds with ambivalence.

Faced with the reticence of the Bible to yield answers and the ambivalence of the protagonist as reader, the autobiographer finds himself compelled to assume the burden of interpretation both of the Word and the man. Thus, as Bruss notes in her study of Bunyan's autobiographical act, *Grace Abounding* must become an argument "rather than an attractive rhetorical display" when the "goal is to convince the artist himself" (38). To make his argument, the author not only reconstructs himself as a protagonist hesitantly attempting to learn to read texts, but he also creates a

narrator reading and interpreting the protagonist. The author reading the narrator reading the protagonist struggles toward interpretation, but invariably the readings refuse to converge into one assured, unquestionable reading. Yet it is this text of multiple, even contradictory, readings that Bunyan constructs to display the shape and meaning of his life, a narrative that must convince both writer and readers that it records a movement from sin to abundant grace, a passage from death to life.

Added to the problem of reading the self as text is the problem of writing that text, for in his return to self-narration, Bunyan finds once again that self-writing is itself a kind of death. In the Relation the Bunyan that confidently opposed officialdom suffered death as the autobiographer painfully emerged into a new consciousness of himself. In Grace Abounding the Bunyan who learned to be a "professor of religion" and basked in the praise of the villagers saw his "good man" identity destroyed when the voices of the Bedford women exposed his self-deception. For the autobiographer, to write is to record one's deaths, and Bunyan cannot ignore this serious consequence of self-narration.

But the autobiographical act must be risked, for if writing is death, it is also birth. The text that memorializes the self's deaths may also celebrate an emerging new consciousness of life. And as the
autobiographer writes from Bedford jail, authoring both his deaths and his struggles toward life, he dare not forget that for him *Grace Abounding* can only be a narrative of rebirth if its truth and the Bible's truth are finally one. For Bunyan the primary text, the text of death and life, must necessarily be the Bible. From its master narrative all self-narration must emerge.

To write his life Bunyan must read in his experience the same story that he reads in the Bible. But to attempt to read either the text of the self or the text of the Bible is to discover the burden of all textuality—the problems arising from the text's indeterminate meaning and the relativity of all interpretations. As Bunyan attempts to assimilate his personal experience to the Biblical narrative, he must make the two stories one. Inevitably, however, both texts resist such reduction. To accept this dilemma means for Bunyan, once again, the death of certitude. But if that is so, and certainly that seems to be the story, first in the *Relation* and then in *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan determines to risk that death as the only way to life. Yet he is never comfortable with that risk; he longs for certainty.

For Bunyan the misreadings, questions, and confusions that surround his first efforts to read and interpret scripture can only be narrated as confrontations, struggles, and battles. The Bible raises disruptive questions that
demand answers. It threatens to seize control and change the reader's understanding of himself and his world. Before this text, a reader must accept frightening responsibility for response and interpretation. And, perhaps most threatening of all, before this text the reader may find that he himself has been interpreted. For Bunyan the Bible is a book of identity, one that he reads with great anxiety, fearful of the discovery that he is not of the elect but is, instead, a reprobate. It is little wonder then that at times Bunyan seems to wish to become a child again to "lose" this weighty burden of reading, for in this section of Grace Abounding where the interpretation of the self becomes linked to the interpretation of the Biblical text, he must search for certitude of his own soul's salvation in written words that question and judge but refuse to yield simple answers or clear meanings.

Karl Weintraub discusses the problem for the seventeenth-century Protestant of the Biblical text's refusal to yield a "uniform, self-evident meaning."² Weintraub notes that though Luther revolted against the authority of the Catholic church, he established a new pattern of authority for the individual Christian in the Bible: Luther had an invincible trust that the sacred word

communicates its "unmistakable meaning with immediate clarity to each attentive reader" (228). Bunyan finds, as he says, his own condition in Luther's experience, and the sectarian undoubtedly shared with Luther an unquestioned allegiance to the Bible's authority, but he could never find for himself the clarity Luther assumed to be present in the Biblical text. On the contrary, Bunyan found, to his great anxiety, that the Biblical text resists such certainty. In Bunyan's experience the scripture was more likely to "break in upon the mind" with the force of a tempest than to yield a clear authoritative meaning. Bunyan often feels as helpless before this power as "a child whom some gipsy hath by force took up under her apron, and is carrying from friend and country" (33). In this section of struggle with the written word, Bunyan recounts dramatically the problems of the seventeenth-century sectarian who, as an inheritor of Luther's tradition of dissent, finds himself compelled to wrest his identity from a text central to his era's struggle with the disruptive questions of authority, interpretation and truth.

In the first edition of *Grace Abounding*, published in 1666, the focus falls on Bunyan's first encounter with scripture, the questions that arise, the interpretive tools he explores, the temptation he undergoes to doubt the Bible's authority, and the process by which he begins to learn to read "the holy Word" from "truth to truth." The
protagonist becomes a reader and novice interpreter and in the process finds himself disturbingly interpreted. He assumes a variety of roles before the Biblical text, some of which cause him to hope, others to despair, but though the narrator attempts to adjudicate the various interpretive responses, no single self-interpretation emerges in response to the strenuous hermeneutical efforts. The autobiographer reconstructs these conflicting selves, but he cannot be certain which is authoritative.

The problems of interpretation and the issue of authority become even more complex when the autobiographer returns to *Grace Abounding* to revise the text for further publications, for in the undated third edition of his autobiography, the first surviving revision, Bunyan accompanies his entry into the Biblical text with his encounters with other texts: the writings of the Ranters, the teachings of the Quakers, and Luther's *Commentarie on the Galathians*. In this revision, possibly undertaken in 1672, the year Bunyan was released from prison, the protagonist struggles with self-definition not only in response to his reading of the Biblical text but also in

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3 My concerns in this chapter are with these additions: the Ranters (43-45), the exercise in typology (70-71), the description of innate depravity (83-85), the Quaker errors (124-25), and Luther on Galatians (129-31); all these paragraphs were added to the third edition (c. 1672). See Roger Sharrock's Introduction to the Oxford GA (1962) xxxiii-xli.
response to other shaping texts. Each text raises its questions and becomes either a threat or a corroboration of the self Bunyan constructs. Each becomes significant in the complex process of self-narration. Thus in this revision, one that Bunyan let stand through three more editions, the text of Bunyan necessarily becomes a complex narration of intertextuality.

Bunyan's revision seems to suggest a new dimension to the questions he raises originally in *Grace Abounding*. He seems to ask not only how he can define himself in relation to the Biblical text but also how he can know for certain that his self-definition is legitimate. How in the maze of sectarian testimonies flowing from English presses can the writer be certain that his text records "the way to heaven and glory"? How can he know his self-narration has authority in the context of competing and opposing narratives like those of the Ranters and Quakers? Bunyan's story emerges in his efforts both to define himself within the Biblical text and his effort to define himself apart from the competing narratives of fellow-sectarians.

Bunyan's desire to become a reader of texts begins after the Bedford women awaken in him a longing for "new birth" and a "new world"; he finds in himself a "bending" toward reading the scripture and, as he says, "all other good things which at any time I heard or read of" (41). In the revision of *Grace Abounding* Bunyan here inserts the
protagonist's encounter with the books of the Ranters, texts that were held in high esteem by many professors of religion. He recalls:

Some of these books I read, but was not able to make a judgment about them; wherefore as I read in them, and thought upon them, feeling myself unable to judge, I should betake myself to hearty prayer in this manner: O Lord, I am a fool, and not able to know the truth from error: Lord, leave me not to my own blindness, either to approve of, or condemn this doctrine; if it be of God, let me not despise it; if it be of the devil, let me not embrace it. . . .Let me not be deceived. (44)

Bunyan's vulnerability to the Ranters seems increased by his closeness to a "religious intimate companion" who turns "a most devilish Ranter." This former intimate, reports Bunyan, gives himself up to "all manner of filthiness," laughing at Bunyan's attempts to rebuke the man's wickedness. The converted Ranter testifies that he has gone "through all religions and could never light on the right till now" (44). And he prophecies that all professors of religion will soon become Ranters, a pronouncement that seems confirmed when Bunyan, following his calling in the country, encounters a company of Ranter converts, all formerly "strict in religion," who condemn the tinker for remaining "legal and dark." They contend, comments Bunyan,
that "they only had attained to perfection that could do
what they would, and not sin" (45).

Bunyan's description of his friend, who has gone
through all religions before becoming a Ranter, parallels
closely the experience of Laurence Clarkson recounted in his
spiritual autobiography, The Lost Sheep Found, published in
1660. Clarkson subtitles his narrative "The Prodigal
returned to his Fathers House after many a sad and weary
Journey through many religious Countreys." In almost
picaresque fashion, Clarkson, always on the move
geographically as well as spiritually, describes his journey
through the "religious countreys" of Episcopacy,
Presbyterianism, Independency, Antinomianism, and
Anabaptism. As a Baptist, he found himself accused of
dipping "six sisters one night naked" (19), a charge which
resulted in a prison sentence. Upon release, Clarkson
abandoned the Baptists to become a Seeker. What he found,
as a Seeker, was a Canterbury "maid of pretty knowledge"
with whom he satisfied his lust, an act which evidently
prepared him to enter the "religious country" of the
Ranters. There he began to preach "that there was no sin,
but as man esteemed it sin, and therefore none can be free
from sin, till in purity it be acted as no sin" (25). In
this doctrine, Clarkson explains, he "pleaded the words of
Paul 'That I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that
there was nothing unclean, but man esteemed it'" (25).
Based on this reading of Titus 1:15, Clarkson concludes, "Till you can lie with all women as one woman, and not judge it sin, you can do nothing but sin" (25).

Sarah Kullin, hearing this doctrine, invited Clarkson to make a trial of his teaching, which he did with Sarah and "one or two more like herself." Evidently the success of this "trial" spread, for by the following Sunday, it had been "noised abroad what a rare man of knowledge" had come to that region, and thus "a great company of men and women, both young and old" came to Clarkson to hear his teaching (26).

Having thus become, as Clarkson records, "Captain of the Rant," he published his views in A Single Eye in 1650, and he continued for a time to live a scandalous life with men and women coming to hear him teach, "being restless until they were made free" (26). He reports that he sent his money to his wife, but gave his body to other women. Following the admonition of Ecclesiastes "to eat and to drink, and to delight" his soul all the days of his life, he worked to make "glad the heart of God," as required in Solomon's writings. Thus he and a Mrs. Star began to travel up and down the country as man and wife, spending their time in feasting and drinking so that, as he reports, "Tavernes I called the house of God; and the Drawers, Messengers; and Sack, Divinity" (28).

When, however, at a meeting attended by "a great
company," Doctor Paget's maid stripped herself naked and skipped among those present, scandalized and outraged officials finally arrested Clarkson, who was eventually sentenced to a month of imprisonment. After his release, he reports, he continued his journey through occultism and atheism. Finally, his journey through "religious countreys" ends with his conversion to the Muggletonian sect.

Clarkson's autobiography *Lost Sheep Found*, with its titillating content, and his *A Single Eye*, the Ranter text, make evident the temptations offered to sectarians by those who had been "swept away" by the Ranters. Bunyan recalls:

Oh! these temptations were suitable to my flesh, I being but a young man, and my nature in its prime; but God, who had, as I hope, designed me for better things, kept me in the fear of his name, and did not suffer me to accept of such principles. (45)

In a recurring theme of *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan alludes to a sense of vulnerability to "temptations of the flesh." In his youth, he reports, he "let loose the reins" to his lusts; later, the pastor of the church in Bedford, Mr. Gifford, leads Bunyan to recognize the "lusts and corruptions" that accompany his "wicked thoughts and desires" (77). The Ranters' call to a "perfection" that permitted and even encouraged carnal indulgence tempted the passionate nature Bunyan struggled to control. Using
scripture to support their position, the Ranters ridiculed
the sober "dark" young tinker for his legalism and
blindness.

Bunyan, in returning to edit his autobiography, sets
the section on the Ranters just before the section that
plunges the protagonist into an obsessive study of the
Bible. This juxtaposition, it would seem, suggests the
emerging divided self: the young man with a passionate
"heart" that calls him to the desires of the flesh wars
against the young man with a passionate "soul" that desires
salvation from those lusts. When he gives place to his
heart, Bunyan records, he courts damnation. Careless of his
soul and heaven, his heart continually hangs back "as a clog
on the leg of a bird to hinder her from flying" (77). At
times his heart "shuts itself up against the Lord, and
against his holy Word" (81), while his soul, knowing the
dangers of the worldly heart, looks to eternity and lies
"like a horse leech at the vein," crying "Give, give" (42).
Bunyan's confrontation with the Ranters externalizes his
inner conflict; reflecting back after Grace Abounding has
undergone several editions, he seems to see that the Ranter
indulgences mirror an aspect of himself.

More importantly for this study, the Ranters represent
for Bunyan his vulnerability, as a reader of the Bible, to
misinterpretation. The Ranters justified their "cursed
principles" with scriptural evidence. Clarkson himself
writes with a consciousness that his errors sprang from his misinterpretation of verses in Titus and Ecclesiastes. Like the Quaker, Baptist, and Muggletonian, the Ranter claimed the right to interpret the scripture for himself and validated his position by the authority of the Bible. But who can be certain he reads the sacred text rightly? Who can be certain that his own blindness will not lead him into error? Bunyan's prayer, he concludes, keeps him from "ranting errors," but the battle with the scriptures for his own truth still lies ahead.

That entry into the scriptures for the protagonist begins comfortably enough with his reading the "Epistles of the Apostle S. Paul," writings that he first finds "sweet and pleasant" (46). But to become a reader of Paul's letters, as Sharrock notes, is to enter texts that for the Sectarian are "repositories of the theology of grace and election" (Bunyan 32). There the Calvinists finds scriptural basis for the doctrine of predestination. And there Bunyan finds that the "sweet and pleasant" words of Paul begin to raise disturbing questions: Do I have faith? Am I elected? How if the day of grace is past and gone? Am I called? To read the Bible, Bunyan learns, is to encounter questions that for the reader remove all present comfort and undermine all certainties. And, interestingly enough, to read Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* is to replicate that process, for the reader of Bunyan's autobiography invariably finds
expectations frustrated and answers that, when given, simply produce additional questions.

As the autobiographer reconstructs his entry into Bible reading, there is no suggestion of the naive response to scripture of the protagonist of the Relation. In his earlier autobiographical writing, Bunyan, a prisoner of only three months, asserted confidently to Justice of the Peace Paul Cobb that the scripture "will open itself and discover its meaning" in the event that two interpretations stand in conflict. But in Grace Abounding a less certain, more reflective narrator recounts the confusion produced by the questions that arise when a reader first undertakes the responsibility of Biblical interpretation.

The entry into Bible reading that begins with the deceptively innocent description of looking with "new eyes" and reading the "sweet and pleasant" Pauline letters erupts into a timeless, boundless world of terror and torment with respite only a preparation for further disruption and recurring disorientation. Time passes--a year, "a great while," a month, forty days, another year--until finally time no longer seems an appropriate measure for endless agony that disqualifies the sufferer for either death or life ("I . . . could not find myself fit for present death," but "to live long would make me yet more unfit" [111]). Spatial images of depth and height broaden the struggle to cosmic dimensions: in his despair Bunyan's heart is "laid
low as hell" and to rely on God's promises is no more possible than "reaching the sun" with his finger. Images of torment emerge: Bunyan is like the child, thrown down by the devil to lie rent and torn, wallowing and foaming. Storms descend on him; whirlwinds threaten to carry him away. To read, the autobiographer suggests, is to encounter questions and to experience disorientations that change the very dimensions of existence.

This emotional, agonizing process begins simply enough with a question—"Do I have faith?"—that occurs to Bunyan as he reads Paul's assertion to the Corinthians: "To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; and to another faith" (1 Cor. 12:8-9). The narrator reconstructs in some detail his first effort toward interpretation, tracing the process by which the young protagonist goes astray. Always vulnerable to doubt, the young reader begins to muse on the passage and fear that he indeed has no faith. But, though willing to concede that he is an "ignorant Sot," that is, without the Spirit's gifts of wisdom and knowledge of the Corinthian passage, he is reluctant to think of himself as a castaway, as one without faith. So, he decides, "at a venture I will conclude I am not altogether faithless, though I know not what Faith is." It would seem that to conclude "I am not faithless" is better than its opposite "I am faithless."

And it is just here that the reader of Grace Abounding, like
the novice interpreter, may make his own premature interpretation and reveal his own ignorance. Certainly this is true if the reader feels that the protagonist has responded correctly to Paul's assertion.

The next statement, necessarily, begins to undermine such a supposition:

For it was shewed me, and that too, (as I have since seen) by Satan, That those who conclude themselves in a faithless state, have neither rest nor quiet in their Souls; and I was loath to fall quite into despair. (48)

Again, the pressure of the sentence is to continue to assert that one is not faithless, for the faithless have "neither rest nor quiet" and they fall into despair. Such a condition seems completely undesirable. However, the careful reader, perhaps now becoming aware of the protagonist's limits, has noticed that the more perceptive narrator has begun a subtext that underlies the protagonist's interpretive efforts. In that subtext, it is Satan who has prompted the denial of the faithless state. It is the Tempter who prompts the protagonist to assume he has faith when he, indeed, has none. What seemed at first an appropriate response has been labeled in the next paragraph a "blinde and sad conclusion" (49). The reader, who may well have supported the protagonist's hope, has failed, too, to interpret well. Both the reader of the
autobiography and the protagonist have fallen to temptation, and perhaps both have learned something through this initiation experience of the fallibility of human interpreters.4

Plagued with uncertainty over "the business of Faith," Bunyan determines to place himself upon trial. "But alas, poor Wretch!" he laments, "so ignorant and brutish was I, that I knew to this day no more how to do it, than I know how to begin and accomplish that rare and curious piece of Art, which I never yet saw nor considered" (50). Ignorant, brutish, unskilled, but "put to [the] plunge" about this matter of faith, Bunyan again falls prey to the Tempter, who, he reports, uses scripture to urge the young man, as he walks between Elstow and Bedford, to work a miracle to prove whether or not he has faith:

I must say to the puddles that were in the horse pads, Be dry; and to the dry places, Be you the puddles. (51)

The temptation for Bunyan is to bypass interpretation of Paul's Corinthian statement and to rely, not on the Biblical

4 See Stanley E. Fish's Self-Consuming Artifacts (Chapter IV, "Progress in The Pilgrim's Progress 224-64) for a discussion of both Christian's and the reader's instruction in the wisdom of distrusting one's "own interpretative abilities" (264). The protagonist and reader of Grace Abounding, also, seem first to have to learn how not to read the text in the way that "every reader will certainly be tempted . . . to read it" (236). Bunyan's interest in "interpretive issues" that Fish finds primary in Pilgrim's Progress seems to have begun in Grace Abounding.
word, but rather on his own activity. If he can perform a miracle, that miracle will be evidence that he does, indeed, have faith. But, thinks Bunyan, if he is unable to perform the miracle, then for certain he has no faith and must conclude himself "a Cast-away and lost" (52). Bunyan laments, "Thus I was tossed betwixt the Devil and my own ignorance, and so perplexed, especially at some times, that I could not tell what to do" (52). The narrator perceives the plight of the would-be interpreter precisely: on the one hand, he has been deluded by the Tempter's misuse of scripture, and on the other, he himself has not learned to read and interpret the scripture for himself. The narrator understands more than the young protagonist, but, even so, he does not—or perhaps cannot—provide the "right" answer.

With his question concerning his faith still unanswered, Bunyan finds himself assaulted with a new question: "Am I elected?" Again, the Pauline writings, in this case a verse from Romans, seem "to trample" on his desires: "It is neither him that willeth, nor in him that runneth, but in God that sheweth mercy, Rom. 9. 16" (58). And, as before, the burden of response makes him anxious:

With this Scripture I could not tell what to do; for I evidently saw that unless the great God of infinite grace and bounty, had voluntarily chosen me to be a vessel of mercy, though I should desire, and long, and labour untill my heart did break, no good could come of it. (59)
The problem for the protagonist here is not the failure to interpret but the horror lest the knowledge gained through the scripture confirm with certainty his reprobation. Questions multiply; Bunyan depicts his inner state as a battleground where his own voice must combat the taunts of the Tempter:

O, Lord, thought I, what if I should not [be elected] indeed? It may be you are not, said the Tempter; it may be so indeed, thought I. Why then, said Satan, you had as good leave off, and strive no further; for if indeed you should not be Elected and chosen of God, there is no talke of your being saved: "For it is neither in him that willeth, nor in him that runneth, but in God that sheweth mercy." (60)

With the scripture having become a demonic voice taunting him, Bunyan endures weeks of oppression, finding himself "quite giving up the Ghost" of all hopes of attaining life, when, unexpectedly, another scriptural sentence seizes him: "Look at the generations of old, and see, did ever any trust in God and were confounded?" (62). Bunyan, "greatly enlightened and encouraged," resolves to search from Genesis to Revelations to read this scripture for himself:

So coming home, I presently went to my Bible to see if I could find that saying, not doubting but
to find it presently, for it was so fresh, and with such strength and confort on my spirit, that I was as if it talked with me. (63)

For "above a year" Bunyan engages in the search for this verse of "comfort and strength," asking "first this good man, and then, another," for help in locating the scripture, but no one knows the source. Finally, Bunyan himself finds the reference, surprisingly, in "the Apocrypha-Books."

Since nothing in his sectarian tradition would lead him to expect that the writings of the Apocrypha would be resources of "the experience of love and kindness of God," Bunyan is at first somewhat daunted; however, he concludes that the verse, though not in "those Texts that we call holy and Canonical," is "the sum and substance of many of the promises"; thus he accepts its comfort. The narrative voice concludes: "I bless God for that word, for it was of God to me; that word doth still, at times, shine before my face" (65).

Though Nussbaum does not work with this example, Bunyan's assessment of the Apocryphal text supports her argument that "Bunyan's troubled relationship to authority" must be recognized in *Grace Abounding*:

The very act of writing *Grace Abounding*, a prison document, provided him a way to defy the very authorities who denied him a preaching voice.

... The autobiography is, in a way, a sermon in
defiance of secular political authority. (Nussbaum 22)

Bunyan's subversiveness, it would seem, extends also to the protestant sectarians who would accept only the "authorized" Biblical text as a resource of God's word. Bunyan's sanction of the passage from Ecclesiasticus of the Apocrypha suggests that he tends to create a "theology accommodated to human experience." His personal experience takes precedence over the sectarian reluctance to accept the uncanonical text. Forced to adjudicate textual authority for himself, Bunyan extends the canon and, in doing so, extends and enlarges possibilities of experience for himself as he writes and for the protagonist as he learns to read the texts of truth. In this incident Bunyan makes his own experience authoritative, and, ironically, in doing so, he is refusing to be limited by other conflicting human notions of authority.

As the narrator continues to probe alternate ways of searching for truth through interpretive responses to texts, before either his first question—"Do I have faith?"—or his second question—"Am I elected?"—has been answered, a third question disturbs him: "But how if the day of grace should

be past and gone?" (66). Perhaps, Bunyan ponders, he has
"over-stood the time of mercy":

And to aggravate my trouble, the Tempter presented
to my mind those good people of Bedford, and
suggested thus unto me, That these being converted
already, they were all that God would save in
those parts, and that I came too late, for these
had got the blessing before I came. (66)

Finding himself in "great distress" and counting himself
"far worse than a thousand fools," the protagonist cries
out, "Oh, that I had turned sooner! Oh that I had turned
seven years agoe; it made me also angry with myself, to
think that I should have no more wit but to trifle away my
time till my Soul and Heaven were lost" (67).

Dayton Haskin, writing about the sense of "belatedness"
in both Bunyan and Luther, suggests that Bunyan's concern
here is threefold in nature: 1) in the course of his own
life, he may be "too late" for salvation; 2) in "the path of
Christian history as imagined among the millenarians" he may
have "arrived too late to be saved"; and 3) in his
experience as a writer, he may have arrived too late, for
"everything bearing upon salvation had been said and written
and done already" and thus the "day of originality was
past."6 For the protagonist, the question seems to center

6 Dayton Haskin, "Bunyan, Luther, and the Struggle with
Belatedness in Grace Abounding," University of Toronto
Quarterly 50 (1981): 302-303. Subsequent references to this
article will appear by page number in the text.
foremost on his personal salvation, fearing that a predetermined number of sinners elected had been saved during the time he remained foolishly unconcerned with the state of his soul. But Bunyan may also be concerned for himself as writer, for as the narrator recreates the protagonist's distress over the question of belatedness, he seems to be consciously and insistently introducing a variety of responses to scripture dealing with the questions of Calvinism as the sectarians understood them. While the protagonist learns to read and interpret, the narrator enlarges the hermeneutical possibilities. In this way, he is demonstrating that he is not "too late" as a writer, but rather he has much to say arising from his individual experience.

Bunyan first links the distress over belatedness with his doubts over his election:

> When I had been long vexed with this fear [of the day of grace being past and gone], and was scarce able to take one step more, just about the same place where I received my other encouragement [the verse from the Aprocrypha that encouraged him to hope for election], these words broke in upon my mind, "Compel them to come in, that my house may be filled, and yet there is roome," Luke 14:22,23. These words, but especially them, "And yet there is roome," were sweet words to me; for, truly, I
thought that by them I saw there was place enough in Heaven for me. (68)

Then the narrator stresses the protagonist's subjective method of interpretation:

Moreover, [I thought] that when the Lord Jesus did speak these words, he then did think of me, and that he knowing that the time would come that I should be afflicted with fear, that there was no place left for me in his bosome, did before speak this word, and leave it upon record that I might find help thereby against this vile temptation. (68)

The 1666 edition of *Grace Abounding* ends the paragraph there, but in the third edition, Bunyan adds: "This, I then verily believed" (68). The addition seems to stress the distance between the narrator's and protagonist's perspectives. The protagonist's interpretation is subjective; he believes Jesus spoke the words for him, for the comfort of a particular struggler who would read the words more than 1600 years later. The narrator separates himself from such a subjective interpretation, but he does not negate that perspective. On the contrary, he heightens it by repetition in the next paragraph:

In the light and encouragement of this word, I went a pretty while, and the comfort was the more, when I thought that the Lord Jesus should think on
me so long agoe, and that he should speak them words on purpose for my sake, for I did then think verily, that he did on purpose speak them to encourage me withall. (69)

This perspective stands, along with the encouragement from the Apocryphal text, as an effort to respond to Biblical texts in a search for truth. It carries only the authority of personal experience, but still it remains one possible way of finding oneself in the Biblical text.

Another possibility for interpretation for the sectarian lay in the use of Biblical typology, a much more orthodox hermeneutic than the protagonist's subjectivism, but a practice that was also able to bring together Biblical event and individual experience. For Peterson, *Grace Abounding* exemplifies the "hermeneutical" autobiographical text in which self-interpretation is privileged and for

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7 Peterson defines biblical typology "in its most orthodox form" as "a system of interpretation in which characters, events, and sacred objects of the Old Testament prefigured Christ or some aspect of Christian doctrine." She notes further that "in common practice, however, especially among Puritans and later among evangelicals, most of these Old Testament types were also applied to the lives of the individual Christians. . . . The possibilities for the personal application of types were almost infinite, limited only by the principles of typological hermeneutics and by the interpreter's imagination" (6-7). Peterson cites Earl Miner's *Literary Uses of Typology from the Late Middle Ages to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977) to support her statement: "From the seventeenth century through the middle of the nineteenth . . . biblical typology was the most important hermeneutic method in England" (22-23).
which Biblical hermeneutics provides principles and strategies of interpretation. Against Bunyan's text, Peterson measures the major Victorian autobiographies, texts that she argues are "self-conscious reflections upon the nature and process of interpretation itself" (28).

Bunyan's text, I would argue, also seems to exhibit a high consciousness of the interpretive act. So much so, that in the third edition Bunyan adds a paragraph introducing the principles of typological hermeneutics applied to an Old Testament passage that would seem to have little relevance to the protagonist's personal experience. Through a system of typology, however, even so unlikely a scripture as Deuteronomy 14, detailing the laws of Moses to the Israelites, can be interpreted as relevant to the Christian life:

I was also made about this time to see something concerning the Beasts that Moses counted clean, and unclean. I thought those Beasts were types of men; the clean types of them that were the People of God; but the unclean types of them that were the children of the wicked One. (71)

Bunyan makes only a glancing reference to the quotation from the Bible but leaps to his concern, the interpretation. Peterson notes that this pattern is fairly typical of Bunyan whose "interpretive excess" generally leads him to devote far more effort in Grace Abounding to interpretation than to
narration (10-11). Most significantly, through what seems to be a primer introducing a typological hermeneutic, Bunyan makes Mosaic law applicable to the anxieties of the protagonist and to lives of individual Christians: clean beasts that chew the cud typify believers who feed upon the Word of God. Beasts that part the hoof signify that believers must part with "the ways of ungodly men." The swine, although it has a split hoof, is nonetheless unclean, typifying "him that parteth with his outward Pollutions" but still lacks "the Word of Faith," without which there can be no salvation, warns Bunyan, "let a man be never so devout" (71).

The autobiographer's addition of a typological hermeneutic suggests the necessity of interpretation, the importance of interpretive tools, and the strenuous effort necessary to extract spiritual meaning and to discover divine purpose in the Bible or in individual experience. More importantly, perhaps, the many hermeneutical exercises represent the autobiographer's effort to make the protagonist's personal narrative one with the Biblical master story. *Grace Abounding* exists as a testimony to its author's commitment to interpret the shape and meaning of his life, to construct his identity, within the Biblical text. The protagonist's questions prod him to explore interpretive procedures, eclectically gathering divergent practices in the quest for understanding. Seemingly, the
autobiographer writes with increasing awareness of the necessity of interpretation, but the task also seems to become increasingly complex. Even with many interpretive tools, the protagonist's questions remain unanswered and his identity uncertain.

To the question—"Am I called?—the protagonist responds in a now-familiar pattern: "Here again I was at a very great stand, not knowing what to doe, fearing I was not called" (72). He longs for certainty of his calling: "I cannot now express with what longings and breakings in my Soul, I cryed to Christ to call me" (73). And after "many months together, . . . the Word came in upon me, 'I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed: for the Lord dwelleth in Zion.' Joel 3.21" (76). The narrator, having brought the protagonist and reader far in interpretive methods, finds it unnecessary to focus on the activity of hermeneutics; instead he simply assumes that the Old Testament verse can apply to the protagonist's situation and he undertakes an interpretation: "These words I thought were sent to encourage me to wait still upon God, and signified unto me, that if I were not already, yet time might come I might be in truth converted to Christ" (76).

With this promise, Bunyan's apprenticeship, his initial effort to become a reader and interpreter of the biblical text, seems to end. The questions concerning his faith, election, belatedness, and calling seemingly have arisen
during the period when he was "never out of the Bible, either by reading or meditation" (46), a time after he heard the three or four poor women of Bedford, "sitting at a door in the Sun, and talking about the things of God" (37). Their talk of a "new birth" has stirred his desire for salvation, but his efforts to achieve a certitude of salvation through reading the Bible and reading himself in the Biblical text have produced only unanswered questions. These questions, however, along with the rigorous hermeneutical effort, seem to have been a necessary preparation for a new self-understanding. The protagonist has learned to read the Bible, but he has not yet read himself. He has learned to interpret but he has not yet produced a self-interpretation. He can, however, begin that task because, presumably, he now knows two things: he knows that he must bring his experience to the Biblical word and risk interpretation, and he knows, also, that he must distrust all interpretations. Having learned the necessary role of the self seeking insight, he is ready to learn why that self's insights cannot be trusted.

Thus Bunyan reports, "At this time I began to break my mind to those poor people in Bedford, and to tell them my condition" (77). The Bedford church members in turn introduce Bunyan to their pastor John Gifford.

Before becoming a minister, Gifford had been a Royalist major, a Bedford physician, and a "gamester and debauchee"
(Sharrock, Notes, GA 140). After his conversion, he began preaching, eventually leading in the formation of the independent congregation at Bedford in 1650 and serving as its pastor until his death in 1655. Gifford seems to function in Bunyan's life much like Evangelist in the life of the protagonist of *Pilgrim's Progress*. In Bunyan's allegory, Evangelist is a figure of severity and wrath, as well as a man of wisdom and strength. He appears first with a parchment roll, urging Christian to flee toward the Wicket Gate, and when Worldly-Wiseman offers "safety, friendship, and content," it is Evangelist who reappears with a "severe and dreadful countenance." He scorns Christian's desire for a "better way," one "not so attended with difficulties." Then, insisting on the way he has set for Christian, Evangelist calls aloud to Heaven for confirmation, producing "words and fire" out of the mountain, which make the very hair of Christian's flesh stand on end (*Pilgrim's Progress* 41, 50-57). In *Grace Abounding* Bunyan seems humbly and painfully aware that his meeting with Gifford set him on his own difficult journey, making the questions and confusion that had come before seem almost comfortable by contrast.

In recalling his meeting with the Bedford minister, Bunyan reconstructs a pivotal moment in his search, but one that, ironically, does not yield expected results. For instead of offering comfort, Gifford "discovers" to Bunyan "something of the vanity and inward wretchedness" of his
"wicked heart," ("for as yet I knew no great matter therein," comments Bunyan). From Gifford, Bunyan also discovers himself to be full of "lusts and corruptions" and "wicked thoughts and desires," ("which I did not regard before," notes Bunyan). And, perhaps most significantly, Bunyan reports:

Whereas before my Soul was full of longings after God, now my heart began to hanker after every foolish vanity . . . and began to be careless, both of my Soul and Heaven; it would now continually hang back both to, and in every duty, and was as a clog on the leg of a Bird to hinder her from flying. (77)

This before-and-after rendition seems to undermine the conventional expectation of the effect of a religious counselor in a searcher's life. Rather than comforter, Gifford seems to function as a gadfly, increasing Bunyan's misery, creating greater agony, and, finally, propelling him into a year-long period of despair of his salvation.

As Bunyan retraces the year of his first temptation to despair, convinced that he has been "forsaken of God" and given up "to the Devil and to a reprobate mind" (84), the language becomes vividly figural. The wicked desires of his heart are a hindrance to his soul, as a clog on the leg of a bird hinders it from flying. He sinks so greatly in his soul and becomes so discouraged that he is laid as "low as
Hell," unable to believe, even if he were burned at a stake, that Christ has love for him. In his dejection Bunyan laments: "Alas, I could neither hear [Christ], nor see him, nor feel him, nor savor any of his things" (78).

When he tells his low condition to the people, they urge God's promises, but, cries Bunyan, "they had as good have told me that I must reach the Sun with my finger, as have bidden me receive or relie upon the Promise" (79). The protagonist is a ship, driven by a tempest. Or he is the child who is brought by his father to Christ, but who, even as he is coming, is "thrown down by the Devil," to be rent and torn so that he lies wallowing and foaming (80). Or his heart is like a gate shut against God and His Word, with his unbelief seemingly set with its "shoulder to the door" to keep God out (81).

Ironically, however, while wretched with a sense of his own wickedness on one hand, on the other he shuns all acts of sin; his conscience is so tender and sore that it smarts at every touch:

I durst not take a pin or a stick, though but so big as a straw. . . . I could not now tell how to speak my words, for fear I should mis-place them: 0 how gingerly did I then go, in all I did or said. (82)

In a description that points toward Christian's tumble into the "Slough of Despond," Bunyan finds himself "as on a miry bog, that shook if I did but stir" (82).
When Bunyan revises this section for the third edition, he both heightens and explains the distress he suffered. He was not suffering guilt for sins he had committed in ignorance, not, it would seem, for swearing, Sunday sports, or bellringing. Rather he suffered because of man's inner depravity, in Bunyan's words, "my Original and inward pollution, that, that was my plague and my affliction" (84). "By reason of that," says Bunyan,

I was more loathsom in mine own eyes then was a toad and I thought I was in Gods eyes too: Sin and corruption, I said, would as naturally bubble out of my heart, as water would bubble out of a fountain. (84)

Heightening this sense of primal and original sin, Bunyan suggests, "I thought none but the Devil himself could equalize me for inward wickednes and pollution of minde" (84). In this addition, the narrator seems to be striving to articulate the protagonist's personal apprehension of inner depravity. It is the protagonist's experiential grasp of his sinfulness that justifies the title of the autobiographical narrative asserting that its subject is, indeed, the "chief of sinners."

Bunyan's claim to equality with Satan in wickedness and his self-designation as "chief of sinners" seems to repeat a commonplace of seventeenth-century sectarian autobiography. St. Paul had labeled himself the "chief of sinners" (I
Timothy 1:16), Oliver Cromewell was, also, "the chief of sinners," and sectarians like Bunyan, Anna Trapnel, and Sarah Wright followed the Pauline-Calvinist model in their own self-constructions.\(^8\) Repeatedly, however, when Bunyan uses the conventional categories, he probes and worries them until they take on considerable complexity. In this case, he searches the process by which the protagonist comes into a new self-consciousness derived from a re-interpretation of the self and its relationship to a larger reality. From his Bible reading, he has learned to his horror that he may "perish forever," and from Gifford and the Bedford congregation he has had reflected his wickedness; these reflections of his own "vileness" overwhelm the protagonist until he cries, "My Soul is dying, my soul is damning" (85).

His confusion increases when his painful self-interpretation is set against the self-constructions of others who hold quite different notions of the self and its relationship to reality. Around him, he finds "old people hunting after the things of this life as if they should live here alwayes" and professors of religion spending tears "for the things of this present life" (85). The protagonist can only wonder at the difference between his and his neighbors' concerns. His new self-consciousness has alienated him from

\(^8\) See Tindall 30, 37; Talon 21-22; and Delany 78-79 for discussions of what Delany calls "rival claimants" to the title "chief of sinners."
those whose labors and cares are "for the things of this present life" and has focused all his anxiety on an indefinable "soul." At the same time the sense of his soul's wickedness seems to separate him from the Bedford believers. His response to this new consciousness is to lament that God made him a man rather than a beast, a bird, or a fish:

I blessed their condition, for they had not a sinful nature, they were not obnoxious in the sight of God; they were not to go to Hell fire after death; I could therefore a (sic) rejoiced had my condition been as any of theirs. (88)

The new self-consciousness that prompts the self-identification of "chief of sinners" does not, in Bunyan's experience, lead to an identification with other great sinners but instead leads to a painful isolation: "I counted my self alone, and above the most of men unblest" (87).

Bunyan's "I-consciousness" in Grace Abounding may be contrasted to the "I-consciousness" of the Relation. In the Relation Bunyan writes out of a heightened sense of being chosen "the hope of the country" and "the first to be opposed for the gospel" following his arrest at Samsell. That arrest seemed to constitute an "I-am-me" experience, a necessary moment in the autobiographer's impulse toward self-definition. That first effort of self-construction ended with the autobiographical voice silenced and the "I"
of the Relation lost. In the context of that loss—the death of the "hero" of the Relation—the autobiographer attempts, once again, but at a level he describes as "going down into the deep," to reconstruct the quintessential "I" of John Bunyan. He no longer is the "hope of the country," and his self-consciousness no longer arises from the opposition of civil magistrates or the devotion of fellow-believers. Rather he is the Sunday gamester, addressed by God in the midst of a game of cat. He is the loathsome creature "in God's eyes" from whose heart flows sin and corruption. For Bunyan to discover that "I am an I" is to risk a new self-interpretation. The "I" is a soul, "damning," dying without God's grace. To discover this soul to be loathsome, wretched, and wicked recovers for Bunyan an essential moment of painful self-definition. This "I" has been constructed after the "I" that was "the chosen of God" and the "hope of the country" has been lost. If one does not cancel the other out, then they must, at least, both exist in juxtaposition. This process of construction in itself suggests that to know the self involves changing interpretations; self-definition involves choosing and re-choosing responses to experience. These autobiographical acts suggest that for Bunyan to write the story of the self is far more complex than the replication of the commonplace designations of sectarian autobiography.

And, as Bunyan continues his narrative, it is this
increasingly complex self that Bunyan brings, once again, to further shaping encounters with the Biblical text. After articulating his heightened consciousness of a depraved "I," he juxtaposes three encounters of that "I" with the Bible. In each case he attempts a self-definition in response to the encounter, only to end with three different, conflicting self-interpretations.

First, upon hearing a sermon, perhaps by Gifford (though Bunyan does not name the minister), based on a verse in the Song of Solomon, "Behold thou art fair, my Love; behold thou art fair," Bunyan, though getting little out of the sermon's conclusions, continues to be haunted by the two words "my love" that were the focus of the sermon's text. As he makes his way home, the two words begin to kindle in his spirit; he seems to hear, he reports, "Thou art my Love, thou art my Love," twenty times together:

and still as they ran thus in my minde, they waxed stronger and warmer, and began to make me look up.

(91)

Bunyan recalls that his heart was so "full of comfort and hope" that he could momentarily believe his sins forgiven:

I thought I could have spoken of his Love and of his mercy to me, even to the very Crows that sat upon the plow'd lands before me. (92)

Bunyan's joy is so full that he feels the need to record the moment:
Well, I would I had a pen and ink here, I would write this down before I go any further, for surely I will not forget this forty years hence.

(92)

Here Bunyan seems to have his first impetus to record his experience and his first intuition that writing can bring into existence an "I" who knows God's love and mercy and can speak that word to others. But ink and pen are not at hand, so that "alas," Bunyan laments, "within less then forty days I began to question all again" (92). The questions return, but Bunyan doesn't forget this experience: in Bedford jail, with pen and ink at hand, he can reconstruct the warmth, hope, and fear; he can hear again the "joyful sound" within his soul. He can recall how he believed his sins forgiven, and he remembers how he could not contain the love and mercy he felt until he reached home. For a moment, Bunyan has been a different man, and that man exists in the text he writes as a testament to his self-construction. Accompanying this experience is Bunyan's sense that to write, to capture the event in words, is to focus this rich experience, enabling the writer to create the person he feels himself, for the moment, to be. With no pen and ink, the invention of this new self occurs almost simultaneously with its loss.

Following this experience of gain and loss comes "a very great storm" upon him, "twenty times worse" than all he has met before. Bit by bit, his comfort disappears; then
darkness seizes him; and, finally, "whole flouds of Blasphemies" pour upon his spirit. The mercy and love he felt from the Biblical word "Thou art my love" turns to confusion and astonishment as "blasphemous thoughts" pose unthinkable questions. Is there in truth a God or Christ? Are the holy Scriptures "a Fable and cunning Story?" With these doubts come, recounts Bunyan, the Tempter's assaults:

How can you tell but that the Turks had as good Scriptures to prove their Mahomet the Saviour, as we have to prove our Jesus is? . . . Everyone doth think his own Religion rightest, both Jews, and Moors, and Pagans; and how if all our Faith, and Christ, and Scriptures, should be but a think-so too? (97)

Though Bunyan attempts to rebut his doubts with Paul's writings, that very effort turns upon him:

Though we made so great a matter of Paul, and of his words, yet how could I tell but that in very deed, he, being a subtle and cunning man, might give himself up to deceive with strong delusions?" (98)

Indeed, Bunyan now does see the Bible with new eyes, but the text, rather than serving as a repository of truth, seems itself capable of deception. Bunyan feels "as if there were nothing else . . . from morning to night" within him but these questions (99). He wonders if he is "possessed of the
Devil" or "bereft of his wits" (101). Others laud and magnify God, but the protagonist, whether he thinks "that God was, or again did think there were no such thing," can feel "no love, no peace, nor gracious disposition" within (101). The narrator compares the protagonist's plight to the child who has been taken up under the apron of "some Gypsie" and by force carried from Friend and Country, kicking, screaming, and crying (102). What Bunyan's metaphors recreate is the sense that a wholly different self has emerged. The self who reads the Bible with skepticism seems wholly other than the self who responded as God's beloved to the Song of Solomon text.

And both the beloved self and the skeptical self are juxtaposed to the Bunyan who eventually, following the advice of "holy Mr. Gifford," returns to the Bible to be confirmed in its truths for himself, to be led as reader "truth by truth" from Christ's birth to his second coming, and to have as his interpreter in this reading the revelation of God himself. Bunyan, once again, "sees the Bible with new eyes" as he describes his "orderly" movement through the gospel:

Me thought I was as if I had seen him born, as if I had seen him grow up, as if I had seen him walk thorow this world, from the Cradle to his Cross; to which, also, when he came, I saw how gently he gave himself to be hanged and nailed on it for my sins and wicked doings. (120)
Even complexities such as how "the Lord Jesus was both Man as well as God" become clear as Bunyan discovers a facility for interpreting the symbolism of Revelation and thus clarifying this complex doctrine: "O methought this did glister, it was a goodly touch and gave me sweet satisfaction" (122). Bunyan's orderly and satisfying interpretations of the Biblical text produce a new self-construction. This Biblical exegete must stand in tension with the skeptic and the lover. The reader of his autobiography comes to feel that these selves do not so much succeed each other as exist simultaneously, giving richness and complexity to the "I" being constituted itself as a text.

And it is here that we find, at least in part, the characteristics that make Bunyan's self-narration distinctive. First, the protagonist is obsessed with recounting the shaping effect the Bible has on his life; for him, self-definition lies in "reading Bunyan" in the Bible alone. And, second, when the Bible refuses a unitary self-definition to the neophyte reader, the narrator must invariably read the protagonist's earlier attempts in reading. But the narrator, too, finds himself unable to reconcile the protagonist's disparate readings so that Bunyan's text becomes, finally, a chain of indeterminate readings in which the author is reading the narrator reading the protagonist reading the Biblical text, and all these
readings are being read and must be interpreted by the reader of *Grace Abounding*. At no point does this "house of mirrors" produce a stilled, single image. Yet when no unitary self-definition emerges from the multiple readings that constitute Bunyan's self-narration, the autobiographer refuses to falsify his experience in order to produce either a coherent text or a unitary self. His integrity lies in his determination to recount his experience "whole," even when his text must sustain the tension and confusion of the multiple, conflicting self-constructions that emerge.⁹

To add to this complex process of self-narration, the autobiographer in the revisions to *Grace Abounding* insists not only that the protagonist's self-definition must emerge from the Bible but also that it must differentiate itself from the competing self-constructions of fellow sectarians. In the revised third edition of Bunyan's autobiography, the narrator contrasts the protagonist's reading of the Bible with "the errors of the Quakers" (123). Listing the Quaker errors, the narrator emphasizes the Quakers' failure to believe "the holy Scriptures" are "the Word of God." U. Milo Kaufman notes that for the Puritan, God speaks his revelation through the Word; thus Quakerism's image of an "inner light" was suspect unless "the light which lighted

⁹ Conversations with James Olney and John I. Fischer have clarified these points for me. The "house of mirrors" image is James Olney's; the assessment of Bunyan's integrity is John I. Fischer's.
every man who came in the world was . . . judged by the Word."10

Bunyan's first published writings were directed against the Quakers. In 1656, four years before his imprisonment, Bunyan published his first tract, Some Gospel Truths Opened, in which he protested the mysticism of Quaker teachings, arguing that such spiritualizing ignores the facts of revelation. When the young Quaker, Edward Burrough, replied to Bunyan's attack in The True Faith of the Gospel of Peace, Bunyan, within a few weeks, penned a rebuttal, A Vindication of Gospel Truths Opened. In this work Bunyan associates the Quakers with the Ranters, arguing that the two sects hold similar opinions, the only difference being that the Ranters make their doctrines "threadbare at an alehouse" while the Quakers set a "new gloss" upon the same doctrines by "an outward legal holiness" (Brown 109). Richard L. Greaves suggests that Bunyan reacted with "an almost crass objectivity based on an infallible Bible" in his "crusade" against the Quakers.11 Henri Talon notes that Bunyan was "revolted" by the Quaker doctrine that man could find "redemptive force within his


own self"; such a doctrine, argues Talon, undermined the "authority of the Holy Books" on which Bunyan relied and, alternately, the Quaker error "made his own conception of the truth clear to him" (96).

In the passage added to Grace Abounding, Bunyan asserts that the Quakers' "vile and abominable" teachings drove him to "a more narrow search of the Scriptures" (125). In 1666 when Bunyan's autobiography was first published, his "downright earnest" search for truth lay in the Bible; in the 1672 third edition Bunyan frames that search with his response to the Ranter texts and the Quaker errors. This revision tells much about the cultural milieu in which Bunyan attempted a self-interpretation, suggesting that Bunyan's determination to find the shape and meaning of his life in the Biblical text was waged, at least in part, as an effort to define himself apart from what he considered the Ranter and Quaker heresies. What seems interesting in this sectarian milieu is that, though Laurence Clarkson can be labeled a Ranter (at least at one period of his "journey through many religious Countreys") and Burrough can be labeled a Quaker, it is much less easy to identify Bunyan by a traditional sectarian label. He is often thought of as Baptist, and once he referred to himself as an Anabaptist, but upon his release from prison he attained a license as a Congregationalist teacher. When asked directly to which church he belonged, Bunyan insisted that he went only under
the name Christian (Greaves 22). Bunyan's strong renunciation of the Ranters and Quakers was often voiced as an objection to their failure to be judged by the Word. Identity for Bunyan, it seems, did not lie in sect or church but was inextricably linked to the Bible.

Bunyan's discomfort with the Ranters and Quaker teachings also seems to encompass the fellow-sectarian autobiographical narratives, for in addition to the sections concerning his opposition to the Ranters and Quakers, Bunyan interjected, as part of the third-edition revisions, his search for a personal narrative written by a "Godly man." He wanted to read an autobiographical account uncontaminated with sectarian religious controversy or one that was not merely a replication of "that which others felt":

I did greatly long to see some ancient Godly man's Experience who had writ some hundred of years before I was born; for, for those who had writ in our days, I thought (but I desire them now to pardon me) that they had Writ only that which others felt, or else had, thorow the strength of their Wits and Parts, studied to answer such Objections as they perceived others were perplexed with, without going down themselves into the deep.

(129)
The narrator asks for pardon ("I desire them now to pardon me") because he, it seems, is no longer inclined to judge
his fellow-sectarians' self-narrations; this point I will return to later. The protagonist, however, in contrast to the narrator, finds in his contemporaries' personal narratives only experiences derived from others, or, perhaps worse, he finds that they simply make use of personal experience to address doctrinal controversy.

Bunyan may have known, for example, the autobiographical narrative of Edward Burrough, his Quaker opponent, whose experiences were published under the title *Description of My Manner of Life* in 1663, the year after his death in Newport gaol in 1662. In 1654 Burrough had printed a rougher form of his autobiography as an appendix to his first tract written to expound Quaker teachings (Tindall 27). Burrough describes his movement from Anglicanism through Presbyterianism through a period of darkness until his "awakening" by the Lord through a Messenger who declares the "Message of Eternal Light" (8). Delany notes that Quaker tracts with brief, subjective testimonies of faith began to appear in 1654 (98), making up a part of the "vast pamphlet literature" that came into existence between 1649 and 1660, "most of it more or less personal in tone" (Delany 82). Technology meant a large reading public had access to varied statements of religious experience, and these statements multiplied as emerging sects "engaged in vigorous propagandizing and seized on cheap printing as an effective means of spreading their beliefs" (Delany 81). The
protagonist of *Grace Abounding*, uncomfortable with these contemporary writings, yearned to read an autobiographical account written before the confusions of the Commonwealth period, an account that could be considered original and thus uncontaminated.

Bunyan continues:

Well, after many such longings in my mind, the God in whose hands are all our days and ways, did cast into my hand, one day, a book of Martin Luther, his comment on the Galathians, so old that it was ready to fall piece from piece, if I did but turn it over. (129)

Upon reading the commentary, Bunyan discovers, much to his delight and comfort, his own story:

I found my condition in his experience, so largely and profoundly handled, as if his Book had been written out of my heart. (129)

Bunyan can only marvel that Luther's experience should anticipate his own:

For thus thought I, this man could not know anything of the state of Christians now, but must needs write and speak of the Experience of former days. (129)

Bunyan found Luther's commentary generously glossed with accounts of his personal experience of temptations to despair and confessions of his sins that compelled him to
hate and blaspheme God. For Bunyan to find that Luther's experience anticipates his own experience with doubt and despair in his quest for salvation seems a validation. In Luther's text he finds a first-hand account of one who has also himself gone down into the deep and can report what he feels out of that experience. Here is one whose personal story does not simply function as a display of "wits and parts" in order to propagate his beliefs. Because Bunyan finds his own story in Luther's, he feels that his miseries are appropriate to the sinner seeking grace.

Bunyan at first hoped to define himself in response to the Biblical text alone, but he found it necessary also to define himself apart from contemporary sectarians like the Ranters and Quakers, whose personal narratives also claim to be validated by the scripture but whose lives have assumed a shape and meaning unacceptable to Bunyan. Thus to find his own condition in Luther's experience means that Bunyan has overleaped the narratives of Ranters and Quakers to one who, not knowing "anything of the state of Christians now," can speak of the experience of "former days" (129). Further, Luther associates his experience with the experience of the Apostle Paul, as Dayton Haskin notes: "Luther, emboldened by his insight into the Pauline texts, presumes at times to speak as if in the Apostle's own person; he assimilates their stories to one another" (305). For Bunyan to identify with Luther, then, moves his own experience via Luther into
the New Testament, a goal that Bunyan has been unable to accomplish satisfactorily for himself. By assimilating Luther's experience to his own as Luther assimilated Paul's, Bunyan can find his model, too, in the Apostle Paul.

Bunyan found in the prefatory comments of the English version of Luther's Commentarie a description of Luther's life with which he could readily identify. The author describes Luther's "blindnes" as a Friar, the awakening of his conscience to a "feeling of sinne," and his movement to a troubled state of remorse, fear, and misdoubt "whereby he was driven to seeke further":

So that by searching, seeking, conferring, and by reading of S. Paule, some sparkles of better knowledge began little by little to appeare.12

But no sooner had Luther begun to move toward a new understanding of Paul's teaching than "it happened to him as commonly it doth to all good Christians":

The more that the true knowledge of Christ in him increased, the more Sathan the enemie stirred with

12 Bunyan read Thomas Vautroullier's translation of A Commentarie of M. Doctor Martin Luther upon the Epistle of S. Paule to the Galathians, first published in 1575, with an address "To the Reader" by Thomas Sandys, Bishop of London. Sharrock assumes that Sandys also wrote the Preface addressed "To all afflicted consciences which grove for salvation . . ." (Notes GA 143). Subsequent editions of Vautroullier's translation, which reprint the address and preface, appeared in 1580, 1588, 1616, and 1640 (Haskin n. 4, 312-13). It is not known which edition Bunyan read; my quotations follow the 1588 edition.
his fierie dartes, with doubtes and objections,
with false terrours and subtill assaultes, seeking
by all meanes possible how to oppresse the inward
soule which would faine take his rest in Christ.

In Luther's battle with Satan, Bunyan finds his own battles
with the Tempter anticipated. He so identifies with the
preface's description of the "spirituall conflictes and
inward wrastlings" of Luther that he echoes in *Grace
Abounding* the following prefatory assessment of Luther's
*Commentarie*:

> For albeit most true it is, that no greater
comfort to the soule of man can be found in any
booke next to the holy Scripture, then in this
commentarie of M. Luther: so this comfort hath
little place, but onely where the conscience being
in heavinesse hath neede of the Phisitians hand.

(A 7-8)

In similar words, Bunyan exclaims: "I do prefer this book
of Mr. Luther upon the Galathians, (excepting the Holy
Bible) before all the books that ever I have seen, as fit
for a wounded Conscience" (130).

Luther's own self-descriptions in the *Commentarie*
continue to parallel Bunyan's experience. Luther describes
his childhood in terms familiar to Bunyan: "After I was
borne, [God] supported me, being loaden with innumerable and
most horrible iniquities. . . [H]ee of his meere grace
forgave me my abominable and infinite sins" (Fol 39). He even notes that "when he was a Monke" he thought he was "utterly cast away" (Fol 262). And, further, Luther offers comfort for Bunyan's spiritual battles: "Let no man therefore despair if hee feele the flesh oftentimes to stirre up new battels against the spirit. . . . I also doe wish my selfe, to have a more valiant and constant heart" (Fol 261). In Bunyan's view, Luther's experience seems to confirm and validate his own, offering him at last, a text to certify his own experience as authentic.

Bunyan found in Luther not only the validation of his own experience but also a source for his rather individualistic understanding of law and grace. Greaves, in his study of Bunyan's theology, emphasizes that designating Bunyan a Calvinist ignores the strong influence of Luther on his thought (153). In the revised Grace Abounding Bunyan notes his interest in Luther's description of the rise of temptations to blaspheme and to despair, experiences that he shares; but Bunyan also acknowledges his surprise that Luther credits these temptations, not only to "the Devil, Death, and Hell," but also to "the law of Moses." Bunyan reports, "[This] at first was very strange to me, but considering and watching, I found it so indeed" (130). Bunyan, in fact, consistently wrote that the law could only lead the sinner to despair. In 1657 to Quaker Edward Burroughs, Bunyan had responded:
The Law . . . is so far from leading us to Christ by our following it, that it doth even lead those that are led by it under the curse. Not because the Law hath an evil end in it, but because of our weaknesse and inability to do it; therefore it is forced, as it is just, to passe a sentence of condemnation on every one, that in every particular fulfills it not. (Greaves 102)

And in a manuscript left unprinted at his death, titled "Of the Law, and a Christian," Bunyan insists that the sinner "only and wholly standeth under the Law, as it is given in Fire, in Smoak, in Blackness, and Darkness, and Thunder; all which threaten him with Eternal ruin if he fulfil not the utmost tittle thereof" (191). This dichotomy between law and grace, paralleled by a dichotomous God of wrath and grace, was Bunyan's legacy from Luther, asserts Greaves (155-56).

In his Commentarie Luther had written: "He that setteth forth the law and workes to the old man, and the promose of forgivenesse of sinnes, and Gods mercy to the new man, devideth the word well" (fol. 6). Luther's Commentarie, argues Greaves, created in Bunyan an intense interest in the role of law and grace in the salvation of the sinner and led Bunyan to "unfold," individualistically, a doctrine of law and grace in a covenant theology (Greaves 118). In this unfolding, Bunyan argued vigorously against
fellow sectarians, particularly the Quakers, who presented God's relationship to man in terms of the mystical experience of "Inner Light." For Bunyan, the emphasis could not fall on man's experience but must rest solely on a covenant made by God alone, "without any real participation on man's part" (Greaves 106). Man could contain no inner light so long as he was under the law. To move from God's wrath to His grace meant to move from death (keeping the law) to life (God's mercy).

Haskins also notes that under Luther's tutelage Bunyan learned to read the Bible as the story of the law and grace. In "a great imaginative leap" Luther taught people to read the Bible as "a passage from Old Testament to New, from Law to Gospel, . . . from sin to abundant grace" (Haskin 307). Then Luther taught these same readers to read "their own lives and times, as recapitulating" the Biblical narrative (Haskin 310). Thus, to find himself in Luther's writing confirmed for the protagonist of *Grace Abounding* that he had, indeed, become a truthful reader of both the Bible and his own experience. In turn, the narrator can write this story, certain that this presentation of self has an authority that Quakers like Edward Burroughs can never claim.

And it is in this context that Bunyan articulates a climactic moment of his entry into Bible reading. He discovers that when the Law begins its tyranny, he finds his
conscience sprinkled with the blood of Christ so that "where but just now did reign and rage the Law, even there would rest and abide the Peace and Love of God" (127). From Luther he has learned to oppose the wrath of the law with the grace of God, just the balm he needs for "his wounded Conscience." It is in this context that Bunyan can exclaim:

Now I had an evidence, as I thought, of my salvation from Heaven, with many golden Seals thereon, all hanging in my sight. (128)

His own battle with interpretation of texts seems ended as he envisions himself receiving authoritative evidence, a certificate with "golden Seals" issued from heaven. Foreshadowing the certificates that Christian and Hopeful give to the "shining Men" at the gate of the Celestial City in Pilgrim's Progress and the certificate that Ignorance lacks, Bunyan images his own salvation from damnation and his own eligibility for entry through heaven's gate. To image his salvation in terms of a certificate seems most appropriate for Bunyan, who has just validated himself as reader and interpreter of the scriptural prescription for attaining grace through Luther's writing, a text that certifies truth as existing in the Bible alone. Bunyan, in turn, in writing Grace Abounding is producing evidence of his own certification; thus the autobiography itself becomes inseparable from the imaged certificate of "Golden seals."

In Bunyan's reconstruction of this first realization
that he might indeed have "evidence of salvation," he wonders at the affective extremes of his experience:

Whereas before I lay continually trembling at the mouth of Hell; now me thought I was go so far therefrom, that I could not, when I looked back, scarce discern it. (128)

This very dichotomy of experience, this dramatic opposition, though amazing, is the experience of Luther as he recounts it in his Commentarie. For Luther God's "mere grace" forgave his "abominable and infinite sinnes," and this "plentie of his grace" also enabled him to preach "the same also unto others" (Fol 39). Grace opposes God's wrath against sin, and grace abounding to the sinner enables its recipient to tell his experience for the benefit of others. To present one's own experience as a movement from wrath to grace and from hell to heaven was to retell Luther's story, and, most importantly, the Biblical story in one's own personal narrative. As Haskin notes, "Bunyan has personally fulfilled the paradigm in his own experience" (310). And, more significantly, Bunyan is entitled to image the struggle as a moment of certification and to produce in writing a document of certification, the autobiography Grace Abounding.

But even in producing this certificate, Bunyan must record his loss of certainty, his return to the "mouth of Hell" where he will once again lie trembling to suffer the torment of doubt and despair. Bunyan reports:
I felt love to [Christ] as hot as fire, and now, as Job said, I thought I should die in my nest; but I did quickly find, that my great love was but little, and that I, who had, as I thought, such burning love to Jesus Christ, could let him go again for a very trifle. (131)

However, even in this reversal both the Bible presenting Paul's experience and the Commentarie with Luther's experience work as subtexts for Bunyan's further temptation. For Paul, toward the end of his letter to the Galatians, warns his readers, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Galatians 5:17 KJV). Luther, in his comment upon this verse, advises:

Let no man therefore despaire ifhee feelle the flesh oftentimes to stirre up new battels [emphasis mine] against the spirit. . . . I also doe wish my selfe, to have a more valiant and constant heart . . . to contemne the . . . tumults which Sathan and his souldiers the enemies of the Gospell stirre up. (Fol 261)

The protagonist of Grace Abounding must now himself enter a "new battel," a "grievous and dreadful temptation" that the Tempter brings upon him—a temptation "to sell and part with this most blessed Christ, to exchange him for the things of
this life; for anything" (133). The narrator can tell the
story of this temptation, which for the protagonist lasts
"for the space of a year" after he has received "strong
consolation and blessed evidence from heaven," because
further temptation, too, works to interweave the texts of
Bunyan, Luther, and Paul, making the very way toward the
narration of the truth of a life to lie through the
assimilation of texts one to the other. As the texts become
interwoven, each complements and verifies the truth of the
other. Thus the narrator has come to see that it is not
through the interaction of reader with text (Bunyan with
Bible) alone that the truth of the self can be known, but it
is also through intertextuality (the interwoven texts of
Paul's letter to the Galatians, the Commentarie of Luther,
and Bunyan's own self-narration) that the truth emerges.

As Bunyan first wrote this section of Grace Abounding,
he focused on becoming a reader and interpreter of the
Bible, the sole authority and the only book of identity.
His revisions, however, suggest that the narration must
bring other texts to the complex task of self-definition.
The seemingly simple task of reading himself and the Bible
in order to learn, as he hopes, that he is of the elect has
yielded no clear self-definition. Increasingly then, he
seems to realize he must actively assume the responsibility
for self-identification that he hoped to surrender to the
Bible. He must read other texts and marshal evidence to
authorize his own experience.
Bunyan interjects his encounter with Luther's text as a climactic episode in the protagonist's effort to learn to read the Bible appropriately in order to know the true shape and meaning of his own life. For Bunyan, Luther's text is linked with his first sense of achieving validation, evidence imaged as a certificate with golden seals, and of his standing under God's grace rather than his wrath. Bunyan can claim this certificate because Luther's experience and his doctrine seem to Bunyan to be "written out of [his] own heart," giving Bunyan's understanding of his own experience and formation of his beliefs priority over the conflicting experiences and doctrines of fellow sectarians. Bunyan, not the Ranters or the Quakers, has had his perspective validated by one whose writings cannot have been corrupted by contemporary divisions and confusions. Further, Luther's text offers him a means of finding in the extremes of his own experience a pattern not only appropriate but necessary for those who would know God's grace; thus his experience is not only validated but his story becomes an authoritative reflection of the way God deals with those to whom he offers his grace.

The irony that underlies Bunyan's "certificate with golden seals," however, is that this certification does not arise out of the Bible alone, as both Luther and Bunyan would hope. Bunyan does win his first sense of validation or election from reading, but his reading, finally, is not
solely in the Bible but also in autobiography. Luther integrates his personal experience with his interpretation of the Bible and offers Bunyan a pattern for the movement from the law to grace, from God's wrath to his mercy. The protagonist of *Grace Abounding* reads Luther, whom he calls an "ancient Godly man" who has himself gone down into the deep, and reading that life affects Bunyan's own significantly. The protagonist prefers Luther's *Commentarie* over all contemporary writing, dismissing his contemporaries' personal narratives as derivative or as vehicles of argument and propaganda. But the narrator asks pardon for the protagonist's judgment ("I desire them now to pardon me"). What does the narrator know that the protagonist did not know when he read the narratives and judged their authors to be writing "only that which others felt" or writing "thorow the strength of their Wits and Parts . . . to answer such Objections as they perceived others were perplexed with"? Certainly, one answer to that question is that though the protagonist has become a reader, he has not, as the "I" of the past, become a writer. The narrator, as the "I" of the present, voices the perspective of an autobiographer who wrote one self-narration, *The Relation*, only to realize that the writer must "go down into the deep" to come to know himself. The autobiographer has written the text that took him down into the deep, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*; there he struggled with temptations
and periods of despair. In returning to rewrite and to relive once again these experiences, the writer creates a narrator who is less willing to judge writers of autobiography because he knows that self-narration, even when initially superficial, may ultimately force the writer to enter the depths of the self.

The implications of this turn in the narrative become significant as the writer begins to assert more and more control in shaping and defining the life that emerges as a result of his own autobiographical act, for the validation Bunyan seeks will come, finally, through writing Bunyan.
CHAPTER FIVE
GRACE ABOUNDING:
WRITING BUNYAN

I was born of writing.
Jean-Paul Sartre

I have no more made my book than
my book has made me.
Montaigne

The power of language to fashion self-hood
is . . . life-sustaining.
Paul John Eakin

By these words I was sustained.
John Bunyan

Bunyan's greatest temptation to despair occurs when he believes that, after receiving evidence of grace, he has assented to "sell" Christ for the things of this world and, thus, committed the unpardonable sin. Although Paul warns the Christian in Galatians, "Ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Galatians 5:17), and Luther, commenting on the Galatians text, offers the consolation that man need not "despaire if hee feele the flesh oftentimes to stirre up new battels against the spirit" (Fol 261), Bunyan invests the seemingly common experience of temptation with an uncommon significance. The autobiographer devotes almost half the lengthy conversion segment of Grace Abounding to the suffering of this period, which he says lasted two-and-a-half years (198). In the first edition, the autobiographer
relates his torments in approximately a hundred paragraphs, adding to this section in the revisions of the third and fifth editions some twenty more together. Both the section's length and its sustained rhetorical energy testify to its significance in Bunyan's effort to reconstruct his experience and to give his life narrative form. In vivid figural language, Bunyan unfolds a desperate struggle for place in a dark world of despair where "the Sun that shineth in the Heavens did grudge" to give him light and "the very stones in the street, and tiles upon the houses, did bend themselves" against him (187). He is like a child "fallen into a Millpit," who makes "some shift to scrable and spraul in the water," yet can "find neither hold for hand nor foot," and, therefore "must die in that condition" (198). Ironically, however, it is in this narration of the self undergoing its terrifying encounter with annihilation—"I did now feel myself to sink into a gulf" (198)—that the autobiographical "I" comes into possession of its own story.

That "I" reconstructs the protagonist's struggle with doubt and his search for certitude as a quest for an answer and for an ending. The question that must be answered for the protagonist is theological: Am I of the elect or am I a reprobate? This question assumes ultimate importance when the protagonist fears he has committed the unpardonable sin. But the theological question, finally, is subsumed in a literary quest for a narrative ending. Prompting this
search are two "stories" whose fearful endings haunt the protagonist as he struggles with the issues of election and reprobation: the brief biographical sketch of Esau in Hebrews and the autobiography of Francis Spira. Both Esau and Spira were reprobates. From Spira's autobiography Bunyan draws the question for his own narrative: "Man knows the beginning of sin, but who bounds the issues thereof?" (179). For Bunyan, the "issue" or outcome of his temptation "to sell Christ" becomes a consuming search: he must know if his story, too, ends in the loss of blessing like Esau and in damnation like the "miserable mortal" Spira.

Repeatedly, Bunyan turns to narratives of the elect and the reprobate to search for an outcome to his own life story. A recurring sequence—reading a life story, focusing on its ending, and then returning to his own quest for an ending—produces in *Grace Abounding* a pattern of seemingly endless repetition. But the repetitive pattern, which recounts the protagonist's intense engagement in creating a coherent story, finally produces results: Bunyan's self-narration does achieve, not one, but several endings, any one of which seemingly would make a satisfactory literary conclusion to the autobiographer's story, yet the narration continues on, past ending after ending. Ironically, however, out of this end-focused and yet end-less narrative the autobiographer achieves self-definition. For it is through narrative as a mode of experience—narrative as a
means of exploring and knowing himself—that the 
autobiographer ultimately constitutes a self that can turn 
dreaded endings into promising beginnings. The story of 
that transformation is the story of Bunyan's 
autobiographical act.

The question of an ending, however, seems briefly to be 
resolved for the protagonist when his first period of 
despair ends with the storm of skepticism and blasphemy 
calmed through the "Revelations of God" (118) that guide his 
reading of the scriptures. But scarcely has he received his 
first "evidence" of his salvation, imaged as a certificate 
"with many golden Seals thereon," when he is assaulted with 
a new temptation—"to sell and part with this most blessed 
Christ, to exchange him for the things of this life; for 
anything" (133). Though persuaded in his own "judgement" 
that he loves Christ dearly, that he feels love to Christ 
"as hot as fire," he soon finds this love "tried" to a 
purpose.

The language of the courtroom becomes the vehicle of 
narration as Bunyan wrestles with issues of evidence, bond, 
and judgment. Moments of arraignment and trial in the 
Relation that were public events in Bedford are now 
agonizing private events occurring in the protagonist's 
inner consciousness, psychological and spiritual occurrences 
where the final judgment of the case bears ultimate 
consequences. In the Relation, it is Justice Kelynge who
sits in judgment against Bunyan's noncomformity and who sentences the defendant to prison and threatens him with banishment and hanging. In *Grace Abounding*, the apostles sit in judgment and view the defendant with scorn and derision or, even worse, the "dreadful Judge," God himself, presides, threatening a judgment that damns, not the body, but the soul to the "Pit." Bunyan represented himself well before Justice Kelynge, but even so he was condemned and sentenced, his three-month imprisonment stretching into years of confinement. Underlying the prisoner's narration of his great period of temptation and despair is the consciousness of authority's power over the accused. Thus he reconstructs his case in terms of a trial, the indictment being that the defendant has committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, the unpardonable sin. The accused serves as his own defense attorney, and, ironically, at times aids his prosecutor. His soul hangs "as in a pair of Scales . . . sometimes up, and sometimes down" (207). The scriptures are called as witnesses, some for and some against the accused, at times warring among themselves or bolting upon the defendant himself. The testimony of these conflicting scriptures must be admitted, however, for the narrator knows that it is in the Bible that the protagonist's case must be won or lost eternally.

The temptation itself—to sell Christ—haunts the protagonist "for the space of a year" (133), his own
resistance to the thought having no effect on its force and strength. His every action, Bunyan recalls, carries "intermixed" the temptation to part with Christ:

I could neither eat my food, stoop for a pin, chop a stick, or cast mine eye to look on this or that, but still the temptation would come, "Sell Christ for this, or sell Christ for that; sell him, sell him." (135)

A nightmarish inner battle rages in which the traitorous thought of the mind batters the heart, hammering against its door "a hundred times together, Sell him, sell him, sell him." Against this battering ram, Bunyan reports, his spirit must stand, "continually leaning and forcing" to prevent "some wicked thought" from arising in his heart and consenting to the invasion. Indeed, Bunyan recalls, "sometimes also the Tempter would make me believe I had consented to it"; the enemy thoughts seem to win and the victim suffers torture "on a Rack for whole dayes together" (136).

In ceaseless nervous activity, his body must at times join the battle, reports Bunyan, so that he finds himself "pushing and thrusting with [his] hands or elbows" to resist the wicked temptation, while as fast as the destroyer cries, "Sell him," the protagonist answers:

I will not, I will not, I will not, I will not, no not for thousands, thousands, thousands of worlds.
Yet even in this resistance, Bunyan recalls, he fears he might set "too low a value of him," so that the protests become as burdensome and disorienting as the temptation itself.

The tyranny of the temptation increases until the protagonist cannot eat a meal without feeling compelled to leave his food to pray, imagining, he recalls, that such impulses were from God. When he refuses, therefore, he feels as guilty refusing to obey a "temptation of the Devil" as if he had "broken the Law of God indeed." With evil masked as good and with unidentifiable voices commanding and threatening, the protagonist spends a year in misery and confusion, reaching at last a breaking point.

Dramatically, Bunyan recounts the morning he yields to the temptation:

As I did lie in my Bed, I was, as at other times, most fiercely assaulted with this temptation, to sell and part with Christ; the wicked suggestion still running in my mind, "Sell him, sell him, sell him, sell him," as fast as man could speak.

Against this temptation, Bunyan at first answers as he has done for the past year, "No, no, not for thousands, thousands, thousands [of worlds]," repeating the "thousands" for at least "twenty times together," the narrator explains.
"But at last," he reports, "after much striving" and, finally, out of breath, both mind and heart conspire as he feels a "thought" pass through his heart, "Let him go if he will!" (139)

Imaging the protagonist's assent as a re-enactment of the primal fall, the narrator reports, "The battle was won":

Down I fell, as a Bird that is shot from the top of a Tree, into great guilt and fearful despair. (140)

Much like the fallen Adam reluctantly descending from Eden into the fallen world, Bunyan goes "moping into the field" with a heavy heart, "bereft of life" and "bound over to eternal punishment" (140).

With the protagonist's fall comes a scripture to "seize" upon his soul, one that recurs with tormenting monotony throughout the long period of despair, recalling the plight of Esau,

who for one morsel of meat sold his Birth-right; for you know how that afterwards when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears, Heb 12. 16, 17. (141)

The protagonist, now "bound" and "shut up," feels nothing to abide with him "but damnation, and an expectation of damnation." He repeats, "Nothing now would abide with me but this, save some few moments for relief." Then the
narrative voice adds, "as you will see," addressing the reader for the first time in the narrative proper (142).

This invocation of the reader calls attention to the autobiographical act being performed and thus to the structuring of the narrative. The "I" of the discourse is, for this moment, the "I who writes." This first insertion of an address to the reader of the narrative signals a momentary shift from the emplotted life to the plotter of that life, to the act of the writer writing a life and the reader reading that life. One moment, the reader unacknowledged through the narrative, has been lost in the dramatically rendered account of the protagonist's fall, swept into and through the narrative by the power of its verbal energy. But then the writer disrupts the narrative flow, acknowledging and addressing the reader, calling attention, not to the narrative but to the act of narration. The "I" who narrates exists in relation to a reader who has been, necessarily, unknown and immaterial to the protagonist. This first conscious focus on the "I who writes" marks the emergence of a voice that will become stronger as the narrative moves toward its ending.

For the protagonist, the narrator recalls, an identification with Esau meant damnation; the words of the Esau narrative were to his soul like "Fetters of Brass" to his legs. His fall has been into a prison that frequently seems itself to be the pit of endless torment but that
equally seems to be an inner world, a fall into the core of darkness of the protagonist himself.

With this recurring motif of imprisonment also come numerous references to walking: Bunyan goes "moping into the field" (140), "walking under a Hedge, full of sorrow and guilt" (143), or "walking to and fro in a good man's Shop" (174). These excursions, on one hand, place the protagonist in the common world, carrying on the ordinary tasks of existence; simultaneously, however, they signify a quest occurring within the protagonist, a desperate, fruitless search for identity.

Dual time references also mark simultaneous planes of actions within and without the protagonist. Vague, general, indeterminate time notations intermix with specific clock time. For the protagonist two lives seem in progress, one timeless in its terrors, the other markedly timed by specific moments of crisis.

The tension between the timeless passive state of bondage and the timed active state of questing erupts into recurring battles that become almost nightmarish in this inner-outer world. The first conflict of this strangely merged existence occurs "one day" after "several months" of hearing the words of damnation sound continually in the protagonist's ear, but this vague time reference becomes surprisingly particular when at "about ten or eleven a Clock" that day the protagonist, while walking under a
hedge, full of sorrow and guilt, bemoaning his "hard hap," suddenly has a sentence bolt upon him: "The blood of Christ remits all guilt." With this word he makes "a stand" in his spirit. The word takes hold. The Tempter "learns" and steals away ashamed. Compared to the blood of Christ, the protagonist surmises, his sin is no more than "this little clot or stone . . . is to this vast and wide field" before him. The conflict seems resolved. One word has vanquished another. And this encouragement lasts for the protagonist "for the space of two or three hours" until, "because it tarried not," he sinks in his spirit "under exceeding guilt again" (143-44). This pattern—a fall, imprisonment, quest, and battle leading to hope only to come once again to a fall—recurs throughout Bunyan's reconstruction of his battle with the "unpardonable sin." His response to what seem to be questions of doctrine—Is his sin unpardonable? If he were elected could he sin such a sin? Is he a reprobate?—become for the protagonist experiential. The recurring pattern of experience and the circularity of the argument suggest that the protagonist dwells in the entangling confusions of a labyrinth that imprisons while it compels the prisoner to continue his useless yet necessary wanderings.

In a seemingly futile effort to grapple with his condition, the protagonist "with sad and careful heart" begins "to search the word of God" for "a word of Promise,
or any encouraging Sentence" to provide relief (147). Looking in Mark, he finds what at first seems "a large and glorious Promise for the pardon of high offences":

All manner of sins and blasphemies shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, wherewith soever they shall blaspheme. (Mark 3:28)

But "considering the place more fully," the interpreter feels his own sin is excluded from the promise. This passage, he fears, applies only to those who sin "in a natural state," not one who slights Christ, as the protagonist has done, after receiving "light and mercie" (147).

The succeeding verse in Mark seems to Bunyan far more applicable to his own situation:

But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost, hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation. (Mark 3:29)

This verse seems an appropriate self-description because it is analogous to the Hebrew description of Esau: "For you know how that afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears" (148). And it is this Esau passage that has seized upon his soul and that sticks always with him; the identification with Esau must be annulled before any promise of forgiveness can be entertained.
Bunyan fears that his "heart's consent" to the temptation to "sell" Christ has made him a reprobate like Esau, who despised his birthright, selling it to his brother Jacob for bread and a "pottage of lentiles" (Gen. 25:34 KJV). Though the story proper of Esau and Jacob occurs in Genesis, Bunyan's scripture comes from Hebrews where Esau is contrasted to numerous Old Testament figures who lived "by faith." According to the writer, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sara, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Sampson, David, and Samuel all lived by faith and thus pleased God (Hebrews 11). Furthermore, these who lived by faith are "a great crowd of witnesses" who watch those yet to come by faith. In this context, Esau is presented by the writer of Hebrews as the sole negative example of the "profane person" who "fails of the grace of God" and who "for one morsel of meat" sells his birthright only to find that later, when he sorrowfully seeks the blessing, he is rejected, for he finds "no place of repentance," though he seeks it "carefully with tears" (Hebrews 12:16-17 KJV). Esau's end thus serves as a warning: "See that ye refuse not him [Jesus] that speaketh" (Hebrews 12:25).

Bunyan seemingly cannot read his experience into the narratives of the faithful. His experience correlates only to the single example of failure to live by faith. Forgiveness is possible for the faithful and even, according to Mark, "the sons of men" who blaspheme, but for Esau, the
faithless, and for Bunyan, who had once received "light and mercie," repentance and forgiveness are unobtainable. The singularity and uniqueness of his situation overwhelms him:

What? thought I, is there but one sin that is unpardonable? But one sin that layeth the Soul without the reach of Gods Mercy, and must I be guilty of that? Must it needs be that? Is there but one sin among so many millions of sins, for which there is no forgiveness, and must I commit this? Oh! unhappy sin! O unhappy man! (153)

And still to aggravate the misery of the protagonist, the scriptural refrain drones on:

You know how that afterwards when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected. (153)

The narrator recalls, "Oh! none knows the terrors of those days but myself" (153).

With some desperation the protagonist returns to the Bible to construct his own search through the narratives of the faithful, hoping to discover an identification with one of the "saved" to negate the identification with the reprobate Esau. "So I considered," the narrator recalls, "David's adultery and Murder" (151). When the protagonist holds his sin of "selling Christ" up to David's adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah, he at first finds hope, for David, too, committed his crimes "after light and grace" received; however, after considering further, hope
fades, for David's sins were "only such as were against the Law of Moses, from which the Lord Christ could, with the consent of his Word deliver him," but the protagonist's sins are against the Gospel, "yea, against the Mediator thereof" (151). David's sin of adultery and murder can be forgiven, but Bunyan's sin cannot; for he has sold his Savior.

Hoping to find a sinner who transgressed, not against the law of Moses but against the "Gospel," Bunyan moves to the New Testament, choosing Peter with some optimism, for his sin seems to come quite close to the protagonist's:

[Peter] had denied his Saviour as I, and that after Light and Mercy received; yea, and that too, after warning given him. (154)

His hope increasing, Bunyan notes that Peter's denial occurred "both once and twice" and, even better, he had time "to consider betwixt." But, even so, after considering Peter's experience further, Bunyan concludes:

[Peter's sin] was but a denial of his Master, but mine was a selling of my Saviour. (154)

With grief and shame, Bunyan must acknowledge finally that his sin is unlike the sin of either David or Peter; his sin can only be compared to the sin of the arch-reprobate, that is, to the sin of Judas himself.

Reluctantly and fearfully, Bunyan begins to consider the story of Judas, hoping that he might find his sin different from the unpardonable sin of Christ's betrayer:
O thought I, if it should differ from [Judas'

And, to his relief, he finds that there does indeed exist

not one but two differences: intentionality and
deliberation. Bunyan concludes:

I found that Judas did his intentionally, but mine
was against my prayer and strivings; besides, his
was committed with much deliberation, but mine in
a fearful hurry, on a sudden. (158)

This relief lasts only briefly, however, for Bunyan,
"hearing always" the sound of Esau's judgment in his ears,
considers that "there might be more ways than one to commit
the unpardonable sin" and that indeed there might even be
"degrees" of that sin. And so he remains "tossed to and
fro, like the Locusts, and driven from trouble to sorrow"
(158-59).

Peterson finds in Bunyan's survey of the lives of
David, Peter, and Judas, the strategy of Biblical typology
necessary to the autobiographies of self-interpretation from
the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. Bunyan
searches for a "correlative type" other than Esau and "works
actively" in this hermeneutical situation to discover the
"meaning and spiritual significance of his actions." Though
Bunyan runs through the list of "biblical counterparts not
once but twice," he fails to achieve a satisfactory
interpretation. For Peterson, the Biblical figures represent an important, if ineffective, tool for self-interpretation (9-12).

Nussbaum suggests that the Biblical figures that obsess Bunyan as he grapples with the unpardonable sin are "provisional roles" or "possible alternate disguises" that allow the autobiographer to establish the authority of God while simultaneously clarifying the conflict between "alternate selves" rebelling against that authority. Through these roles Bunyan can achieve "confrontation within the bounds of authority" (24-26).

Bunyan, of course, does fear, as Peterson suggests, that he is a correlative type of Esau and he does hope desperately that he is instead a correlative type of one of the Saints; he, therefore, looks determinedly at the sins of first David and Peter and later Solomon and Manasseh, hoping to find that their forgiveness foreshadows his. Also, each figure does provide a provisional role for the autobiographer, as Nussbaum suggests: the roles of Esau, Judas, and Cain awaken his terror of judgment and the roles of the saints add "sorrow, grief, and horror" to Bunyan, for God loved these men, keeping them safe, making them "to abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (157). Though Bunyan's concern in this section is in part with interpretation and trial roles, his greatest anxiety is focused on the outcome of each life-story he considers. The
autobiographer in the process of plotting his own story depicts the protagonist surrounded by the stories of others. But, significantly, the autobiographer knows the outcomes of the stories of Esau, David, Peter, and Judas, but the outcome of his own story is unknown. Bunyan reads each of these lives as narratives, starting at the end, and finds the meaning of the life revealed in the outcome of the life-story. But he cannot read his own "emplotted life" in this way. His anxiety arises, therefore, not from the failure of an interpretive tool (as Peterson argues) or from the inefficacy of role-playing (as Nussbaum suggests) but from the realization that the meaning of his experience at every point can only be determined by knowledge of his own life-story's end. His life can be lived only if he can live backwards from the end and thus discover the meaning of his story.

This quest for an ending increasingly underlies the protagonist's interpretive efforts and the narrator's reconstruction, for after examining the narratives of David, Peter, and Judas, the autobiographer projects a possible ending, an imaginatively constructed outcome, to the life story he tells. He imagines the shame the protagonist will feel to "be like such an ugly man as Judas" on the "Day of Judgment"; he envisions how "loathesome" he will then be to all the Saints. This image of the end is so painful to Bunyan that he reconstructs his temptation to deny the
reality of any such ending:

I was much about this time tempted to content myself, by receiving some false Opinion; as that there should be no such thing as a Day of Judgment, that we should not rise again, and that sin was no such grievous thing. (161)

The Tempter, Bunyan reports, suggests that even if indeed such an ending proves true, it still will relieve present torment to practice denial in the manner of Atheists and Ranters. But even as such thoughts pass through his heart, Bunyan recalls, he sees "Death and Judgement" already in view:

Methought the Judge stood at the door, I was as if 'twas come already. (162)

Tormented by the shame of his imagined ending, yet unable to live his life oblivious to the certainty of an end, the protagonist has no recourse but to return to reading life stories and relating these narratives to his own experience, determining to find an ending to make present life livable.

His search finally leads to an encounter with "the dreadful story of that miserable mortal, Francis Spira":

Every groan of that man, with all the rest of his actions in his dolors, as his tears, his prayers, his gnashing of teeth, his wringing of hands, his twining and twisting, languishing and pining away under that mighty hand of God that was upon him,
was as knives and daggers in my Soul. (163)

The stories of Esau, Judas, and Cain become contemporary for Bunyan in Spira's account of apostasy and reprobation.

According to Sharrock, Bunyan's source for the story of Spira is Nathaniel Bacon's *A Relation of the Fearful Estate of Francis Spira, in the year 1548*, a text published in 1649 with eleven editions printed by 1695. Bunyan may have first heard Spira's story in the Bedford church, for Calvinist ministers frequently found the apostate Spira an appropriately dramatic example of the reprobate who sins the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost. Spira's great remorse after his apostasy from the English church to Catholicism also served as a warning to fearful sectarians, who might be tempted to conform to the English church for fear of persecution. Bunyan's identification with Spira

1 See Sharrock, *Grace Abounding* n. 163, p. 146. My quotations follow the 1678 edition, printed in London by Thomas Dawks. It is not known which edition Bunyan read, but possibly the publication of the 1678 text prompted him to tell Spira's story in more detail when he revised *Grace Abounding* in 1680 for its fifth edition.

2 Sharrock notes that Bunyan would have been reminded of the "terror of Spira's case . . . by its repetition in the life of his Bedford associate John Child (1638-84)." Child dissociated himself from the Bedford congregation to conform to the English church and later hanged himself. His story appeared in 1688 (*The Mischief of Persecution Exemplified: by a true narrative of the Life and Deplorable End of Mr. John Child*) and later was appended to editions of the life of Spira as *A Relation of the Fearful Estate of John Child*. According to the Bedford Church Book (22), in February 1658-9 Bunyan was asked to serve notice on Child to attend a full meeting to explain his absence from services (Sharrock, n. 163, p. 146).
during his long period of despair seems to lie primarily in Spira's certainty that he knows an end that has turned every moment of his life into a realization of death. Spira, certain that his estate is worse than the cases of Cain and Judas, desires only to die, spending his days crying, "O miserable wretch, O miserable wretch" (71).

In a prefatory poem, Nathaniel Bacon casts Spira's situation in terms that Bunyan would have found appropriate to his own condition:

Reader, wou'dst see how sinning against the light
   Will quench and leave the soul in a sad night
Of discontent: come hither Reader then, look there
   And learn light-quenching sins to fear.

"A thousand deaths" live in Spira who himself cannot die, and the torments of death are greater because Spira once responded to God's light and tasted his Joy before "backsliding":

   How black are quenched lights;
Quencht joys are double frights,
   Black days are double nights.
Heaven tasted, lost, a double Hell.

The poet invites the reader to "see a soul that is all despair; a man/ All Hell; a Spirit all wound" and asks, "Who can a wounded spirit bear?"
Identifying with this wounded spirit, Bunyan recalls that reading the book of Spira was to his own "troubled spirit as salt, when rubbed into a fresh wound" (163). Bunyan, who has sinned "after light and grace" received, finds his assent to part with Christ horribly anticipated in Spira's denial of Christ after receiving Christ's truth, resulting, as Spira contends, in his "being ever accursed from the presence of God," unable to pray because the "holy Spirit is quite gone, and cannot be recalled" (40). In Spira's narrative, Bunyan learns the experiences of the reprobate and discovers the coherence of an emplotted life in which all events are given meaning by the narrative's certain ending. Spira's certitude that he is eternally damned underscores his story from beginning to end, making the coincidences with Bunyan's own experience seem frighteningly significant.

Spira's narrative begins in 1548, "when the glorious Sun of the Gospel was but newly risen in Europe," with his discovery of the "newly revived opinions of Luther," writings that had hitherto been unknown in Cittadella, Italy, the town where Spira resided with some wealth and position. After reading Luther, Spira began searching scripture and other books, finally coming "to tast their nature so well" that he became a professor and teacher of Luther's truths to his family and friends, neglecting even his own law practice in order to teach the truth learned
from Luther that

we must wholly, and onely depend on the free and
unchangeable love of God in the death of Christ,
as the onely sure way to Salvation. (4)

For six years, this was the "summe" of all Spira's
discourse, his teaching attracting so many to "publick
Meetings," that ultimately he drew the attention of the
Pope's Legate, who denounced Spira as "a dangerous Lutheran"
(6). Under this censure, Spira became fearful; he was for a
time "distracted and tossed in the restless Waves of doubt"
until he began to consider "Peter in a Dungeon" and the
"Martyrs in the Fire," determining finally that if he, too,
made "a good Confession," he would receive in exchange for
prison or death "an eternal reward in heaven." Thus Spira
asked himself, "What hast thou in this world comparable to
Eternal life, to Everlasting happiness?" (9-10). Finally,
he decided that he must "fear hell, death, and eternal wrath
. . . rather than deny the Lord of Life" (10).

The peace that Spira at first received after this
decision was soon disrupted by the voice of the "flesh" that
warned Spira to consider the consequences of his decisions:

Dost thou not consider what misery this thy
rashness will bring thee unto? thou shalt lose
all thy substance, . . . thou shalt undergo the
most exquisite torments, . . . thou shalt be
counted an Heretick of all, and to close up all,
thou shalt die shamefully. (11).

With images of the "loathsome stinking dungeon, the bloody ax, the burning fagot" terrifying him, Spira yielded "unto the allurements of this present world" and "thus blinded" went to the Legate at Venice to "beg pardon for so great an offence" against the Church of Rome.

After he had signed his name to a written confession of his errors and promised "to acknowledge the whole Doctrine of the Church of Rome, to be holy, and true" and, at the same time, had abjured "the Opinions of Luther, and other such Teachers, as false and Heretical," Spira began his journey home only to hear the voice of the spirit warn:

Dost thou indeed think eternal Life so mean, as that thou preferrest this present life before it? dost thou well in preferring wife and children before Christ? ... Is the small use of a moment of time more desirable, then eternal wrath is dreadful? (15-16)

The spirit's address to Spira concluded, finally, with an admonition:

Thou canst not answer for what thou hast already done; nevertheless the gate of Mercy is not quite shut. Take heed that thou heapest not sin upon sin, lest thou repent when it will be too late.

(16)
With the "terror of God on the one side, and the terror of this World on the other side," Spira turned to his friends who counseled him not to betray his wife, children, and friends into danger. This advice represented "the last blow of the battle," and thus Spira publicly signed the "infamous Abjuration" and paid a fine of "thirty pieces of gold" (19-20).

As he left the church, Spira heard the voice of judgment:

Thou wicked wretch, thou hast denied me, thou hast renounced the covenant of thy obedience, thou hast broken thy vow; hence Apostle, bear with thee the sentence of thy eternal damnation. (20).

Under this sentence, Spira, "trembling and quaking in body and mind," fell to the ground; from that moment he never found "peace or ease of mind" but lived with "ever his Judgement before his eyes" (21).

The remainder of Spira's narrative records the visit of physicians, divines, and friends who all attempt to offer a comfort that Spira steadfastly refuses. Arguing that God "is ready to shew you Mercy," they hold up examples of God's mercy: Peter, who "denied [Christ] thrice with an Oath," and "the Thief, who "spent his whole life in Wickedness." "The Mercy of God is above all sin," they argue; "God would have all men to be saved" (29-30). But to these arguments Spira would answer:
It's true . . . [God] would have all that he hath elected to be saved; he would not have damned Reprobates to be saved: I am one of that number, I know it, for I willingly and against my knowledge denied Christ, and I feel that he hardens, and will not suffer me to hope. (30)

Spira could only conclude that having "no faith, no truth, no hope," he was "a Reprobate like Cain or Judas":

I feel no comfort can enter into my heart; there's place there onely for torments and vexings of spirit; I tell you my case is properly mine own, no man was ever in the like plight, and therefore my Estate is fearful. (32)

And Spira's position remains unchanged, insisting that though he never denied Christ in his heart, he denied him "in a word" and that word was enough to bind him to "perpetual punishment without any hope of pardon" (33,36).

And though Job, David, Solomon, and Peter were continually presented to Spira as examples of God's mercy, he himself insisted that he was a reprobate like Cain, Saul, and Judas, citing Paul's admonition to the Hebrews—"It is impossible for those who were once enlightned, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were partakers of the holy Ghost, if they fall away, to be renewed to repentance"—as the final judgment.

Once, noticing the flies around him, Spira observed:
Behold, . . . now also Belzeebub [sic] comes to his Banquet; you shall shortly see my end, and in me an example to many, of the Justice and Judgment of God. (45)

Thus, reports the narrator, Spira died, envying Cain and Judas, after having lain eight weeks in a continual burning, neither desiring, nor receiving anything but by force, and that without digestion, so spent that he appeared a perfect Anatomie, expressing to the view nothing but sinews and bones: vehemently raging for drink, ever pining, yet fearful to live long; dreadfull of Hell, yet coveting death; in a continual torment, yet his own Tormentor. (78-79)

The narrator concludes that in the life and death of Francis Spira, there exists "an extraordinary example of the justice and power of God," but he warns that "secret things belong unto the Lord our God," and charity teaches men "to hope all things" (79).

To Bunyan, coming upon Spira's book, end-focused and death-focused as it is, the judgment that he feared for himself seemed vividly rendered in the experience of Spira. And the warning that followed Spira's signing of the abjuration is the sentence that haunts Bunyan's tormented spirit: "Man knows the beginning of sin, but who bounds the issues thereof?" (Fearful Estate 14). That warning, linked
to the Hebrew admonition—"for you know how that afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected"—becomes, Bunyan recalls, "a hot thunder-bolt" falling upon his conscience (50).

With horror Bunyan recognizes that his experience may replicate that of the reprobate Spira. Spira's narrative seems to mirror his own story, undeniably reflecting common elements: the influence of Luther, the denial in "word" though not in "heart," the horror of being only "near and almost" a Christian, the identification with Judas, the failure to identify with David, Peter, and other forgiven sinners, and the stern judgment of Hebrews. To read his experience in Spira parallels his earlier reading of his story in Luther, and the two readings mark the extremes of Bunyan's situation. In both narratives, the beginning and end are known: God's grace forgave Luther's "abominable and infinite sinnes," making his battle with the flesh only a skirmish preparing for God's victory, but God's judgment damns Spira, making his battle an apocalyptic event that discloses the destruction of his soul. And it is Spira's ending rather than Luther's that Bunyan fears belongs to his narrative.

After reading Spira, the protagonist would "for whole days together" feel his body and mind "to shake and totter under the sense of the dreadful Judgement of God, that should fall on those that have sinned that most fearful and
unpardonable sin" (164). Imaginatively, he re-enacts in his own experience the end of the reprobate. Much like Spira who felt before death "the gnawing worm" and "unquenchable fire," Bunyan feels in his terror "a clogging and heat" at his stomach. Like Judas who at his end fell headlong, bursting asunder, Bunyan feels as if his fear will "split asunder" his breast-bone. And like Cain whose murder of his brother Abel left him in "fear and trembling under the heavy load of guilt," Bunyan too feels marked by sin that causes him to "wind, and twine, and shrink under the burden" upon him. In this rehearsal for his own possible ending, Bunyan, judged and sentenced, feels "like a man that is going to the place of execution," wishing for some small crevice into which he could creep and hide himself but finding his way to lead inexorably on to death (164-67).

Desperate for that crevice of escape, Bunyan once again reviews the "sins of the Saints," believing that if all the sins together of David, Solomon, Manasseh, and Peter should be no greater than his one sin, he might indeed find hope. But in these narratives he can read neither his offense nor his ending:

This one consideration would always kill my Heart,
My sin was point-blank against my Saviour, and that too, at that height, that I had in my heart said of him, "Let him go if he will." (172)
This sin, the protagonist concludes, is "bigger than the sins of a Countrey, of a Kingdom, or of the whole World, no one pardonable, nor all of them together, was equal to mine, mine out-went them every one" (172).

Faced with the enormity of his sin, Bunyan in his mind flees from the dreadful God of Judgment, yet finds to his torment he cannot escape God's wrath. But as his "mind and spirit" are fleeing from God's face, he hears a voice causing him to look over his shoulder, "hollowing," it seems, "Return, Return" (173). Glancing back, he hopes to glimpse the God of Grace following him with a pardon in his hand, but darkness and clouds immediately obscure his vision as he hears, "For you know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he found no place of repentance" (173). Thus the Bunyan-Esau figure of his imagination runs on into the darkness, fleeing judgment, unable to accept the impending end.

For the protagonist the dreadful God of Wrath looms largely and vividly in his imagination while the God of Grace remains scarcely visible. But the autobiographer, recording the events of his years of despair, uses his self-narration not only to reconstruct but also increasingly to probe and explore the mystery of divinity. In his first writing of Grace Abounding Bunyan omits all reference to what might be called the "rushing Wind" experience, but in the third edition, he adds this mystical experience, calling
attention to his decision to risk an "unfolding" of his "secret things," and in the fifth edition the writer elaborates the description further, commenting on its purpose and significance. These additions tend to refocus the reader's attention from events occurring to events written about, increasing the distance between reader and protagonist while prompting reader interest in the "I who writes." Through these incremental revisions and the shifting focus, the autobiographer signals an attitude toward narrative as a mode of cognition. The exposure that he decides to risk is not so much the secret of his mystical experience as the secret of his faith in self-narration, for it is in the retelling of his story, the emplotting of his experiences, that he can "venture" toward endowing with meaning what first seemed "unspeakable."

This moment of mystery occurs in a most ordinary setting, a predictable combination in Bunyan's narrative. While "walking to and fro in a good mans Shop," bemoaning his "sad and doleful state" and praying that if his sin was not the sin against the Holy Ghost, he would be shown this truth, the protagonist experiences "the noise of Wind" rushing in at the window and hears a voice speak: "Didst ever refuse to be justified by the Blood of Christ?" In a moment, he grasps whole his past life of faith and sees that he had never "designedly" refused such justification. Out of that insight, he "groaningly" answers, "No." To his
response the Word of God falls upon him "with power": "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh, Heb. 12.25" (174). In the first telling of this event, Bunyan can only confess, "I have not yet in twenty years time been able to make a Judgment of it," adding almost reluctantly that the "sudden rushing Wind" seemed at the time "as if an Angel had come" and also adding cautiously,

Both it [the wind] and the Salutation I will leave until the Day of Judgement, only this I say, it commanded a great calm in my Soul, it perswaded me there might be hope; it shewed me, as I thought what the sin unpardonable was, and that my Soul had yet the blessed priviledge to flie to Jesus Christ for Mercy. (174)

The "I who writes" continues: "I know not what yet to say unto it," explaining that because he could not understand the event, he chose not to speak of it in his narrative, doing so now only "to be thought on by men of sound Judgment" (174).

In the fifth-edition revision, the writer attempts a further interpretation:

It [the rushing wind experience] showed me, also, that Jesus Christ had yet a work of Grace and Mercy for me, that he had not, as I had feared, quite forsaken and cast off my Soul; yea, this was a kind of chide for my proneness to desparation; a
kind of a threatening me if I did not, notwithstanding my sins and the hainousness of them, venture my Salvation upon the Son of God. (174)

In this addition, Bunyan finds in the experience more than just a promise of hope; he has come to regard the moment as a chide to his despair—a charge to leave his passivity and to undertake a challenge to venture. The "I who writes" is becoming in the process of writing the "I who ventures," and it is the process itself that both produces and documents that shifting identity. That "I," capable of choice—capable finally of shaping a life and defining its meaning—begins to emerge here, and that emergence signifies a writer who with increasing consciousness is "making" the book that has made him.

The reassurance that follows the "rushing wind" experience lasts only "three or four dayes" before the protagonist begins, once again, to mistrust and despair, but in this repetitive alteration between hope and despair, a discernible change begins to become evident: the protagonist chooses a different response to the recurring despair. Instead of languishing helplessly before the numbing despair or fleeing in misery, as he has done formerly, he determines "to cast [his soul] at the foot of Grace by Prayer and Supplication" (175). This struggle to pray must overcome an equally great reluctance "to pray to this Christ for mercie"
against whom he had "most vilely sinned!" (175). In the revision of the fifth edition, the narrator interweaves with the protagonist's reluctance his own continuing difficulty with approaching God through prayer after sin: "and, indeed, I have found it as difficult to come to God by prayer, after backsliding from him, as to do any other thing" (175). Momentarily, the reader perceives that this difficulty is not peculiar to the protagonist but a recurring trial for all Christians. The experienced narrator overrides the judgment of the naive protagonist, making the reader more conscious that an "I who writes" shapes the narrative. The narrator, who interpreted the "rushing wind" as a challenge to venture, now imbues his protagonist with that same determination:

I saw there was but one way with me, I must go to
him and humble myself unto him, and beg that he,
of his wonderful mercy, would show pity to me, and
have mercy upon my wretched sinful Soul. (175)

His own fearful reluctance, however, recurs in the chiding of the Tempter who argues that the protagonist will only add sin to sin:

Yea, now to pray, seeing God hath cast you off, is
the next way to anger and offend him more then
ever you did before.

For God . . . hath been weary of you for these
several years already, because you are none of
his; your bauling in his ears hath been no pleasant voice to him; and, therefore he let you sin this sin, that you might be quite cut off, and will you pray still? (176-77)

Yet even as these cruel taunts oppress the protagonist, he "with great difficulty" attempts prayer, although the "saying about Esau" would set at his heart, "like a flaming sword, to keep the way of the tree of Life" (178).

As he struggles to pray in private, the protagonist also desires "the Prayers of the people of God" for his soul; but to risk asking for their prayers would mean to risk learning that God had revealed to them the protagonist's reprobate condition:

Yea, I trembled in my Soul to think that some or other of them shortly would tell me, that God had said those words to them that he once did say to the Prophet concerning the Children of Israel, "Pray not for this people, for I have rejected them, Jer. 11.14." So "Pray not for him, for I have rejected him." (179)

It seems to the protagonist that some already know his fate, but they dare not tell him; and he, in turn, dares not ask "for fear it should be so" (179). Then the dreadful end of Spira looms into his consciousness: "Man knows the beginning of sin, (said Spira) but who bounds the issues thereof?" (179).
In an addition to the third edition of *Grace Abounding* Bunyan underscores the desperate need for confirmation when he reconstructs the protagonist's risk in confiding his fears to "an Antient Christian." After telling him all "his case," the protagonist also confesses his fear that he has sinned the sin against the Holy Ghost:

> He told me, He thought so too. Here therefore I had but cold comfort, but, talking a little more with him, I found him, though a good man, a stranger to much Combate with the Devil.
>
> Wherefore I went to God again as well as I could, for Mercie still. (180)

In what becomes a recurring pattern, the autobiographer's additions to the first edition of *Grace Abounding* stress the necessity of the protagonist's movement toward self-directedness. The man capable of shaping his life and endowing his experience with meaning begins to be glimpsed in the protagonist who recognizes that his own experience (his "combate with the Devil") enables him to judge his case for himself.

The problem of prayer, however, pales in comparison to the obstacle posed to the protagonist by the Bible's Word of Law and Grace. The protagonist becomes convinced that for him to receive grace, the Bible must be written new, "the whole way of Salvation" must be altered, and Christ must die anew. The protagonist groans under the inalterability of
the Word, but the narrative voice, running as subtext, asserts in a third-edition revision that he gained in this experience an "advantage":

Oh! I cannot now express what then I saw and felt of the steadiness of Jesus Christ, the Rock of Man's Salvation, what was done could not be undone, added to, nor altered. (186)

The experience that threatens destruction to the protagonist has become a foundation upon which the narrator can construct and order experience. The reader must respond to both perspectives, allowing the narrator's judgment to restructure the protagonist's despair.

It is the self of the past contained in Grace Abounding's split "I" who finds himself excluded from all design, all order of the cosmos:

Methought I saw as if the Sun that shineth in the Heavens did grudge to give me light, and as if the very stones in the street, and tiles upon the houses, did bend themselves against me. (187)

Yet in the midst of this ultimate displacement (this banishment "out of the World"), he receives the comfort of a voice that asserts, "This sin is not unto death" (188). And with that comfort, the protagonist feels himself "raised out of a grave" to cry, "Lord, how couldst thou find out such a word as this?" (188).
To this experience, the interpreting self of the present, the other self of the split "I," explains:

None but those that know what my trouble, (by their own experience,) was, can tell what relief came to my soul by this consideration. . . . I seemed now to stand upon the same ground with other sinners and to have as good right to the word and prayer as any of they. (188)

The relief and the right to the word and prayer lasts only until "towards the evening of the next day" (189). And even as the protagonist dares hope, his heart begins "again to ache" and he fears he may well "meet with disappointment at the last" (196). With the loss of comfort, the quest for light from the heavens, a place in creation, and the "Promise of Life" becomes again inseparable from the quest for an ending, for his hope may after all be only delusion: "I might be deceived and destroyed at the last" (195).

Comfort and peace regarding that ending, Bunyan concludes once again, can be maintained only if the hope or "refreshment" concurs and agrees with the scriptures: "For the Scriptures cannot be broken, John 10.35" (195). With this return to the Bible, Bunyan completes the metaphor for the formation of his identity. The protagonist's beginning lay in being taught to read and write, skills he promptly forgot. That loss signifies his condition--wordless and, therefore, storyless. Rebirth lies through acquiring, once
again, these skills necessary to constitute the self and thus to know the self's story. Like Esau, he has failed to value his own "birthright," but the wordless child has become a protagonist who has re-valued the necessary verbal tools. His story reaches its climax in a return to the Word, choosing and determining to read himself imaginatively into its masterplot and to write that story as an act of self-constitution.

And it is just here that the change and growth in the narrative perspective begins to come to fruition. Reading ceases to be passive reception and becomes an active, highly charged, highly imaginative engagement for the protagonist. In metaphors that continue to be those of struggle and battle, the protagonist, while often still victim, begins slowly, but increasingly, to make demands and set the terms of peace. Though the forward movement remains uneven, the progress achieved arises from a narrator who increasingly manipulates the plot to tell his story.

To begin this movement, the protagonist, who has formerly cringed before God's Word in fear, now begins to appropriate the Word and speak the Bible's Word to God: "O Lord, I beseech thee show me that thou hast loved me with an everlasting love, Jer. 31.3" (190). And, no sooner has he said the words but they return "with sweetness" to him "as an ecco or sounding": "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (190). Bunyan sets this word of love against the word
of rejection bound to the story of Esau: "O the combats and conflicts that I did then meet with!" (191). Now an able struggler in the combat, he strives to hold to the word of love as the story of Esau flies in his face, "like to Lightning": "I should be sometimes up and down twenty times in an hour" (190).

Returning to the Bible, he faces its words of death, reviewing in full the passages from Hebrews that force "the Gospel" from his soul. Hebrews 6 records the plight of those who "once enlightened" afterward "fall away." Hebrews 10 condemns to "Judgement and fiery Indignation" those who "sin wilfully" after having received "knowledge of the truth"; for such there remains "no more sacrifice for sin." And Hebrews 12 tells the story of the faithless Esau who sells his birthright and afterwards, "when he would have inherited the blessing," finds only rejection; "for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." The protagonist confronts these words of death and can only conclude:

No Promise or Encouragement was to be found in the Bible for me. . . . I had cut myself off by my transgressions, and left myself neither foot-hold, nor hand-hold amongst all the stayes and props in the precious Word of Life. (197)

In metaphor the narrator projects the worst, imagining the precariousness of the protagonist's position. He "sink[s]
into a gulf, as an house whose foundation is destroyed" (198). He is like a child "fallen into a Millpit, who though it could make some shift to scrable and spraul: in the water," yet it can find "neither hold for hand nor foot" and though struggling for life must at last die in the pit (198).

Having faced his annihilation and confronted the scriptures that exclude him from the Bible's saving Word, the protagonist has no alternative but to sustain his life through his own words. Determining to pray, he battles the Tempter:

The Tempter . . . laid at me very sore, suggesting, That neither the mercy of God, nor yet the blood of Christ, did at all concern me, nor could they help me, for my sin; therefore it was but in vain to pray. Yet, thought I, I will pray. But, said the Tempter, Your sin is unpardonable. Well, said I, I will pray. 'Tis no boot, said he. Yet, said I, I will pray. (200)

The protagonists' series of "I will's" culminates in the "utter[ing] of words" that produce, first a Scripture that fastens on his heart—"O man, great is thy Faith, Matt.15.28"—and, finally, a "piece of a sentence" that offers life—"My Grace is sufficient":

It was as if [this Word] had arms of grace so wide, that it could not onely inclose me, but many
more besides. (204)

And by these words, Bunyan concludes, he was "sustained" (205), a statement that must refer first to the Biblical words but that also must include the autobiographer's own words determinedly risked to ward off death and annihilation.

The Biblical word, however, though it has offered general comfort ("My grace is sufficient"), has left out particular assurance to the protagonist ("My grace is sufficient for thee"). Because the protagonist must know his personal relationship to grace, he remains in conflict:

My peace would be in and out some twenty times a day: Comfort now, and Trouble presently; Peace now, and before I could go a furlong, as full of Fear and Guilt as ever heart could hold. (205)

For seven weeks the scripture "about the sufficiency of grace" and the scripture "of Esau's parting with his Birthright" hang in balance as if a pair of scales weighs the two within the protagonist's mind: "Sometimes one end would be uppermost, and sometimes again the other" (205).

Toward the end of this period, the protagonist, while in a "Meeting of Gods People, full of sadness and terour," finds breaking upon him with great power the words that tip the scales toward grace:

"My grace is sufficient for thee, my grace is sufficient for thee, my grace is sufficient for
thee." (206)
Three times together these life-giving words break in, each a "mighty word," each "far bigger than other" words. Through words, the protagonist reaches the first of the epiphanies that mark his passage toward a life-sustaining sense of an ending.

Recalling the power of the words, "My grace is sufficient for thee," Bunyan reconstructs the moment in the church meeting when these words of life "broke upon him":

My Understanding was so enlightned, that I was as though I had seen the Lord Jesus look down from Heaven through the Tiles upon me and direct these words unto me. (207)

Some years earlier, while the protagonist was playing a Sunday game of Cat, the same figure had looked upon the sabbath-breaker with stern eyes, threatening punishment for the young man's ungodly practices (22). Now, for a second time, the figure of Christ looks upon the protagonist, but this time he speaks words of grace and life. To this promise, the protagonist responds with joy, first overcome with "glory and refreshing comfort" and then for a time warmed by a lingering encouragement to hope. But after "several weeks," the words about Esau return, forcing his soul to hang "as in a pair of Scales again, sometimes up, and sometimes down, now in peace, and anon again in terror" (207).
Torn between the possibilities of grace and damnation, Bunyan reconstructs the conflict between the Corinthian Word of Life and the Hebrew Word of Death. When the scripture of Grace orders his mind, he is quiet, but if the scripture concerning Esau dominates his thoughts, he dwells in torment:

Lord, thought I, if both these Scriptures would meet in my heart at once, I wonder which of them would get the better of me. (212)

With this thought, he begins to "desire of God" that these conflicting words will actually meet, willing such a battle, determined to know his fate. And, Bunyan recalls, "two or three days after, so they did indeed":

They boiled both upon me at a time, and did work and struggle strangely in me for a while; at last, that about Esau's birthright began to wax weak, and withdraw, and vanish; and this about the sufficiency of Grace prevailed, with peace and joy. (212)

Amazingly, perhaps ironically, the outcome of the dreaded battle between the Biblical words seems never to have been in doubt; the narrator interprets the result as a matter of authority, for, he explains, "the Word of the Law and Wrath must give place to the Word of Life and Grace" (214).

Yet though "grace" wins over "judgment," Bunyan still insists that he must have evidence that his own case is
amenable to grace, for he can not "quite be rid" of the parallel to his own plight that he finds in the Esau narrative. If Esau's story is his own, then there can be no grace for the protagonist, and he has ultimately lost, for when he faces his own end, he will find himself still rejected and despised by God.

Bunyan's quest for an ending has inevitably brought him back to an unavoidable, final confrontation with Hebrews, the only scriptures, the protagonist notes, that refuse to offer hope and instead stand against him to keep him out of heaven. He asks:

How many Scriptures are there against me? there is but three or four, and cannot God miss them, and save me for all of them? (208)

The protagonist laments, "O if it were not for these three or four words, now how might I be comforted!" Finally, he begins to wish these words altogether "out of the Book" (208).

But to omit these words would be to change the masterplot, and Bunyan images the writer's authority over his text and the power that lies in plot construction when the Biblical writers contemptuously refuse his tampering:

Then methought I should see as if both Peter, and Paul, and John, and all the Writers did look with scorn upon me, and hold me in derision. (209)
These writers, makers and masters of the Biblical text, refuse Bunyan's desire to rewrite scripture and chide the protagonist for his efforts to blame their words for his plight:

> All our words are truth, one of as much force as another; it is not we that have cut you off, but you have cast away yourself; there is none of our sentences that you must take hold upon but these, and such as these. (209)

Then the damning words of Hebrews, once again, intrude into Bunyan's text—"There remains no more sacrifice for sin, Heb. 6; And it had been better for them not to have known the will of God, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment, Heb. 10"—followed by 2 Peter 2:21: "For the Scriptures cannot be broken" (209).

For Bunyan the scriptures are the masterplot, a story that cannot be changed, a written text of undeniable authority. His own emplotted experience must be constructed as a subtext of the Bible's over-arching master story; this sacred story, in spite of Bunyan's resistance, necessarily will determine the ending of the protagonist's personal story. Yet underlying Bunyan's challenge to the scriptures in Hebrews is the strong desire to shape his own story and write his own ending.

In Bunyan's struggle to write his story, the embryo exists that will grow as other writers that follow Bunyan
increasingly transfer authority from the Biblical plot to individual story. Peter Brooks notes the "new importance" of the life-history in the post-Enlightenment West, a factor he traces to "the decline in belief in a sacred masterplot." No longer able to believe in a "Providential history" that subsumes all the "errant individual human histories to a justified, if distant, end," society begins to value plot because of the "authority of narrative" to speak of "origins in relation to endpoints."

Bunyan, writing in the pre-Enlightenment West, cannot reject the Bible as his authoritative narrative as he writes his own life-history, but his problems with that text foreshadow the rise described by Brooks of an increasing competition between the authority of personal experience and the authority of the Biblical narrative. As noted earlier, Nussbaum argues that the protagonist of *Grace Abounding* can only rebel "within" authority (23), but even so, Nussbaum suggests, as Bunyan explores the possibility of rebellion against God, his own autobiographical text begins "to compete for authority with the Scriptural text" (21). This competition for authorial power emerges clearly in Bunyan's

image of the Biblical writers' scorning his rebellion against the authoritative book of Hebrews.

Blocked by the New Testament writers' adamant resistance to his challenge to their texts, Bunyan makes a surprising move: he imaginatively transforms these scornful apostles into the "Elders of the City of Refuge," those persons described in Joshua with a mandate to protect the slayer who kills his neighbor unintentionally (Joshua 20:3). According to the Joshua narrative, the guilty slayer can flee to the City of Refuge, stand in the entrance of the city gate, and declare his cause "in the ears of the elders of that city"; the elders in turn must offer shelter, "a place, that he may dwell among them" (Joshua 20:4). Even if the "avenger of blood" pursues the slayer, the Elders of the City of Refuge will not deliver him up because he committed the crime unwittingly and did not hate his victim beforetime (Joshua 20:5). The slayer, therefore, finds in the City of Refuge a dwelling-place.

Bunyan explains his own relationship to the Elders of the City of Refuge:

These [Peter, Paul, and John, i.e., the "Apostles"] were to be the Judges both of my Case and me, while I stood with the avenger of blood at my heels, trembling at their Gate for deliverance; also with a thousand fears and mistrusts, that they would shut me out for ever. (210)
The question, Bunyan continues, is whether or not he, as the slayer pursued by the avenger of blood, has the right to enter the City of Refuge. Considering the text carefully, he determines that the slayer "who lay in wait to shed blood" could not enter the city, but only the murderer who shed blood "unawares," not out of "spight, or grudge, or malice" (218):

I thought verily I was the man that must enter,
for because I had smitten my Neighbour
unwittingly, and hated him not afore-time. (219)

With growing confidence, Bunyan argues his case:

I hated Him not afore-time, no, I prayed unto him,
was tender of sinning against him; yea, and
against this wicked Temptation I had strove for a
twelve-moneth before; yea, and also when it did
pass thorow my heart, it did it in spite of my
teeth. (219)

And, finally, on a note of triumph Bunyan makes the judgment:

Wherefore I thought I had right to enter this
City, and the Elders, which are the Apostles, were
not to deliver me up. (219)

The victory is Bunyan's, for the Apostles, who would condemn him on the basis of the Hebrews scripture, must, as the Elders of the City of Refuge, offer him sanctuary because they themselves are bound by the scriptural word in Joshua.
Bunyan recalls:

But above all the Scriptures that yet I did meet with, that in the twentieth of Joshua was the greatest comfort to me. (218)

That comfort must arise, at least in part, because the Joshua passage has enabled the narrator to seize control of his story. Through the activity of the imagination, he has constructed for himself a City of Refuge where salvation cannot be denied the slayer. This self-assertion marks a significant turning point in the autobiographer's quest for identity and his literary search for an ending.

The narrator, having established his right to author his story, "ventures," once again, "to come nigh unto those most fearful and terrible Scriptures" of Hebrews, and, amazingly, he now discovers "their visage changed": "They looked not so grimly on me as before I thought they did" (222-23). Upon approaching "the sixth of the Hebrews" ("trembling for fear it should strike"), he finds that the "falling there intended was a falling quite away" and "an absolute denial of the Gospel of Remission of sins by Christ." In considering "the tenth of the Hebrews," he finds that the wilful Sin there mentioned is not every wilful sin, but "that which doth throw off Christ, and then his Commandments too." And upon re-examining "the twelfth of the Hebrews, about Esau's selling his Birth-right," Bunyan now can differentiate clearly between Esau's action
and his own: Esau's sin was "a thought consented to ... after some deliberation," it was "a publick and open action," and it was a "continued" action, since "twenty year after, he was found to despise [his Birth-right] still" (225).

But the most troublesome aspect of the story for the protagonist has been that "Esau sought a place of repentance," but even here the narrator now differentiates Esau's case from the protagonist's: Esau's repentance "was not for the Birth-right, but for the Blessing," as indicated in the Genesis narrative. For the Hebrew writer then, Bunyan suggests, the Birth-right signified Regeneration, and the Blessing the Eternal Inheritance. Thus when the "Apostle" writes, "Lest there be any profance person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his Birth-right," his words can be re-read,

Lest there be any person amongst you that shall cast off all those blessed beginnings of God that at present are upon him, in order to a new Birth, lest they become as Esau, even be rejected afterwards, when they would inherit the Blessing.

(226)

Continuing his interpretation, the narrator moves from these "blessed beginnings" of "new Birth" to the end:

For many there are who, in the day of Grace and Mercy despise those things which are indeed the
Birth-right to Heaven, who yet, when the deciding-day appears, will cry as loud as Esau, "Lord, Lord, open to us; but then, as Isaac would not repent, no more will God the Father, but will say, "I have blessed these, yea, and they shall be blessed; but as for you, Depart, [for] you are workers of iniquity." (227)

Bunyan transforms the Esau narrative into a story of beginning and ending, a microcosm of the larger Biblical story as outlined by Frank Kermode in The Sense of an Ending:

[The Bible] begins at the beginning ("In the beginning . . ") and ends with a vision of the end ("Even so, come, Lord Jesus"); the first book is Genesis, the last Apocalypse. Ideally, it is a wholly concordant structure, the end is in harmony with the beginning, the middle with beginning and end.4

Kermode argues that man lives "in the middest," and thus needs "fictive concords with origins and ends" to give "meaning to lives" (7). And Eakin, commenting on Kermode's thesis, notes that "we are all orphans, living as we do 'in the middest,' equally removed from knowledge of our birth

and our eventual death." Thus, "we write and we live with the end constantly in view," concludes Eakin, because we must always "attempt to bring closure and hence significance to the otherwise meaningless flux of human experience" (163). In this context, Bunyan's transformation of the troublesome Esau narrative into a story of Genesis and Apocalypse illustrates the relation of narrative to his emplotted life. He has found a solution to his "orphaned" condition through re-interpreting the Esau story and, in so doing, he has imaginatively appropriated Esau's beginning while rejecting his ending in order to construct an alternative ending, one that gives meaning to life "in the middest."

Esau chooses to reject his birthright, the "blessed beginnings," and thus loses the blessing, the "eternal inheritance"; he comes to the end, therefore, orphaned, unable to claim Isaac as father; on the "deciding-day" Esau may cry, "Lord, Lord," but it will be too late for repentance, for the end was decided in its beginning. Bunyan, too, slighted his birthright when he yielded to the temptation to "sell" Christ, but his was a hasty act, followed by repentance; therefore, the "blessed beginnings" can yet be claimed, and this "new birth" provides a father for the orphan, a father who grants his "blessing" as an eternal inheritance.
Bunyan, having imaginatively claimed a place in the City of Refuge and having differentiated his emplotted life from Esau's, reconstructs his third--and climactic--vision of the Son. Christ had first looked, "hotly displeased," upon the Sabbath-breaker playing tipcat to condemn; then He had looked through the tiles of the church roof to encourage; in the final vision, however, it is Bunyan who looks up to claim his place and his inheritance:

One day, as I was passing in the field, and that too with some dashes on my Conscience, fearing lest yet all was not right, suddenly this sentence fell upon my Soul, "Thy righteousness is in Heaven"; and methought withall, I saw with the eyes of my Soul Jesus Christ at Gods right hand, there, I say, as my Righteousness. (229)

Bunyan reiterates, making his assertion certain:

Wherever I was, or whatever I was a doing, God could not say of me, "He wants my Righteousness," for that was just before him. . . . My Righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever," Heb. 13.8. (229)

Bunyan's orphanhood is subsumed in the sonship of Christ, his place secure because the Son's position is unchanging. And he demonstrates his new confidence by quoting from Hebrews to certify his sense of an ending.
Bunyan, writing from Bedford jail, images the life possible, even "in the middest," as freedom from imprisonment:

Now did my chains fall off my Legs indeed, I was loosed from my affliction and irons, my temptations also fled away: so that from that time those dreadful Scriptures of God left off to trouble me; now went I also home rejoicing, for the grace and love of God. (230)

Convinced that grace abounds, even to the sinner who has despairs of his salvation for over two years, Bunyan returns to his home to look for the scripture, "Thy Righteousness is in heaven," but, when he cannot find the "Saying," his heart begins again to sink. At last, he finds in First Corinthians a similar statement: "He of God is made unto us Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption" (230). The closeness of that Scripture seems to confirm his own reassuring sentence.

Though Bunyan perhaps remained unaware of the source of the sentence that reassured him, "thy righteousness is in heaven," Roger Sharrock suggests Luther's Commentarie on the Galathians as a possible source. Luther wrote:

Moreover, they know that God is then most nere unto them, when he seemeth to be farthest of, and that he is then a most mercifull and loving Saviour, when he semeth to be most angry, to
afflict and destroy. Also they know that they have an everlasting righteousness, which they wait for through hope, as a certain and sure possession laid up for them in heaven, even when they feel the horrible terrors of sinne and death. (Luther, Folio 233; Sharrock, n. 129, p. 150; emphasis added)

Earlier Bunyan had drawn comfort from reading Luther's Commentarie when he found his own condition in Luther's experience; living his way further into his own experience, he finds, perhaps unconsciously, in Luther the words to assess and describe a new understanding of that condition. At first, Bunyan follows Luther's image, suggesting that such "righteousness" is a "possession," a treasure to be claimed:

Now I could look from myself to him and should reckon that all those Graces of God that now were green in me, were yet but like those crack'd-Groats and Four-pence-half-pennies that rich men carry in their Purses, when their Gold is in their Trunks at home: O I saw my Gold was in my Trunk at home! (232)

but then Bunyan transforms the figure, moving from a "possession" in heaven to a person who is both the Son of God and at the same time an alternate self of the autobiographer:
The Lord did also lead me into the mystery of Union with this Son of God, that I was joyned to him, that I was flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone. . . . By this also was my faith in him, as my Righteousness, the more confirmed to me; for if he and I were one, then his Righteousness was mine. (233)

In a final, grand metaphor Bunyan looks into heaven, not to see the Christ looking down on him, but to see himself:

Now could I see myself in Heaven and Earth at once, in heaven by my Christ, by my Head, by my Righteousness and Life, though on Earth by my Body or Person. (233)

Just as he imaginatively constructed his place in the City of Refuge, he now takes possession of Heaven and, in doing so, he projects past his end to make eternal life a present possession.

The protagonist's story seems concluded as the narrator summarizes the causes of his temptation: his failure to pray for continued deliverance from temptation and his own weakness in presuming to tempt God. He then considers advantages gained from this temptation: his quickened sense of God and his Son, his faith in the truth of scripture, and his ready acceptance of God's promise. Commenting on his engagement with Biblical truth, the narrator exclaims:
O! one sentence of the Scripture did more afflict
and terrify my mind, I mean those sentences that
stood against me, (as sometimes I thought they
every one did) more, I say, than an Army of forty
thousand men that might have come against me. Wo
be to him against whom the Scriptures bend
themselves. (246)

Having survived the battle with the scriptures, however, the
narrator can claim:

I never saw those heights and depths in grace, and
love, and mercy, as I saw after this temptation:
great sins do draw out great grace; and where
guilt is most terrible and fierce, there the mercy
of God in Christ . . . appears most high and
mighty. (252)

Again, the narrative seems to conclude with the narrator's
perspective interpreting, assessing, and evaluating the
protagonist's period of temptation and his experience of
salvation.

In an almost pedestrian transition, the narrator,
having seemingly concluded, continues:

Now I shall go forward to give you a relation of
other of the Lord's leadings with me, of his
dealings with me at sundry other seasons, and of
the temptations I then did meet withall. (253)
Suddenly, and certainly unexpectedly, the protagonist's world of temptation and doubt returns. After joining the fellowship of the Bedford church, he finds, as he partakes in the communion service, that a "fierce and sad" temptation seizes him "both to blaspheme the Ordinance, and to wish some deadly thing to those that then did eat thereof" (253).

This account of his temptation to blaspheme and his wish for death to others is followed by two reconstructions of his own encounters with death. The self-narration, which had seemed to become a celebration of life reclaimed from death, becomes, once again, death-focused.

"Upon a time," recalls Bunyan, when "inclining to a Consumption," he "suddenly and violently" became so ill and so weak that he began to fear for his life, and as death seemed to approach, there came also, recalls Bunyan, flocking into my mind an innumerable company of my sins and transgression. . . namely, my deadness, dulness, and coldness in holy Duties; my wandrings of heart, my wearisomness in all good things, my want of love to God, his wayes, and people, with this at the end of all, "Are these the fruits of Christianity? Are these the tokens of a blessed man?" (254)

These questions produce so much fear that Bunyan feels his sickness doubled; formerly weak only in his "outer man," he now feels himself equally sick in his "inward man": "My Soul
was clog'd with guilt, now also was my former experience of God's goodness to me quite taken out of my mind, and hid as if it had never been, nor seen" (257). Sinking into despair, he laments: "Live I must not, Die I dare not" (257).

Once again, however, the word of God performs its transformation: "Ye are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, Rom. 3.24" (257). And with that word, he is as one "awakened out of some troublesome sleep and dream," realizing, once again, that God, to justify the sinner, looks not upon the sinner but upon his Son (258). And Bunyan exclaims:

Now was I got on high; I saw myself within the arms of Grace and Mercy; and though I was before afraid to think of a dying hour, yet now I cried, Let me die; now death was lovely and beautiful in my sight. (259)

But at another time, when Bunyan again falls ill, the Tempter returns, for, as Bunyan suggests, the Tempter is "much for assaulting the Soul when it begins to approach towards the Grave" (260). Once more, former comfort departs in the face of death. The protagonist looks upon the "terrors of Death and the Judgment of God," fearing that if he dies, he will miscarry forever. He imagines his damnation, envisioning himself "already descending into the Pit," and he laments, "I was as one dead before Death came"
But even in the midst of his descent into Hell, the "words of the Angels" carrying Lazarus into Abraham's bosom "dart" upon him: "So shall it be with thee when thou dost leave this World" (260), and with this promise his sickness vanishes.

At another time, however, "a great cloud of darkness" descends, hiding "the things of God and Christ." In this state the protagonist's very soul seems dead, his loins broken, his hands and feet bound with chains. After three or four days in this condition, as he sits by his fire, Bunyan recalls that suddenly, he felt in his heart a word, "I must go to Jesus." At this word, his spirit revives, his "former darkness and atheism" flies, and "the blessed things of heaven" return to his view (262).

Turning to his wife, Bunyan asks whether there is such a scripture--"I must go to Jesus." When she doesn't know, he sits trying to remember "such a place"; then "after two or three minutes," a fragment of scripture comes "bolting" in upon him: "And to an innumerable company of Angels." Turning to the twelfth chapter of Hebrews, he finds the scripture about "mount Zion" set before his eyes (262).

With joy, Bunyan recalls, he turns to his wife to cry, "O now I know, I know!" And out of the twelfth chapter of Hebrews, the very chapter containing the narrative of Esau that so oppressed the protagonist, comes a vision of the heavenly Jerusalem, with Bunyan entering the gates in the
company of angels and the saints, standing before "God the
Judge of all" unafraid because he has been made "perfect":

Ye are come to mount Zion, to the City of the
living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an
innumerable company of Angels, to the general
assembly and Church of the first-born, which are
written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all,
and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and
to Jesus the Mediator of the New Testament, and to
the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better
things than that of Abel, Heb. 12.22,23,24. (264)

Bunyan has found an ending he will use again in Pilgrim's
Progress when Christian and Hopeful emerge from the River of
Death to be surrounded by a heavenly host who accompany them
to the gate of heaven as all the bells in the city ring for
joy.

To conclude the conversion segment of his narrative,
Bunyan constructs two possible endings. Out of sickness and
fear of death, he imaginatively constructs his descent into
the pit, "dead before death comes"; then in an alternate
ending and with a contrasting image, he describes a
triumphal entry into the heavenly Jerusalem. As the
autobiographer obviously sees, there can be little question
that the fitting ending to his life-story is the vision
appropriated from Hebrews, the book of the Bible that has
tormented the protagonist with its descriptions of the
unpardonable sin and haunted him with the reprobation of
Esau: "For you know how that afterwards when he would have
inherited the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no
place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with
tears."

The self-narration of the autobiography proper may be
said to begin with the protagonist's assent to sell his
savior—a re-enactment, for Bunyan, of the primal fall—and
the narration ends, following the pattern of the Biblical
master-story, with an entry into the heavenly city. By
appropriating Hebrews to his own narrative, the writer
achieves a life-story that follows the Biblical paradigm,
seemingly bringing to his experiences meaning and
significance as he sets his emplotted life within the
Biblical masterplot. But to read *Grace Abounding* in this
way requires a determination to ignore the fact that
Bunyan's narrative has, not one ending, but a plentitude of
endings. The story could well end with the City of Refuge,
or with the vision of Christ as Bunyan's righteousness or,
surely, with the march of the Elect into the heavenly
Jerusalem. The narrative achieves a successful ending only
to end again and again. In this end-focused narrative, the
construction of endings seems, finally, to be secondary to
the self-constitution and self-discovery occurring through
the narrative process. Thus Bunyan forces his narrative to
sustain a plurality of endings with no closure because these
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endings increasingly produce the selfhood the autobiographer seeks.

Thus, after bringing his conversion narrative to an "end," Bunyan appends two "brief accounts," summarizing his ministry and imprisonment. In the description of his experience as an itinerant preacher, Bunyan stresses the contrary states that co-exist when he preaches, "full of guilt and terreur" himself, but able, even so, to preach with strength and power until, his work done, he finds he can scarcely climb down the pulpit stairs before his own inner torments return (277). The "I" of the ministry segment seems to combine both protagonist and narrator of the conversion-story proper, for the public and private selves, the ministry to others and to the self, are joined in an "I" whose maturity can bear the inevitability of self-division.

The minister familiar with travel into the darkness of his own soul also travels into "the darkest places in the Countrey, even amongst those people . . . furthest off of profession"; there he labors "to bring forth Children to God" (289-90). No longer fatherless himself, he can become father to others, knowing with the Psalmist that "children are the heritage of the Lord" (290).

In the extensive addition to the fifth edition, Bunyan defends his innocence against charges that he has "Misses," "Whores," and "Bastards"; these slanders linked Bunyan to
Agnes Beaumont, a twenty-one-year-old convert who defied her father to attend church, riding behind Bunyan on his horse to one of the meetings. When the enraged father forbade her to return, then relented, and then promptly thereafter died within two days, Agnes was charged with his murder and Bunyan was suspected of furnishing poison to effect the father's death. When Agnes was acquitted, the scandal abated, but Bunyan felt himself to be a victim of unjust accusations of immoral conduct. Thus his defense in the ministry appendix takes the form of a challenge to his enemies to meet him before the tribunal of God; here Bunyan uses once again the metaphor of the courtroom, forced in this instance to defend his public honor, as he once did his soul and even earlier his body, before threatening persecutors. Certain of his vindication from the malicious charges, he defies his foes: "I am not the man, I wish that they themselves be guiltless, if all the Fornicators and Adulterers in England were hang'd by the Neck till they be dead, John Bunyan, the object of their Envie, would be still alive and well" (314).

The imaginatively constructed trial of the ministry appendix becomes an actual relation of trial, judgment, and imprisonment in the second "brief account" appended to the conversion narrative. Bunyan swiftly summarizes the events presented dramatically in the Relation of the Imprisonment of Mr. John Bunyan, the naive protagonist of the earlier
narrative having written his way toward a self-definition that can sustain contrarieties and a self-understanding that accepts doubt as the inevitable twin of certitude. This maturing "I" recalls his efforts, as nonconformity became an issue, to prepare for the possibility of either long imprisonment or death, but even as he tried, he failed: "I found myself a man, and compassed with infirmities" (327). The parting from his wife and children was to him "as the pulling the flesh from [his] bones" because he knew the "hardships, miseries, and wants" they must endure, especially his blind child: "O the thoughts of the hardship I thought my blind one might go under, would break my heart to pieces" (327). The "I" of the Relation interpreted his role in heroic dimensions; the "I" of Grace Abounding knows the suffering.

Yet both protagonists join momentarily as the prisoner images, once again, an end to his life-story, his death at the gallows. The prisoner in Bedford gaol, "possessed with the thought of death" and feeling "the rope about his neck," imagines the shame of his "pale face and tottering knees" and the pride of his final speech to the "multitudes" who have come to see him die. And once again, as he faces his death in this repeatedly death-focused autobiographical act, the Tempter torments him with doubts about the end. But this time, to the Tempter's questions--But whither must you go when you die? what will become of you? where will you
be found in another world? what evidence have you for heaven and glory?—Bunyan can respond.

In the conversion narrative, Bunyan yielded to the Tempter, agreeing to let Christ go, imaging his assent as a re-enactment of the primal fall: "Down I fell, as a Bird that is shot from the top of a Tree, into great guilt and fearful despair" (140). But in this prison appendix, Bunyan, though fearful of death and finally uncertain of his end, refuses to yield and rejects despair:

I thought that God might chuse whether he would give me comfort now, or at the hour of death; but I might not therefore chuse whether I would hold my profession or no: I was bound, but he was free: yea, it was my dutie to stand to his Word, whether he would ever look upon me or no, or save me at the last. (337)

Uncomforted, bound, uncertain of his salvation, Bunyan, unexpectedly, chooses to act:

I am for going on, and venturing my eternal state with Christ, whether I have comfort here or no. (337)

In this remarkable act of self-assertion, Bunyan, who earlier "fell" like a bird from the top of a tree, now images his response, not as a fall, but as a self-chosen leap:
I will leap off the Ladder even blindfold into Eternitie, sink or swim, come heaven, come hell; Lord Jesus, if thou wilt catch me, do; if not, I will venture for thy Name. (337)

The "I" that seized control of his life-story has become the "I" who ventures, not because he knows the end ("come heaven, come hell"), but because the quest for the end has accomplished the genesis of the self. And it is this "new birth," this self born of writing, that is the achievement of Bunyan's autobiographical act in The Relation and Grace Abounding. As Bunyan made his book, his book made him; in turning to words to reconstruct his past, he produced in narrative a self who can reach toward the future knowing the creative and sustaining power of words and able, therefore, to minister the word as author and preacher, both in fiction and from the pulpit.
A Word, a Word to lean a weary Soul upon, 
that I might not sink forever! 
'twas that I hunted for. 
John Bunyan

I. Conclusion and Preface: A Frame 
to Grace Abounding

From the book of Hebrews, Bunyan appropriates to his 
life-story the Esau narrative of reprobation and the 
apocalyptic, heavenly-city vision of salvation; this 
appropriation enables the autobiographer to tell his own 
story as one of both loss and gain, death and life. Bunyan 
reiterates and crystallizes this tension in the brief 
preface and briefer conclusion to Grace Abounding; at the 
same time, he suggests the complexity of his self­ 
construction by an unexpected but telling reversal, for he 
emphasizes in the conclusion his doubts and in the preface 
his certainties.

The conclusion set in contrast to the preface focuses 
the tension of the self-definition the prisoner achieved 
through his autobiographical act and the contraries his 
self-narration must sustain. Together the two writings 
provide a frame to display Bunyan's life-story, a narrative 
that relates a process of self-constitution through writing. 
Realizing the wordless and storyless condition of his
childhood, Bunyan's quest for "a Word to lean a weary Soul upon" (250) compels him to become an obsessive reader and writer, sustaining himself through torrents of words in his quest for the Word that transforms death into life. Though his quest produces no Word of closure, but rather a multitude of words and a plurality of endings, the process of the search itself has accomplished both self-discovery and self-definition. And it is out of this difficult and painfully achieved understanding of the self that Bunyan can describe the life of faith as one of flux with altering states of mind and an ever-present tension between doubt and certitude.

To conclude his end-focused yet seemingly "end-less" narrative, Bunyan, whose mode has been to flood the reader with torrents of words, attempts with unexpected economy to list the complexities of the life of faith.

In his first point, temptation has become a given and the extremes of atheism and theism co-exist:

1. Of all the Temptations that ever I met with in my life, to question the being of God, and the truth of his Gospel, is the worst, and worst to be born; when this temptation comes, it takes away my girdle from me, and removeth the foundations from under me. (p. 102)

Sustaining the self when the ultimate structures or supports of existence disappear has become an ongoing task. Like the
Phoenix, the self must rise out of the ashes of its destruction. Rebirth occurs again and again. To interpret the life of faith in this manner necessitates a recurring pattern of moving beyond destruction toward creation, and the story of such a "life" can be told only if an ending can produce the beginning of a new story.

In such a story, paradox is the principal grammar:

2. Sometimes, when, after sin committed, I have looked for sore chastisement from the hand of God, the very next that I have had from him hath been the discovery of his grace.

3. I have wondered much at this one thing, that though God doth visit my Soul with never so blessed a discoverie of himself, yet I have found again, that such hours have attended me afterwards, that I have been in my spirit so filled with darkness, that I could not so much as once conceive what that God and that comfort was with which I have been refreshed.

4. I have sometimes seen more in a line of the Bible then I could well tell how to stand under, and yet at another time the whole Bible hath been to me as drie as a stick . . . that I could not conceive the least dram of refreshment, though I have lookt it all over.
5. Of all tears, they are the best that are made by the Blood of Christ; and of all joy, that is the sweetest that is mixt with mourning over Christ. (p. 102)

For Bunyan, truth can be communicated only through the language of paradox. Grace and judgment, God's presence and absence, the Word's plenitude and dearth, and the soul's joy and sorrow, all are the polarities of experience that must be embraced and can only be described in terms contradictory but accurately descriptive.

It is in the context of these ambiguities that Bunyan can end the conclusion to Grace Abounding with a confession of the "seven abominations" in his heart and an affirmation of the "good" that these abominations generate. The first catalog begins with his "inclinings to unbelief," and the second ends with the claim that provocation to doubt results in faith that "God thorow Christ" will carry him "thorow this world" (102-3). Bunyan's experiences have convinced him that the life of faith has this dialectic, and the autobiographer's determination to encode these experiences in narrative has produced the self who finds the truth of his existence inevitably paradoxical.

Grace Abounding records the development of this assertive "I," and Bunyan precisely images the emergence of the self in the "birth vision," presented earlier as a projection of desire but appropriate, finally, as a paradigm
of the inward drama of the entire autobiography. After overhearing the talk of the poor women of Bedford, who seem to have discovered a "new world," Bunyan realizes that in all his thoughts about religion, the "new birth" has never entered his mind. This experience assumes a symbolic form when the protagonist dreams he sees the poor people of Bedford "set on the Sunny side" of a high mountain, "there refreshing themselves with the pleasant beams of the Sun." Bunyan, however, outside in the dark and cold, finds his way to a place in the Sun blocked by a high wall. "Thorow this wall my Soul did greatly desire to pass," recalls the protagonist; he longs to go "into the very midst" of the Bedford folk to comfort himself "with the heat of their Sun."

Making his way around the wall, he discovers a narrow gap, "like a little door-way," and he attempts to pass through the very "straight and narrow" opening. Finally he stubbornly pushes and squeezes his head through the gap, and then by "a side-ling striving," he gets his shoulders and body through, finally taking his place "in the midst" of the folk, "comforted with the light and heat of their Sun" (54-55). The vision functions in Bunyan's self-narration as a rebirth image, a foreshadowing of salvation that will come, but the vision also depicts a self-assertive act and functions as a symbol of determined self-creation. *Grace Abounding* displays that creative act by tracing the growth
of consciousness and charting the generation of self that has occurred.

This growth becomes further evident in the Preface written by Bunyan to accompany George Larkin's publication of *Grace Abounding* in 1666. At this halfway point of his twelve-year imprisonment, the prisoner and autobiographer imitates Paul in his greeting, "I thank God upon every Remembrance of you," and, assuming the Pauline posture of father to the children of his ministry, Bunyan offers his words as the means for "edifying and building up in Faith" those who read "the work of God" upon his soul. He pledges to tell his experiences "even from the very first, till now" so that his children may perceive the "castings down and raisings up" of their father.

Though the words suggest the losses and gains the protagonist will sustain, the tone of the narrative voice suggests authority and position. The author justifies the recollection and publication of his personal narrative by citing impressive precedents in Moses, David, and Paul, all of whom urged the recollection and recitation of personal experiences with God. These precedents serve to elevate and dignify Bunyan's text while at the same time establishing the value of the autobiographical act. To attempt to turn the self into a text becomes an act of heroism parallel to David's battle with Goliath. Autobiographical narrative, requiring as it does the memory of one's fears, doubts, and
"sad moneths," becomes as the "head of Goliah," a sign of both danger and deliverance, of death and life.

In this context then the autobiographer can urge his readers to begin a personal quest for their own stories:

Remember the word that first laid hold upon you;
remember your terrours of conscience, and fear of death and hell: remember also your tears and prayers to God; yea, how you sighed under every hedge for mercy. (p. 3)

Bunyan's insistently repeated injunction to "remember the Word, the Word, I say, upon which the Lord hath caused you to hope" seems to carry the echoes of his own lament: "A Word, a Word to lean a weary Soul upon, that I might not sink for ever! 'twas that I hunted for" (par. 250). The writer born of words offers himself as text, believing that his own creative act can effect not only self-creation but can bring the generative principle to others.

Bunyan concludes the Preface by pointing the way into his narrative:

My dear Children,

The Milk and Honey is beyond this Wilderness:

God be merciful to you, and grant that you be not slothful to go in to possess the Land. (p. 4)

So writes the seventeenth-century Moses who lies imprisoned in the wilderness as he points the way into the wilderness of his text. In his metaphor Bunyan urges his readers
toward their personal quests—and their personal stories—as they begin to read *Grace Abounding*—a life-story that appropriates the narratives of Paul, Luther, Esau, Spira, and many others. Thus he seems to suggest that self-narration accomplished through reading and writing personal stories is an appropriate and perhaps even a necessary task to be undertaken on a journey toward the Promised Land.

II. Rebirth through Self-Narration

In this study, I have explored Bunyan's two autobiographical texts: *The Relation of the Imprisonment of Mr. John Bunyan* and *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, arguing that Bunyan's self-narration is a complex act that extends over a period of approximately twenty years. The first event of that act, I have conjectured, occurs shortly after his imprisonment in 1660 when he begins the five narratives of the *Relation*, a text that seemingly was written soon after the events it records but left unpublished until 1765. The silencing of the autobiographical voice of the *Relation* and the "death" of its naive protagonist leaves the writer storyless, a condition reproduced in Bunyan's second autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* where Bunyan portrays himself as a child who "utterly" forgets how to read and write, leaving him both wordless and storyless. If *Grace
**Abounding**, begun some time after the accounts of the **Relation** ended in 1662, serves as a wake for the naive, confident protagonist of the **Relation**, it simultaneously records the waking of an autobiographical "I" to death's ever-present threat to life's structures of meaning and portrays that awakened self's struggle toward new life and new meaning through self-narration, a task that requires constituting his experience and, ultimately, himself in words. The storyless child becomes the man who discovers first in reading and later in writing the creative power of language. Reading and then writing for Bunyan become acts of life, and those acts record the widening circumference of consciousness that begins with the "I" of the **Relation** in all its naivete and develops into the maturing "I" of **Grace Abounding**, a text whose six editions from 1666 to 1688 record through its frequent revisions a journey of the self "into the deep." Narrative becomes a mode of experience for the narrator, as he relates the "castings down and raisings up" of the protagonist, and it is narrative experience—the task of telling his story, of constituting himself in narrative—that sends the increasingly assertive narrator on a quest for an ending to his personal story, a search that leads him finally not to an ending but a beginning—to the genesis of a self who chooses to venture the life of faith, even when the ending of the life-story remains unknown.
The *Relation* and *Grace Abounding* together reconstruct in narrative a paradigm of life-death-rebirth, a pattern that embodied for the sectarian the Christian story of salvation. Though Bunyan repeatedly despairs as he fails to find evidence of this pattern in his own experience, he does, nevertheless, narrate in his two autobiographies a story of life-death-rebirth; the irony inherent in Bunyan's life-writings is that he is telling the story that he repeatedly asserts he cannot tell. In doing so, he brings meaning and coherence to the chaotic, seemingly incoherent experiences he emplots. In the process of attempting to shape his repetitive, torturous descent into the deep of his inner experience, a self who can tell a coherent story emerges. That self has been constituted through language in narrative. Ultimately then, through writing the story of the self Bunyan creates a self who possesses a story, who is born of writing, and thus who has achieved rebirth through narrative.

Further, the writer argues through his text that reaching back into the past to write the story of the self has enabled him to construct in narrative a self who can reach toward the future to minister the generative word to others in sermon and fiction. Bunyan has assuredly found a "word to lean a weary soul upon," and he has also found far more: he has discovered a faith in the life-sustaining and life-changing power of words, a discovery that becomes
abundantly evident as he transforms the personal experiences of his autobiographical act into the allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. In Christian's pilgrimage, the autobiographer transmutes his personal narrative into "a universal myth" (Sharrock, Introd. *Pilgrim's Progress* 9), finding in fiction a form to narrate a story whose end exists in concord with its beginning and middle. Christian's triumphant entry into the Celestial City, however, must at least in part point backwards to the self-narration of the autobiographer who dared to imagine his own angel-accompanied triumphant march through the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem. That ending to Bunyan's autobiographical act, however, becomes only one of multiple endings, none of which effect closure, forcing the autobiographer in *The Relation* and *Grace Abounding* to sustain his life through words and define the meaning of that life through narration as he lives toward an ending whose outcome necessarily remains unknown.
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