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So far, however, as I could collect anything certain, I gathered that they have two distinct currencies, each under the control of its own banks and mercantile codes. One of these (the one with the Musical Banks) was supposed to be the system, and to give out the currency in which all monetary transactions should be carried on; and as far as I could see, all who wished to be considered respectable, kept a larger or smaller balance at these banks. On the other hand, if there is one thing of which I am more sure than another, it is that the amount so kept had no direct commercial value in the outside world; I am sure that the managers and cashiers of the Musical Banks were not paid in their own currency. Mr Nosnibor used to go to these banks, or rather to the great mother bank of the city, sometimes but not very often. He was a pillar of one of the other kinds of banks, though he appeared to hold some minor office also in the musical ones. The ladies generally went alone; as indeed was the case in most families, except on state occasions.

I had long wanted to know more of this strange system, and had the greatest desire to accompany my hostess and her daughters. I had seen them go out almost every morning since my arrival and had noticed that they carried their purses in their hands, not exactly ostentatiously, yet just so as that those who met them should see whither they were going. I had never, however, yet been asked to go with them myself.

SAMUEL BUTLER *Erephion* (1872)

ALLEGORY

ALLEGORY is a specialized form of symbolic narrative, which does not merely suggest something beyond its literal meaning, but insists on being decoded in terms of another meaning. The most famous allegory in the English language is John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which allegorizes the Christian struggle to achieve salvation as a journey from the City of Destruction, through obstacles and distractions like the Slough of Despond and Vanity Fair, to the Celestial City. Virtues and vices are personified as people Christian encounters on his journey, e.g.:

Now, when he was got up to the top of the hill, there came two men running to meet him again; the name of the one was *Timorous*, and of the other, *Mistrust*; to whom *Christian* said, Sirs, what's the matter? You run the wrong way. *Timorous* answered, that they were going to the City of *Zion*, and had got up that difficult place; but, said he, the further we go, the more danger we meet with; wherefore we turned, and are going back again.

Since the development of an allegorical narrative is determined at every point by its one-to-one correspondence to the implied meaning, it tends to work against what Henry James called "the sense of felt life" in the novel. Allegory therefore appears in mainstream fiction, if at all, in interpolated narratives like dreams (*Pilgrim's Progress* is itself framed as a dream) or stories told by one character to another. Graham Greene's *A Burnt-out Case*, for instance, features a bed-time story told by the hero Query to the childlike Marie Rycker. The story, about a successful but cynical jeweller, is a transparent allegory of Query's professional career as a famous Catholic architect who has lost his religious faith; it also has a teasing relevance to Greene's own life and literary career:

"Everyone said he was a master-technician, but he was highly praised too for the seriousness of his subject matter because on the top of each egg there was a gold cross set with chips of precious stones in honour of the King."

As an extended fictional device allegory is used mainly in didactic, satirical fables, such as *Gulliver's Travels*, *Animal Farm*

and *Erewhon*. In these masterpieces a surface realism of presentation gives the fantastic events a kind of weird plausibility, and the game of correspondences is played with such wit and ingenuity that it never becomes boringly predictable. The title *Erewhon* is "nowhere" spelled backwards (almost). Butler thus places his book in the tradition of Thomas More's *Utopia* ("No Place"), the description of an imaginary country which has instructive resemblances to and differences from our own. A young Englishman crosses a range of mountains in some outpost of Empire (it sounds like New Zealand, where Butler spent several years) and stumbles upon a previously undiscovered country. Its inhabitants have reached approximately the same stage of development as Victorian England, but their values and beliefs seem bizarre and perverse to the narrator. For example, they regard illness as a crime, requiring punishment and segregation from respectable people, and crime as an illness, deserving of commiseration from friends and relatives, and requiring expensive treatment by sympathetic practitioners called "straighteners". We soon cotton on to the basic conceit — Erewhon exhibits Victorian *mores* in displaced or inverted forms — but it is important that the narrator does not. Part of the pleasure of this kind of fiction is that our intelligence is exercised and flattered by interpreting the allegory.

The Erewhonians do not have any religious belief, and they attribute the narrator's observance of the Sabbath as "a fit of sulkiness which they remarked as coming over me upon every seventh day." What they have instead are Musical Banks, thus called because in them "all mercantile transactions are accompanied with music . . . though the music was hideous to a European ear." These buildings are elaborately decorated with marble cladding, sculptures, stained-glass etc. Respectable people like the Nosnibors (Robinsons), who have befriended the narrator, go through the motions of conducting small financial transactions at these banks, and deplore the fact that so few people make full use of them, though everyone knows that their currency has no real value.

The implication that Victorian religion was largely a social ritual, that, while nominally subscribing to the tenets of Christianity, the

English bourgeoisie conducted their affairs on an entirely different, materialistic basis, is very clear. It is not for the sake of such a rather obvious message, however, that we read and enjoy *Erewhon*, but for the absurdist humour and thought-provoking felicity with which the analogies are developed. Banks, for example, especially large, important banks, *are* rather like churches or cathedrals in their architecture and décor; noting the neatness of the analogy we are made to think about the hypocrisy and false pretensions of financial as well as ecclesiastical institutions. And the discreetly self-righteous comportment of the ladies on their way to the Musical Bank, carrying their purses "not exactly ostentatiously, yet just so as that those who met them should see whither they were going", is much more amusing than it would be if they were characters in a realistic novel carrying prayerbooks. Allegory is yet another technique of defamiliarization.