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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Isabel Hofmeyr. *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of "The Pilgrim's Progress".* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. xii + 314 pp. $22.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-691-11656-3.

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Published on H-SAfrica (June, 2005)

Isabel Hofmeyr's *The Portable Bunyan* is an intriguing book derived from her painstaking multinational research into the translation, production, and circulation of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* in Africa, and to a lesser extent within the African diaspora. The book is of enormous value as a research tool because of the charts Hofmeyr includes which list all of the known translations into African languages and because of the generous number of reproductions of the various illustrations that accompanied the text in its many editions. The details of Hofmeyr's findings and arguments are fascinating in themselves, and the book's overarching argument makes a valuable contribution to the general reconfiguration of studies of empire and imperialism by providing further evidence of the ways in which things that look like tools of empire might actually be shaping the imperial home.

Essentially, Hofmeyr sketches three stages of transmission of *The Pilgrim's Progress*: first within Bunyan's own generation via the religiously persecuted Puritans, the second via nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries, and the third as an important part of the ideology of Englishness as expressed through what came to be canonized as the great tradition of English literature. While Hofmeyr's particular interest is in the latter two vectors and their mutual influence, her most detailed research concerns nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century missionary activity. She argues persuasively that *The Pilgrim's Progress* was one of the most important texts used by Protestant missionaries precisely because of its portability, not just in raw, linguistic translatability from one language to another, but in its perceived ability to retain sufficient of the translator's intended meanings as it was physically "translated" or carried from one place to another. From a utilitarian point of view, Hofmeyr further suggests that *Pilgrim's Progress*'s portability depended on the recognition by individual missionaries and the societies that sent them that the book's straightforward linear narrative made it more authoritative and less theologically problematic as a conversion tool than the multiple narratives of Christ's life in the gospels. In equally pragmatic terms, the episodic narrative of *Pilgrim's Progress* lent itself to manageable, selec-

tive translation of key episodes, and such abridgments in turn lent themselves to physically portable pocket-sized editions. The text's allegorical mode, particularly in regard to characters and topography, allowed for ready transcultural equivalents, although Hofmeyr demonstrates very clearly that these equivalents are rarely congruent with their originals. In the first of the book's three sections, for instance, "Bunyan in the Protestant Atlantic," Hofmeyr demonstrates how missionaries and converts both inserted themselves into the text or imagined themselves as characters from *Pilgrim's Progress*. The folk elements of Bunyan's text provide a generic overlap between *Pilgrim's Progress* and Kongo folk-tales for instance, that allowed for an apparent overlap in ways of reading. The recognition of this overlap in turn opened up new ways for missionaries and converts to represent "traditional" folk material as evangelist parable.

In discussion of all these aspects, Hofmeyr never loses sight of the material processes of translation--including fund-raising and the use of local converts as translators or co-translators--that produce the books as physical objects. In a particularly interesting argument, she demonstrates how these physical books could become "fetishes" just as much for English missionary societies as they might be for individual Africans: "Both traditions of interpretation, to some extent, construed the book as a magical object and, in this apparent agreement, could construct a discourse field that validated the propagation and translation of further texts, while simultaneously pursuing different agendas" (p. 17). In the section "Bunyan in the Protestant Atlantic," Hofmeyr presents a very clear case to show how crucially *The Pilgrim's Progress* mediated between particular British congregations and their West African missions (she focuses on a Baptist congregation in Camden Road, London, and their Congo mission station of San Salvador in what is now northern Angola) and drew "center" and "periphery" together into a single, transnational "mission domain" marked by complex, mutually influential interactions. That stories *about* the quasi-magical power of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in Kongo translation were used to generate further funding for missionary activity shows how the book became a sort of fetish for congregations in Britain and in Africa.

Readers of this list, however, will probably turn with greatest eagerness to the second section of Hofmeyr's book "Bunyan, the Public Sphere, and Africa." Here Hofmeyr turns to analysis of Southern African translations of *Pilgrim's Progress* and the rich cultural implications thereof. For example, looking at Tiyo Soga's mid-nineteenth-century translation allows Hofmeyr to comment on the complicated interweaving of resistance and assimilation involved in the Xhosa mission elite's negotiations between tradition and modernity. Hofmeyr suggests that Soga's introduction to his translation indicates how clearly he was using the text in his own self-interest to forge an identity for the new mission elite "invent[ing] new forms of authority for themselves" (p. 116) while negotiating a path between the old chiefly class and "the acrid racism of the settler world, ever ready to condemn the 'educated native' for wishing to rise above his feudally ordained station" (p. 116). Subsequent chapters in this section show how issues of gender further complicate these issues. In insightful readings of Thomas Mofolo's first novel *Moeti oa Bochabela* (*The Traveler to the East* 1906) and Ethel M. Dell's bestseller *Greatheart*, Hofmeyr argues that both writers use motifs from Bunyan in order to rethink gender relations in the mission domain: Mofolo, she says, seeks to redefine manliness in terms of "meritocracy rather than inherited position and authority" (p. 170), while Dell's recasting of a Great-heart figure allegorizes a celibate space in which colonial women in particular, but missionaries in general could "elevate themselves" above the zone of racial "'contamination' while still presenting themselves as guides and caregivers" (p. 164).

Hofmeyr goes on to give similarly deft, though brief, readings of more contemporary African novels, including Fagunwa's ***The Forest of a Thousand Demons*** and ***Expedition to the Mount of Thought***, Tutuola's ***The Wild Hunter in the Bush of Ghosts***, Ngugi's ***Devil on the Cross***, and Dangarembga's ***Nervous Conditions***. In each case, she suggests that references to ***Pilgrim's Progress*** do not have to imply borrowing from "English" originals because Bunyan had been indigenized for some time, and that intertextuality here does not simply demonstrate the influence of imperial center on imperialized periphery, but a more mutual and ambivalent set of influences. In the case of ***Nervous Conditions*** (where I find her evidence for intertextuality rather tenuous, and where she mis-names Tambu's father Joshua instead of Jeremiah), she concludes that "Dangarembga's engagement with Bunyan as a presence in the African novel helps to throw into feminist relief two of the major features of African fiction, namely its masculinist emphasis and its insistent engagement with questions of nationalism" (p. 212).

The concluding section "Post-Bunyan" wraps up the book by providing evidence for the way in which ***The Pilgrim's Progress***, having been internationalized for more than two centuries by its exportation via the Protestant Atlantic, finally in the first quarter of the twentieth century becomes redomesticated and incorporated into the English national tradition. Hofmeyr tellingly invokes scholars such as Gauri Vishwanathan, Terry Eagleton and Chris Baldick, all of whom have drawn attention to the late imperial attempts at inventing a secure national identity so as to shore up the confidence of imperial agents to display their cultural superiority to subject peoples. Thus, Bunyan's "universalism" had to be, and was, reconfigured in a peculiarly nationalistic and racialized way. One example of the "English-izing" of Bunyan emerges in the de-allegorizing of the landscape of ***Pilgrim's Progress*** and attempts to match up its topography with local landmarks in and around Bunyan's hometown of Bedford (p. 221). Hofmeyr sums up the whole paradoxical process as follows: "On the one hand, a stress on white Englishness rooted the writer in England, while maintaining Bunyan as a literary icon who could confer racial distinctiveness on Britons. An ethereal universality, on the other hand, could elevate Bunyan above the black colonized societies with whom mission discourse had so long connected him. Such societies had initially provided the precondition for nineteenth-century ideas on Bunyan's universality. Their erasure from the critical record became one precondition for twentieth-century scholarship to take shape and for ***The Pilgrim's Progress*** to become unequivocally a book of England" (pp. 226-227).

The Portable Bunyan does a remarkably good job of doing what it sets out to do--that is, to provide a "transnational history" of ***The Pilgrim's Progress***. In limiting herself mainly to North-South, white-black vectors and allocating only part of one chapter to the West Indian missionary Joseph Jackson Fuller and the additional issues introduced by the East-West vector, she has left the way clear for other scholars to fill in some very interesting gaps and to bring the story further up-to-date in a period marked by a new kind of Western imperialism currently underscored by what we might call a neo-Victorian Protestant evangelism. (I offer these suggestions not as criticism of Hofmeyr's book, but to indicate the fruitful scope of inquiry that she has opened up.)

Three particular areas strike me as being worth further research here: first, I think it would be valuable to inquire how Bunyan was used outside England to foster a sense of Englishness abroad; I can recall for instance, having ***The Pilgrim's Progress*** read aloud to us at house prayers in my very English boarding school in Cape Town, and Bunyan's words still ring in my ears from repeated singing of hymns of his that had worked their way into the Anglican hymnal. Secondly, I was surprised that Hofmeyr referred only in passing to the existence of an Afrikaans translation of

The Pilgrim's Progress. But how did Bunyan play in Afrikaans? Did he play an emancipatory role in the NG mission churches, for example, or was his racialized, English-ized avatar useful to bolster apartheid ideology? And what about such novels as F. A. Venter's *Swart Pelgrim*? Would that not suggest that the whole "Jim Comes to Johannesburg" motif of South African literature might be interestingly illuminated by reference to *The Pilgrim's Progress*?

Finally, very early in her book, Hofmeyr declares, "*The Pilgrim's Progress* is no longer widely read today" (p. 3). In fact, we have by no means reached the end of the book's transnational history; as the briefest of searches on Amazon.com will confirm, *The Pilgrim's Progress* continues to be translated at an extraordinary rate--into contemporary English, into versions for children, in pictorial versions, for use as a kind of daily prayer-book, and so on. Here in the Bible Belt of the United States, Bunyan is still alive and still taking on multiple forms. For example, Duke Divinity School's Baptist House was founded in 1990 as a kind of refuge from the "fundamentalist takeover" of the Southern Baptist convention. In a recent Duke Divinity School newsletter we find the following: "To Curtis Freeman, the program's current director, Baptist House is a metaphor for hospitality, shelter and care. It's a lot like Interpreter's House in one of Freeman's favorite books, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*; a place that offers the pilgrim sustenance and support, a connection to the pilgrim's tradition, and guidance for the journey. 'When students come here, Baptist House keeps them anchored in their Baptist identity,' says Freeman. 'It helps connect them to one another and to the larger Baptist world, while they're getting the theological formation they need.'"[1]

If we shift the perspective from specifically English literature and the history of British mission activity to the American sphere, there is really interesting intertextual work to be done on Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible*; not only does that book re-interrogate the role of white missionaries in the Congo and repeatedly allude to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, but in its wonderful conceit of having the dyslexic Adah be a mistress of the palindrome, it also confirms Hofmeyr's central insight that the transnational history of *The Pilgrim's Progress* has always gone in two directions, at least.

Note

[1]. Bob Wells, "Duke's Baptist House Celebrates Fifteen Years," *Divinity* 3.3 (2004): pp. 1-2. http://www.divinity.duke.edu/Publications/ 2004.05/features/baptisthouse/ 01.htm.

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Citation: Simon Lewis. Review of Hofmeyr, Isabel. *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of "The Pilgrim's Progress".* H-SAfrica, H-Net Reviews. June, 2005.

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