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TITLE: John Bunyan, his chair and a few other relics: orality, literacy and the limits of area studies

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John Bunyan, His Chair and a Few Other Relics: Orality, Literacy and the Limits of Area Studies

With the break up of area studies, the world of scholarship has witnessed a fair degree of continental drift. Previously ringfenced regions have become analytically contiguous as different scholarly enterprises come to terms with a world permanently puckered together by imperialism and its aftermath. In retracing this painful stitching of the world many are seeking new boundaries in which to rethink knowledge. Prakash, for example, asks how "the history of colonialism and colonialism's disciplining of history can be shaken loose from the domination of categories and ideas it produced - colonizer and colonized; white, black, and brown; civilized and uncivilized; modern and archaic; cultural identity; tribe and nation" (5).

One answer he provides concerns location: "It is fitting that such refashionings of history and theory emerge from that other place, the site of colonialism, because it was there that the disciplines both reached for mastery and were undone...To return to the colonial scene, therefore, is to release histories and knowledges from their disciplining as area-studies; as imperial and overseas history; as the study of the exotic other that seals metropolitan structures from the contagion of the record of their own formation elsewhere..." (12).

He goes on to say that "postcolonial knowledge takes shape at the specific and local points of disciplinary failure; it arises at certain conjunctures and affiliates with particular traditions of thought" (12).

One such signal failure pertains to questions of orality, a diffuse notion which frequently found its first analytical life in the peripheries. Invented - often simultaneously - in relation to European and African peasants at times as part of the racialized idea of 'the people' or 'peoples', workshopped at the margins of Classics and then re-exported to numerous colonial sites, the idea has had a variegated existence. In Africa, the topic has been housed grudgingly or uneasily in disciplines like African Language studies, folklore studies, linguistics and philology. More recently, orality has been linked to its previously invisible doppelganger - literacy - but again this occurs in an ungainly debate that sprawls across patches of applied linguistics, social history and literary studies.

The failures of these disciplinary divisions have become increasingly manifest. In the realm of literary studies, for example, the simple presence of orality signals that the cornerstone definition of the discipline - notably that literature is something written - will not hold. A second node of failure concerns the continental division of labour with regard to orality and literacy: African has oral literature, Europe written. The interaction of these forms in Africa (but apparently not in Europe) produces 'hybrid' genres of literature which require forms of analysis that are different from those applied to European literary traditions.

Overall, then, the idea of orality chafes uneasily against all disciplinary boundaries. The resultant discomfort pushes us to envision other ways of bundling out knowledge. In relation to questions of orality and literacy much of this unbundling has been underway for some time and much work has demonstrated how the terms constrain understanding since they often double for other notions like colonizer/colonized; developed/underdeveloped; urban/rural; Europe/Africa and so on. A familiar story by now, it requires no further rehearsing here. Yet once unbundled and unfreighted, what happens? What new energies are sparked by splitting the atomic cluster of orality/Africa;

literacy/Europe?

This paper tries to bring to life some possible answers to this question in relation to John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress. A thoroughly transnational and globalized text, strongly streaked with 'European' orality, it suggests various lines of approach to the issues posed above. One could for example focus on how the twentieth-century reception of this seventeenth-century text (produced by a first-generation literate in a paraliterate world) has sidelined the text's orality. One could equally trace how the text was received in the numerous quarters of the Imperial world to which it travelled along the highways of nineteenth-century evangelical mission activity. An interesting template for combining oral and literate traditions, the book often provided an interesting reference point for graduates from mission schools who in their own literary work were grappling with just these issues.

These are not the subjects of this paper. Instead, the paper considers the massive nineteenth-century popularity of the text. In brief it argues that the scope and nature of this popularity have never been satisfactorily analysed despite the massive scale of Bunyan scholarship. It argues that this oversight can be traced to an historically contingent and narrow notion of reading which screens out the oral, performative dimensions through which the text's success was secured. It also points to the ways in which reading is understood as an activity whose meaning-making is limited to national boundaries. The paper attempts to demonstrate that the reading and reception of this book depended as much on the Imperial presence of the text as on its dissemination in Britain.

In essence, it calls for a reconsideration of the verb 'to read', a phrase which supposedly describes what nineteenth-century British readers did with The Pilgrim's Progress. That it should capture so little of what made the text's reception so effective returns us to our starting point of disciplinary failure and the urgent need to reconsider questions of orality and literacy and the limits of area studies.

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If remembered at all today, John Bunyan will probably be recalled as a rather cranky religious writer of the olden days who wrote a book about a pilgrim. Those who know slightly more will think of him as an Nonconformist writer of the English Revolution who after centuries of neglect rose to prominence in the nineteenth-century and whose text, The Pilgrim's Progress, travelled to many parts of the world via the arteries of mission proselytisation. Read in today's secular climate, the book appears turgid and at times incomprehensible and it is difficult to imagine how it could ever have been so popular.

Yet popular it was, in some instances inspiring a cultish devotion which is hard to imagine. Macauley, for example, in his 1854 entry on Bunyan for the Encyclopaedia Britannica, noted that austere Puritans were known to display Popish emotionalism when it came to the subject of Bunyan:

> Many Puritans to whom the respect paid by Roman Catholics to the reliques and tombs of saints seemed childish and sinful, are said to have begged with their dying breathe that their coffins might be placed as near as possible to the coffin of the author of the Pilgrim's Progress. (Macauley 18)

This strong sense of emotionalism was widespread. Readers of The Pilgrim's Progress talked of reading it with "heart palpitant" (Law 50). Others spoke lovingly of the characters as friends, familiar as those "on the Front at Brighton" (Birrell, "John Bunyan Today" 152). This sense of emotional investment operated both at a personal and national level. At the unveiling of Bunyan's statue in Bedford, his hometown, the Dean of Westminster speaking of The Pilgrim's Progress said

> It is one of the few books which has struck a chord which vibrates alike amongst the humblest peasants and amongst the most fastidious critics. Let us pause for an instant to reflect how great a boon is conferred upon a nation by one such uniting element. How deeply extended is the power of sympathy, and the force of argument, when the preacher or the teacher knows that he can enforce his appeal by a name which, like that of an apostle or evangelist, comes home as if with canonical weight to every one who hears him; by figures of speech which need only to be touched on in order to elicit an eclectic spark of understanding and satisfaction. (Stanley 52)

In effect the book became a national institution and for many became one of the key symbols of an increasingly racialized patriotism. Robert Louis Stevenson, a great admirer and commentator on Bunyan's work compared all Britons to Bunyan's pilgrim. "It is the fact, that every man, whether a seeker for God or not, comes into the world inseparably connected with his Race. He is born a member of a great society, so that already at his birth he is under certain laws, and subject to influences beyond his control....in the language of modern science, the pilgrim is deeply affected from his birth by the solidarity of his Race..." (Stevenson 7).

In addition to being a national symbol, Bunyan also assumed a strong Imperial presence. One commentator claimed that there were more copies of The Pilgrim's Progress in existence than of any other English book bar the King James version of the Bible. In its English - and numerous translated versions - the text was seen a key link in Empire, a book to "mitigate the antipathies of race [by sailing] across estranging seas" (Birrell, "Links of Empire" 79).

Attempts to explain this extraordinary popularity have generally centred around the changing fortunes of Nonconformist and Dissenting traditions. These moved from being radical underground movements in the seventeenth-century to respectable middle-class organisations by the mid-nineteenth century. The way in which Bunyan's text became the beneficiary of these shifts has, like all aspects of Bunyan's work, been extensively documented (Greaves; Keeble).

In broad outline, this scholarship tells a story of a text which in the century after its publication in 1688 was both sneered at and revered. For the eighteenth-century Anglican intelligentsia, the book was lamentably vulgar. For many ordinary people - particularly Nonconformists - the text became as Thompson has shown the "book of books" second only to the Bible and a source for radical meditation on social inequality (Thompson 34).

This divergence of opinion narrowed as both the Evangelical Revival - which lauded Bunyan's theology - and Romantic thinking which hailed the text for its untutored genius and spontaneous creativity, brought Bunyan into the mainstream. A series of influential editions of The Pilgrim's Progress, entries into encyclopedias and literary histories ensured that Bunyan became a ubiquitous nineteenth-century presence. The growing respectability of Nonconformism

augmented the cultural authority of Bunyan's work.

These accounts of Bunyan's reception have fixed a crucial framework in which our understanding can be located by sketching some of the broader intellectual developments which occasion his parabolic rise. Yet these accounts give little sense of how this popularity was secured. How, for example, was the book disseminated? How was it used? What reading contexts could ensure its evident affective power? How could the book become such a cult object of national importance? These questions are taken for granted and one comes away with the feeling that the book simply spread like ink in blotting paper.

These silences around distribution may in some instances be seen as mere empirical oversights; a matter of filling in detail. I would like to take a stronger position and argue that the silence grows out of a prior set of assumptions regarding the term 'reading'. The first assumption revolves around ahistorical conceptions of reading in which present-day reading practices are rolled back into the past. In terms of these perceptions, reading is envisioned as a noiseless interaction of brain and text. The broader supporting institutions, performances, landscapes and social networks which make reading possible are not considered. In short, reading is construed as a narrowly 'literate', silent and decorporealized activity. The dimensions of oral performance and re-enactment which accompany reading are erased from view.

The second assumption is that the meanings extracted from 'reading' are largely limited to national boundaries: the reception of Bunyan is consequently imagined as if it were only a matter of examining what happened within the borders of the United Kingdom or at times Europe. The idea that the power of reading may precisely revolve around its ability to enable instantaneous and imaginative transnational 'travel' is not contemplated. I do not mean this only in the simple sense that we can read about far away places but that very often our sense of one place is tied up with many others. Or as a reader of Bunyan said, "I was born nearly 500 miles from Bedford, but, in my boyhood, [I] used to read the 'Pilgrim's Progress' and think of Bunyan and Elstow [the village near Bedford where Bunyan was born]...in the same way...as I thought of the Holy Land where the prophets wrote and spake" (Wylie 38).

These ideas of reading circumscribed by nation and medium can be glimpsed from Q D Leavis' discussion of Bunyan's success. "[H]ow is it," she asks, "that Bunyan was able to write the most popular book of his age and the most popular of subsequent ages?" (Leavis 101). For her the answer lies in Bunyan's use of language in turn heavily implicated with the register of the Authorized Version.

> ...the characteristic effect of reading a passage of Bunyan is a stirring of the blood - the Biblical phrases and cadences evoke overtones, and the peculiarly thrilling quality of the prose is due to this technique which enables a precise particular occasion to draw on the accumulated religious associations of a race. Bunyan's work could no more then Shakespeare's have been done in any other language. (101)

The passage assumes that Bunyan's power derives firstly from a Protestant Englishness (which the passage naturalizes as being synonymous with nationality) and secondly that it depended on his actually being read. This paper questions both of these assumptions. Firstly it will argue that Bunyan's success depended as much on people who didn't read him as on those who did.

Secondly it argues that part of Bunyan's popularity depended on his construction as a quintessentially English writer. This process cannot, in turn, be separated from the propagation of the text in the Imperial world and the contemplation of this reception back in the metropolis.

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In the Bunyan museum at Bedford, there is a replica of Bunyan's chair. Alongside it is a reproduction of an advertisement from a nineteenth-century Nonconformist newspaper offering the chairs for sale. According to this advertisement, "No Nonconformist minister can be without one!"

If one is looking for clues to explain the success of The Pilgrim's Progress, Bunyan's chair - and the museum in which it is housed - is a good place to start. Located in the church buildings on the site of Bunyan's church, the one-roomed museum is filled with flat old-world display cases containing all manner of Bunyan relics and realia. Reproduced in the introductions to any number of editions of The Pilgrim's Progress, the relics form a minor canon of their own. Bunyan's stick - "wrought by the cunning hand of an Indian workman" (Thompson and Robjohns 20) - Bunyan's apple corer; Bunyan's ale jug; Bunyan's fiddle, pictures of these routinely punctuated texts about Bunyan. Other display cases contain Victorian objects - jigsaw puzzles, items of crockery, playing cards - commemorating the 'Bedford tinker'. Framed Victorian prints on the walls represent canonized moments from Bunyan's life (Bunyan's blind daughter Mary visiting him in prison). Also hanging on the walls are various wooden doors. One is the door of Bedford gaol where Bunyan spent twelve years in prison. Another one comes from the church in which Bunyan was christened. It contains within itself a smaller opening said to represent the wicket gate of The Pilgrim's Progress. The museum also includes a display of translated editions of The Pilgrim's Progress opened to reveal their various illustrations. After being conducted around the cramped room, one is taken to the adjoining church to see the commemorative stained-glass windows and door with alto-relievo panels representing episodes from the book (Anon. Souvenir Guide).

This provincial museum usefully summarizes some of the ways in which one can start thinking about the reception of The Pilgrim's Progress. The Congregational church which houses the museums points to the Nonconformist tradition in which the text arose and was subsequently nurtured. Within this tradition, Bunyan's text stood second only to the Bible and was often read in the same devout and intensive way as the Scriptures. Yet as the relics and realia remind us, the text's meaning and popularity did not depend solely on its being read. One could participate in the idea of the book through making jigsaw puzzles, drinking from commemorative teacups, playing a card game, and adorning one's house with pictures of the author and scenes from the book. At the same time, by looking at pictures from translated foreign editions of The Pilgrim's Progress (often made available by mission organisations) one could nurture the belief that one's own beliefs and tastes were proving ineluctably popular throughout the globe.

Let us expand briefly on these different ways of 'consuming' the text. As regards reading, there were many methods through which this could be done. As indicated above, one way of absorbing the text involved intensive, devout reading strategies since the book was a kind of 'shadow' Bible. This could include daily study of selected excerpts with books like Half-hours with Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress (Burbridge) or Daily Thoughts on The Pilgrim's Progess, (by "A Pilgrim"). Or,

one could learn sections off by heart and reread the text often over many years. The book itself in its original version and in most evangelical editions contained marginalia indicating Biblical verses appropriate to the section of text being read. In some instances, these marginalia could mean that one read from two books simultaneously, pausing when necessary to page through the Bible to locate the reference given in the margin. More commonly though, Nonconformist readers would instantly have recognized the verse which would then have echoed in their heads as they continued their reading. This 'double-decker' reading could also occur in relation to the songs quoted in the texts. At least one of these subsequently became a famous hymn ("He who would valiant be....") and particularly when the text was read aloud, the songs would be sung. For serious devotees of the text, one could attend lecture series; acquire commentaries and in the latter half of the nineteenth century, a range of biographies on Bunyan. Introductions to the text often assumed familiarity with these biographies and commentaries and as with other traditions of scholarship, Bunyan books endlessly plagiarized each other in that process through which 'commonsense' knowledge becomes established. For the aficionado, The Pilgrim's Progress existed at the centre of a web of texts stretching at times to the ends of the earth.

Another favoured strategy for consuming the text came through reading aloud. While such reading was often directed at children in the home, the wide-spread institution of Sabbath reading provided an opportunity in which adults and children absorbed the text as a family. School and Sunday school were other places where children would have encountered the text in a range of media like tracts, wall-charts; magic lanterns slides; songs and in one instance a specially-written cantata for children. Many would also have received the book as a Sunday school prize or as a gift. For many, The Pilgrim's Progress entered the deepest warp and weft of their existence. Robert Blatchford, subsequently editor of The Clarion (an early and important Labour newspaper), described Bunyan as "the friend and teacher of my childhood, The Pilgrim's Progress was my first book...in my tenth year I knew it almost by heart" (Blatchford 191). Like many other children, he amused himself enacting scenes from the text. To do this he equipped himself with a two-foot broken stage sword-blade, a paper helmet and a breast plate. Thus prepared,

> I went out as Greatheart and did deeds of valour and puissance upon an obsolete performing poodle, retired from Astley's Circus, who was good enough to double the parts of Giant Grim and the two lions.
> The stairway to the bedroom was the Hill Difficulty, the dark lobby was the Valley of the Shadow, and often I swam in great fear and peril, and with profuse sputterings, across the black River of Death which lay between kitchen and scullery. The baby also, poor, unconscious mite, played many parts. Now it was Christiana, and had to be defended against the poodle at the point of the sword; now it was Faithful being tried for his life; now it was Ignorance crossing the Black River in a cradle boat rowed by myself as Vain-Hope; and anon it was Prudence and Charity buckling on my harness before I went out to fight and vanquish Carlo [the poodle] (as Apollyon) in the Vale of Humiliation. (192-3)

This pleasurable internalisation of the text meant that many carried intense and abiding memories of the book. In 1927, one journalist recalled: "...I remember with special vividness - I was a little under six years of age - the Sunday afternoon when my father gave me a large volume, bound in green half-morocco and containing 'The Pilgrim's Progress' and 'The Holy War' by John Bunyan with outline illustrations by H C Selous" (Roberts 15).

This recall of the illustrations points to the crucial role that pictures - both in the text and beyond - played in propagating the text's popularity. For many, pictures became mnemonics for episodes in the story. For others, pictures were the story. Or as one nineteenth-century reader said

> If you had ever seen our 'Pilgrim's Progress' with its thumbed, tousled and tattered pages, you would have sworn that it had been read by generations of children, but all torn pages and creases did not really mean that we had read it; they only meant that we were never tired of looking at the pictures. (Birrell, "John Bunyan Today" 151)

These pictures - often reproduced outside the texts as postcards, framed pictures; magic lantern slides - in turn became a way in which people could participate in and own a story they might never have read themselves. ("...I fancy that if the question were put in the next census paper, 'Did you as a child read 'The Pilgrim's Progress' or have it read to you?' most honest men and women would have to answer 'no'" (Birrell, "John Bunyan Today" 151).

These pictures also provided a vehicle through which translated editions could be mediated to a 'home' audience. Ever since the first appearance of the book, translations were quick to follow. These picked up considerably in the nineteenth-century as missionaries in conjunction with evangelical literature societies prepared translations. At first these texts simply included British illustrations. Later these were 'indigenized'. These pictures were often reproduced in mission literature and the reports of evangelical literature societies. They also formed part of missionary exhibitions. Since the book and all of its episodes was so intimately known, the pictures were generally recognizable to British viewers. This recognition in turn nurtured the notion that others were reading the same story and subscribing to the same ideas: "Even the Caffrarian and Hottentot, the enlightened Greek and Hindoo, the remnant of the Hebrew race, the savage Malay, and the voluptuous Chinese - all have the wondrous narrative in their own language" (Offor xxv).

What readers in other parts made of these pictures - particularly the early British ones containing "late romantic landscapes, idealized Puritan maidens, abundant lace, and steeple-crowned hats" (Sharrock 50) - did not occur to British readers. In their minds, these pictures signalled that everyone read the same story with characters "whose names and faces are familiar to the whole world" (Stanley 51). Japanese illustrations could hence be considered "very characteristic, especially the portraiture of Mr Worldly Wiseman who appears before us as the very ideal of a smug, self-satisfied Pharisee" (Brown n.p.). Another commentator spoke of "Appollyon giving a truly Japanese conception of that great enemy" (Green 172).

Yet each translation occasions a different text. Even a quick glimpse at some translated titles - The Book of Bunyan, The Traveller, A Heaven's Pilgrimage - reminds us that there was no one fixed story. (These are the English renditions of the titles of Zulu, Swahili and Somali versions.) But because the meaning of the text was so tied up with its pictures, many British readers were able to sustain the illusion that one of their most beloved texts could pass untouched through the ether of language, culture and national boundary.

But exactly what meanings did these pictures embody? On one level, they obviously carried the verities of evangelical Protestant Christianity. As others like Colley have shown these ideas were closely stitched into broader ideas of a racialized English patriotism (Colley 28). This sense of patriotism had in turn been reshaped in the last quarter of the nineteenth-century under the impact

of Imperial expansion and the mounting sense of internal crisis regarding a rotten and corrupting industrial society. Out of this conjuncture, nationality became routed on "populist lines of race, language and tradition" a matter of "white skins [and] English tongues" (Colls 47, 44). This sense of racialized patriotism often took the form of an inward looking ruralism "a sentimental love of mother country, particularly when traced to recollections of youth and perceptions of rural England" (Brooker and Widdowson 117). This ruralness was not all-encompassing and was implicitly modelled on South England and the South Midland shires (Howkins 117) the most "anciently civilized" area of Britain - as Havelock Ellis put it (Colls 39).

Like many major literary figures, Bunyan's reputation was affected by these seismic shifts in opinion. Tracing exactly how this happened is too ambitious a task for this paper. We can none the less glimpse something of this process by looking briefly at the unveiling of Bunyan's statue in Bedford in 1874. The idea - and capital - for the statue came from the Duke of Bedford prompted by the "pious regard " for the memory of the first book given to him as a child by his mother (Wylie 22). There was a considerable build up to event. Special sermons were preached in all Nonconformist and some Established churches (24). Several thousand people attended the unveiling and four thousand children received memorial illustrated copies of The Pilgrim's Progress in addition to being fed a ton-and-a-quarter of cake and 600 gallons of tea. Bunyan relics were on display.

Two related themes dominated the numerous speeches: Bunyan united the nation and as such could claim to be the most quintessentially English writer. The Pilgrim's Progress spoke to "peer and peasant" (119); to the "least instructed and the best instructed" (54); to "the humblest peasants and...the most fastidious critics" (52) and to Churchman and Dissenter (113-120). The Dean of Westminster described his work as "a well of English language and of Christian thought, pure and undefiled" (Stanley 54).

This theme of Englishness cropped up in other speeches. Bunyan was "more spontaneous then Shakespeare" (36); his language described elsewhere as "hardbitten, clean-cut Saxon English" (Blatchford 219) was celebrated as being "of the soil", and "steeped to the very heart in the genius of the people among whom it was born" (Wylie 77).

This compound sense of Christian Englishness was of course not limited to Britain alone. Through the spread of The Pilgrim's Progress this concept had spread throughout the world. Or as one speaker at the unveiling said, "Travel whether you choose, along the stream of the Ganges - through the rich groves of Ceylon - by the sparkling shores of Polynesia - or under the broad-leaved bananas of New Zealand, you shall meet thousands who rejoice and tremble over the vicissitudes of 'Christian'" (Birrell, "Bunyan's Personal Pilgrimage" 108).

This theme of Bunyan in the world was taken up by the Dean of Westminster: "And when I speak to you of Bunyan in ...his world-wide aspect, I speak to you no longer as a stranger to the men of Bedford, but as an Englishman to Englishmen; no longer as a Churchman to Dissenters; but as a Christian to Christians, and as a man to men throughout the world". It all added to a sense of nationality so extravagant that it overflowed its national limits. Or as the Archbishop continued: "It is one of the few books which act as a religious bond to the whole of English Christendom. It is, perhaps [one of the books] which, after the English Bible, has contributed to the common-religious culture of the Anglo-Saxon race" (51).

If a sense of nationality could be bigger than its borders, it could also be smaller. One of the subthemes at the unveiling concerned this theme which centred around Bunyan as a man of Bedford. The Dean expressed the idea thus: "It is the strength of a country and of a town to have its famous men held in everlasting remembrance. They are the links by which you are bound to the history of your country, and by which the whole consciousness of a great nation is bound together. In your Bedfordshire lanes he doubtless find the original of his 'Slough of Despond'. In the halls and gardens of...Haynes and Woburn [stately homes] he may have snatched the first glimpse of 'House Beautiful'" (Stanley 48).

This allegorical logic where the local could stand in for the national was to become a crucial plank in the wider re-invention of Bunyan as a national institution. In some instances, this localism was propagated by Bedford citizens keen to extend the cult of Bunyan further afield. In other instances it arose in tandem with the patriotic notions of ruralism modelled on the landscape of South England and the South Midlandshires, an area into which Bedford just fell. In terms of this thinking, numerous books were produced which illustrated the extent to which The Pilgrim's Progress reflected the landscape and features of Bedford. This in turn lead to a guidebook genre in which one could walk, cycle and subsequently motor to view the sites of Bunyan and the features of the landscape which appeared in the story (Foster; Thompson and Robjohns; Crockett).

Yet when one turns to the text itself there is surprisingly little description of landscape. What there is relies mainly on stylized and often Biblical descriptions of the environment. This lack of description deterred few. Blatchford, himself an active propagator of ruralism in his two books Britain for the British and Merrie England said,

> We remember many of Bunyan's scenes because he tells us so little about them. Of the Hill Difficulty he tells us nothing but that it was a hill and steep; of the footpath across the Giant Despair's demesne he tells us little but that it ran hard by a hedge; and we remember these things because we have all seen steep hills and hedgerow paths, and because we at once adopt a hill or a path from the pictures in our memories. (213)

In another guide book - Foster's Bunyan's Country: Studies in the Bedfordshire Topography of The Pilgrim's Progress - almost anything can be construed as typically Bedford. At one point, Foster notes that Bunyan observed and loved "Bedfordshire streams, and Bedfordshire roads and lanes and footpaths, Bedfordshire mansions and gardens, and Bedfordshire hills were to him places pleasant to look upon..." (29). This is then linked to a passage in The Pilgrim's Progress: "...at a great distance he saw a most pleasant mountainous country, beautified with woods, vineyards, fruits of all sorts, flowers also, with springs and fountains, very delectable to behold". Bedford is of course an area with few mountains and no vineyards. But such minor impediments appeared to detain few in their quest to 'write' the meaning of Bunyan into the landscape. Forster, for example, reminds us that in Bedford can be read "[e]ach page of the history of the island" (23). Through this logic, Bunyan and his reproduction of "scenes and localities which were familiar to him" can be inscribed in a broader national history.

This concentric sense of localized nationalism was to eddy even wider. By 1948, another guide book Bunyan's England: A Tour with the Camera in the Footsteps of the Immortal Dreamer (Crockett) speaks of Bunyan's grave in London: "...he rests in the Metropolis of the British

Commonwealth...one of the noblest creations of the British race" (2).

This image of Bunyan - and hence one of the key nodes of English culture - radiating out from the Midland shires into the Imperial world was a common one. Elsewhere he was referred to as "a light [shining] forth...to enlighten the habitable globe" (Offor xxv). This spreading sense of Englishness in turn allowed many to think of Bunyan as both being both English and universal at the same time.

This sense of Bunyan's English reputation being linked to his Imperial presence has largely been lost. Today many studies of Bunyan consider him only within national boundaries. The awareness of his wider presence in the world is recognized but it remains a numb point cut off from the mainstream of Bunyan studies. This paper has attempted to re-establish that link to remind us that the re-invention of Bunyan as a national institution is inseparable from his dissemination into the Empire. Or as an historian of the Religious Tract Society [RTS], one of the major nineteenth-century distributors of evangelical literature, comments: "...the impulse which drove [the RTS] to give the Christian Gospel and vernacular translation of the Bible to the heathen in distant lands drove them also to take counsel together about the heathen at home" (Hewitt 17).

The Pilgrim's Progress, one of the mainstays of evangelical literature organisations, commended itself for both of these tasks. As a long-standing classic of the poor, it provided an entry point for those wishing to "refin[e] the atmosphere and cultivat[e] the taste of the uneducated" (Stanley 54). Given that it had "always had a hold upon the toiling poor...the one book above all books well-thumbed and torn to tatters among them", the text suggested itself as the "first book [to be] translated by the missionary who seeks to give true thoughts of God and life to heathen men" (quoted in Venables 179). The book also had a well-established reputation as a childrens' book and this helped commend it to missionaries who saw it as befitting
their 'childlike' converts.

What these converts made of the text has thus far been the subject of much speculation but little research. Christopher Hill in the conclusion to his masterful biography of Bunyan suggests that in situations of colonial inequality, the 'original' revolutionary meaning of the text was rediscovered. A recent 'postcolonial' reading of Bunyan in Textual Practice suggests the opposite. The text was simply another oppressive instrument of Imperialism in which "no subject position is made available for non-white readers" (Spargo 89). Interestingly, this latter deduction is made from the introductory poem in the text. This section of the book was generally excluded at least from most African translations. This may seem a small error but is it instructive in two regards. Firstly it assumes that texts float unchanged through the ether of language. This notion presupposes a conception of 'the text' which is seen in abstract terms. The text has no material, physical existence in the world. Secondly and arising out of this, these ideas assume that in order to understand texts transnationally we do not need to grasp the situations into which these texts migrate or the cultural formations into which they are enfolded.

These assumptions are important since they takes us back to the title of the paper, namely orality, literacy and the limits of area studies. They provide a reminder of the extent to which readings of 'European' texts frequently rely on an unarticulated 'literate' model in terms of which texts exist as abstract entities consumed in the noiseless process of silent and private reading. They also

point to the hidden hand of an area studies model in terms of which only certain areas of the world are in acute focus. Once one's object of study passes out of this zone, one's analysis blurs and texts behave according to simplistic notions which would not be entertained in relation to the initial area of sharp focus. It is of course the problem which Chakrabarty has identified in his by now famous phrase of "asymmetrical ignorance" or to rephrase it, "symmetrical knowledge".

What this paper has attempted to do is lay the ground work for the establishment of such symmetrical knowledge. It has argued that this not only requires - as Chakrabarty suggests - a balanced and nuanced knowledge of 'metropole' and 'periphery', it also requires that one mix and match categories. One of the major insights arising from 'African Studies' has been in the area of orality and oral literature. By projecting some of these categories onto 'European Studies', one can open up ways of seeing that have long been forgotten.

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