

ISABEL HOFMEYR. *Dockside Reading: Hydrocolonialism and the Custom House*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2022. Pp. 136. \$84.95 (cloth).
doi: 10.1017/jbr.2023.53

What happens to books as they travel from ship to shore? In her stimulating investigation, *Dockside Reading: Hydrocolonialism and the Custom House*, Isabel Hofmeyr offers a fresh perspective on book history in the British Empire. Little concerned with either authors or readers in the usual sense, she turns to a particular kind of professional reader, the official of the colonial Custom House. Hofmeyr shows how printed materials of all types assumed their place within a regime that regulated a bewildering variety of commodities. Customs officials were not ignorant or dull readers, Hofmeyr insists, despite the literary portraits of these figures that surface in Nathaniel Hawthorne's work and elsewhere. Instead, they followed a dockside hermeneutics, decoding the book as substance. The task of the Custom House reader was to recognize the book's meritorious position in colonial society with an appropriate tariff, or, conversely, cast it out as illegitimate or dangerous. To describe these practices, rather than evoking the more visual and epistemological language of classification, Hofmeyr prefers the term *assaying* (10). Its associations of touch, heft, and substance insist on an enlarged sense of the material environment for the book, and for the colonial state. The book as thing stands for the port as key site for management of the legal, economic, and social transitions between oceans and land.

Hofmeyr's work is known for calling attention to worlds above and below the waterline, so it seems appropriate that this short book exists on two different planes itself. Hofmeyr repeatedly chooses a micro-historical scale, pulling out choice details from the archives of colonial Customs and Excise in southern Africa and in Sydney, Australia. Hofmeyr first traces the career of George Rutherford, collector of customs and chair of the Harbour Board in Durban, with an excursion to the history of the architecture of the Durban waterfront that illustrates its hierarchies of labor and space. Turning to Port Elizabeth, she tracks the regulatory history of marking goods for imperial trade with the stamp of their origins. The operation of (and disputes over) copyright law takes her again primarily to Durban. Finally, she compares censorship practices during the Boer War in southern Africa and in Sydney, Australia during the 1920s and 1930s. But at another level, Hofmeyr consistently refuses the limits of the micro-historical view from the archives. She insists on the imperial dimensions of her subject, plumbs the ambiguous metaphors of bodies and things, and ranges freely across several decades from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century.

Hofmeyr's attention to the oceanic environment is part of wider currents of literary scholarship, but her particular focus on the Indian Ocean is a welcome addition to established literary criticism concerned with North Atlantic, Caribbean, and Pacific regions. Her introduction reviewing this multidisciplinary interest in ocean environments and its implications for post-colonial studies will be of wide interest. Because we associate colonialism with the territory, we neglect the categories and experiences of the ocean environment that defined colonial society. Hydrocolonialism, she argues, "requires us to think laterally, vertically, and contrapuntally" (17), attending to the imperial geographies that connect distant lands by water and analyzing the relationships that were trafficked across the boundaries of water and land. Dockside reading, like many other kinds of waterfront regulation, was built from assumptions about infection (hygiene), corruption (proximity, waste), or adulteration (purity). These patterns readily translated into and mingled with practices of colonial racial control. Hofmeyr then effectively reminds us that hydrocriticism is less about poetic notions of mobility and flow and more about regulation and exclusion: "the elemental politics of the colonial maritime frontier" (20).

Hofmeyr refers to the "patient provocation" of objects (48) and she is herself a provocative writer, with a clear intention to test her method and happy to set aside some issues. For me

there were two surprises. We gain little sense of the changing nature of the book in a period of sweeping transformations in print culture from this analysis. It is intriguing that the legal and economic scrutiny of imported books seemed so little concerned with a myriad of other markers—statistical quantities of reading materials, for example, size and shape of books, illustrations, or bindings. Customs readers treated books, in other words, as both material *and* abstract, concerned to place the book within a cacophony of other objects. Copyright is then a mark of manufacture, like the mark stamped into a hide or woven into a fabric selvage. We do gain occasional glimpses of the physical nature of books: the waterproofing of tariff handbooks and their interleaved blank pages, or the objectionable covers of books triggering censorship in 1930s Sydney. But these are brief and passing. The logic of Customs and Excise is Hofmeyr's subject, and like the practices themselves, we seem forced to retreat from actual volumes and pages. The conclusion is a different sort of surprise, shifting to a different register. It considers how the influence of the Custom House mode of analysis can be traced at the level of literary genre. Following some fascinating and too-brief remarks on the diminished presence of the author in the colonial world, Hofmeyr explores a travel guide, *The Story of an African Seaport*, by J. Forsyth Ingram (1899), drawing comparisons with the well-known novel, Olive Shreiner's *Story of an African Farm* (1883). With this brief dockside reading of her own, Hofmeyr demonstrates what literary criticism gains from the dockside perspective.

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ALEXANDRA HUGHES-JOHNSON and LYNDSEY JENKINS, eds. *The Politics of Women's Suffrage: Local, National and International Dimensions*. New Historical Perspectives. London: University of London Press, 2021. Pp. 422. \$50.00 (cloth).
 doi: 10.1017/jbr.2023.54

The 2018 centenary of some women winning the vote in the United Kingdom saw a number of processions and parades, with marchers dressed in the purple, green, and white of the Women's Social and Political Union, flooding the streets of Britain as women had done a hundred years before. As Nicoletta Gullace points out in her afterword to *The Politics of Women's Suffrage: Local, National and International Dimensions*, however, these triumphal celebrations did little to represent the complexities of the women's suffrage movement, with its numerous schisms, sometimes dictatorial personalities, and tensions between regional and national bodies. Gullace is right that this volume, derived from thirteen papers presented at a 2018 conference on women's suffrage, offers a timely corrective to that uncomplicated narrative.

Recentering politics in the discussion of women's suffrage is at the heart of the analytical framework proposed by the volume's editors, Alexandra Hughes-Johnson and Lyndsey Jenkins. In their introduction, they argue persuasively that the campaign for women's suffrage was about more than just granting women the vote. Rather, its leaders sought "lasting structural change by navigating, interrogating, accepting, challenging, and remaking the existing political system" (3). Much recent scholarship on the suffrage movement has been focused on the campaign's social and cultural elements. Though such work is important, it can sometimes obscure the desire for real structural change that drove suffrage campaigners. Organized into three sections examining the ways women worked within existing political structures, how advocates advanced political demands via cultural and social methods, and the ways women navigated international political structures, the volume largely succeeds in its goal of