



“There are NO (Teddy) Bears in Africa!” Discuss

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In November 2007 a middle-aged English primary-school teacher in Khartoum named Gillian Gibbons was arrested and jailed for allowing her class of seven-year olds, after due electoral process, to name a teddy bear “Mohammed.” Gibbons might have thought she’d be safe in Khartoum. The Civil War had ended two years earlier; and Khartoum was a long way from the ravages of famine and the fighting in Darfur. But with the Rift Valley Fever epidemic starting up and the terrible floods that year she should have known it would not be a teddy bears’ picnic (*BBC News*, 2007).¹

We know exactly what happened to Gillian Gibbons. She was reported by the school secretary, formally charged under Section 125 of the Sudanese Criminal Act, found guilty of “insulting religion” and sentenced to 15 days’ imprisonment. Ten thousand protesters took to the streets of Khartoum, demanding her execution. A small number also took to the streets in London, demanding Gibbon’s release from prison. After eight

¹ The *BBC* reported the school’s director, Robert Boulos, as saying that Gibbons has been following “a British national curriculum course designed to teach young pupils about animals,” and that “this year’s topic was the bear.” Apparently the teacher had asked one of the children to bring her teddy bear to school. Then she has asked the class to choose a name for it. “They came up with eight names including Abdullah, Hassan and Muhammad,” Mr Boulos said. The children voted; and twenty of the twenty-three children chose “Muhammad” as the bear’s name. Then each child took the teddy bear home for a weekend, during which he or she had to keep a diary about what they did with the bear. Finally, all the entries were collected in a book with a picture of the bear on the cover and a message that read: “My name is Muhammad.” It seems clear that the project was based on a research project reported three years previously that found teddy bears a useful tool to boost the motivation to learning in young children. The children’s befriending and diarising of the teddy bear not only improved their motivation but also had “a positive backwash” on the school, providing it with “a positive interpersonal context.” (Andrews, 2004, pp. 1-18).

days in jail, through the intercession of two British Muslim peers in the House of Lords, however, she was granted a presidential pardon and deported. While the case had no notable effect on Sharia law in Sudan, the British parliament voted subsequently to abolish the blasphemy laws there (which applied only to attacks on Christianity). But what happened to the teddy bear? The media never reported his fate.² And that started me wondering about all the other bears in Africa whose fates I had never before even considered.

So, in this article I want to think about teddy bears and their relationship to Africa, and more particularly, I want to think about how they function – what kind of cultural work they do - in the production of literary and political geographies of Africa.

Objects, Animals, Things

Contrary to popular belief there were bears in Africa once. Fossils found in South Africa have shown that *Agriotherium africanum* was in fact the largest bear ever to have lived. It became extinct approximately five million years ago. The Atlas Bear (*Ursus arctos crowtheri*), which is also now extinct, was perhaps not strictly native, for it is thought to have descended

² There is also a question – not the subject of this paper - about what happened (or will happen) to the blaspheming children. If the aim of the teddy-bear project was to improve their interpersonal skills and enhance the motivation to learning, were these skills, for example, damaged by the arrest of their teacher and the surrounding controversy concerning the blasphemy laws? According to developmental psychologist, Robert Kegan, children make meaning based on the differences they perceive between the different objects that they choose or receive to engage with, which they apprehend as having internal lives of their own (Kegan, 1982). And if, as Colleen Goddard points out, “the self-appointed object is refuted, critiqued or denied in any way, attachment difficulties may arise later in life” (Goddard, 2014). It is likely that the teddy bear named Mohammed, once stripped of his name, was also removed from the classroom. Did the parents then remove their children from the school? The Unity High School at which Gibbon taught in Khartoum is an independent school, founded by the Coptic community in 1902, and aims to provide a British-style education to children from ages 6 to 16 years of age, culminating in the IGCSE examinations from Cambridge University. In the neighbouring Islamic nation of Egypt, on March 2016, a juvenile court sentenced three Coptic Christian children to five years in prison and ordered a fourth placed in a juvenile facility for a 32-second video filmed by their teacher mocking the “Islamic State of Iraq and Syria” (ISIS). They were charged with "mocking Islamic prayer rituals" and "disrupt[ing] public order." Their teacher was sentenced to three years in prison for assisting their crimes. Freed on bail, the children fled Egypt and, with the aid of human rights organizations in Turkey, applied for humanitarian visas to Switzerland (Caballero, 2016).

from brown bears imported by the Romans from the Cantabrian Mountains of northern Spain. Still, it did once range all across Northern Africa. Then, in East Africa, we have the Nandi Bear. But it is a cryptid – a creature reportedly sighted on numerous occasions but which has not been verified by science. The Nandi Bear is ready-made for fiction. It features in the March 1963 Gold Key comic, *Tarzan and the Nandi Bear*, where the wild white hero tricks the rapacious bear into destroying a caravan of Arab slavers, thereby liberating their captive slaves, before he finally kills the monster and saves the cattle herds of the local people as well (Burroughs 1967). The Nandi Bear appears again in the April 1969 Gold Key issue (#28) of *Korak Son of Tarzan* (Shuker, 2016). More recently it has featured in Vered Ehsani’s series of African paranormal thrillers, in the fifth novel, titled *Curse of the Nandi* (Ehasani, 2016).

Teddy bears of course are not real bears but they are not mere objects either. The earliest teddy bears looked more like real bears than they do today. In 1943, however, Konrad Lorenz outlined a “baby schema” (*kinderschema*) of specific physical features responsible for triggering affection and motivating caretaking in human beings - large head, high protruding forehead, large eyes, and so on (Lorenz, 1971; Glocker et al., 1995). Collectively these features generate a sense of “cuteness;” and in the interests of mass-market capitalism they can be applied to any number of commodified objects, including of course teddy bears. This explains the representational shift that has occurred in the production of teddy bears, so that they look more infantile and less bearish.³

Adults encourage children to invest teddy bears with symbolic power; and child psychologists have developed a variety of theoretical perspectives about the teddy bear. They are comfort objects, objects of inanimate attachment, personified instruments of self-expression, proxy parents invested with the symbolic power to protect the child in the parents’ absence. In psychology the dominant ways of thinking about teddy bears derive from D.W. Winnicott’s (2003) ground-breaking theorising of “transitional objects” – that is, objects that the child experiences as part of him-or-herself but also as an aspect of the external world. As Sherry Turkle puts it: “Transitional objects, with their joint allegiance to self and other, demonstrate to the child that objects in the external world can be loved” (Turkle, 2007, p.314). Teddy bears are objects (stuffed toys) in some

³ Ironically, this might also explain why, in illustrations of bears in children’s literature, they tend to look like teddy bears even when they are not (that is, when they are animal characters rather than toys).

contexts and subjects (comforters, protectors, confidantes, travelling companions) in others. Transitional objects often function in adulthood also. Many adults keep their teddy bears from childhood, or they buy new ones, investing them with ongoing therapeutic power (Hooley & Murphy, 2012, pp. 179-91).⁴ A survey for Travelodge in 2012 found that over a third of British adults still sleep with a teddy bear to comfort and preserve them in their sleep (Daily Mail, 2012).

Psychology is not the only discipline to take teddy bears so seriously. In anthropology, for example, the simultaneous human likeness and otherness of the teddy bear make it a paradigmatic figure for negotiating cultural differences (“they are Bears, silly child, and . . . They may look a little like us, but they are really very, very different . . .”) (Fox, 1992, p. 47). Ethnographic research methodologies have also been applied to exploring the quasi-ritual practices of mothers of preterm babies placing teddy bears and other stuffed-animal toys into life-support cribs, in an effort “to *animate* these prosthetic devices, as veritable cyborg wombs which interpolate mother-child bonding and problematize maternal identity” (Landzelius, 2006, p. 323-44). Sociological enquiries into toys, citizenship, culture, race, religious emotion, gender, sexuality and executive business leadership have all focused at some point on teddy bears (Ball, 1967, pp.447-58; Browne, 2011, p. 25; Gorgy & Orkeny, 1999, pp. 95-114; Hennen, 2005, 25-43; Livingston & Pearce, 2009, pp 1229-36; McFarlane, 2012; Woodhead & Riis, 2012, p. 170). Criminologists spotlight issues like the role of teddy-bear costumes in armed robbery, the failure of the teddy bear’s traditional symbolic powers to protect children from crime and the efficacy as a gift in the healing of traumatised victims of criminal abuse (Ferrell and Saunders, 1995, p. 128, 138). Medical research has raised awareness about teddy bears collecting dust and posing a threat to children’s health.⁵ Health experts say the gifting of a teddy bear can help the recovery of trauma victims; scholarship in cultural and communication studies protests the proliferation of teddy bears across multiple sites of suffering and mourning offers only a false promise of closure, mediating

⁴ This can be healthy or unhealthy. For example, an over-reliance on transitional objects in adulthood can be symptomatic of underlying personality pathologies such as the Borderline Personality Disorder.

⁵ In early 2016 the Norwegian Heart and Lung Association released a new advertising campaign featuring teddy bears made to look like Adolf Hitler, Muammar Gaddafi, and Kim Jong-il, with the warning that for children with asthma and allergies stuffed animals were just as dangerous as the worst despots. After protests from the Jewish community the advertisements were banned.

the victim's sense of disempowerment with a pre-packaged and kitsch sentimentality that forecloses any real historical understanding of the traumatic events he or she has experienced (Moody & Costa, 2006; pp. 38-42; Sturken, 2007; Varga, 2009b, pp.71-96). Religious studies cover some of the same terrain, considering teddy bears in memorialisation and healing, but also as role models for the practice of love and as spiritual directors (Callaghan, 2003, pp.19-32; Grider, 2006, 246-264; Nickerson, 2007).

With the material turn in the social sciences and the affective turn in the humanities, teddy bears are now also important in a variety of new and/or renewed fields of cross-disciplinary inquiry, most obviously those focused on human-object and human-animal interactions. In the field of human-object relations a key question is object agency. If fetishism is the explanation for our personalised interactions with teddy bears, agency is entirely reserved for the human subject. But it is also possible to deduce from those interactions that some objects at least, especially perhaps transitional ones such as teddy bears, are sufficiently evocative to influence who we are and how we develop as social beings.⁶ Researchers have found for instance that the “baby schema” extends to real animal subjects; and that children develop a moral schema identifying “good” and “bad” animal figures according to whether or not they possess the distinguishing traits of cuteness (Borgi, Cogliait-Dezz, Brelsford, Mintz & Cirulli, 2014, p. 411; Lee & Kang, 2012, pp. 32-49). Confusing and complicating this moral schema, however, the production of teddy bears in recent years has diversified to include a number of intentionally deconstructive subspecies – killers, terrorists, vampires, zombies, cyborgs and the like.⁷ These kinds of teddy bears incarnate a symbolic resistance to the hegemonic anthropocentric culture that places real animals in the colonised domain of “dead” nature - plastic, passive, “completely lacking in qualities such as mind and agency that are seen as exclusive to the human”

⁶ As Russell Belk (2015, p. 21) points out, there are a variety of different models for object agency, including: actor network theory, entanglement theory, vibrant matter, alien phenomenology, post-phenomenology, speculative realism, new realism, and assemblage theory. (Bennet, 2010; Bogost, 2012; Deluze & Guattari, 1987; Harman, 2011; Hodder, 2012; Latour, 2005; Sparrow; 2014; Verbeek 200/2005).

⁷ Terror Toys, Creators of Horror Themed Plush and Horror Dolls, offer a range of one-of-a-kind blood-drenched “terror teddies” – including demons and zombies. Some are self harming or suicidal. One holds a gun to his head, and another has torn his own chest apart to reveal his ribcage. Others are murderous, wielding carving knives in their claws. Another toy company, Terror Teds, offers similarly objects all carefully “horrified” with handmade gore.

(Plumwood, 2002, p. 107). As machines with which to think through a new environmentalism and ethics of personhood that does not rely upon human centrality, teddy bears might be considered strategically crucial. A good illustration of this is the satirical film, *Ted 2* (2015) directed by Seth MacFarlane, in which the central protagonist is a teddy-bear subaltern who walks and talks and struggles for legal recognition as a ‘person’ so that he might adopt a child with his human partner. Steve Rose reads the film as a reflection of changing attitudes towards animal rights (Rose, 2015). But in so far as the symbolic rebellion of teddy bears in popular culture in recent years is conceptually affiliated with other forms of colonial resistance, they can also be seen as exemplary postcolonial subjects, shaking off the shackles of their objectification as mere “things” as they rise up against the “the tyranny of the subject” (Miller, D., 2005, p. 38; Fowles, 2016, pp. 9 - 27). The colonising subject, as Daniel Miller identifies it, is human; and the subaltern, as Graham Harman argues, is the Orientalized object (Harman, 2005, p. 240). But as the agendas for environmental and social justice are symbiotically entwined, the “object” could be any “othered” human subject. In one controversial scene in *Ted 2*, the teddy bear compares himself to Kunta Kinte, the hero of Alex Haley’s Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1977), a Mandinka man from the Gambia, captured and sold into slavery into Virginia and horrifically brutalised by his plantation owners in punishment for his escape efforts. Manohla Dargis, a chief film critic for the *New York Times*, is one of several reviewers who focuses on this episode in detail as exemplifying the film’s crude “appropriation of black lives” for white entertainment (Dargis, 2015). The satire falls flat. Yet it is possible to see the teddy bear’s struggle for “personhood” as an analogue for resistance to the objectifying imperatives of racialised colonialism. In fact, Ted’s fight for subject recognition accords directly with the manifesto of Franz Fanon’s *Toward the African Revolution* (1968), which was an inspirational text for the American civil rights movement.

While bears abound in the folk tales of Celtic and Northern European cultures, and while they also feature in the story-traditions of many Native American peoples, they were relative latecomers to the written fiction of animals.⁸ Of course, real encounters with real bears occur in specific

⁸ Shakespeare’s most famous stage direction - "Exit, pursued by a bear" (from *The Winter’s Tale*) dates from 1623. But Robert Southey’s “The Three Bears” - published in 1837 – is generally considered the first published version of the tale now widely known as "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." And it is not until the publication of Rudyard

geographic and cultural contexts; and the nature of those encounters inevitably influences the literary representation of the animals involved, human and non-human.⁹ More cross-cultural comparative studies are needed to decide whether it also influences the literary representation of teddy bears.¹⁰ But where there are no bears, teddy bears are perhaps more liberated to diversify and complicate their cultural meanings. In any case, as we have seen already, the meaning of the teddy bear is far from fixed; and it is easy to forget that these ubiquitous stuffed animals have not been eternally present, or that they came into our lives originally in circumstances that were at the outset far from innocent.

Foundation Myths and Realities

In 1902, at the end of a long and tiring Mississippi bear-hunt, the US President Theodore Roosevelt found himself confronted with an exhausted creature tethered to a willow tree, run down by hounds and clubbed into submission. The president declined the kill, judging it unsporting; instead, he ordered someone else to put it out of its misery. The cartoon depiction of the incident in the Washington Post a few days later was captioned “Drawing the Line in Mississippi,” and was thought to refer to the President’s opposition to lynching in the South. But a Brooklyn candy storeowner with a sideline in stuffed toys picked up on the cartoon. He placed two stuffed toy bears his wife had made in his shop window with a sign that said “Teddy’s Bears.” Soon he was mass-producing them.

Over time the teddy bear was disconnected from its original context of African slavery in the Americas; and today most people have no idea that the now-ubiquitous teddy bear was originally a mythological projection of the US presidency, representing compassion - and seemingly bridging the borders of both human and non-human subjects, races and species (Varga,

Kipling’s *The Jungle Book* in 1894 that a bear features as a major literary protagonist (Pastoureau, 2011).

⁹ Inversely, cultural beliefs about bears and the symbolic meaning with which they are imbued in literature help determine those interactions. In the controversial Canadian classic by Marion Engel, *Bear* (1976 p. 24) when the protagonist first confronts a real bear in the wild she realises that “years of corruption by teddy bears” have predisposed her falsely to imagine that its nose should be less pointed; and she is surprised by its “genuinely piggish and ugly” eyes.

¹⁰ Although there is a dearth of cross-cultural research into the literary representations of and human interactions with animals, and no comparative research on the literature of teddy bears, there are some relevant studies in anthropology, psychology, sociology and other disciplines (Akhtar & Volkan, 2014; Haldar & Wærdahl, 2009, pp. 1141-50; Hurn, 2012).

2009a, pp. 98-113).¹¹ So it is hardly likely they will recognise the irony of that characterisation in relation to Teddy Roosevelt's 1909 African safari – a year-long trek across British East Africa – during which he and his son, Kermit shot and killed more than a thousand African animals, including 17 lions, 11 elephants and 20 rhinoceros.¹²

Roosevelt's pardon of one exemplary American bear was a deceiving ceremony of innocence. It spoke of sovereign power, just as the "collecting" of a thousand African trophies in the name of American science did.¹³ The bear that he chose not to kill in Alabama was murdered the moment he turned his back, and the animals he killed in Africa were shipped back to Washington, stuffed and mounted for display in the nation's capital as part of the Smithsonian Institution's museological dioramas of American education and power.¹⁴

My reference point here is Donna Haraway's book *Primate Visions* (1989), which links the semiotics of diorama display in the US to the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, underwriting the US war against terror and global capitalism today much as it did the expansion westward and subjugation of Native American peoples in a previous colonial period. For Haraway – and a great many other scholars since – taxidermy is a useful label to identify a diverse range of imperialist and capitalist methodologies for locating sovereignty, extending property and maintaining control by means of a kind of suspended animation. That is, by the slowing or stopping of life processes either by applying external pressure or

¹¹ See Vargo (2009a, pp.98-113) for an explanation of the socio-cultural transformation of Roosevelt ("from Great White Hunter into mythical humanitarian") and of the Mississippi bear (from animal victim of violence into a "childhood innocent capable of redeeming adult life").

¹² The Smithsonian Institution's summary description of its Roosevelt African Expedition Collection notes the inclusion of 1,000 skins of large mammals and 4,000 skins of small mammals. According to Roosevelt's own count, he brought back also approximately four thousand birds, two thousand reptiles and amphibians, five hundred fish and numerous crab, beetle and other kinds of invertebrate and plant specimens (Roosevelt, 1909).

¹³ But this annually recurring event in reality is pregnant with deep and terrible significance. It holds the inner secrets of sovereign power, insofar as those secrets remain hidden in the archaic rituals in which sovereign power is constituted, recreated and perpetuated even in our so-called modern states.

¹⁴ These "became some of the most popular exhibits in the new National Museum building, now the National Museum of Natural History. Unveiled to the public in 1913, they remained on exhibit for most of the twentieth century. Today only one Roosevelt specimen, this white rhino, is still on public display" (*Smithsonian*, nd).

intervening internally. The granting of a symbolic pardon is often a means to divert attention from these actions. A good example of this is China's cancellation of a large portion of Zimbabwe's Chinese debt last year, at the same time coercing Zimbabwe into adopting the yuan as legal currency and exempting China from its indigenisation laws, thereby enabling Chinese investors to increase their shareholding and thus to gain increased control over the local economy (Fiskesjö, 2013, p. 53).¹⁵ The pardon serves to boost the taxidermic powers of the pardoner.

There is a competing account of the birth of the teddy bear that comes from the Steiff toy-making enterprise in Germany. Margarete Steiff began by making toy elephants. Her nephew, Richard Steiff, joined the company in 1897, and gave the company its first toy bear in 1902, a prototype based on his drawings of the famous hybrid bear in the Nill'scher Zoologischer Garten in Stuttgart, a brown bear crossbred with a polar bear. Initially the new toy was not well received in Germany. It was seen as a "stuffed misfit" (Pfeiffer, 2001, p. 20). It was not cute, and it was "very dark in colour" – not a teddy bear at all really (Cronin, 2011). But in the aftermath of the Roosevelt's bear "pardon," the market for "Teddy's Bears" in the US had expanded beyond reckoning; and in 1903, to capitalise on that market, the New York doll import company, George Borgfeldt & Co., placed an order with Steiff for three thousand of its toy bears.¹⁶ By 1907 the Steiff factory was manufacturing 974,000 bears! The success of Steiff in the US market was unprecedented – but it was not achieved without cultural sacrifice. The Steiff bear was originally named Petsy, after the German folk-name for "Meister Petz," originating in the animal fables of Hans Sachs (McClellan, 1947, p. 355). But Roosevelt's campaign managers exploited the link between the man and the bear to such advantage that the made-in-America teddy bear became the president's mascot; and in his second term the

¹⁵ Magnus Fiskesjö explains the power of the pardon in this way: "The power of pardon signals the location of sovereignty, which finds its expression the decisions placed directly in the sovereign's hands: the decisions on wielding or resting the executioner's axe (whether in specific cases, as for fellow humans on death row, or animal by animal), or in the decision to make or avoid war, whether foreign or civil. And sovereign power finds its most obvious expression in—is always reconstituted in—every concrete example of every pardoned turkey or every exemplary teddy bear, as in the case of every death row captive, and, most important of all, in every decision on whether or not to trigger the suspension of normal order, as in that exceptional state of emergency known as 'war'" (Fiskesjö, 2013, p. 53).

¹⁶ This was such a massive order that Steiff had to build a new factory to fulfil the contract. But the first shipment of German bears to the US was lost - and the fate of these bears is still unknown.

market for teddy bears went wild and Steiff was forced to rename its product the “Teddy Bear” (Hendeles, 2009, p. 24).¹⁷

Precisely when and how the first teddy bear entered Africa is unknown. Clifford Berryman, whose teddy bear cartoons referring to Roosevelt had evolved into a whole series of cartoons since the Mississippi bear hunt, covered the President’s African safari with an image of the eponymous Teddy Bear pondering whether or not to follow him on the trip (Berryman, 1909). But there are no cute stuffed bears in the photographic record of the President’s African safari ‘slaughter’ in the archives. Teddy bears soon spread across Europe, supplied initially by Steiff, and subsequently by other manufacturers, in Germany and in Britain (*Bears for Africa*, 2008). By 1910 the British press was pleased to report that the teddy bear was the most popular toy ever invented, that there was no monopoly on its manufacture and that British-made bears were “as good as any foreign ones produced” (*Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 1910, p. 6). By 1917, with German and British enmity at a peak, the teddy bear was so widely manufactured and so popular that it was said to be “absolutely British” (*Yorkshire Evening Post*, 1917, p.3). British toy companies exported across the Empire; the teddy bear became the mail-order Christmas present of choice for British children both at home and abroad. But there was no really concerted effort to export teddy bears to Black Africa.

There are a number of reasons for this. While the market was potentially huge, there was significant administrative variation among the colonies and later among the postcolonial nations that replaced them; and the former colonising powers maintained their economic advantage well into the postcolonial era. The market too was segmented by a confusing plethora of ethnicities, among which only a small percentage was white; and teddy bears, while mostly brown, were racially white. Blackness was reserved for ‘golliwogs’.

As Donna Varga and Rhoda Zuk (Varga and Zuk, 2013, pp.647-671) have shown, the illustrated children’s literature published in Britain during the first half of the twentieth-century frequently paired teddy bears with golliwogs. Together they enacted the prevailing racial logic of imperialism, a controlling binarism that reduced all ethnic differences to black and white, and which installed whiteness as the dominant category of identity. The

¹⁷ Hendeles notes that the appearance of the bear also altered. “It started to look more as it would appear for some time to come, with very long limbs, oversized paws and feet, a hump on its back, a head with a long snout, sewn nose and mouth, and boot buttons for eyes” (2009, p. 24).

golliwog made its first appearance in *The Adventures of Two Dutch Dolls and a Golliwogg*, a storybook for children in verse by Bertha Upton, illustrated by her daughter Florence Kate Upton, and published in 1895. The dolls in the book are white, while the golliwog is "the blackest gnome," a "horrid sight" (Upton, p. 26), modelled on blackface minstrel tradition; and although he turns out to be kind and courageous and much beloved throughout the next twelve volumes of adventures created by Florence and Bertha Upton, he cannot be contained therein, and he becomes a villain (In Enid Blyton's books, for example, golliwogs are generally rude, deceitful and untrustworthy.) In his adventures with the white dolls, as Varga and Zuk (2013) point out, the golliwog is a bungler and a scamp, a creature of dubious morality and lesser intelligence; and often the dolls must save him from his own devices. Similarly, in a whole range of other later fictions where the teddy bear stands in for the white dolls to partner the golliwog, the 'black gnome' retains its racial coding of subservience in relation to the ursine innocent; and in the material culture of childhood the same cultural codes applied. The artefacts of this racial paradigm spread far beyond Britain; and Steiff gave it a big boost in 1908 when it became the first company to mass-produce and distribute golliwog dolls (*The Evening Post*, 2014; Hamlin, 2007, p.51).¹⁸ But Africa, with its relatively small Caucasian population, was obviously not a market conducive for the export of either the golliwog or the teddy bear. The golliwog was a demeaning and distorted image of the black child and the bear, symbolically cast in the image of the pure and innocent white child, was also potentially offensive. In fact, in 1907 there had been a briefly serious movement in Britain to suppress the sale of both types of toy on the grounds that they were "subversive to the humane instinct in children" (*Western Daily Express*, 1907, p.6). But it was not until the 1970s, when many of the traditional manufacturers had closed down and individual teddy bear artists and artisans stepped into the breach, that the racial coding of teddy bears began to change. In part this may relate to the teddy bear's decoupling from the golliwog in the wake of the civil rights movement in the US and the raising of public awareness about racial caricature in relation to the African diaspora (Miller, J., 2010).

Foundations myths (myths of origin) are literary constructions. From one point of view, they tell us how things came to be; from another, they tell us about the time in which they were written. So far as I am aware there

¹⁸ Steiff also made a number of non-Western dolls, mainly for export to the US, among which - as David D. Hamlin observes - African dolls were a conspicuous absence (2007, p.51).

is only one published narrative of the coming of the teddy bear to Africa. It was written by Japanese children's author, Satomi Ichikawa, and published first in France in 1998, with a question for its title: *Y a-t-il des ours en Afrique? (Are there Bears in Africa?)*. The English edition, published three years later, has the more declarative title: *The First Bear in Africa!* (Ichikawa, 2001). The teddy bear in this instance belongs to a little girl from a tourist family on safari. The narrative is indifferent to the precise geography of origins and destinations. It matters only that she has come from "far far away," and that she has come to Africa, stopping at a small village in the savannah. The animals all have Swahili names, so we may infer that the locale is Kenya. In any case, when she leaves the village she forgets her teddy bear; and the whole of the ensuing narrative concerns the efforts of Meto, a young boy from the village, to return the bear to her before she departs Africa forever. Lost anthropomorphised toys are a staple of children's literature; and the driving force of many teddy-bear narratives is reunification (Doebelius, 2014).¹⁹ In real-life scenarios often the restoration narrative adds to the commodity value of the object; it also ensures the mental health of the child subject, who might otherwise develop an internalisation disorder of one kind or another.²⁰ The tourists in Ichikawa's narrative are satirically exoticised. Meto wonders why they don't speak his language, dress differently and watch the villagers from behind strange machines called cameras. But he also intuits that the little girl is emotionally attached to the alien animal; and he enlists the help of his African animal friends – a hippopotamus, a lion, an elephant and a Giraffe – to assist him in restoring the teddy bear to her. So both the bear and the girl are saved, in return for which she presents Meto with a ribbon. The purpose of the coming-of-the-bear narrative is Western salvation. It gives the African child the opportunity to prove his moral virtue to the white child, who is surely the book's primary reader; and it rewards Meto for his

¹⁹ See for example: "When Woody Cranmer left his treasured teddy 'Pooh' in Buenos Aires, the eight-month-old thought he would never see his lovable companion again. The toy had been passed down from his father Scott, 30, from Wakefield, who was given Pooh as a baby. Once the family realised he had gone missing during their trip last month they took to social media to try and find their furry family member. And thankfully within days, Mr P Bear - now the owner of a gold executive club card - was located by the British Airways team and flown back to Leeds Bradford Airport, West Yorkshire, to be reunited with his anxious family."

²⁰ In cases of melancholia, for example, "the ego is unable to accept that such a loss has occurred and, in order to counteract reality, it incorporates the lost object as a living entity within its own psychic topography, ultimately identifying as the object." (Brisely, 2013, p.256).

services with the usual token of the imperial imaginary, a pretty ribbon from the girl's hair.

Teddy Bears to Africa

We know that the Victorian discourse of darkness was projected onto Africa by Europe as a way of endowing its economic imperialism with the justificatory mission of enlightenment. Even in 1958, when Michael Bond created the now famous English immigrant Paddington Bear, the manuscript he sent to his editor stated that the hero had come to England "all the way from darkest Africa" (Harper Children, 2007). The editor, who was better informed about the geographical distribution of bears, advised Bond that there were no bears in Africa; and Bond changed the text, so that Paddington comes from "darkest Peru" (Bond, 2016, p.3).

This doesn't really work. There are species of bear native to Peru, yet still it seems somehow absurd to say that Paddington Bear comes from "darkest Peru." We in the West have been so programmed by the remarkably continuous discourse of colonialism that we read what the author wrote originally without ever knowing that he wrote it.²¹ But the Peruvians have adopted Paddington. The Peruvian government has issued him with a passport. Peruvian scientists have named a beetle in his honour; and the Spectacled Bear, which is the only living bear species indigenous to South America, - the Andean Bear, as it sometimes called - is known colloquially as the Paddington Bear.²²

Of course Paddington is also a global phenomenon. "The Paddington books have sold more than 35 million copies around the world and have been translated into more than 40 languages"(Kirka, 2008). In fact he doesn't like to travel. Even a trip to the London Zoo has him shivering in fear of the other animals, who seem by comparison so hungry and so fierce (*Hull Daily Mail*, 1920, p.1).²³ There seems little chance now of his going

²¹ The relational system of empire thinking that made Africa the place of darkness also made Australia terra nullius ("nobody's land"), and the system succeeded not just in parts but as a whole, naturalising all of its geopolitical descriptors, so that really they cannot simply be switched about.

²² The Spectacled Bear of the Andes is one of the most endangered species of surviving bears on the planet.

²³ This trope of the white innocent in fear of Africa has a long lineage. In November 1920, for example, the British press reported "a very pretty incident" that had occurred in Belgrave Square as Prince Arthur of Connaught and his family were preparing to depart their London home so that he could take up his position as Governor General of South Africa. Their young son, about eight years of age, discovered in the car outside that he had forgotten his favourite teddy bear and dashed back into the house to retrieve

to Africa. But although Paddington has never been to Africa he does not lack influence there. In 2014 the decision to hold the African premier of the film, *Paddington*, in Zimbabwe was reported in the British press as “a charm offensive” aimed at healing the rift in UK-Zimbabwean relations “by demonstrating a cultural affinity between the two nations”(Smith, 2014). Paddington is a quintessentially English bear and on occasion a very useful armchair ambassador to boot – a figure of “soft power.” But he is also a spokesperson on occasion for immigration, and it is worth remembering that the first publication of *A Bear Called Paddington* in 1958 came at the height of post-war African-Caribbean immigration to London.

Strictly speaking Paddington is a bear rather than a teddy bear. He was inspired by a teddy bear, which his author purchased from Selfridges on Christmas Eve 1956. But Paddington himself did not enter the material culture of childhood in the physical guise of a stuffed teddy bear until 1972.²⁴ In fact the distinction between bears and teddy bears in children’s fiction is often blurred. Readers – child and adult - frequently disagree as to whether the protagonist is object or subject, a stuffed toy or a real bear. There has been passionate debate on this point for example with regard to A.A. Milne’s creation, Winnie the Pooh (Milne, 1926).²⁵ Either way, Pooh is the most famous teddy/bear never to visit Africa in his own literary lifetime. Whatever the degree of his agency, it should have been easy enough for him to do so. After all, his human companion, Christopher Robin, spends an entire morning on an adventure to Africa without even leaving the house, though we are not told what he thought of it. But although Pooh never sets foot in Africa, there is at least one critic – albeit a creature of fiction himself - who thinks that he makes no sense without it. The evidence for this ridiculous assertion comes from Frederick Crews satirical critique of postcolonial criticism, which focuses on Pooh’s ill-fated attempt to sneak up on a beehive and rob its inhabitants of their honey, attaching himself to a balloon and disguising himself as a small black

him. He re-appeared triumphant with the bear tucked under his arm. But the teddy bear apparently did not wish to go to Africa and is pictured “holding up grotesque stuffed arms in expostulation at his fate.”

²⁴ The first Paddington soft toy was created by Gabrielle Designs, a business run by Shirley and Eddie Clarkson, and was given as a Christmas present to their children Joanna and Jeremy Clarkson (best known now as co-presenter of the BBC TV show *Top Gear*).

²⁵ Pooh first appeared in AA Milne’s *Winnie-the-Pooh*. He was named after “Winnipeg,” a bear at London Zoo, and “Pooh” a swan, the author and his son had encountered on a holiday.

cloud. Too late he realises they are “the wrong sort of bees” (Crews, 2006, p.91), and that he has made no escape plan if they decide to attack, which of course they do. The postcolonial commentary (by the fictive Professor Das Nuffa Dat of Emory University) goes like this: because Pooh has blackened himself for camouflage, it is obvious that the bees also must be black, metaphorically speaking. In other words they are “Africanised” bees, whose defensive action is underwritten by Cesaire and Fanon. A footnote in Crews’ text (alluding to a real-life essay by distinguished literary critic and cultural historian, Joan Dayan, aka Colin Dayan) (Dayan, 1995, pp. 801-813) alerts the reader to the fact that, at the time of writing, there had been widespread racialised panic in the US of late concerning attacks by “Africanized” killer bees. The satire records this as the empirical evidence for the postcolonial professor’s argument that the swarm of bees that attacks Pooh is really nothing more than an hallucinatory vision of the racial hysteria that Pooh himself exemplifies.

But the swarm surfacing through the teddy bear’s colonised Unconscious also has specific historical reference. According to Das Nuffa Dat, it alludes to the 1885 Siege of Khartoum by the Mahdi and his followers. There is only one problem. Is it the defeated British commander, General Gordon, whom Pooh represents, or is it Lord Kitchener, who subsequently re-conquered the Sudan for the British? Das Nuffa Dat resolves this difficulty rather too easily with an ingenious manoeuvre. Pooh, he says, is both Gordon and Kitchener - for as any discerning critic “attuned to the idea of hybridity as camouflage” will tell you Pooh is “a psychological hybrid,” “a would be overlord whose will has been sapped by subliminal identification with the very subjects he has subjugated”(Crews, p. 92). The upshot of this nonsense is that Pooh is cast as a protagonist of central importance in African history.

The film versions of Pooh place him in Africa explicitly as a moral crusader. In *Pooh's Adventures of The Lion King* (Daniel Esposito, 2008), for example, an evil King usurps the throne from its rightful heir - the orphaned lion cub, Simba - and the Pride Lands turn to desert as a result. Pooh finds Simba unconscious and left to die in the wasteland. He adopts him, and restores him to life; and it is only by this British intervention that Simba survives to reclaim his African birthright and reverse the environmental disaster of the Pride Lands.

There have been two authorised sequels to A.A. Milne’s books about the bear and his friends, beginning with David Benedictus’s *Return To The Hundred Acre Wood*, in which Tigger dreams of Africa (2009, p. 29). One morning Roo brings out the big atlas that he and his friends have borrowed

from Christopher Robin; and while he and Tigger are jumping over oceans and conquering nations on paper they inadvertently tear off a piece of Madagascar. Tigger pauses in cartographic contemplation, gazing down at West Africa. He blinks a couple of times, and then he lets loose a magnificent burp. Clearly, he doesn't have much of an opinion about the place:

“What’s that country?” he asks.

“It’s the Ivory Coast,” says Kanga.

“Ivory Coast,” murmured Roo. “Sounds lovely”

(Benedictus, 2009, p. 29).

If we imagine that this novel is set in the same approximate timeframe as the last of Milne’s books about the teddy bear and his friends (*The House at Pooh Corner*, 1928) the Ivory Coast, was a French colony then, part of the Federation of French West Africa. Slavery had not long been abolished. But the African population had no political rights; and all men of a certain age were taxed to work ten days each year without pay.

Tigger ponders, “Where do I come from?” He dimly remembers “a forest, with trees much taller than the ones in the Hundred Acre Wood. And monkeys” (Benedictus, 2009, p. 29). Of course, there are no tigers in Africa. But the idea that he might be African makes Tigger ill with anxiety; and it is only through Christopher Robin’s persuasion that he is able to accept the idea that, by the power of his own imagination, he can at any moment be wherever he wants, and with that realisation his stripes begin to re-acquire definition. He is again neither orange nor black; and the narcissistic rupture in his self-consciousness is healed.

Of course the instrumental force of an object such as a teddy bear does not always live up to its imagined symbolic power; and in narratives where this occurs the end result is invariably tragic. This is one way to look at the death of the protagonist, Sebastian Flyte, in the quintessentially English novel, *Brideshead Revisited*, by Evelyn Waugh (1945). Sebastian is a charming but deeply troubled English lord, who seeks solace but finds ruination in alcohol, and who fetches up finally in Tunisia hoping to find redemption through suffering and self-abasement. With him to the end is his faithful friend and protector, a teddy bear named Aloysius (after the patron saint of youth). But the teddy bear’s protective power is not equal to Sebastian’s desire for self-destruction. The novel encourages us to imagine Sebastian somewhere in North Africa, torn to pieces by angels and demons – or if you prefer, by his own contradictions, his devotion to ministry in Africa on the one hand, and his devotion to rum on the other. Aloysius is a proxy for God, and the inability of the teddy bear to save Sebastian signals

the tragedy of Christianity in the modern world, a loss of power underpinned by the general decline of faith. But Sebastian's tragedy is symbolic in another way, for it is also the tragedy of a misguided missionary. A postcolonial reading of the teddy bear's failure to save him might argue that the bear's power only operates in the savage zones, whereas as Sebastian's sister tells us, he leaves England to escape the savages, not to join them.²⁶

Teddy bears are changing, both in material culture and in literature. They can be evil, treacherous, horrifying. They have morphed into zombies, witches, suicide assassins, concealing drugs or bombs – creatures of dread and bloody violence. Many stick to tradition and are kind and caring. But they are not passive; they have agency. Increasingly, they travel on their own, and quite a few now travel to Africa. Susan Hoy even erases her own identity as an author so that her ursine protagonist, Reginald ("Reggie") Oliver Smythe, is able to present himself in the first person. It is *his* name that appears as author under the title, and he tells his story in *his* voice, in the form of a fictive journal of his adventures on safari in East Africa. Susan accompanies him, and in fact she forces him on safari, knowing that he prefers "still life." The teddy bear's story places her as the subaltern, unable to speak in her own voice. She is the subaltern. In one book he travels to the Nile, in another to East Africa. In the Norfolk Hotel in Kenya he is the only bear, and he wonders if he is the first. He studies Swahili. He lists the native animals that he sights and observes: "Fur coats look best on the original owners." He is emotionally literate too, more so apparently than Susan, who has taken him on safari without regard to his own feelings. He misses the other stuffed animals who are his friends, especially Pansy, another teddy bear, to whom he writes: "I'm falling apart without you!" And he is – literally. His nose falls off somewhere between Nakuru and Nairobi, and Susan has to make "makeshift" repairs. But in the end he's grateful to Susan for forcing him out of his 'still life.' Africa changes everyone . . . even a bear" (Smythe, 1995).

Barrington Bear also goes to East Africa on safari, and although his adventures are told in the third person, a letter to the reader precedes them - in his own hand and voice – introducing the author, Keith Szafranski, as his friend, his travelling companion and his scribe (Szafranski, 2008). As a non-native animal, of course Barrington needs a guide to the game parks,

²⁶ My dissatisfaction with Waugh's novel, however, is not that I have to infer the fate of Sebastian - for which there are clues enough - but that I am given no indication whatsoever as to the fate of Aloysius.

and who better than another stuffed animal, a chimpanzee named Sokwe. Naturally, as a non-human tourist and stand-in for Szafranski, who is a professional photographer, Barrington also wants to “shoot” the native human animals. Sokwe teaches him the Swahili names of all the non-human animals but also ensures that he meets a Masai warrior whose task it is to guard the human village from those same animals. Like ‘Reggie’, Barrington is a character created to educate as well as entertain readers about East Africa.

Raymond Floyd is an educator of a different ilk. Motivated by the unbearable (sic) knowledge that “there are no bears in Africa,” he wants to educate African animals in person (sic) about bears. (Mrs Moose & Pauley, 1993). He is a kind of performance artist, turning himself into a travelling teddy-bear exhibit.

Teddy Bears from Africa

The “hand-made teddy bear” movement of the 1990s had a significant impact in South Africa especially, and today teddy-bear manufacturing provides full-time employment to women from a number of disadvantaged communities. The Taurina teddy bears from Capetown are a good example. They take their name from the Tswana and Sotho word for a lion (*tau*) and the acronym NINA (“No Income, No Assets). The idea is that the making of Taurina teddy bears empowers the women who make them to become the ‘lions’ of their own destinies. African teddy bears have become a cottage industry exporting to collectors all around the world.

But what happened to the teddy bear at the centre of the Khartoum Blasphemy case? Initially he multiplied, and you could find him for sale through websites dedicated to spreading the word of Islam or alternatively defending freedom of expression and religious tolerance (at the same time raising money for the congressionally chartered, non-profit United Services Organization – [see for example *Truth Booth Online*, nd]). For a while he became a kind of holy warrior for hire. Then he disappeared from those manufacturer’s sites. Perhaps he is on the run, like the teddy-bear hero of Clifford Chase’s novel, Winkie, who, finding himself neglected on the toy shelf, takes control of his life by escaping into the remote forest - only to “find[...] himself on the wrong side of the US War on Terror” (Chase, 2006). A whole spate of terrorist attacks has been traced to that forest. So when the FBI arrives, and finds only a tiny teddy bear, they arrest him anyway. After all, he might be a master of disguise: “maybe they were trained for that, in the Near East, the Far East, Africa, wherever terrorists were bred . . .” (Chase, 2006, p. 13).

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