From Darkest Peru to Contemporary Politics: The Timelessness of Paddington's Search for a Home

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This contribution suggests reading the family film *Paddington* (2014) as a cultural product that contains traces of its source text's contemporary history and politics and combines a variety of temporal levels to point towards the timelessness of Paddington's search for a home and, in turn, of the phenomenon of migration and exile in general. In a London that is characterised by contradictory temporal references, Paddington emerges as an "everybear" who is looking for a home, while the Browns represent the timeless need for decency and compassion.

Keywords: Michael Bond, *A Bear Called Paddington* (1958), *Paddington* (2014), exile, migration, children's classics

Vom dunkelsten Peru zur aktuellen Politik: Die Zeitlosigkeit von Paddingtons Suche nach einem Zuhause
Dieser Beitrag liest den Familienfilm *Paddington* (2014) als ein kulturelles Produkt, das Spuren der Geschichte und Politik seines Quellentextes in sich trägt und unterschiedliche Zeitebenen verbindet, die auf die Zeitlosigkeit von Paddingtons Suche nach einem Zuhause und damit auf das Phänomen von Exil und Migration im Allgemeinen hinweist. Paddington bewegt sich durch ein London, das durch widersprüchliche Zeitbezüge gekennzeichnet ist, als "Jederbär", der nach einem neuen Zuhause sucht, während die Familie Brown das zeitlose Bedürfnis nach Anstand und Mitgefühl verkörpert.

Schlagwörter: Michael Bond, *A Bear Called Paddington* (1958), *Paddington* (2014), Exil, Migration, Kinderbuchklassiker

Michael Bond's *A Bear Called Paddington*

Of all the heroes and heroines that have been searching for a home in the last century of children's literature, few have become as iconic in status as Paddington, the bear from "Darkest Peru", who meets the Brown family at Paddington station and is given a home and a name at the same time. Even to those who have never read the original stories or seen the films, Paddington is a well-loved

and recognisable character who materialises in all types of merchandise, particularly as cuddly teddy bears. Incidentally, a toy bear is also the starting point of Paddington's own story: in 1956, when Michael Bond was looking for a Christmas stocking filler for his wife, he chanced upon a little toy bear in Selfridges. He bought the bear, gave it to his wife, and they called him Paddington. Paddington soon became part of the family, joining them on family vacations or sitting with them at the dinner table. Bond at some point decided to compose tales about the antics of the little bear, an occupation which kept him busy until a short while before his death at the age of 91 (Horwell 2017).

According to Veronica Horwell, who wrote Bond's obituary for the *Guardian* in June 2017, Paddington had become "a sympathetic allegory of the Commonwealth immigrants of the 1950s" and, after the release of the 2014 film, "a benign signifier of welcomed migration". In an article in the *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Kyle Grayson characterises *A Bear Called Paddington* as "a vernacular political text about bordering practices and foreigners" (2013, 378). This linking of Paddington with contemporary issues of migration in public discourse was supported by recurring murals in Glastonbury and Bristol in the 2000s, attributed to the cultstreet artist Banksy, showing Paddington with the caption "Migration is not a crime" (Holston 2017), and of course by the two recent film adaptations. In the following discussion of the *Paddington* family films, with a focus on *Paddington* (2014), I will analyse the complexity of this "signifier of welcomed migration" and point to the timelessness that surrounds Paddington in the stories but is all the more manifest in the film version of 2014. This timelessness, I would argue, is encoded in the film in a variety of ways, in order to appeal to a broad range of audiences. Homelessness and being a foreigner, and, on the other hand, the decency of people who do provide a home for the homeless are constructed as timeless and, in consequence, of all times. The place for this new home, however, is clearly London.

Paddington as a liminal character

In all the Paddington stories and the films, there is one constant: none of the humans involved are particularly surprised about a young bear who lives in West London and speaks perfect if somewhat archaic English, something that Angela Smith has called "the joke which is carried throughout the series" (2006, 43). Paddington's adventures are based on a simple and effective formula: Paddington manoeuvres himself into trouble or makes a mess, which the Browns or other adults help him sort out, and he returns to his original state as part of a loving family, as the symbolic child that he is. Like a young child, he is always forgiven and unreservedly loved (see Royall Newman 1987, 135). Paddington is striking in his straddling of dichotomies: he is neither child nor adult, yet both (see Smith 2006, 47); he behaves like a human being but looks very much like a cuddly toy, even if he occasionally behaves like a wild animal. He is completely ignorant of much that he encounters in London, and yet he frequently passes on sound

advice to children and adults alike. As a bear with impeccable manners among humans whose own manners vary greatly, he is caught in the dichotomies of self and other, foreign and familiar, or, in Grayson's terms, "embod[ies] multiple subjectivities" (2013, 381).

That Paddington is looking for a home in London, rather than anywhere else in the world, makes perfect sense within the logic of his story: the explorer who visited his adoptive parents had come from London and instilled in the two grown-up bears a desire for and a knowledge of England. Paddington then could be seen as a colonial subject of the 2nd generation who returns to the "mother country", in the same way that many colonial subjects in the 1950s and 1960s arrived in England, often with a colonial education, to find a job and a home. That Peru never was in fact a British colony is of little consequence for my argument and Paddington's postcolonial status. In Bond's first version Paddington came from "darkest Africa", but his publisher suggested replacing the continent with a country in which bears were actually native (see Smith 2006, 35). Paddington's arrival in London comes across as a moment of colonisation: the Browns, white and "civilised", take him in benevolently, expecting him to adapt to their living standards, and giving him a name that is easier for them to pronounce than his native name in "Bearish" (which, in Bond's original story, was referred to as "Peruvian")[1].

From a postcolonial and an ecocritical perspective, then, Paddington can be read as a colonialised character and a wild creature that has been domesticated. With this in mind, I will investigate how Paddington's search for a home in London is invested in colonial and postcolonial British history and how those references suggest contemporary London has dealt with its migrants and foreigners.

Paddington's timelessness

I argue in this contribution that there is a certain timelessness in Paddington, both in Bond's stories and *Paddington*, the film. This becomes particularly pertinent with a view to Paddington's status as a classic, a canonised piece of children's writing. Classics have always been defined as "hav[ing] stood the test of time" ("classic"). Literature that is deemed part of the canon has been characterised as "durab[le]", "timeless" (Barton / Hudson 1997, Lundin 2004) and "invest[ed] in perpetuity" (Lundin 2004, xvii). While this has been regarded as a sign of enduring high quality by some, it has also been looked at sceptically by others, revealing a kind of anxiety over the fact that the canon is supposed to be there "forever and always" (Ake et al. 1980, 52). Barbara Herrnstein Smith, too, sees the purported timelessness of canonical texts critically, suggesting that "we make texts timeless by suppressing their temporality" (1983, 28). From these sources, two interdependent conceptions of timelessness seem to emerge: on the one

1 See Angela Smith's discussion of the naming scene (2006, 42) and Hunt and Sands' postcolonial critique of *A Bear Called Paddington* (2000, 48).

hand, the popularity and endurance of a text over centuries or decades, and on the other a sense of universal values and timeless concerns that engage readers long after the text was written or published.

In the case of the *Paddington* stories of 1958, both aspects of timelessness seem to apply: the books have sold well and have never been out of print or commercially unsuccessful, and the films have helped increase this popularity. The universal qualities of *Paddington* have been nicely summed up in a recent article by Jean Webb as "values of a humane society: awareness, acceptance, courage and kindness" (2018, 169) – and similar principles such as decency, tolerance, forgiveness, family values and good manners can be added to both the books and the films.

Herrnstein Smith's scepticism of timelessness, however, admonishes us to be wary of a possible suppression of a text's temporality: How can a text written in the 1950s still apply fully in the 2010s, rather than jar in a contemporary reading because of its particular time-specific references and contexts? Paddington is decidedly place-centred: it is always evident where his adventures take place – Windsor Gardens and Paddington Station in London, mostly, or Brighton (barely disguised as Brightsea). The temporal location is not so clear, however: while material goods, lexical and sociopragmatic choices seem to vaguely indicate the 1950s, there are no particular historical events, nationally or internationally, that are referenced, nor any activities that would be unimaginable in the 2010s or, indeed, the 2020s. The effect is indeed a certain sense of timelessness that pervades the stories. This, in turn, means that Paddington can be seen as an "everybear"[2], in the sense that his story could take place at any time, even if it is bound to a particular place. The dynamics of time and place, however, should be more intimately connected. Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope suggests that both time and place only take on a life in fiction in a reciprocal relationship with one another. If place is so crucial for Paddington's story, surely we can expect to find a temporal dimension, too. In the multimodal medium of film, we should presume even more of a temporal manifestation of the London topos than in the stories. What temporalities, then, could have been suppressed in the various manifestations of Paddington, and what can be gained by uncovering them?

Uncovering Paddington's original temporalities: 1958

Britain in 1958, when the first Paddington stories were published, had been reigned over by Queen Elizabeth II for four years and ruled by Harold Macmillan's government for a year. Among other signs of progress, Gatwick Airport opened that year, the first parking meters were introduced and the first boutique opened in Carnaby Street. In the summer of 1958, London was shaken by over a week of

2 See Royall Newman, who calls Paddington "everyman's bear" (135) in her 1987 article on bears in children's literature.

violence, the Notting Hill so-called "riots" (Olusoga 2016, 509),[3] a series of racist attacks by white Britons on the recently immigrated postcolonial residents of the Notting Hill area in West London, an area not far from Paddington Station, which has long since been gentrified. The riots were generally understood as a culmination of an increasingly racist atmosphere in the capital and elsewhere in England, fuelled by right wing politicians such as Oswald Mosley. The immigrants had been coming to the UK from the Anglophone Caribbean, India and Pakistan since the late 1940s, looking for work and housing, many of them following British recruitment for jobs in the National Health Service, on public transport and in the building industry. Many of them, or their fathers and grandfathers, had fought on the British side in the two world wars. They thought of the former centre of the British Empire as their home and, as a consequence, had a high level of identification with the "mother country". They arrived expecting to be treated well, but found an often openly hostile climate: they were frequently attacked without provocation in the street and discriminated against when it came to jobs and accommodation.

This was the time when the original Paddington stories were published. Like in other post-war fiction for children, no explicit political commentary can be found. As Peter Hunt and Karen Sands criticise, in this and other postwar children's fantasy, "you might be forgiven for not noticing that the Empire has disappeared" (2000, 48). *A Bear Called Paddington* traces a successful story of immigration and integration, with slapstick elements and warm-hearted animal-human interaction, rather than a political manifesto for the rights of migrants. Paddington's story of migration could have taken place at any time, but it appeared first in 1958, and adult readers would have been cognisant of the Notting Hill riots, which took place in the vicinity of Paddington Station. For an adult readership of the time, presumably, the story of Paddington would have been understandable as a response to the political situation. A 21st century audience can resort to a whole array of other connotations in regard of the topic of migration. How, then, does the film version of Paddington from 2014 deal with these connotations and what temporalities can be uncovered?

Uncovering the temporalities of Paul Smith's *Paddington* (2014)

London in 2014, when Paul Smith's first film version of *Paddington* premiered, was quite a different place from London in 1958. This becomes clear in the very first London shot of the film, which acts as an orientation shot (10:22-10:33) and situates Paddington, the stow-away from Peru, at the Port of London, a modern container harbour. While the earlier scenes in Peru, which focus on the bear family's marmalade making and the earthquake that starts Paddington's journey, cannot be easily located in time, the view of London leaves the audience without a

3 For more information and context see Olusoga, David (2016): *Black and British. A Forgotten History,* and Jones, Cecily (2007): "Notting Hill riots." In: *The Oxford Companion to Black British History.*

doubt. The camera zooms out to rest on the London cityscape with Tower Bridge at its centre, flanked by such iconic modern buildings along the Thames as City Hall, built by Norman Forster and completed in 2002, "the Shard", completed in 2012, and "the Walkie-Talkie", completed in 2014 and opened in 2015, a year after the release of the film. Clearly this is a contemporary version of London, ultimately recognisable through its mix of historical and postmodern architectural icons. This, to the viewer, suggests a coherent 21st century backdrop for this timeless tale of smooth migration.

However, these expectations are quickly thwarted: from very early on, the film abounds in anachronisms and contradictory time references that complicate any unambiguous reading of this as a tale of the early 21st century. Paddington's meeting the Browns at the station takes place in front of an old-fashioned "Lost & Found"-sign that does not exist at "real life" Paddington Station. The train that arrives at the station a minute later, though, is a modern fast train from the 2010s. It is this mix of temporalities that seem to me to indicate to the audience that while there is a certain timelessness to the story of migration, there are also a number of specific historical contexts of migration through the ages, and these need to be acknowledged, too.

The historical context referenced above, which did not find its way explicitly into the 1958 stories, is all the more present in the 2014 film. Rather than tracing the fate of a single ursine migrant in London, the filmic Paddington's search for home is explored within the context of various human arrivals to London, starting with Paddington's farewell to his Aunt Lucy. She attaches a label to his neck which says "Please look after this bear" and explains that "there was once a war in the explorer's country. Thousands of children were sent away for safety, left at railway stations with labels around their necks and unknown families took them in and loved them like their own" and adds hopefully that "[t]hey will not have forgotten how to treat a stranger" (8:22-8:42). It is well documented in the Paddington literature (e.g. Baker 2007, 15) that Bond was inspired by having seen the Kindertransport himself, and his character Mr Gruber, tells his Kindertransport story to Paddington (34:55-35:03).

The historical reference to the Kindertransport takes us back to the late 1930s, 9 months before the beginning of World War II, when a British non-governmental institution called "Movement for the Care of Children from Germany" launched a rescue operation for children with Jewish background from Germany, Austria, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Roughly 10,000 children were taken in by British families, some of them turning out to become the only survivors of families that were otherwise killed in the death camps. The taking in of minors required the changing of immigration laws in the UK, which the British government supported and effected. The children could take only very little with them, many of them nothing but the clothes they were wearing and the label with their name and a number that would help the authorities allocate the child.[4]

4 See the National Holocaust Centre and Museum's as well as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's articles on the "Kindertransport".

Paddington, here identified as a child, is sent to London in the hope that he will be taken up kindly.[5]

While the Kindertransport meant a chance of survival for the children before the beginning of World War II, the end of the war brought large numbers of adult migrants to the UK, from a different area in the world. The mid to late 1940s, but especially the late 1950s, saw thousands of migrants from places in the former Empire, especially the Anglophone Caribbean and India (from 1947 onwards Pakistan, too), coming to England in the hope to find jobs. Now seen as an iconic moment was the arrival of a ship called the *Empire Windrush* at Tilbury Docks on 21 June 1948, carrying almost 500 passengers, mostly Caribbean, as well as service troops and a few stowaways (Macedo 2007, 155). Roughly half of them had served in the war, witnessed a devastating hurricane in Jamaica in 1944 (echoed in the Peruvian earthquake that kills Paddington's adoptive Uncle Pastuzo), which had weakened the economy and made the job situation difficult, and were now looking for employment in the British industry (Olusoga 2016, 493-494).

The Windrush generation features in Paddington, though again not explicitly: after his arrival at Paddington Station, the Browns take him to his new home in a black cab, and the driver takes him past all the London sights[6] (and past an elderly gentleman having a glass of red wine in a restaurant, a cameo appearance by Michael Bond). The song that accompanies the scene (16:23) is "London is the place for me", and it develops from an extradiegetic soundtrack into intradiegetic music, when Paddington is driven past a Calypso band (D Lime featuring Tobago Crusoe, see Jordens) playing the song in the shelter of a closed shopping mall in the Borough market area (16:30-16:33). The song is of particular relevance here, not merely for the optimistic lyrics: "London is the place for me / London, that lovely city / You can go to France or America / India, Asia or Australia / You're gonna come back to London city / London is the place for me". The composer and performer was Lord Kitchener (real name Aldwyn Roberts), a Calypsonian originally from Trinidad and Tobago, who was one of the passengers on the *Empire Windrush* and wrote the song specifically for his moment of arrival in 1948, performing it live at Tilbury Docks to a team of journalists of Pathé television (Gilmore 2007, 244). The same band appears a little later, on Paddington's first day in London, when they perform on the street and he greets them politely, taking off his hat, while the Browns walk past them as if they did not notice them (32:09). While they play very upbeat and happy calypso music in this scene, too, they also appear in a later scene with a completely different mood: roughly an hour into the film, Paddington is thrown out of the Browns' house for having created havoc there. He walks slowly through the rain, accompanied by a very sad tune: "Blow, wind, blow" (1:01:04-1:01:18), which runs on "I was never told that the city of London could be so cold". In contrast to the earlier appear-

5 See Craig-Norton (2017, 25) for a critical appraisal of the Kindertransport and its limited model function for underage refugees from Syria in 2015.

6 St Paul's, Elizabeth Tower (Westminster Palace), the London Eye, Tower Bridge, Piccadilly Circus, and a graffiti in Shoreditch saying "Let's adore and endure each other."

ances of the band, the mood is gloomy: apart from the rain falling heavily and Paddington slouching by, the musicians are dressed in beige and grey raincoats, whereas earlier they were shown in bright primary colours. The scene in the rain continues with Paddington taking shelter in front of Buckingham Palace, where one guard very kindly offers him sandwiches, cakes and tea to the tune of "Rule Britannia". The following guardsman, however, throws him out of the shelter and the sad song returns on a final line: "I decide to roam, now I wanted to go back home" (1:02:25-1:02:26), as Paddington tries to make himself comfortable on a park bench in the rain. From "the place for me" to "go[ing] back home", Paddington's search for a home is immersed in the demographic history of London via the music that identified post-war migration movements, reflecting the ups and downs of the migrant experience.

The *Empire Windrush* has meanwhile become a symbol of a generation of arrivals from the former Empire, and also a reminder of how the hope and optimism of these arrivals was thwarted after they had to face the realities of a racist and prejudiced society. More recently, the Windrush generation has become more visible again in the media on account of the British home office declaring more than 2000 people, many of whom were part of that first generation, illegal immigrants and sending out deportation papers. A *Guardian* editorial called this the "Windrush scandal", and in October 2018 claimed that the consequences for many victims were still noticeable, some of them having lost their income. *Paddington* was released in 2014, a few years before the scandal, and yet, the temporal connections are there for the informed audience to uncover. By attaching Paddington's story to historical waves of migration, Paddington becomes less of an individual who "made it" and more of an historical "everybear", who reflects experiences of migration and integration through the decades.

Uncanny co-temporalities in *Paddington*

The general theme of the timelessness of looking for a home manifests itself on a variety of levels. Apart from the historical allusions discussed above, *Paddington* teems with elements that suggest a time level other than the 2010s in which it is purportedly set (see my comments on the London orientation shot above). This is especially true of technological devices: while the Browns own a rather modern-looking HP laptop computer (20:02), the communication system of the Geographer's Guild resorts to a dated PC set-up that has an early 1990s look to it and that is attached to a steam-operated tube system (46:20-46:40; 48:56-49:12). There are no mobile phones anywhere in the film, Judy seems to use a walkman or similar device, some characters use a public phone box, and there are various types of landline phones in the film, all dated.[7] The Browns' home is replete with

7 *Paddington 2*, which is not the focus of this chapter, resorts to the same strategy: there are no mobile phones, and the villain of the piece, played by Hugh Grant, is shown in an old-fashioned dog food advertisement played on an even more old-fashioned boxed wooden TV set. The Browns'

retro furniture: the kitchen is either a contemporary version of mid-century design or an authentic rendering of a 1950s kitchen plus a microwave oven. Towards the end of the film Mrs Bird can be seen to clean the place (1:21:59), and while we can identify parts of a modern screen, we can also spot a number of old pieces of furniture and decoration, like a carousel horse. Mrs Brown's fashion style is especially reminiscent of the 1960s, and some of the children's interests are also somewhat quirky and nostalgic, such as Jonathan's building structures with Meccano. In both *Paddington* and *Paddington 2*, an unobtrusive yellow VW beetle (e.g. 39:47; 45:46; 54:13; 1:07:39) is parked in Windsor Gardens, an area that looks as it might have done in the 1950s. Some of the props and references point to the 19th century, such as Jonathan's Meccano, the Victorian wool fair they have been to, the steam tube system at the guild and the mechanical gadgets in Mr Gruber's antique shop. This might allude to another temporal layer of migration: the 19th century was a time when Irish migrants came to the UK as a consequence of the potato famine, Jewish refugees came from Eastern Europe, and other European immigrants escaped the Austro-Prussian Empire (Lloyd 2007, 3).

One scene particularly complicates the disambiguation of time: Mrs Bird tells the children how much their father worries about them and how his role of a father changed him (41:15-41:43). As she speaks, we see the Browns, in 1970s style, get off a motorbike at a hospital which is recognisably UCL hospital in "real London", just before Judy is born. The building is a postmodern glass and steel structure of the early 2000s (the modern section of the hospital was opened in 2005), whereas the clothes and props point to the 1970s. However, Judy could not have been born in the 1970s if she is a teenager in the 2010s. Alternatively, we could locate the whole film in the late 1990s or early 2000s, which would accommodate Judy's age but could neither explain the contemporary architecture of the hospital or the skyline nor the parents' carefully curated 1970s clothes and props.

Other attempts at temporal disambiguation are similarly irreconcilable: Millicent Clyde's age when her father comes back from Peru in comparison to her age when she captures Paddington; and this in comparison to the outdated language that the bears learn through the explorer's grammophone. Whichever way we look at it, the time references make no coherent sense. Rather, they support the impression of temporalities that have been eclectically thrown together or stacked on top of one another, as if the film was not entirely convinced of its millennial identity. These uncanny co-temporalities, which are presented to the audience for decoding, support the timelessness I have identified in Paddington's search for a home and the Browns' decency and kindness in providing one. They also cater for multiple audiences: while the children and teenagers would decode the references to earlier times as simply old, the adults might have more specific nostalgic associations with the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, possibly also the time that connects them with Paddington in their own reading lives.

fashion styles are retro, and Judy's printing press and Jonathan's obsession with steam engines also point to a nostalgia that belies the technological advancement of the 2010s and the usually solid interest of teenagers in digital technology.

Red, white and blue: colour codes of Britishness

If we see these co-temporalities as a critique of contemporary attitudes towards migration and a celebration of people's decency to welcome foreigners into their midst, we have to ask how much this is actually a direct comment on the UK and its policies, or rather a vague comment on international conditions of migration. Here again, the audience needs to read the multimodal codes in the film. One such code is colour: the dominant scheme in *Paddington* consists of primary colours. Bright reds and blues are often used, sometimes in a complementary way to indicate a particular connection between characters: the character Paddington, long before the film, was given a blue dufflecoat and a red hat by Bond and the various illustrators, an attire which equips him with the colours of the British national flag. The filmic Paddington has taken this over. In particular scenes, this colour scheme is intensified: in a scene in the Browns' kitchen (59:37-59:45), Paddington's red and blue outfit is complemented by Mrs Brown's blue hat and red coat, while the other two characters in the scene, Mr Brown and Mrs Bird, are dressed in neutral colours in front of a rather neutral backdrop. The emotional connection between Mrs Brown and Paddington, which is very strong from the first scene at the station onwards, when the "Found" sign comes on with a "ping" (13:04), is made even more explicit: Mary Brown is the one character who keeps believing in Paddington, and they are wearing the same colours. Apart from a few Union Jacks in the film – outside (34:15) and inside (34:22) Mr Gruber's shop, or when the guard at Buckingham Palace offers Paddington a sandwich (1:01:51) – there is an abundance of red and blue in the film. Mr Brown tends to wear blue and Mrs Brown red, as if to label their complementary approaches of emotion versus reason as equally British. In a slapstick scene in the Browns' living room (56:32-57:05), the colour-coded Paddington in front of a blue sofa and red accessories – a lamp, a cup and saucer, a plaid and some books – becomes entangled in white sellotape that criss-crosses the space and results in an almighty mess. The red and blue is cut through with white stripes, and together with the light grey seams of the sofa, the scene looks like a very untidy or deconstructed version of the union flag.

Changes in the characters' colour schemes frequently indicate a change in character or relationship: Mr Brown, dressed in a blue jumper, starts to warm towards Paddington and gives him his old dufflecoat, which has exactly the same colour (43:10). When the Browns decide to rescue Paddington from the Natural History Museum, Mr Brown, like his wife, wears red (1:13:22). The Browns' house expands on the colour scheme of red and blue: this becomes clear as soon as Paddington steps into the house and onto tiles in red, white and blue (17:05), and continues with the walls painted in red and white (17:14) and the blue pictures and lamps (17:40). Mr Brown's study has blue walls and red curtains (19:54), whereas Mrs Brown's room has red walls and a few blue accessories (24:54); Judy's room is blue (25:56), while Jonathan's is predominantly red (25:57). When Paddington leaves, the house loses its primary colours and turns into more muted shades (1:02:31-1:03:42).

If we are prepared to look for a political stance in *Paddington* on the basis of colour symbolism, we could read this as an acknowledgement that migration to the UK is an untidy, knotty business, legally and otherwise – but also that migrants are here to stay, or stick; they become attached to and entangled in our lives and our homes. Despite the focus on the cute bear and his adventures rather than on an explicit political position, the film invites such an interpretation, especially if we acknowledge that it addresses a variety of audiences.

Family entertainment, politics and Paddington

While *A Bear Called Paddington* (1958) was clearly addressed to children, but was later read with passion and nostalgia by adults, too, *Paddington* (2014) was already conceived with multiple audiences in mind. As Christy Lemire puts it in a review of *Paddington 2*, commenting on *Paddington*:

> With his adorably furry frame and plucky spirit, the talking bear from Darkest Peru conveyed a pointed political message while remaining soft and accessible to the littlest audience members. Despite his old-fashioned roots, the story he had to tell felt utterly contemporary. No small feat, indeed.

Political scientist Kyle Grayson (2013, 380) points out popular culture's educational potential to frame a political narrative in a way that is more accessible to a child audience. *Paddington* has been variously categorised as children's film or family entertainment, the latter in the tradition of the G-rated Disney movies. Peter Krämer has defined the "family adventure movie" as being aimed at all members of the family "by telling stories about the spectacular, often fantastic adventures of young or youthful male protagonists and about their familial or quasi-familial relationships [...] and by being released in the run-up to, or during the summer and Christmas holidays" (2005, 271). Even though Krämer's prime example is the *Star Wars* series of the mid-1980s, the description seems to fit *Paddington*. Some academics working in the field of film studies do not make a distinction between children's and family films, but seem to think of children's film already in terms of multiple address, as the following argument by Noel Brown suggests:

> Many of them [children's films] deal with serious issues; some are vehicles to question or to protest against dominant social practices. Indeed, the genre's apparent conservatism has allowed some filmmakers to deal with politically sensitive issues in ways that would be impossible in mainstream cinema. The specificity of children's cinema lies partially in its ability to offer a unique perspective (the child's point of view) on culture and society under a cloak of innocence. (2018, 104)

There is a great deal that is conservative in *Paddington*: as a stranger to the new country, he is expected to adapt to the rules of the Brown household and to the cultural norms of the dominant culture, which have to do with food, personal hygiene and dress codes, among others (Smith 2006, 48). The Browns as a nucle-

ar family demonstrate rather conservative family values: Mary works part-time from home, whereas Robert works in insurance, has an office to go to and is clearly the bread-winner in the family. They have an elderly woman who looks after their home and their living standards reflect upper middle-class capitalist ideology. The majority of characters, certainly the main characters, are white and middle-class, with a cast of multiethnic side characters populating Windsor Gardens. Seen in this light, the ethics of giving Paddington a home are also based on conservative ethics of decency and of helping one another. However, the film deviates ideologically from Conservative values, if we think party politics, and does indeed tackle a "politically sensitive issue", i.e. migration. Children watching it will instantly understand that Paddington must be helped. The xenophobic character, Mr Curry, becomes an outcast of the community and is punished for his behaviour, whereas the helpful neighbours of Windsor Gardens are rewarded for their support by an emerging sense of community that takes them out of the isolation they were living in before Paddington moved in. The binary formula of good and bad seems to be firmly in place here and a safe way of driving home the general political message to children and teenagers.

To the adults and the more discerning younger audiences, the film positions itself through a variety of codes and within the contingencies of its genre: the colour coding supports the notion that in terms of place this is about British politics, while none of the codes are able to tie the film down to a temporal level. This results in a suggestion that Britain has always been a place where migrants are looking for a home, where they have struggled and where they have been helped in the process, at least to some extent. The story of the Kindertransport, though it did save a great number of lives, has recently been interpreted more soberly by some, on account of many child evacuees being traumatised by being torn away from their families, and of the general ethical question of saving children but ignoring the fate of the parents.[8] Similarly, many of the so-called Windrush generation, so optimistic at their arrival in London, experienced a great deal of racism and prejudice throughout the decades, and as the recent Windrush scandal showed, can still not rest assured that they are recognized as full British citizens in all respects.

True to its literary basis and in compliance with genre expectations, *Paddington* is not an explicitly political film as such, although it is fair to say that it greatly improves on the charges of "isolationism, tradition, and monoculturalism" (Hunt / Sands 2000, 48) that were levelled against *A Bear Called Paddington*. In as much as any film has an ideological basis, this one positions itself against the current British political climate of nationalism and xenophobia. In 2014, the term "Brexit" had been known for two years but was not a household term yet, but incidents of racism and signs of a widening social gap were visible. Reviews acknowledge references to contemporary politics. Xan Brooks, for instance, in a *Guardian* review, expresses the hope that Paddington's "story is so gently affirming, it might just

8 See Craig-Norton (2017, 25-26), who quotes Polly Toynbee's critiqe of the simplified humanitarian grand narrative (2015) of the Kindertransport.

melt the heart of a UKIP MEP." In 2017, when *Paddington 2* was launched, the UK had started negotiating about Brexit with Brussels. In the end credits of *Paddington 2*, in which we are told what happened to the protagonists and villains after the story closes, there is an image of Mary Brown in a swimsuit and the information that she managed to swim across the channel, but when she arrived in Calais, she could not produce her passport, so she had to swim back all the way to Dover. Even perched at the end of the film as it is, I see this as a clear position on the issues of borders, migration and Brexit. Rather than alienating a young audience with explicit political commentary, the director banks on the story's timelessness and uses its potential to create a network of references and allusions for those who care to look. This sketches a clear ethics, understandable for both young and older viewers: that historically Britain has always been a country of immigrants, that they have not always had a warm welcome, and that foreigners ought to be accepted, treated decently and given a home. This is the central moral compass of the film, and it separates the decent from the nasty characters. Finally, London turns out to be more welcoming than it seemed at the beginning, at least in theory. As Paddington concludes: "Mrs Brown says that in London everyone is different, but that means anyone can fit in. " (1:23:02-1:23:08).

Paddington's otherness is conveniently ursine – he might not have been treated so well had he been a human migrant from South America. But the metaphor still stands: Paddington is "a benign signifier of welcomed migration", as Horwell suggests, though the film does not embrace this ideology uncritically. Instead it shows us mild and watered down versions of possible problems that migrants can be up against. Eventually, Mr Brown has the last word on the issue, in his confrontation with the racist – or should that be "speciest"? – Mr Curry: "It doesn't matter that he comes from the other side of the world or that he's a different species. Or that he has a worrying marmalade habit. We love Paddington, and that makes him family" (1:18:39-1:18:50). If that sounds too naive and fluffy for a critical viewer, too much like a feelgood-message for children, the family film provides layers and layers of more controversial references, which acknowledge the greater complexity of people finding a home abroad.

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