



**“Please Look After This Bear”: Immigration, Attachment, And Post-War British Identity in
*Paddington Bear***

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates *Paddington Bear* as a literary site where themes of immigration and attachment converge within the framework of post-war British children's literature. Drawing from attachment theory (Bowlby, Ainsworth) and migration studies, the paper analyses how Michael Bond's creation engages with the socio-cultural anxieties of 1950s Britain, particularly around refugee reception, cultural integration, and the reconstitution of national identity. Paddington, a displaced bear from “darkest Peru,” operates as a metaphor for the child refugee and postcolonial migrant, whose journey reflects both loss and adaptation. At the same time, the Brown family's nurturing role models secure attachment dynamics, offering a psychologically stabilizing counterpoint to the bear's dislocation. The study contributes to ongoing scholarly conversations around children's literature as a vehicle for processing collective trauma and negotiating inclusion. In bringing together psychological and sociocultural lenses, the article argues for *Paddington Bear's* enduring relevance as a text that naturalizes empathy and hospitality in multicultural Britain.

Overview

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This offers a critical re-examination of Paddington Bear as a post-war cultural text where themes of immigration, attachment, and national identity converge within the framework of British children's literature. By situating Michael Bond's iconic character within the historical and psychological landscape of 1950s Britain, the study traces how the figure of Paddington, a polite, displaced bear from "darkest Peru" encapsulates the tensions and aspirations of a society grappling with the legacies of empire, the rise of the welfare state, and the moral imperative of hospitality.

Employing a dual theoretical framework that draws from attachment theory (particularly the work of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth) and postcolonial migration studies (including the work of Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, and Paul Gilroy), the article explores how Paddington Bear simultaneously performs psychological repair and national storytelling. On one level, the Brown family's unconditional care provides a textbook example of secure attachment, offering young readers a model of emotional safety and familial belonging. On another, Paddington's awkward integration into British society becomes a metaphor for the refugee or postcolonial migrant, a figure whose foreignness must be rendered endearing, legible, and ultimately acceptable within the bounds of national culture.

INTRODUCTION

The proposed article is motivated by two overlapping scholarly concerns. First, while much has been written about immigration in contemporary British fiction, relatively little attention has been paid to how mid-century children's literature helped construct normative frameworks of inclusion and exclusion. Second, there is a growing interest in how children's narratives respond to collective trauma be in wartime evacuation, migration, or cultural displacement through fantasy, metaphor, and moral instruction.

Michael Bond's Paddington series, first published in 1958, emerges at a critical juncture: the British Empire is waning, Commonwealth migration is reshaping the social fabric of cities, and anxieties around national identity are beginning to take centre stage in public discourse. Bond, who famously cited his inspiration in wartime images of child evacuees and refugees arriving at British stations with luggage tags, creates a bear who is simultaneously comic, vulnerable, and deeply political. Paddington is both welcomed and scrutinized, constantly misreading British customs while embodying a "politeness" that makes his foreignness palatable. This dynamic allows the text to function as a subtle pedagogical tool, it invites young readers to empathize with the outsider while reinforcing an idealized, tolerant version of British identity.

Children's literature studies, especially the work of Jacqueline Rose and Marah Gubar, supports that the genre is not a political but rather serves as a key site where cultural anxieties are rehearsed, resolved, or deferred.

Jacqueline Rose and Marah Gubar are influential figures in children's literature studies, offering contrasting perspectives on how children's literature functions and how children are represented within it

In her work, *The Case of Peter Pan; or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1984), Jacqueline Rose argues that children's literature is fundamentally shaped by adult desires and projections. She contends that the genre often constructs an idealized version of childhood, reflecting adult fantasies rather than the realities of children's experiences. Rose suggests that this dynamic positions the child as an "Other," a being to be shaped and controlled through literature,

Marah Gubar offers a counterpoint to Rose's theory by emphasizing the active role children play in engaging with literature. In her article "Risky Business: Talking about Children in Children's Literature Criticism," Gubar critiques the notion that children are merely passive recipients of adult-imposed narratives. She advocates for a view of children as "artful dodgers," capable of interpreting, resisting, and even subverting the messages within literature. Gubar's approach highlights the collaborative nature of meaning-making between authors and child readers, suggesting that children's literature can be a site of negotiation and agency rather than unilateral adult influence.

Theoretical Framework

The article adopts an interdisciplinary approach that bridges literary analysis with developmental psychology and postcolonial theory:

Attachment theory (Bowlby, Ainsworth) provides a psychological lens through which to understand the narrative's emotional architecture. The Browns' care-giving echoes Bowlby's concept of a "secure base," enabling Paddington to explore, adapt, and eventually thrive. **It emphasise the importance of secure emotional bonds for a child's development. Immigrant children, separated from familiar environments and caregivers, often face attachment disruptions. Paddington's longing for Aunt Lucy and his integration into the brown family highlight the formation of new attachments crucial for emotional stability.** Mrs Brown's immediate compassion and Mr .Browns gradual acceptance reflect how attachment figures can ease the psychological strain of migration. Their home functions as a secure base from which Paddington explores the world, makes mistakes and returns for comfort and reassurance. In this

context, the story becomes a therapeutic narrative for both characters and readers, promoting emotional resilience amid uncertainty.

Paddington's behaviour reflects his developing emotional resilience. Despite facing hostility, such as suspicion from Mr Curry or institutional coldness in the film adaptations, his polite, hopeful attitude suggest the emotional security gained from being unconditionally cared for.

Despite challenges, Paddington's optimism and kindness remain steadfast. His bond with the Browns empowers him to navigate cultural misunderstandings and societal prejudices, showcasing how emotional support fosters resilience in immigrants. The story illustrates the transformative power of care, acceptance and belonging in fostering resilience and integration.

Migration and Postcolonial theory frame Paddington's journey as a metaphor for displacement and assimilation. The bear's arrival from "darkest Peru" recalls colonial geographies and introduces a gentle critique of British paternalism. Post colonialism examines the lingering effects of colonial rule and the movement of former colonial subjects into the heart of the imperial centre. Scholars such as Bhabha and Hall help situate the bear as a hybrid subject neither entirely other nor fully assimilated whose liminal status reflects Britain's own post-imperial ambivalence.

Migration theory examines displacement, adaptation and integration. Paddington though warmly welcomed by the browns, must still navigate suspicion, bureaucracy and xenophobia. His struggle to be accepted to learn new norms, and to be seen as more than a stranger parallels real world migrant narratives. These challenges echo the migrant's negotiation of identity and belonging in a host country.

Postcolonial theory concerned with power dynamics, identity and cultural hybridity following colonialism, highlights how Paddington's polite demeanour and foreignness create both tension and comic misunderstanding in British society. His experience reflects real world migrant narratives shaped by historical colonial ties.

"I'm not really supposed to be here at all. I'm a stowaway."

Paddington admits his unauthorized presence positioning him as an illegal migrant without paperwork. This candid moment invites the reader's empathy while subtly invoking the complexities of real-world immigration status.

“Welcome to London”: Contextualizing Paddington in Postwar Britain

This section situates the creation of Paddington within the historical milieu of the late 1950s, focusing on the decline of empire, the influx of migrants, and shifting conceptions of national identity.

“Mr. and Mrs. Brown first met Paddington on a railway platform.”

The railway station (Paddington Station) becomes a symbolic border zone between safety and the unknown, between displacement and potential belonging. It's the classic “port of entry” trope found in refugee and immigration narratives.

“He had a label round his neck which read: ‘Please look after this bear. Thank you.’”

This is the most iconic line, and serves as both emotional appeal and social instruction. It echoes the labels attached to child evacuees during WWII and refugees. It implicitly invokes a moral obligation to provide care.

“A Bear of Good Manners”: The Politics of Politeness and the Immigrant Body

Here, the paper unpacks how Paddington’s foreignness is made acceptable through manners and affect, drawing attention to the ways in which social codes govern belonging. As a foreigner and outsider, he constantly perform politeness and respectability to reassure others of his harmless. This mirrors how immigrants are often expected to “behave well” to be welcomed. Immigrant’s body marked as different both charming and suspect. His coat, suitcase and the label saying vulnerability and foreignness to conform mask the burden of being constantly watched, evaluated and judged.

‘Please’ and ‘thank you’ are the phrases Paddington uses frequently, showcasing his politeness

“Please Mrs Bird, may I have a marmalade sandwich?”- His politeness

“Thank you, Mrs Brown for helping me”- his gratitude

“I’m afraid I’ve made a bit of a mess”- his apologetic nature demonstrates his good manners.

“The Browns and the Secure Base”: Attachment, Trauma, and Recovery

this section uses attachment theory to explore how the Browns function as caregivers who restore trust and stability to a dislocated subject. Paddington’s emotional growth mirrors therapeutic processes familiar to child psychology. Despite his traumatic separation from his homeland and Aunt Lucy, Paddington forms a secure attachment with the Brown Family. Their kindness, stability and care allow him to begin recovering from trauma of displacement in line with attachment theory, the Browns act as good enough caregivers, offering safety and emotional attunement.

“We can’t just leave him here.” - Mrs Brown

Simple, decisive, and ethically charged. This line frames hospitality not just as charity but as a moral imperative, echoing post-war discourses around Britain’s duty to “look after” those displaced by conflict or colonial fallout.

“A Suitcase Full of Meaning”: Paddington and the Myth of British Decency

The suitcase, marmalade, and tag (“Please Look after This Bear”) are read as narrative devices that encode broader cultural myths about hospitality, moral duty, and British exceptionalism. It suggest that while the Paddington stories promote a comforting image of British kindness, this may contrast with real-life attitudes towards immigrants and refugees.

The myth lies in the idea that Britain always acts decently and inclusively, when in reality, its history and current policies often tell a more complicated story. The phrase points out a tension, Paddington’s warm reception reflects an ideal, while real world practices may fall short making Paddington both a charming children’s character and a quietly powerful symbol in debates about identity, belonging and national values.

“Paddington Today”: Post-Brexit Britain and the Afterlife of the Refugee Bear

finally, the article reflects on Paddington’s resurgence in the 21st century, including the popular films, and examines how the character has been reimagined in the context of modern immigration debates, including the Wind rush scandal and the UK’s treatment of asylum seekers.

This article makes a timely contribution to scholarship on children’s literature by drawing connections between psychological development, migration discourse, and post-war cultural memory. It shows how *Paddington Bear*, often dismissed as a benign and nostalgic figure, is in fact deeply imbricated in Britain’s efforts to reimagine itself as a nation capable of empathy, adaptability, and inclusion. By foregrounding the bear’s role as both migrant and child-surrogate, the article illuminates how narratives of care and belonging operate as tools of both ideological formation and emotional education. Paddington’s vulnerability, while the politeness (“Thank you”) reflects British decorum crucial to the novel’s politics of acceptability.

Conclusion

Paddington Bear’s story serves as a subtle yet powerful reflection of post-war British identity, shaped by the themes of immigration and emotional resilience. His experiences of cultural confusion and eventual acceptance reflect both challenges and aspirations of migrants in contemporary Britain. He embodies the immigrant experience marked by loss, adaptation, and the search for belonging. Set against the

backdrop of post-war Britain, is a time of rebuilding, decolonisation and increasing diversity. His journey mirrors the nation's own efforts to redefine itself. Though Paddington's politeness, and emotional warmth, the narrative offers a gentle but meaningful critique of national identity, inclusion and enduring legacies of empire. In doing so. He invites audiences of all ages to reflect the importance of empathy and openness in a world still negotiating its colonial past and multicultural present. In welcoming and caring for the bear, the story imagines Britain is much capable for empathy, integration and transformation. The Browns provide Paddington with emotional stability, fulfilling the psychological needs described in attachment theory, while his daily misadventures highlight the processes of sociocultural learning and integration. At the same time, post-colonial theory sheds light on how Paddington's presence challenges historical power dynamics, offering a subtle reimagining of Britain a multicultural society. Thus Paddington becomes not just a character of children's fiction, but a symbol of evolving the British identity rooted in kindness and care. The series becomes not just a tale of childhood adventure, but a hopeful reflection on how nations and hearts can be reshaped by empathy, care and cultural exchange.

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