

Abstract

The cultural influence of Michael Bond's Paddington stories is remarkable in its own right, yet Paul King's recent Paddington films (2014 and 2017) further increased the Peruvian bear's notoriety and introduced him to a new generation. Yet, just as Paddington, the literary figure, is largely neglected in academic research, a critical examination of the cinematic material failed to materialise so far.

This circumstance is regrettable in view of Paddington's status as an irregular migrant in contemporary London who experiences animosity largely based on his outward appearance. Given the colonial undertones of early Paddington books and the films' promotion of the marginalised bear's kindness and politeness, this thesis examines first how Paddington is brought into the subject position of a 'racialised Other,' and then assesses whether the films apply a contemporary concept of 'civility' to figuratively silence the bear.

To do so, an analytical, multimodal approach is adopted for scenes of both films and combined with an interpretation through concepts of postcolonial theory. Most noteworthy to this are Paul Gilroy's concept of 'postcolonial melancholia,' Sara Ahmed's 'strangerness,' Homi Bhabha's 'mimicry,' Frantz Fanon's 'racial epidermal schema,' and Achille Mbembe's 'necropolitics.' Furthermore, changes in Paddington's characterisation are made palpable by contrasting the early books to the contemporary films.

The thesis concludes that Paddington's position as a symbolic 'racialised Other' remains complex. While the cinematic depictions ameliorate the colonial connotations of the early books and vilify the biological racism of Paddington's antagonists, covert cultural racism potentially perpetuates harmful beliefs of difference. In the end, extradiegetic and extratextual knowledge beyond the text is necessary to disclose the films' political potential. Hence, Paddington's role as a kind and polite migrant ultimately leads to divergent interpretations.