

# Colonising the Play World

## Texts, Toys and Colonial Fantasies in German Children's Stories around 1900<sup>1</sup>

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In German children's literature around 1900, the representation of childhood in pseudo-colonial realms participates in a construction of racial identities based on trans-cultural play. Acts of reading and scenes of instruction intersect with material objects to convey a pedagogy of race dominated by learned whiteness. This article asks: How does German children's fiction around 1900 reconfigure national identity as imperial experience? An analysis of a noncanonical though exemplary fictional text about a jungle adventure demonstrates strategies used to include the child in the colonial experience. Imagining this ›play world‹ replicates for the child reader a sense of agency and citizenship through encounters with an indigenous mediator, an impish primate and imaginary landscapes – each represented through the lens of European epistemologies. These tropes produce tension between historical fact and imaginative fiction, working together to map a colonial geography of German identity on to a model transatlantic German childhood. Framed by theories of material objects and toys, and supported by the work of literary scholars and cultural historians, I examine the brief story »Die kleine Urwälderin« [The Little Jungle Girl] from *Auerbachs Deutscher Kinder-Kalender auf das Jahr 1902* [Auerbach's Almanac for German Children, 1902]. In it, the Amazonian setting aspires to historically factual representation, which, however, cedes considerable territory to the realm of fantasy. The projection of a German forest adventure on to a Brazilian geography elides historical truths, such as centuries of the transatlantic slave trade, and instead inserts imperial signifiers into an established syntax of the European child at play. The resulting national ideology of childhood identity in this German-language story imposes colonial order on a reimagined play world.

Supported by the work of theorists of material culture, literary scholars and historians of German colonial culture, this analysis proposes a framework for understanding how the act of reading engenders colonial fantasies of German childhood around 1900. The story »Die kleine Urwälderin« [The Little Jungle Girl] and its illustrations appeared in *Auerbachs Deutscher Kinder-Kalender auf das Jahr 1902* [Auerbach's Almanac for German Children, 1902]. Founded in Berlin, in 1833, by the publisher Dr August Bertold Auerbach, the *Kalender* contained stories, poems, puzzles and illustrations for children; after 1887, Fernau Verlag in Leipzig became the publisher. It was issued annually until 1943 and, after the Second World War, from 1954 to 1966 under the title *Auerbachs Kinder-Kalender* by Hoch Verlag in Düsseldorf. The 1902 edition of the almanac, under the direction of its fourth editor Georg Bötticher (1848–1918), contains a six-page story by

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W. Helmar [Maria Hellemeyer], which is accompanied by two illustrations by the Leipzig artist Max Loose. It narrates a day in the life of the young German protagonist, Anita Villing, who lives on a plantation in the Brazilian ›jungle‹ with her father and the domestic servant, Caschumka. Anita must earn the right to play with her beloved doll, Liesl. While accompanying Anita on a horse ride through the jungle, the doll is attacked by a monkey, which at first responds to Anita's call and accepts a treat of brown sugar. With the intervention of Caschumka, Liesl ›recovers‹ from the attack and is eventually returned to the homeland. The tropes of a forest fairy tale are defamiliarised, transformed into a colonial fantasy that elides historical contexts of latent and manifest colonialism (Zantop 1997, p. 2). Bracketing harsh realities of history, from centuries of African slavery in the Americas to European exploitation of the Amazonia and its resources, the story is a cautionary tale about the consequences suffered by a doll in the wilderness. In this article, I follow textual and material details – the significance of feathers across different cultural contexts, for example – to trace the development and dissemination of an American imaginary that becomes integral to a model of German colonial childhood.

### Brazil and the play world

In his study of literature from and about Brazil aimed at young readers and children, Franz Obermeier characterises much of the work as an attempt to process »die soziale Realität des Landes« [the social reality of the country]<sup>2</sup> (Obermeier 2016, p. 7), though he allows a wide margin for the unspecific scenarios common to fairy tales and children's stories. We can speculate about their authors' intentions to make Brazil palatable for emigration around 1900, following the abolition of slavery in 1888; but a conscious effort to ›whiten‹ the population did certainly prompt Brazilian politicians and diplomats to commit their efforts and resources to recruiting European families. The German settlements thrived in the south of the country (for example, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul) but not in the Brazilian Amazonia, which is the setting of »Die kleine Urwälderin.« Obermeier further observes that travel literature was often rewritten for young readers and sometimes reworked as fiction (ibid., p. 37), and he clarifies the composition of the target audience for Brazilian adventures: »Das gefährliche Abenteuer präsentierende Land bot sich einfach mehr für die Selbstbewährung Jugendlicher oder junger Erwachsener an, als für Reisen von Kindern.« [The country and associated presentation of a dangerous adventure simply appealed more to the self-examination of adolescent or young adult readers than for children's travel.] (ibid., p. 70)

An accurate depiction of ethnography or geography is not made in the »Die kleine Urwälderin« and Obermeier does not consider it in his work. He does treat W. Helmar's *Vom Urwald zur Kultur. Erlebnisse eines Mädchens, 1898* [From the Jungle to Civilisation: Experiences of a Young Girl, 1898], but he does so dismissively, attributing the inadequate understanding of cultural differences in Brazil to the shortcomings of the writer (ibid., p. 132). Speculating on the gender of the author, he does not identify Maria Hellemeyer as the author behind the pseudonym W. Helmar. Indeed, little is known about her life. While she did not achieve critical acclaim or even notice, her work reproduces a paradigm about ethnographic play and practising whiteness that has considerable purchase on the development of European notions of culture and civilisation through colo-

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise specified, all translations are by the author.

nisation, often independent of historical reality. Obermeier notes, for example, that Brazil functions for her as a »Versatzstück einer exotischen Prägung einer Normabweichung« [a set piece for the exotic impression of a deviation from the norm] (ibid.). I do not disagree, but it is the nature of those impressions that interests me. One can infer that Helmar reached her intended audience as her work appears in an almanac for young readers. That the ›exotic impression‹ involves the protection and preservation of white skin and an amalgamation of African and American colonial tropes of the wilderness compels me to consider the young jungle girl of the story's title as a coloniser of the play world.

The polyvalent German term *Spielwelt* [play world] encompasses German material, literary and pedagogical cultures in its construction as a real and imaginary space in transatlantic modernity. »Die kleine Urwälderin« demonstrates the ways that reading, through the mingling of fact and fiction, expands an imaginative geography by using the trope of worlding (Tautz 2018, pp. 16–17). While *Spielwelt* can define not only the actual spaces of children's play activities but also the imaginative terrain, it more conventionally denotes the former. When ethnographer and historian Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann calls attention to the variation in the meaning of the word *Kinderzimmer* in the nineteenth century, for example, she describes the transformation from a *Schlafräum* [bedroom; literally, sleeping space] to a *Spielwelt* [play world] (Weber-Kellermann 1991, p. 25). Although often used more connotatively, the term signifies a physical, literal space.

My focus includes imaginative play *with* the world. An example from a German-American toy manufacturer illustrates this point. In advertising copy from the A. Schoenhut anniversary catalogue of 1912, the play world begins to comprise interactions among mimetic play, material objects and a sense of children's citizenship. Play becomes performative. Marking the fortieth celebration of the immigrant Albert Schoenhut's prosperous US American venture, the authors of the catalogue, his six sons, celebrate the »German hereditary instinct of toy making« and their American ingenuity and business acumen (Schoenhut et al. 1912, pp. 5–6). Further, their description of the toy-making enterprise evokes the ideology of colonisation. They write: »It is our hope that the past is but a prophecy of the future and that Schoenhut Toys and Dolls – and all American-made play products – will be an increasing element in peopling the American Children's play world.« (Ibid., p. 24)

The assumption of the play world as an uninhabited space in need of a population intersects with colonising discourses about, among other regions, the American ›wilderness.‹ The rhetoric of »peopling [...] the play world« thus connects the material culture of manufacturing to the verisimilitude engendered through emulative play. Further, the assertion of genealogical relationships between German and American toy production connects the ›old‹ and ›new‹ worlds in a way that not only reproduces the image of the human likeness in a doll but also models imperial identity for the reading child. In particular, the materiality of the doll accrues significance. It exemplifies the »social life of things,« to borrow from Arjun Appadurai's notion that objects circulate in »different regimes of value« (Appadurai 1986, p. 4). The doll Liesl's circular path from Europe to South America and back to Europe posits a fantasy of racial reconciliation that underwrites the formation of the protagonist Anita's colonial subjectivity.

In exemplary stories of European childhood on other continents, or other continents viewed through the lens of German-speaking Europe, the possibility of empire exemplifies what Courtney Weikle-Mills defines as an ›imaginary citizenship‹ of young adult readers. The story under consideration here instructs a particular brand for the German-speaking child, the privileges and priorities of which are corroborated by acts of play

with material objects. Weikle-Mills asserts a »profound notion that children can ratify national narratives« (Weikle-Mills 2013, p. 1); toys, too, testify to the truth of national narratives, while disrupting, varying, or even subverting them. The textual positing of imaginary citizenship, for which the national story functions as its proof, is countered by the introduction of toys, the transnational experience of which transcends the national. While her work focusses on Anglo-American literary and pedagogical production prior to 1900, Weikle-Mills' concept of imaginary citizenship of children resonates with the concept of national to imperial citizenship predicated on whiteness.

German-language adventure stories about play around 1900 unfold with the nation-state as a recent phenomenon and German colonisation of Africa a contemporary reality. Following its unification in 1871, Germany enhanced its national narrative with colonial ambitions. The Congress of Berlin (1884–1886) effectively carved up the remaining territory of Africa not yet colonised by other European powers. Germany established four colonies in Africa (Togoland, Cameroon, German South West Africa and German East Africa), encompassing approximately 1 million square miles (or 2.6 million square kilometres) and 12 million inhabitants (Wildenthal 2001, pp. 1–2). Germany also acquired a series of islands in the Pacific (1884–1914) and established a colony in Tsingtao, China (1891–1914). However, as historian David Ciarlo cogently observes, the majority of Germans evinced little interest in the colonies: »Despite a brief surge of interest (buoyed largely by the press), the German public seemed, at least to the die-hard colonial ›enthusiasts,‹ to largely ignore Germany's colonies.« (Ciarlo 2011, p. 4)

At the same time, Germans abroad in North and South America identified with the imperial desires of the homeland, defining themselves as colonists and pioneers (Simpson, 2019). As I argue, based on a reading of the »Die kleine Urwälderin,« the colonial adventure for the German child abroad becomes accessible through the act of reading and play.<sup>3</sup> The construction of racial identity, of German whiteness in a new ›homeland‹ abroad, generates a narrative about work, play and global identity. With attention to Germans outside Germany, such as the fictional Anita and her father, that identity acquires an ›imperial passport,‹ despite Germany's modest colonial possessions at the turn of the twentieth century. Details about migratory feathers, signifiers of the colonial experience, trace the inscription of an American imaginary that becomes integral to the transnational portrayal of German childhood.

## Hybrid play

Texts about toys are an example of intentional instruction with reference to the interaction with objects and caregivers. Dolls, as simulacra of the human, necessitate a specifically European implementation of toys in compensatory and vicariously consumed domestic and colonial landscapes in order to regulate ownership. In »Die kleine Urwälderin,« the reader accompanies the occasionally petulant protagonist on her adventures in the primal jungle of Brazil. Helmar depicts a distant land with an exoticised version of the classical German fairy-tale forest. The jungle is described as »wunderbar schön und seltsam,« [wonderfully beautiful and strange], then immediately compared to a *Feengarten* [fairy garden] (Helmar 1902 a, p. 69), which creates a tone of ambivalence. Yet the project of cultivating the land corresponds with the civilising task of parenting the child.

<sup>3</sup> Generally, the positive tone of adventure and descriptions of exploration shifts radically after the

Herero Wars, 1904–1908, which is now recognised as the Herero and Nama genocide.

The descriptive passages invoke a compelling though challenging life on a *hacienda* run by Anita's father. The use of the word *hacienda* [Portuguese, *fazenda*] collapses the difference between Spanish and Portuguese, homogenising any linguistic or historical accuracy, but is nonetheless helpfully glossed: »So nennt man dort ein Gut.« [That is what an estate is called there.] (ibid., p. 70) Jeff Bowersox calls attention to such disregard for accuracy and describes the »confusion of colonial markers« (Bowersox 2013, p. 124) endemic to colonial literature aimed at a youth audience. Yet in this instance, the lapse remains puzzling. Despite the dominant image of South America as colonised by Spain, sufficient sources in German that targeted candidates for migration to Portuguese-speaking Brazil were available.

To consult another source: Georg Anton (Ritter) von Schäffer, a major in the Brazilian Honour Guard, as well as an adventurer, entrepreneur and author, published a recruitment tract, in 1824, to attract Germans to Brazil. *Brasilien als unabhängiges Reich in historischer, mercantilischer und politischer Beziehung* [Brazil as an Independent Empire in a Historical, Mercantile and Political Context] recounts the working relationships in a plantation economy, using the Portuguese word *fazenda* [adapted to German orthography as *Facendas*] (von Schäffer 1824, pp. 304–306). Von Schäffer's audience, however, comprised adult readers; his purpose was to portray an attractive – politically, economically, and topographically – hospitable alternative to overcrowding and underemployment in Europe. While the publication of this tract supersedes the German colonial period, its inaccuracies and homogenisations of lands ›over there‹ reveal a voracious colonial imaginary in the absence of actual German colonies in South America. The story of Caschumka and her ward, however, speaks the language of empire.

Fantasy landscapes inhabited by characters of colour populate adult and children's literature alike. German authors of popular novels, Karl May foremost among them, created fantasy worlds about faraway places that had little basis in historical reality. They reveal more about the reading appetites of German-language Europeans at the time than about contemporary African or American realities. The truth is not portrayed, but imagined, and history recast and projected on to the page and the canvas of a national imaginary. These imaginative revisions of factual information apply as well to authors of children's literature. In the introduction to his game-changing book, H. Glenn Penny writes, »By 1900, Germany's leading ethnographic museums had descended into chaos. A wild array of artefacts from all over the world pushed these museums well beyond their material limits.« (Penny 2002, p. 1) He enumerates a seemingly random list of collected and displayed material objects indicative of cultures and peoples both local and far-flung, among them Polynesian canoes, Inuit clothing and Benin bronzes. With empirical methodologies to tame the relentless collecting, Germany's consumption of the cosmopolitan resists the descent into chaos through precisely the pedagogical epistemology at work in the narrative. The unfamiliar is rendered familiar, even in the realm of fantasy. In this way, an imperial identity is enabled by the colonial project.

### Whiteness in the Global South

Just as toys were gendered and racialised, so, too, were stories about toys. In Bowersox's analysis of colonial games, he writes that »girls were not actively encouraged to engage in colonial play in the same way as boys« (Bowersox 2013, p. 49). In this story, however, the young European, through the assistance and guidance of indigenous and subordinate cognition, experiences the jungle as well as the domesticating miming of

mothering her favourite doll. Early on we learn that Anita's mother, Frau Villinger, is deceased. Caschumka, a mixed-race household servant, plays the role of mother surrogate. Bowersox, in discussing entertainment literature, further observes that »[m]edia aimed at girls, by contrast, turned the colonial world into something much less adventurous and disorderly« (ibid., p. 132). In this story, the spaces of the colonial imaginary retain a vague sense of adventure and risk but accommodate the ›European‹ and the ›Brazilian.‹ Paternal authority, once textually established, recedes from the story, except to oversee Anita's regimen of book learning.

This story, however concise, elaborates on the surfaces of skin and skin tone in revealing and disturbing ways. Though not a colonial experience per se, the mapping of maternal knowledge on to a Brazilian forest reiterates the process of constructing whiteness and appropriating ›native‹ knowledge. The author emphasises the trials and realities imposed by the Global South, »Weit von hier, jenseits des großen Weltmeeres« [Far from here, beyond the great ocean] (Helmar 1902 a, p. 69), on the surfaces of European bodies. The body of water, the Atlantic, dominates the concept of a European world and worldview. The geography of the watery world builds the boundary for the play world. In this hybrid space, white skin is at risk. The narrator creates a comparative framework to normalise exotic contrasts: »Es sah ganz seltsam aus, wenn das weiße Kind zwischen all den braunen und schwarzen Gestalten der Dienerschaft umherlief« [It was completely strange to see the white child running among all the brown and black figures of the servants.] (ibid.) The narrator introduces Caschumka, »eine bronzefarbene herzensgute Dienerin« [a bronze-coloured, good-hearted servant] (ibid., p. 70), as mother surrogate, after accounting for the presence of Anita and her father, the only German emigrants in the Brazilian forest. Here again, the narrative embeds the relationship between Caschumka and Anita in a familiar and quasi-familial setting; in doing so, the historical reality of slavery and the fact that German Brazilians owned slaves are elided (Cassidy 2015, p. 28). Caschumka's provenance remains ambiguous in the story, which repeatedly foregrounds her local knowledge.

Tension emerges due to the contrast between the verbal description of her »bronze« skin and the black and white of the illustrations, homogenising the range of racial signification and their histories in Brazil. The myth of German moral superiority, in which the violence and brutality of other European powers is contrasted with the good, albeit less powerful Germans, was widespread in contemporary literature for young readers. The inciting incident occurs when Anita has a childlike lapse in obedience: She refuses the ministrations of Caschumka and throws a tantrum to resist the daily application of an oily substance that functions as an insect repellent. This occurs after Caschumka pulls back the mosquito netting from Anita's bed. The »rote Masse« [red mass] (Helmar 1902 a, p. 70) of the repellent is a reasonable precaution with which the child must comply. The narrative invests considerable energy in the protection of white skin. Caschumka later rewards compliant and industrious behaviour with access to Anita's precious doll, the favoured object of play.

Curious is the interplay between the representations of Anita and the exclusively verbal description of the doll, especially when examined in the context of the visual images. In Fig. 1, we see the sharp contrast between Caschumka, whose feet seem to continue the lines of the animal skin rug, and Anita, whose body is presented in contiguity to the unlined bed sheet. The upper frame of the illustration alludes to tiger stripes – there are no tigers in Brazil – which underscores the con-



Fig. 1  
»Die kleine  
Urwälderin« by  
W. Helmar. Illustration by Max  
Loose. From  
Auerbachs  
Deutscher Kinder-  
Kalender auf das  
Jahr 1902, p. 69

tion of South American and African signifiers. This associative visual logic underscores the affinity between animal and human skins.

In describing the unillustrated doll, Helmar writes: »Es hatte einen weißen Porzellan-kopf mit roten Backen und Lippen und blauen Augen und porzellanene gelbe Locken. Seine Arme und Beine, Hände und Füße waren aus weißem Leder gefertigt« [It had a white porcelain head with red cheeks and lips and blue eyes and porcelain yellow curls. Its arms and legs, hands and feet were made of white leather.] (Ibid., p. 70) The materiality of the doll is significant. Leather was used in doll production. Historian David Hamlin, in discussing the centre of German doll production, Sonneberg, notes the variety of the products: »They varied in size, material, hairstyles, clothing, and so on. Critically, they had a variety of subcomponents, such as porcelain or wax heads, glass eyes, wooden appendages, textile clothes, mohair or felt hair.« (Hamlin 2007, p. 90) The author Helmar, however, does not create the doll from reality alone. This colonial fantasy brings together the materiality of toy production, destructive encounters in the jungle and the help of indigenous skills and resources. Around 1900, the upper arms of dolls were usually made of leather and stitched to porcelain forearms. The multiple textures attest to the individual doll's hybridity prior to the jungle adventure, but the story demonstrates a further hybridising of European and indigenous resources. The doll, made precious through European origins, must be rationed, along with the leisure to play.

The life of a European child in the wilderness of Brazil makes many demands on the young protagonist; Anita bears a double burden commensurate with her dual ›citizenship.« She must be an industrious learner about survival: »Was man so in der Wildnis braucht, das ist Reiten und Schießen, Fallen stellen, Schwimmen und Turnen, und dann mußte sie geduldig beim Vater sitzen und Schreiben, Lesen und später Rechnen lernen« [What you need to know in the wilderness, that is riding and shooting, setting traps, swimming and doing gymnastic exercises, and then she had to sit patiently at her father's side and learn writing, reading and later arithmetic.] (Helmar 1902a, p. 71) In short, an imperial pedagogy: As Anita learns to live and play her part as a German child of the jungle, she inherits an investment in its domination and cultivation. Under the tutelage of Caschumka, she makes progress with some predictable childish resistance. Aside from the brief mention of the daughter's duty to learn European skills at the behest of her father, the patriarchal presence makes scant impression in the narrative. The dyad of indigenous cognition, represented by Caschumka and the pluck of her ward, proves sufficiently capable of generating an autonomous adventure story that blends associations of the wilderness of Africa and the Americas.

In this edition of the almanac, the stories, poems, puzzles and illustrations cover a wide range of natural and supernatural landscapes, from giant mushrooms and undersea adventures to more sobering stories of mining coal and a grandfather's narration of his war stories. Helmar contributed another story about a misbehaving child, »Die Giraffe« [The Giraffe]. In this *Märchen* (fairy tale), little Else spits at her nanny and her mother when called home from play. Her fate: An earth spirit appears and transforms her into a giraffe. Else's mother dies of despair, and the giraffe ends up in a cage, displayed in a zoo (Helmar 1902b, pp. 138–140). Wild animals populate her two stories to different ends. In »Die kleine Urwälderin,« Caschumka mediates between the child and the wilderness, embodied in an attacking monkey. Loose depicts the moment of kinship with the monkey, presumably after it has been given some sugar as a treat, in his illustration (see Fig. 2). For the protagonist, the absence of any European peers makes mimetic play impossible – and Else would not have been a paragon of good behaviour in any case.



Fig. 2  
 »Die kleine  
 Urwälderin«  
 by W. Helmar.  
 Illustration by  
 Max Loose. From  
 Auerbachs  
 Deutscher Kinder-  
 Kalender auf das  
 Jahr 1902, p. 72



Fig. 3  
 Newspaper advertisement from  
 Deutscher Pionier  
 am Río de la Plata,  
 Vol 2, No. 143,  
 30.11.1879, p. 2

Anita has no other children in her world, so her actions conform to the environment of the jungle. She has never seen »wie europäische Kinder ihre Puppen spazieren führen« [how European children take their dolls out for a walk], so instead she slings it over her shoulder »wie man ein Gewehr trägt« [as one would carry a weapon] (Helmar 1902 a, p. 71), although she manages to tuck the doll's feet into a belt to accommodate the toy while riding a horse. Helmar calls attention to the absence of European playthings, which were, however, available in some South American cities. In the newspaper *Deutscher Pionier am Río de la Plata*, advertisements for dolls and toys broadcast the import with aplomb (see Fig. 3). For example, in 1879, J. H. Pehling's toy store in Buenos Aires announces: »Alles was in diesem Fache bis jetzt erfunden ist beziehe ich direct aus Europa.« [Everything that has until now been invented in this field I acquire directly from Europe.] (*Deutscher Pionier am Río de la Plata* 1879, p. 2)

It is important to note that the advertising copy lists baby carriages, rocking horses, complete kitchen sets, all types of games and so much more; the complete inventory of which cannot be listed due to space constrictions here. The little jungle girl's story, driven by the tension between survival and the quotidian, as represented by the need for skin protection and incorporating wilderness skills into everyday existence, must eschew the further acquisition of European toys and treasure the object from a distant homeland. The story does not aspire to represent the experience of the colonial child with any realism; rather, the details mobilise the South American imaginary with sufficient basis in a European epistemology to make the distant locale a part of the German play world. Moreover, the distance between urban consumerism and the postulated ›jungle‹ of the displaced German child is precisely placed in order to be overcome. Anita naturally and unselfconsciously practises her jungle skills. Clearly, the requisite baby carriage, a toy transport popular at the time, was not in Anita's possession or Caschumka's toolkit nor would such a contrivance have navigated the jungle well. Anita's play opens up multi-directional ways to model and to mime behaviour and optics between Germany and a fictional Brazil. The narrative description of the natural environment suggests correspondences between play and reality, and skin and porcelain. The omniscient narrator describes orchids: »Es sind dies sonderbare Blumen, die aussehen wie Spielzeug.« [These are peculiar plants that look like toys.] (Helmar 1902a, p. 71) The natural world becomes in itself and through simile a plaything, the jungle a play world.

By the 1890s, German manufacturers engaged in the widespread production of dolls with porcelain or biscuit porcelain heads and cloth or leather bodies; especially important were the two manufacturers Simon & Halbig and Kämmer & Reinhardt, located in Sonneberg, Thuringia. Yet at the time, these dolls would have had mohair or some



hair-like substitute, not the porcelain locks the narrator describes, if they were among the more popular character dolls. The unusual use of the adjective, *porzellanen* suggests that the author is describing the quality of the hair, not the actual substance. The material and metaphor engage in an unstable and transferable relationship. Metonymically, the doll's composition and complexion are constructed. In his 1928 review of Karl Gröber's, *Children's Toys of Bygone Days*, Walter Benjamin drew a compelling comparison between literary textuality and a toy's materiality. In his discussion of the materials toys are made of, Benjamin writes: »The alabaster bosom that seventeenth-century poets celebrated in their poems was to be found only in dolls, whose fragility often cost them their existence.« (Benjamin 1999, p. 115) That fragility and whiteness are integral to the story's resolution.

The doll is able to emit a sound, again, not an uncommon trait in contemporary toy manufacturing. Helmar describes the sound early in the story. On the jungle ride, Anita makes a calling noise to attract a small monkey. When it appears, it too makes sounds, which are described in terms of a European epistemological framework: »In Europa hört sich das Piepen ganz junger Spatzen fast ebenso an.« [In Europe, the peeps of very young finches sound almost the same.] (Helmar 1902 a, p. 73) The frame of reference needs constant comparing and contrasting to keep the inventory of European and Brazilian habitats from aligning. Significant here is the initially congenial relationship between Anita and the monkey, with the sounds functioning as communication between the species. Beginning in 1824, the trope of a monkey falling in love with a human circulated in various media across Europe (Obermeier 2016, pp. 70–72), disseminating a sentimental trope of communication between monkeys and humans. In this Amazonian story directed at children, there is a hint at the possibility of cohabiting species. Anita gives the monkey some brown sugar, not white, which the narrator glosses as European (Helmar 1902 a, p. 73). However, ultimately the experience of this young protagonist has an impact on the homeland because the monkey attacks, Caschumka comes to the rescue, and Anita's doll is sent ›home.‹ »Die kleine Urwälderin« is a story about the remigration of the doll and the ability of material objects to acquire historical agency; demonstrating in this instance that »objects are active agents in history« (Auslander 2005, p. 1017). The toy, the doll Liesl, broken in the jungle and repaired by an indigenous household servant, embodies the materiality of European production, with prosthetics from the tropical forest that incorporate the colonial experience of the child into a return to the homeland.

### Material mobility

This story, with its occasional Pygmalion moments, relies on the transference between a young subject and both animate and inanimate objects. Once it consumed a proffered treat of sugar, the monkey searches for more and spots Liesl; it attacks the precious object and rips off an arm: »Eilig sprang es auf einen Baum und zerbiß und zerriß den Arm, daß die Zeug- und Lederstücke nur so herumflogen.« [Quickly it sprang on to a tree and bit and tore the arm so that pieces of clothing and leather were just flying around.] (Helmar 1902 a, p. 73) Incensed by the attack, Anita, in a fit of pique, wants her guardian to shoot the monkey, but Caschumka uses reason to dissuade her from the prospect of killing the animal. Caschumka prevails; she describes the monkey as an »unvernünftiges Tier« [irrational animal] (ibid., p. 74) and convinces Anita by admonishing her about being human: »Aber Du bist ein Mensch und darfst nicht böse handeln.« [But you are a human being and may not behave badly.] (ibid.) The domestic servant and mother sur-

rogate repairs Liesl with whatever material she has at local disposal; the repair includes bird feathers.

The mother surrogate, Caschumka, plays a pivotal role in the remigration narrative – all the while her homeland and path from Africa to Brazil via the Atlantic slave trade are not mentioned, although they are necessary prerequisites for the moral of the story. Moreover, the early modern European integration of Brazilian featherwork for ocular pleasure and display, as generally seen in *Kunstkammer* [cabinets of arts and curios], for example, or for costume or decoration, fully obscures the network of indigenous signification. Mostly associated in Europe with the coastal Brazilian Tupi, featherwork, though traded throughout the colonial economies, was embedded in Amerindian cosmologies. Additionally, Helmar's narrative works both with and against Loose's illustrations to homogenise any distinction between Amerindian cognition and an African slave's artisanal doll repair. Though the craft is indigenous to South America, the labour supplied is represented as that of African ancestry. The amalgamated doll is the product, uncannily, of an amalgamated history that is ultimately the privilege of power and dominance. In her essay on Brazilian featherwork, Mariana Françaço writes: »A central element in the early modern *Kunstkammer*, feathers and featherwork arrived in European collections first and foremost as global networks of commerce and politics.« (Françaço 2016, p. 121) Caschumka intentionally refrains from plucking the colourful feathers directly from the bird skin while repairing the beloved porcelain-faced doll. In the story, the domestic servant finds the feathers decorative and leaves them for flourish. Though the conclusion leaves open Anita's remigration, the story ends with the doll returning to Germany with its bird skin and feathers, remnants of its jungle adventure. The featherwork invokes an optics of decorative natural materials, which were traded directly between indigenous peoples of Brazil and Europeans dating back to the mid-sixteenth century, according to Françaço (Françaço 2016, p. 113). Further, Françaço traces the European association of Amerindians with featherwork back to the early modern period. This visual stereotype, albeit diluted, and lacking in any granular detail, nonetheless populates the story of the hybrid doll.

The European child Anita learns to control the irrational impulses she experiences in the jungle from her bronze-skinned guardian and protector, a native informant, who is also invested with the balance of reason and surrogate parental power to instruct (Fiorentino 1989, p. 404). The colour of skin also figures into the European construction of Native Americans, as seen in the press coverage of the Wild West shows with abundant associations between »noble savages« and »impressive red-brick faces« (ibid.). Like the depiction of Caschumka in the story, these descriptions of colour purport to be adulatory. Her skin tone is a repository of the necessary pedagogy for instructing young whiteness. Unlike the message conveyed by the popular mainstream periodical for boys, *Der gute Kamerad*, in which the dangers of the Brazilian jungle around 1900 are depicted (Bowersox 2013, p. 136), this story relies on a mother surrogate to achieve the accommodation of a transnational German childhood. Caschumka combines local knowledge, which the narrative describes as indigenous cognition, with common sense and enlightened guardianship. Though the use of local material does not rise to the level of Tupi featherwork, Caschumka's bird-skin-and-feather repair of Liesl's torn and bitten doll body creates a hybrid toy that displays the colours of subaltern artisanship, which sutures the feathery signifiers of the tropics along the porcelain purity of the European lineage: »So ist Liesl später auch mit einem Vogelfederarm nach Deutschland gekommen.« [This is how Liesl later came to Germany with a bird feather arm.] (Helmar 1902a, p. 74) The

feathers become colonial signifiers for the Brazilian jungle adventure; they are mobile, migratory agents of a colonial fantasy. These lessons and the material objects, mangled and repaired, transmit the pedagogy of colonial play that nurtures imperial, imaginary citizenship in a way that communicates through comparisons to European audiences. The projection of a facile hybridity on to the material object, the doll, relieves colonial anxiety. At the beginning of the play session, Anita, under Caschumka's watchful eye, accessorises the doll. Liesl is equipped with a lasso (ibid., p. 71), for example. And Anita adorns the doll: She creates a beautiful necklace from the »schönsten, zierlichsten Vogel-federn« [loveliest, most delicate bird feathers] (ibid.). The material doll embodies a transnational, transcontinental childhood, prepared to rustle cattle while wearing a necklace composed from nature's debris. Liesl's return to the homeland, with the colonial markers of the Brazilian jungle, signifies a creolisation of her identity.

## Conclusion

This story and its interaction with imagery succeeds neither in enhancing play nor modelling European childhood as such, but rather in infusing the reading experience itself with the danger directed at the object and recovery enabled by a skilled domestic servant. With native feathers and hands mending the doll's wounds inflicted by the teeth of the wild jungle denizen, the hybrid South American-European doll teaches the German-speaking reader how to play; effectively ordering the world with bird skin and a hint of feathery colour in the unruly space of the American imaginary. The texts, toys and contexts of a colonial experience, created in the crucible of reading, present the pieces to a pedagogical puzzle that practises cognitive play skills and applies them to the construction of racialised identities. The ›imaginary citizens‹ of the German-speaking play world, such as Anita Villinger and her doll Liesl, evolve with and respond to the existence of real German colonies and the fantasies those inspired.

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