

## Gifting the Bear and a Nostalgic Desire for Childhood Innocence

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Fig. 1 (Bumper Picture 1920, 3)

### Abstract

*This article examines twentieth and twenty-first century adult relational interactions with the teddy bear toy. It describes the association between the teddy's mythological origins and its infusion with a commoditized sentimentality that provides adults with a nostalgic return to an imagined personal and social time of childhood innocence. This analysis further details how the 'gifting' of teddy bears to adults and children in response to social or personal crises denies possibilities for meaningful human interactions and social change.*

Each and every human being at one time or other has wanted a teddy bear to give them friendship and companionship (Andrews 2004, 1).

Imagine a child holding tightly onto a teddy bear. The bear's face wears a comforting smile; the child's shows openness and peacefulness. This is an iconic image that from the early twentieth century has symbolized the toy's assumed protective innocence shielding the otherwise vulnerable innocent from real or feared harm. The line drawing shown here, from a 1920 children's picture book, reflects this illusory simplicity. Produced by instilling emotional labor in adult products (Hochschild 1983, 160), this commoditized compassion is constitutive of the adult teddy bear culture that by the 1920s, privileged the toy as a redeemer of individual human frailty and of human social failings. Unlike children's fantasy, the dominant beliefs and values of this adult culture are governed by an emotive sentimentality that depicts the teddy bear as possessing real feelings toward humans. Thus, as a result of the creation of the teddy bear as emotive subject, the ideology of teddy bear culture sees the

personal sacrifice of superfluous material goods as both all that is necessary and sufficient for the personal and social restitution of humanity.

This article provides a socio-cultural history of that transfiguration and of its relationship to the activity of teddy bear gifting: the provision of teddy bears as a means for alleviating the alienated emotional self. Adult teddy bear culture is identified as an outcome of the late nineteenth-century symbiosis of child-animal nature in popular and scientific culture. Over the first half of the twentieth century, the ideologies of the child as young animal and animals as sentient beings became embodied in the teddy bear, which, in turn, became representative of white childhood innocence. From the second half of that century and continuing into the twenty-first, the toy was further imbued with social, emotional, and material capacities of transformative love.

Examining the mythology of the teddy bear's origins and the infusion of the item with a commoditized sentimentality reveals how it has become possible for the teddy to be reified as therapeutic artifact, and for its gifting to become an act of social justice seen as equivalent to donations of food, clothing, and financial aid. It can be tempting to dismiss or mock adult reverence for the teddy as nothing more than kitsch, but Ehrenreich (Ehrenreich 2001, 43-53) has warned of the ways that the all-encompassing nature of kitsch in the lives of women suffering from breast cancer is built upon a social alienation that celebrates passive social interaction in place of real social change. Similarly, Sturken's *Tourists of History*, explains that the teddy bear's cultural promise is to, by its presence alone, "make us feel bet-

ter about the way things are," (Sturken 2007, 7) to quell the possibility for anger, rebellion, aggression, or hate against personal and social conditions. Coupling its socio-cultural history to the analyses of Sturken and Ehrenreich, I argue that the gifting of teddy bears, a commercialized relational artifact, is a practice that inherently replaces real social and political engagements with a dehumanizing relationship to things.

### The Birth of an Icon

Happy birthday, teddy bear  
It's been 100 years.  
Happy birthday, teddy bear  
We're glad that you are here  
(Pell 2002).

The origin of the teddy bear toy and its value as ambassador of love is situated within a mythological outcome of a November 14, 1902 hunt, when President Theodore Roosevelt is deemed to have freed a bear that had been roped for him to kill. In different tellings, the captured bear is variously described as "old", "young", "sick", or, according to a 1926 magazine article, as "only eighteen inches tall" (Crenshaw 1926, 62). The narrative also places the event as being on the last day of a failed hunting venture during a break in border negotiations between Mississippi and Louisiana. Some accounts characterize Roosevelt as being an unenthusiastic participant in the hunt who takes the captured bear as a White House pet; at other times, the President is said to have taken the bear to a zoo or taken the bear's pelt to the Smithsonian for preservation.

The year 2002 was celebrated in North America, Europe, and Asia as the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of the origin of the teddy bear. In Mississippi, this anniversary was even marked with a resolution designating the teddy bear, or teddy, as the official state toy with the legislature stating that “the stuffed bear toy, appropriately named the ‘Teddy Bear,’ evolved and continues to be a universal symbol of love, comfort and joy for children of all ages” (Mississippi Legislature 2002). In the resolution’s wording, President Theodore “Teddy” Roosevelt is reconstituted as bear sympathizer, a soft-cloth child’s toy becomes a humanitarian ambassador, and Mississippi, a state with a long history of violence, is constructed as the source of this empathetic creature.

Frank Murphy’s children’s book, *The Legend of the Teddy Bear* further buttresses the legitimacy of this narrative by explaining that while, “many legends are based on fiction...the story of Theodore Roosevelt refusing to shoot that bear...is based on fact” (Murphy 2000, no page). Murphy blends hagiography with patriotism by claiming that Mississippi and Louisiana, “wanted this great and fair man to settle an argument about a boundary line” (Ibid). He propagates the President’s folkloric status by denoting him as akin to the common man, while at the same time being “adored” by “the people of America” (Ibid). In reality, Roosevelt was of Fifth Avenue old New York stock who had not yet established a Presidential reputation, given that he had only succeeded to the office in September 1901 upon the shooting death of President McKinley, and towards whom there were wide-spread feelings of disgruntlement (Dalton 2002; Watts 2003).

Murphy’s text and illustrations accentuate the fear and suffering of a captured cub, roped by the neck with two dogs at bay. Roosevelt, though toughened by life in the outdoors, displays a benevolence that belies the hunting discourse of his time:

Some of the men in the president’s group cornered a young bear. Barking dogs surrounded the frightened bear, as the men roped and tied it to a tree...The frightened bear clawed at the rope, trying to free itself. The bear whipped his head back and forth. Its back feet kicked up clouds of dust and dirt. Teddy looked down at his rifle and then..laid it on the ground. He shouted out to his men, “Stop badgering that bear! It is helpless. Let it go!” (no page)

The key points of this and similar stories for both children and adults are: hunters other than Roosevelt capture the bear; Roosevelt, disgusted by the act, orders its release; the bear escapes unharmed. The variations on this myth are globally disseminated through the Smithsonian, popular publications and websites for adults, children’s picture books, and scholarly histories of Theodore Roosevelt. These have been successful in displacing real knowledge of Roosevelt’s hunting behaviors with fictitious reminiscences of him as a selfless animal protector. This substitution has been a necessary component of teddy bear culture; it provides the model for love to be transferred from human to bear, which is then imagined as being reciprocated by the bear, through its lifeless representative in the form of the teddy bear, to humans.

The actual events of the hunt need repeating here not only to counter the proliferation of inaccurate accounts, but also because the facts provide context for an-

alyzing gifting behavior. On November 14, 1902 Roosevelt was engaged in the first day of a bear hunt in the canebrakes of the Mississippi Delta. It had been planned weeks in advance by Roosevelt as a holiday to recuperate from the taxing endeavors of resolving the anthracite coal strike that had paralyzed the Eastern seaboard (President's Trip 1902, 9). According to Holt Collier, the esteemed African American hunter who was the party's guide, Roosevelt insisted on being the first to kill a bear (Buchanan 2002, 167). This could not be guaranteed if the hunters were to follow the dogs, as the Delta terrain made it impossible to herd the bear toward a specific hunter. Roosevelt was, therefore, positioned in a blind, stationed in an open area where Collier assumed a bear could be driven out (Ibid).

Select journalists who had been allowed to the hunt site, and who published identical stories in the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* provided an account of the events. It was reported that Roosevelt returned to the camp when it appeared that the bear would not be flushed until late in the day, but, in Roosevelt's absence, the bear emerged at the spot where he had been placed (One Bear Bagged 1902, 1; One Bear Falls Prey 1902, 1). The bear, having been chased into a water hole, attacked and killed one of the hunting dogs. Collier, who later expressed exasperation with Roosevelt's desertion of his assigned post and thus failure to prevent the ensuing mayhem, acted to save his remaining dogs by clubbing the bear with his rifle. He then tethered the comatose animal to a tree so that Roosevelt could have his kill (Buchanan 2002, 170). Roosevelt declined, probably

because his political enemies would have used his shooting of an unconscious bear against him. A fellow hunter attempted to kill the bear by knife, but his lack of skill only caused the animal further torment; so Collier finished the task by stabbing the bear through the heart (Buchanan 2002, 171-2). The carcass was taken back to camp where it was deemed to have been an adult weighing 250 pounds and the body was consumed over the next couple of meals, with a paw roast for Sunday's dinner (Quiet Day in Camp 1902, 1).

The day after the story about the hunt was published, the *Washington Post* ran, on its front page, the cartoonist Clifford Berryman's depiction of the President refusing to kill the bear (Berryman 1902a, 1). In it the animal's captor, shown as a white rustic in place of Collier, struggles to keep his grip on a rope wrapped tightly around the bear's neck. The bear, instead of being unconscious, pulls strongly back with eyes suggesting fear. Roosevelt carries a Winchester and has a full cartridge belt around his waist. The hunt knife that was tucked into his belt was not primarily for skinning or self-defense, but for killing animals by hand, the preferred technique of the socially elite hunters of the period.

*Post* readers would have been aware of the details of the bear's death from the previous day's article. Roosevelt's predilection for killing wild animals was also well known. For these reasons as well as the softly ironic style of Clifford Berryman, the *Post's* star political cartoonist, the public would have been able to understand the cartoon and its "Drawing the Line in Mississippi" caption as a derisory commentary on the President's



accusations of extravagant hunting practices by others, while himself engaging in excessive animal slaughter.<sup>1</sup>

What happens at this point in teddy bear history is as wrapped in confusion and mythology as the tale of the 1902 hunt. According to teddy bear lore, the cartoon stimulated Rose Michtom, co-proprietor of a New York novelty store, to create and sell a home-stitched, stuffed toy bear modeled on Berryman's cartoon. It was, supposedly, a quick seller, prompting her to make more which also speedily sold. Rose and her husband then reportedly exchanged letters with President Roosevelt requesting, and getting permission, to name the toy the "Teddy bear". Its subsequent popularity resulted in the formation of the Ideal Toy Company and the mass production of teddies. While this tale acts to perpetually heighten the homespun and entrepreneurial Americana version of the origins of the teddy bear's manufacture, most of it is probably false.

Another possibility, that is probably closer to the truth, although it remains marginal to teddy bear culture, is that the toy is based on Johnny Bear, the title character of nature writer Ernest Thomson Seton's 1900 story of that name (Seton 1900). Seton was one of the most admired of the new-style nature writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His stories, written for adults but also shared with children, were the first in English non-fiction to present the perspective of wild animals as having moral, psychological, and emotional lives that are as meaningful as those of humans. He and like-minded writers were powerful influences on the growing penchant to understand the wilderness and its inhabitants as having an inherent

worth that could be shared with humans rather than exploited for economic gain (Lutts 1990, 30; Nash 1982, 147-148).

It is most likely that the earliest stuffed toy bear to arrive on the American market was created by Steiff, the German felt manufacturing company.<sup>2</sup> In early 1903 it presented such an item at toy fairs in New York and Leipzig. It was a rod-jointed toy, the appearance of which was based on the European brown bear (Maniera 2001, 25-6). Rather than being a replication of Berryman's image, this bear was an extension of the company's line of soft-cloth wild animal toys that was developing from, and encouraging, a growing public market for this type of children's plaything.

Regardless of who sewed the first teddy-like bear, its idealization as human-animal child was manifested in the period's adult popular culture, including Seton's story about Johnny Bear.

### From Wild Bear to Innocent Teddy

After Berryman's publication of "Drawing the Line" he included an insouciant bear in his next cartoon about Roosevelt's same hunt. In this one, a bear sitting atop a hill observes the hunting party leaving the area carrying exhausted and dead dogs; one hunter drags behind him a live bear around the neck of which is a tag that reads, "Back to the Zoo"; the bear on the hill holds a newspaper with the taunting headline, "HOW CAN YOU BEAR TO LEAVE ME!" (Berryman 1902b, 1). Berryman continued to regularly use the bear imagery (which he referred to as Bruin) in his political cartoons, often shown in tandem with Roosevelt and for a number of years as a critical comment on Roosevelt's hunting practices.

However, the antics of Bruin are more clearly aligned with the taunting bear, as opposed to one being helplessly dragged away.<sup>3</sup>

Adult readers of the *Washington Post* were so enthralled with Bruin that its appearance made Berryman a celebrity. The National Press Club subsequently requested the November 16 cartoon for display and archival purposes. Berryman could not locate it, (it had likely been discarded), so he drew it anew (Mullins 2002, 43). The actual date of the new version remains obscure, but it likely took place between 1903 and 1906. The differences between the first and the second images are notable. In the new version the bear hardly resembles the real thing; it is small, wide-eyed, and vulnerable. Its size makes it of no use as meat and of no danger to humans. Roosevelt is less a svelte example of the strenuous life and more a portly sport hunter of his social class *sans* hunting knife. In this drawing Berryman reproduced what had become a favored re-imagining of the outcome of the November 14 hunt, with Roosevelt as the bear's savior, and the animal as a young, quivering creature.

In teddy bear culture the second version of "Drawing the Line in Mississippi" is invariably cited, including by the Smithsonian, as the original, with the reimagined captive bear's appearance proof that it stimulated the creation of the Michtom's teddy toy, and with its title demonstrating Roosevelt's demand for the animal's release. Such has helped sustain the mythological relationship between Roosevelt and the bears – the real one and the toy. It preserves the belief of a spontaneous generation of the teddy bear from the original 1902 *Washington*

*Post* cartoon (and a regeneration of the real, killed bear), and replaces Berryman's original challenge to Roosevelt's hunting practices with reverence. This historical amnesia in relation to the cartoons is a purposeful deceit, given that the correct dating is provided in many popular writings about the teddy bear, but then immediately ignored. Those who engage in this reconstruction of historical memory appear to be fulfilling a public's nostalgic desire for a personal and social time of innocence, and perhaps to liken one's self – through teddy bear gifting – to the fabled Roosevelt.

In 1906 the bear toy really was refashioned by the Michtom enterprise with its production of a cuddlier and more infantile version. Rods were not inserted into the body and its appearance was babyish – with chubby limbs, largish head, low-set wide-spaced eyes, round torso, soft coat, and small hump (Maniera 2001, 25-26). This restyled bear incorporated the latter nineteenth-century conceptualization of an animal-child symbiosis that arose out of the new nature writer literature and child development theory (Varga 2009a).

By the second half of the nineteenth century, white childhood was being popularly defined by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's seventeenth-century argument as a period of moral innocence, an idea amplified by theological assertions that white children were "angels incarnate" who had "entered this world with the innocence and sanctity of heaven still clinging to them" (Calvert 1992, 104-105). In the realm of visual culture, the eighteenth-century painterly equation of "childhood with innocence and with nature" was, in the nineteenth century, pop-

ularized by the production of prints of idealized child portraits (Higgonet 1998, 49, 51). The belief in white childhood innocence was given scientific credence in the late nineteenth century by the child study authority, G. Stanley Hall (Ross 1972 309-340) through the application of recapitulation theory to human development. The theory posits that individual development is a successive passage through the evolutionary phases of one's race, with infants and young children being at a stage of unenlightened morality analogous to animals (Gould 1967). The uniting of the sublime wild and innocent childhood discourses created, by the final years of the nineteenth century, a belief in a natural kinship between animals (especially young animals) and children that gave to both a consciousness that was superior to that of adult humans (Varga 2009b). The outcome was an archetype of a white childhood naturally innocent of impiety in thought and action and physiologically marked by chubby limbs and wide-open eyes.

Commodification, mass production, advertisements, and children's literature quickly established the Michtom model of the teddy bear as a nursery toy, and its child-like form was ensconced in material and social culture. This included its 1907 inscription on infant spoons (Teddy Bear Baby Spoon 1907, 27), and inclusion in an advertisement for children's breakfast cereal (Toasted Corn Flakes 1907, 48). Its imagery was replicated by other producers of toy bears and in most children's stories with a bear character. Its idealization of innocence was featured as the piano music for *Teddy Bear's Two-Step* (Bratton 1907) renamed with lyrics added in 1932 as *Teddy Bears' Picnic* (Kennedy 1932).

While the early twentieth century's cult of innocent childhood expanded the range of soft-cloth children's toys to other animal characters (Varga 2009a), the teddy bear was imbued with an exceptional status. It was not just an item of childhood pleasure, but, early on, was thought capable of safeguarding children against adult vagary. As such, the teddy is singular in its function of maintaining the innocence of children and of childhood. In addition, it provided early nineteenth century parents and other adults with an object they could give to children as a means of vicariously satisfying their own emotional needs to experience the world as new and joyful as if through the eyes of the wondrously innocent child (Cross 2004).

The teddy's role as protective agent of childhood innocence is a central element of children's stories from 1907. In that year the widely popular *Ladies' Home Journal* provided a fictional story about an ill mother who buys her young son a soft-cloth bear (Taylor 1907, 11, 76). The boy's father mocks his son's interest in the toy as effeminate, resulting in their estrangement. When the mother dies the child is bereft of companionship, and he seeks out the bear for comfort. The boy's need overcomes his father's derision, and they are reunited in a melodrama of sorrow and love: "Father's arms swept around them and gathered them into his queer lap....'Poor old man!' he was whispering over and over. 'I'll try hard, Boy. Oh, my God, but try hard, little chap!'" (Taylor 1907, 76). The bear looks on, winking in triumph. The story's publication in a popular adult magazine suggests that the teddy was accepted by middle class adults as a guardian of childhood – at least in a fictionalized world – and as a

therapeutic agent of emerging twentieth-century consumer capitalism" (Lears 1994, 250).<sup>4</sup>

Another of the earliest teddy gifting stories was a 1911 tale about a well-to-do child who gives her small bear toy to a destitute girl who had expressed a desire for one just like it (Oldmeadow 1911, 78-79). An unknown man who had witnessed her generosity rewards selflessness by in turn giving her a teddy for Christmas, with this one being "almost as big as herself" (Oldmeadow 1911, 78). Extending the toy's protective status beyond its original owner and the bourgeoisie provided a moral lesson to children of that social class: giving a teddy to poor children would bring happiness to the destitute, and result in an exponential material return.

The teddy as a cultural signifier of the symbolic comforts of childhood, home, and family was further commercialized during various social crises of the early twentieth century. After the 1912 *Titanic* sinking, Steiff produced black mourning bears; these were part of a window display at Harrods and for sale (Cockrill 2001). During World War I, pocket-size teddy bears were produced for sale as charms to be given as gifts to soldiers being deployed (Maniera 2001). Still, for most of the first half of that century, the teddy was primarily considered a child's plaything and a storybook character whose status of childhood innocent did not generally encompass adults.<sup>5</sup> This would change in the 1950s.

### Nostalgic Innocence

I should like to bury something precious in every place where I've been happy and then, when I was old and

ugly and miserable, I could come back and dig it up and remember. (Waugh 1945, 24)

The cultural importance of the teddy was dramatically transformed as of the mid-twentieth century, to being an item of adult idolatry. This was stimulated by the rising popularity of psychoanalysis with its notable reference to the teddy bear as a commonplace transitional object that because of its unchanging and passive form was used as a tool of comfort and security for children as they learned to understand themselves as separate from their mothers (Winnicott 1953, 89, 91). In the face of psychosocial alienation within capitalism, the teddy, as a mother-substitute, became an adult fetish. Retreating inward to find solace, the toy could be spoken of as having a therapeutic value for adults, of being considered, "a leavening influence amid the trials and tribulations of life" (Henderson 1962 as quoted in Maniera 2001, 144).

The post-1950s expansion of commercial nostalgic production enhanced adult interest in teddies (Moran 2002). An increased availability of entertainment products and discretionary income heightened the anxiety of an adult consumer culture "fearful of the future and alienated from the past" from which "they found refuge in the mystique of childhood...defined and experienced through consumer culture" (Cross 2004, 27, 15). Teddy bears produced for, and marketed specifically toward, adults were stylized after those from the earlier decades of the twentieth century (Cockrill 2001). These bears were neither toys for adults, nor simply a reminder of times past. Instead, the teddy was intended to provide a real



transcendence of time and space, a material means for bringing back as lived adult reality the supposed simple and innocent times of an undefined era of a bygone childhood.

In the early 1980s the teddy as a solution to the nostalgic desire for childhood innocence was given substantive impetus by the American and British television broadcast of Evelyn Waugh's book, *Brideshead Revisited*, from which the opening quote to this section has been taken (Waugh 1945, 45). The program made a celebrity of Aloysius, the teddy bear companion of the adult, Lord Sebastian Flyte. In addition, Flyte's implicit homosexuality, unacknowledged in mainstream teddy bear culture, made the artifact an icon of the gay community. In the 1980s, giving teddy bears to AIDS sufferers was a means for extending contact in an indirect way to the forbidden bodies of the ill and the dying. Originally these were personal giftings, but, by the end of the decade, they had become an essential part of the growth of AIDS activism (Harris 1994, 55-6). The commodification of AIDS teddies was also a means for challenging straights to see the disease as a killer of innocents.<sup>6</sup>

The collectors' and popular magazine, *Teddy Bear and Friends*, has been one of the initial and foremost solidifiers of teddy bear culture. Established in 1983, the magazine and its followers have been supportive of a lifestyle normalizing the adult adoption of fantasized childhood hegemony. This includes the creation of terminology that defines its beliefs, the meaning of which is obscure to those unfamiliar with the culture- for example: *arctophiles* are lovers, that is, fans, of teddy bears; a *hug* is a collection of teddy

bears; *artist bears* are handmade limited edition teddies; *bearapy* is teddy bear-facilitated mental health intervention.

By the last years of the twentieth century its most adherent adult fans considered the teddy a sentient being indistinguishable from human childhood and this idea has been reproduced within children's culture. The 1994 children's book, *When the Teddy Bears Came* (Waddell 1994/1998) provides further evidence of the adult view of teddy bears as, at the very least, no different from that of children, and, perhaps, of even greater sentimental value. In the story, a newborn human baby, who remains genderless and nameless, is gifted with one teddy after another. In contrast to the baby's status, each teddy is gendered and named. Alice Bear, Ozzie Bear, Sam Bear, Huggy, Rockwell Bear, Dudley Bear, and Bodger Bear are wide-eyed furry infants with whom Tom (the baby's brother) has to compete for family space on the sofa. In the final pages, the teddy bears' and human infant's needs are deemed equally worthy of struggle for space and attention: "And that's what they did. When the new baby came to Tom's house they all took turns taking care of the bears...and together they all looked after the baby" (Waddell 1994/1998).

The expansion to adult popular culture of the desire for the teddy to be a child is illustrated by a 2010 television commercial for Snuggle Dryer Softener Sheets. A teddy bear has been the product's 'spokes-bear' since at least 1984, denoting familial comfort by its expression of both the "wondrously innocent" and "cute" of post-industrial consumer society (Cross 2004). The 2010 advertisement shows a young white woman who

has just taken laundry out of her drier, kneeling down with hands stretched out toward a digitalized Snuggle teddy. The bear toddles toward her, arms stretched forward, eyes wide and bright in anticipation of her comforting hug.

While advanced capitalism has heightened individual expectations for personal fulfillment, the failure of those needs to be met through material consumption and the “split in society between personal relations and anonymous social relations” (Zaretsky 1976, 10) has left people devoid of a satisfying inner emotional life. The ownership and exchange of teddy bears is an act intended to mediate between feelings of being alone and unloved, and the desire to receive and give love. Its extension through teddy bear gifting is an individual and collective attempt to integrate a personal life with effective communal relations. However, the basis of teddy gifting culture in the commercialization of emotions, with its emphasis on the individual’s personal feelings and inner needs, causes it to replace political action and reinforce the very conditions of subjective and social alienation.

### Gifting as Therapeutic Innocence

Gary Cross has persuasively argued that the cultural construction of a wondrously innocent child has provided adults with assurance that by their participation in children’s culture they too can be sheltered from life’s difficulties and made emotionally whole. Within this context resides the expectation that the teddy bear is capable of transforming human lives. Hundreds of organizations exist for the purpose of collecting donated teddy bears and providing them

to children who have experienced a mass disaster or a personal tragedy. Innumerable human illnesses and conditions have a teddy bear mascot, often adorned with an emblematic colored ribbon. Emergency personnel carry teddies about to give to children and adults who have experienced trauma.<sup>7</sup> Such activities of teddy bear gifting are based on a belief in the toy’s capacity for transcendent love that creates for recipients a fanciful pleasure-filled childhood. The internet site, *Teddy Bears for Hope*, explains this in rhetoric comparable to spiritual belief as being an inexplicable phenomenon: “There’s just something about a Teddy Bear that’s impossible to explain. When you hold one in your arms, you get a feeling of love, comfort and security. It’s almost supernatural” (Teddy Bears For Hope).

Website solicitations by teddy bear organizations are also often patterned after televangelist ministries, for example:

Every donation to **Teddy Bears for Hope** will help send brand new teddy bears to children around the world who will benefit from their love and comfort. Donations of all amounts are accepted and appreciated in order to provide hope to as many children as possible.

(Teddy Bears for Hope “Donate”, bold in original).

Pictures of forlorn children who are without teddies and smiling children with teddies, along with stories of happiness returned, support a belief in the object’s transformational possibilities.

Gifting was initially manifested as a spontaneous and sporadic placement of teddies on coffins of young children or at sites of the deaths of young people (Grider 2006, 256-257). The 1995 bombing

of the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City brought about a mass expression of memorializing in protest against the attack and as a means of conveying emotional kinship with victims and their families. A variety of material goods were brought to the scene, each in some way a personal expression of human intimacy. These things, which included teddy bears, were favored television images and were repeatedly shown along with melodramatic music, footage of the bombing's aftermath, and a photograph of the attempted rescue of the infant, Baylee Almon.

The spectacle encouraged such an onslaught of teddies that despairing city officials pleaded with the public that, "no more cuddly stuffed teddy bears be sent"; that, "they are beyond teddy bears" (Knapp 1995, 5). Their appeal went unheeded. Items of various kinds kept arriving and were finally incorporated into the city's memorial project (Sturken 2007, 117-118); by 2009 there were 60,000 items (Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum). That the teddy is the official representative of all, having been named in 1995 as the National Memorial's "symbol of comfort," bespeaks of the desire for an object to fulfill a desire for love to conquer despair. It is the lone "being" gracing the Memorial Holiday Ornament – a Christmas tree decoration showing a teddy bear seated on a Memorial chair, and similar looking teddies are sold at the Memorial store (Ibid). It has been named Hope Bear, and schools borrowing the Memorial's peace education Hope Trunk receive a certificate, "proclaiming your school a Hope Bear school," and get to keep the toy (Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum 2008, 2).

Two years after Oklahoma, the car crash death of the United Kingdom's Princess Diana resulted in a manic outpouring of grief about her demise, and anger at the British Royal family for what was perceived as its poor treatment of her. Mounds of teddies were placed outside her one-time London home, Kensington Palace, with personal notes attached, and were tossed along with flowers onto her passing funeral motorcade. The Oklahoma and Princess Diana episodes foretold the monstrous dimension teddy gifting was to take. In 2001 hundreds of thousands were sent to New York City, Washington, and Pennsylvania after the September 11 terrorist attacks. That of these, 100,000 were provided by the Oklahoma City Memorial archive (Strauss 2001) reveals that the burden such questionable donations place on aid workers had been substituted, in public service memory, with a desire to believe in the toy's capabilities of magically reversing time. By October 2001 there was a concern that a shortage of teddy bears would further traumatize children. One of the founders of Operation Teddy Care reported that, what with the needs of Oklahoma City, Kobe, postal workers (because of anthrax), hazardous material workers, police and rescue workers – all of whom "need the comfort of a teddy bear" – "traditional sources of large donations of the toys are 'maxing out'" (Workman 2001).

After 9/11, as in Waddell's story discussed earlier, the bears kept arriving. In 2004 planeloads were sent to East Asia after the December Tsunami. In 2005 they arrived in New Orleans on the tail of Hurricane Katrina. In 2010 they were travelling to earthquake-ravaged Haiti. Name a social, health or environmen-

tal disaster and the teddy follows, including to Africa for children born with AIDS. Christs [sic] Light began sending the toy in 1983 to such afflicted infants after a request by aid workers for, "the comfort of the human touch and a teddy bear, so the dying AIDS orphaned babies would have the company of a toy as they wait for death, all alone by themselves, in white metal cages [cribs]" (An AIDS Orphan Solution). The quotation is presented on the website without any sense of irony about the attempt to replace the dearth of social contact with a material object.

Faith in the teddy bear's presence to make everything better, and at the same time provide donors with the personal satisfaction of having effected change is expressed in the following response to September 11:

My children are too young to donate blood and we could send money; but we wanted our children to have something tangible to do, so we thought if we could send a teddy bear, a child could hold on to that in their time of grief and healing and maybe find some comfort. (as quoted in White and Cowan 2001)

For those wishing for a more confident assurance of redemption from alienation, HolyBears™ are available for purchase at [www.holybears.com](http://www.holybears.com). The extensive line includes the pink and hopeful, "How can a young person stay pure?" Sweet 16 HolyBear. Each HolyBear comes with a bible-shaped tag on which is written a gospel verse pertaining to the item's focus. The one for Cooking HolyBear is John 6:35: "Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.'" Testimoni-

als on the HolyBears website that proclaim the profitability of the products for retailers and fundraisers exemplify the limitations of buying and gifting a material commodity to satisfy real emotional needs while at the same time attempting to make a financial profit or rectify a gap in social services. (Deerlake Design "Cooking HolyBear™"; "Sweet 16 9 Inch HolyBear™")

The supposed redeeming effect of the teddy bear to return one to childhood and spiritual innocence has also been formally incorporated into therapeutic programs. An example is Adult Children Anonymous, a self-help group for adult children of alcoholic and dysfunctional families. It uses the teddy bear as mascot, with a call to empowerment voiced by its TeddysRule logo (TeddysRule). The teddy bear image is found on all its web pages; teddy bear nights are celebrations of a member's one-year anniversary in the program and members can receive various certificates that include the toy's image. The explanation by the organization for its use of the teddy bear is that it represents an, "acceptance of the fact that some of our less functional behaviors can be traced back to the parts of us that didn't quite grow up and the role we begin to play in reparenting ourselves, meeting needs that weren't met earlier and developing new and better life skills" (Ibid). It is a poignant attempt to meet the desire to recapture a lost childhood, or to create one that never existed.

One of the most commercially successful items of the nostalgic teddy bear industry is Spinoza© the Bear Who Speaks from the Heart,™ as a companion to institutionalized, vulnerable populations. This teddy comes embedded with a tape



cassette or CD player for listening to Spinoza's songs for developing self-esteem and self-love. Spinoza's retailers argue that his "gift" is in providing comfort, companionship and love in lieu of family or paid caregivers (Ibid). Spinoza comes with a full line of audio, visual and material products and instructional books for their use with all ages and varieties of dependencies. "His" audio recording, *Good Friends*, has been lauded as providing a person with Alzheimer's confidence in one's self through its message of being, "accepted just the way he/she is" (Spinoza Bear). Facility staff have reported that residents, "will tell the stuffed animal their thoughts and feelings because there just isn't anyone else they feel they can talk to" (Cutler 2004, 10-11). Notwithstanding the comfort that Spinoza brings, it subsequently infantilizes its adult recipients and promotes acquiescence by them of their condition, and of its gifters toward the shortage of alternative, stimulating human interactions.

Despite Spinoza's lack of interactive responsiveness, its promotion as meaningful support personnel raises moral and ethical issues. Sherry Turkle poses important questions about the use of interactive robots for supportive companionship and assisted living in relation to resolving emotional alienation She asks:

Do plans to provide relational robots to children and the elderly make us less likely to look for other solutions for their care? If our experience with relational artifacts is based on a fundamentally deceitful interchange (artifacts' ability to persuade us that they know and care about our existence) can it be good for us? Or might it be good for us in the "feel good" sense, but bad for us in our lives as moral be-

ing? [. . .] These questions ask what *we* will be like, what kind of people are *we* becoming, as we develop increasingly intimate relationships with machines (Turkle 2006, 3, emphasis in original).

### The Limits of Symbolic Love

If teddy bears ruled the world,  
Oh my, what a wonderful place.  
Everyone would be happy.  
There would be a smile on every face.  
(Miner 1997)

The teddy bear brings melodramatic pleasure to adults because it exists for the purpose of returning the supposed gift of human love received from Roosevelt on that terrifying day in the 1902 swampy canebrake of the Mississippi Delta. In its role as redeemer, the teddy retains the paternalistic function of its presidential namesake. This questionable message is assumed by adults to be an acceptable response to social injustice. One example, of many, of its transmission to children and thereby its cultural acceptance and reproduction, is found in the 2002 illustrated book, *The Teddy Bear* (McPhail 2002). This story tells of a young boy whose teddy, when it is left behind at a restaurant, is thrown into the trash. A homeless – nameless – man finds the teddy. During the night he sleeps with it in dumpsters, and during the day cradles it in his arms on a park bench. One day the man leaves the teddy on a bench, "while he looked for something," Ibid) and the little boy finds it. Joyously, he and his family retrieve the bear. When they see the homeless man approaching they quickly move away; but when they hear his child-like "wailing" (Ibid) for the bear, the boy runs back and gives him the teddy. The man

is comforted, as an infant would be, taking up the toy with a smile and hugging it. The final illustration shows, without intended irony, the man stopped along the park path with the teddy bear in one arm, and bag of belongings in the other, evaluating the worth of items in a garbage can. The not-so-implicit message, given that the adults have avoided contact with the homeless man, is that he, and others of his ilk, can be emotionally content with a teddy bear in place of real human contact.

The emotional bond of enthusiasts to the artifact's function as an emissary of hope is considered by them as neither a personal preference nor a culturally-produced phenomenon, but as inherent in the object. Its devotees regard the teddy as being, "a truly international figure that is non-religious and yet is universally recognized as a symbol of love and affection" (as quoted in Maniera 2001, 144). Thus, adults project meanings onto the teddy as having real affective possibilities, for instance by, "providing hope for children worldwide...one teddy bear at a time" (*Teddy Bears for Hope*). The outcome for individuals is an alienation of the emotional self as well as a disunity at the level of social interactions (Seeman 1959).

Through magical thinking the teddy bear has become a proto-human infant the presence of which alleviates suffering. Teddy bear gifting provides a sense of personal benevolence and bestows upon its adherents a state of mystical innocence. This inducement of self-representation through the commercialization of emotions (Longman 1992, 112) results in a metaphysical transcendence of, rather than confrontation with, the realities

of an alienated life. In wrestling with the problem posed by a teddy bear culture that confuses thingness with humanity, we need to answer the question, "If teddy isn't there, does anyone care?" with Turkle's admonishment that, "simulated feeling is never feeling. Simulated love is never love" (Turkle 2006, 2). Notwithstanding the importance this soft-cloth toy has for many persons' emotional and personal lives, teddy bear culture denies the very essence of human relationships desired by its members.

### Notes

1. While there have been arguments that the caption and drawing refer to Roosevelt's stance against lynching, with the neck-roped bear representing African Americans. However, there is more evidence against than for this argument; in fact, Roosevelt maintained that African American males were prone to engage in rape, that lynching was a suitable punishment, and that taking a leadership role against it would only destroy his political career (Sinkler 1972, 420; 430-34). In addition, Berryman's cartoon oeuvre caricatured African Americans.
2. Steiff began producing stuffed wild animal toys from 1880. However, at the time it produced the first stuffed toy bear its primary manufacturing product was still felt (Pfeiffer 2005; Varga 2009a).
3. Berryman's "Bruin" has not yet been properly historicized. Its popularity as a political and social interpreter indicate that it was more than a likeable comic character, but was afforded significance as a cultural authority along the lines of what Lears' has identified as the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries' elevation of "simple and childlike rusticity" (Lears 1994, 57) to a therapeutic lifestyle. Lears' analysis provides key insights for understanding how Berryman

could determine the viability of transforming Bruin, within two months, of its origin, from being a wild adult bear, to a human-like cub without its losing, and perhaps its even gaining, such authority, especially through its relationship to Roosevelt. The link between Lears' denoting of American therapeutic culture of that early period, and the therapeutic culture discussed in this paper has still to be worked out.

4. This teddy bear story is also interesting because of the period's emphasis on the need for white males to demonstrate hyper-masculinity that would protect the white "race" from degeneration (Bederman 1995). Theodore Roosevelt was an exemplar of the "strenuous life" devoted to countering what he deemed to be the deleterious effects of sentimental femininity on white boys, especially those of the social elite (Lears 2009; Roosevelt 1900, see especially Chapter X, "The American Boy").

5. This does not mean that adult popular culture was devoid of teddy bear imagery (see, for example, Hillier 1985) but these were primarily in the form of comic foil that extended the long history of bears in sites of entertainment (Brunner 2007) to satiric association with Roosevelt, rather than as the serious contender for adult emotional intimacy that they would become, and that they already were in childhood culture.

6. The symbolism of the teddy bear within AIDS activism is more complex than can be discussed here and is deserving of its own article.

7. Of course, not all persons who are recipients of such "gifts" are comforted by them, and the practice can be absurd. For instance, I have been advised about the experiences of workers at community homes for adults with developmental challenges, who upon being presented with teddies on the sudden death of a resident, were surprised and discomfited, rather than comforted by the action. However, a lack of positive responsiveness

by "non-believers" does not eliminate the existence of a teddy bear culture as discussed in this paper. The distribution of the toy regardless of its propriety demonstrates the extent to which teddy bear culture has become a normative and bureaucratic practice by some emergency personnel and agencies.

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# Responses

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**O**n an overnight layover in London at a hotel near Heathrow airport, I took a needed walk after an eight-hour flight. In this placeless landscape, I happened upon a soaking wet teddy bear affixed to a mesh fence on a bridge at the airport's entrance. Instantly, I knew I was in the presence of a memorial—someone had perished at or near this spot, or perhaps on a flight that originated from, or was bound for, Heathrow. Indeed, I found "We miss you, Micky!" scribbled in black marker on the fence nearby. An unmistakable symbol of specialness, this teddy bear infused an otherwise dreary, run-of-the mill site with sentiment.

Donna Varga's piece offers a way to comprehend how it is that a plush bear would become such a readily recognizable symbol of loss and object of comfort with her historically informed analysis of the making of this icon of sentiment and sentimentality. We learn from her about the muddled origins of the teddy bear story and the making of it into a modern myth whereby President Teddy Roosevelt's actions are rendered magnanimous in the journalistic accounts of a particular hunting trip in 1902. But, it was when the soft, cuddly bruin subsequently was brought under the auspices of factory production that the mythological status of the teddy bear transformed into a negotiable symbolic currency. As the features of the plush toy became standardized by mass production, so too did its association with childhood innocence, taking on, as Varga notes, a



kind of protective aura as it became a gift given to soothe children (and others) during crises. Varga's analysis here opens up interesting avenues of inquiry into thinking about the relationship between commodity, mythological production and consumption. It also points the way to considering how narratives may become congealed, transformed, or preserved in material forms; shared and exchanged on a large scale only when mass produced.

In the same instance, unfortunately, the perspective brought to bear on the role and place of the teddy bear in emotional life evinces a myopic view of what commodities and promotion can and can't do and what people

can and can't do with them. Strewn throughout Varga's essay are strong statements—unsupported with evidence or that appeal to a reader's sense of likelihood—regarding how the teddy bear was received and what it has meant to children and adults over the course of the century. For instance, the reader is told that the teddy provided parents with an object they could give their children to satisfy "their own emotional needs to experience the world as new and joyful." As well, children learned "moral lessons" from the extension of the teddy bear's protective status. In the end, Varga asserts, the teddy bear has been made into an object of therapeutic culture as in, for instance, the way it was used as part of the emotional comfort extended to AIDS patients and to those affected by the Oklahoma City and September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

My concern with these interpretations has little to do with their truth value or the extent to which they reflect some reality. No doubt, the teddy bear has taken on iconic status, infused perhaps with a good measure of therapeutic power. The concern I have, rather, centers on the way that Varga presents these (and other) uses and meanings of the teddy bear as singular, primary, and essentially exhaustive of the object's uses and meanings. In laying out the historical trajectory of this cultural object as becoming an increasingly unified, shared *public* symbol of comfort, Varga presumes to know/theorizes the place of the teddy bear in the everyday emotional life of people in their less public, more local contexts and settings. This theoretical extension is made possible by an adherence to a clearly present but

unstated belief that, once commercialized, an object retains some kind of taint that renders inauthentic most any practice associated with it.

Varga thus sees the teddy bear primarily and ultimately as an artificial symbol-object that "replaces real social and political engagements with a dehumanizing relationship to things." It is artificial because it was borne of, and exists in, the realm of commercial goods and commodity production. She reads acts of children and adults alike to offer the teddy bear as a gesture of comfort (or sympathy or communion) as evidence that that they understand it to have magical powers which, in the end, "results in a metaphysical transcendence of, rather than confrontation with, the realities of an alienated life." The elisions and presumptions made here are manifold. It is entirely plausible that many who gift the bear understand very well in their own terms that "it" is not "magical" in itself, but that it is the gesture, the very expression of sentiment to known and unknown others—aided by a shared, known icon—that constitutes the social magic of human relationality. That the bear was at one time a commodity need not completely preempt the meaning and intent of actions made with it.

In seeing sentiment that is expressed with commercial products as inauthentic and co-opted, Varga thereby forecloses analysis right at the point when it could yield important insights. Work by Appaduari (1986) and Kopytoff (1986) on the social biography of things suggests that something produced as commodity need not retain that status and can be transformed by the social lives and social processes in which it is embedded. As



well, Douglas and Isherwood (1979) and Zelizer (2005), in their own ways, demonstrate how social relations and social uses of things can frame goods which are then not necessarily trapped in semantic confines of their original production.

To be sure, it is important and necessary to retain a critical stance with regard to the interests and forces of commercial production. One need not be Pollyannaish about the power and reach of capitalism when advocating for multi-vocal, polysemous readings of commercial goods and related practices. A critical stance, however, that also theorizes social actors as merely duped by capital and who cannot see through the haze of commodity fetishism does not assist in extending understanding because it does not engage with the local, grounded hows and whys of material and symbolic consumption. I do not know the details of what inspired those to memorialize Micky at Heathrow with a teddy bear, but I certainly would not presume their gesture and sentiment to be artificial because their chosen symbol once had economic exchange value.

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## Teddy Bear Culture[s]

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Donna Varga's "Gifting the Bear and a Nostalgic Desire for Childhood Innocence" expands upon her earlier work on the development and social history of the teddy bear toy, as it appears in "Teddy's Bear and the Sociocultural Transfiguration of Savage Beasts Into Innocent Children, 1890–1920" (Varga 2009). Here, however, she goes much further. Varga analyzes adult attachment to the stuffed animal, provides us with some theories as to the nature of that attachment, and ultimately states that the "'gifting' of teddy bears to adults and children in response to social or personal crises denies possibilities for meaningful human interactions and social change."

Overall, the essay provides much food for thought. The material on late nineteenth and early twentieth century concepts of "animal-child symbiosis" that Varga provides serves the essay well, and she substantiates this exposition with close analysis of relevant literature and illustrations. These sections contribute to a growing body of work on the changing views of the child and the concept of childhood innocence. Also of interest is Varga's explanation of how the image of Teddy the president became wedded to the image of teddy the soft toy, both of which seem to have fanned the flames of each other's public appeal, particularly in the United States.

Furthermore, her essay pays particular attention to the phenomenon of using teddy bears to commemorate national tragedies. I am encouraged to see this topic receiving scholarly treatment, as this memorial practice seems to be a lightening rod: its ability to bind some people together during crisis seems equally matched by its ability to repulse others. Varga's essay is representative of how the practice appears to the observers in the latter group.

I would like to address two issues that come up in the reading of Varga's essay: the question of "culture[s]" in the context of teddy bear use and the question of causality with regard to various factors that influence the use of the teddy bear. As someone involved in both cultural studies and folkloristics, I would enjoy seeing the topic that Varga names "teddy bear culture" expanded upon further. For example, does the essay's phrase "teddy bear culture" apply primarily to North American bear owners, to all English-speaking owners, to all teddy bear owners exposed to capitalism anywhere, or to an actual subculture that varies its practices according to region?

If there is such a thing as "teddy bear culture," in the sense of a subculture of doll collectors who own, buy, display, repair, alter, make, give, and promote teddy bears, then there will be even more material to explore in the future. Varga offers proof of it being a self-sustaining folk group by listing some in-group terms used among English-speaking adherents. In-group jargon, as Alan Dundes notes in his work helps members affirm group identity and helps create awareness of who is, or is not, part of the group (Dundes 1989, 30–31). Such terminology

exists within any folk group, as I note in my own work on different groups of doll owners. My book *Doll Culture in America* (under development with University Press of Mississippi) shows that there are many Americans who creatively express their identity through the medium of dolls (including soft toys like teddy bears) and that they constitute a thriving and diverse subculture.

In addition, examining teddy bear practices from the point of view of material culture studies or folklore would mean accounting for the first-person insights of members of that culture. That, in turn, would mean spending time in the field, as I have, talking to actual teddy bear owners. When one talks to teddy bear owners in person and reads their own accounts and documents closely, one finds that “teddy bear culture,” as interpreted by those who practice it in the United States, places great emphasis on person-to-person relationships.

I would venture to say that teddy bear owners number among the most socially active, as well as socially aware, of doll group participants. In one set of circumstances mentioned in the essay, for instance, 9/11 drives focused heavily on raising funds for victims’ families (*Teddy* 2002, 12; Clay 2002, 144). In this case, Marianne Clay writes, Teddy bear web sites and mailing lists “whose topics are normally restricted to bears” were “filled with prayers, outpourings of sympathy and support, queries and reassurances about the safety of friends, and news of candlelight vigils, bear giftings, and relief efforts. In places where phone service became difficult, online bulletin boards provided the best way for some people to assure family

and friends of their safety” (Clay 2002, 144). Note that “bear giftings” take only a subordinate role in the outpouring of support. In other words, as other doll collectors, doll groups, and group-related writings I’ve studied over the last few decades have stressed, whatever doll a group emphasizes becomes a means for interaction, a portal for human contact. The contacts that doll people have with each other, which originate in the practice of their hobby, can turn into sources of practical and emotional support.

This essay, as well as Varga’s prior work on teddy bears, provides a start to addressing the actual practices of teddy bear culture(s). Future treatments will be even more helpful if readers could see teddy bear cultures, especially with regards to the memorial use Varga describes, placed in comparative context with folk practices, such as mourning rituals, as examined by folklorists. When placed in that broader context, the material culture aspect of teddy bear use may come across as less alarming. If the *mementi mori* habits of nineteenth century New England, for example, had been taken up by the mass media and mass production techniques of the last twenty years, might we have seen piles of synthetic hair embroideries left by Ground Zero instead?

My point is that this essay opens the door to additional intriguing possibilities when examining the teddy bear phenomenon, beyond that of the influence of Teddy Roosevelt as a paternalistic “redeemer” of nature-children.<sup>1</sup> Varga spends time discussing the power of the media with a close eye towards the myriad ways popular and political culture fed on each other at

the time. But prying into media history a little further, if we take into account the amazing growth of media power in Western societies from the turn of the century onward, coupled with the West's growing ability to distribute the first generation of mass-produced soft toys across multiple borders, we can ask what the effects of these forces were on any mourning ritual with the power to comfort large numbers of people.

Regarding the question of causality, tracing the power of the teddy bear back to its namesake's influential tale represents only part of the story. If the Roosevelt-as-redeemer story had, in fact, given birth to the peculiar staying power of the teddy bear, as Varga argues, then how should we regard the examples of British and German teddy bear culture sprinkled throughout the essay? Teddy Roosevelt would have been seen as much less of a "redeemer" outside of America.

While most of the popular and literary sources cited in the essay are American, the impact of the first mass-produced soft toy came from Germany. The Steiff family's application of a short pile plush fabric to assembly line production changed everything. As Wendy Lavitt's *American Folk Dolls* (1982) and Max von Boehn's *Dolls and Puppets* (1956 [1929]) demonstrate, soft playthings have been made and cherished by children in the West and elsewhere long before mass production, but the Steiff family's innovation was to take what was once a private artifact and put it on public display in stores and catalogs in multiple countries (Cross 1997, 8). The Steiffs were influential in four ways: in introducing plush animals into mass production, in popularizing soft toys that could be used

by either boys or girls at a time when children's playthings were segregated by gender, in enabling the toys to hold expressive poses, and in hitting upon one animal form that struck a cross-cultural, cross-gender, and more highly anthropomorphized note than any other (Pfeiffer 2005, 17-59; Cross 2004, 54; Cross 1997, 95; Calvert 1992, 117).

In fact, the details of the production history of the teddy bear make me wonder about the chain of causality set up in Varga's essay. While no original bears have survived (the original string joints were too weak), Steiff does have records that show the development of the bear from a fierce to a babyish persona. Some of these documents predate the Michtoms'/Ideal's involvement. For instance, Mary Hillier, Günther Pfeiffer, and Leyla Maniera trace the development of Richard Steiff's design for Bär 55PB, known then as "Petsy" (short for *Petz* [Bruin]), to the life study sketches Steiff drew while he was still an art student in Stuttgart before the turn of the century (Maniera 2001, 26-27; Hillier 1985, 21-22; Pfeiffer 2005, 10-13). Hillier claims that Steiff was influenced by one particular bear from the pre-Roosevelt era, a performing bear who would wave at children, and who was trained by one of Steiff's acquaintances (Hillier 1985, 22). The original, somewhat fearsome, Steiff bears were whittled down from the original large bear on wheels in the late nineteenth century, to the more familiar, anthropomorphized bear kingpin skittle in 1892, to the hump-backed, long-armed, string-jointed initial 1902-03 design, and finally to the more "friendly," less wild-looking 1905 disk-jointed design (Pfeiffer 2005, 8-9, 13, 16, 46, 50-52; Maniera 2001,



24-25)<sup>2</sup>. So, if a German company, Steiff, began developing an anthropomorphized soft animal design before Roosevelt went on his famous hunting trip, could there have been multiple forces at work in imbuing the teddy bear “with exceptional status,” as Varga writes?

Therefore, the supposition of a single trajectory of influence and the limited approach to the study of teddy bear owners was where the essay faltered for me, as a reader. I agree that overuse of teddy bears in lieu of person-to-person caregiving would be inappropriate. But singling out such practices as entirely representative of certain folk groups, if we agree to designate “teddy bear culture” as a set of folk groups rather than a malaise, does not provide a complete picture. As cultural critics, folklorists, and anthropologists so often do, perhaps we might step back and take into account that teddy bear users may constitute their own folkloric groups, and therefore acknowledge that these users might carry out folk practices at variance to what might be expected for citizens of North America, Germany, or the United Kingdom. By so doing, we can observe that, like any folk entity scattered among different countries and regions, there is no one type of “teddy bear culture.” In closing, I look forward to reading more from Donna Varga, especially as she makes new discoveries about the culture(s) of the teddy bear. I thank her for this welcome attention to important facets of material culture as they present themselves through the use of soft toys.

### Notes

1. For additional reading of the potential connections between the image of the teddy bear and imperialism, see Donna Haraway (1984-1985) “Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936,” *Social Text*. 11:20-64.
2. The metal rod design was an intermediate, short-lived design from 1905.

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