

<p>Institution: University of Worcester</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 34 - Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory</p>
<p>Title of case study: Supporting multiculturalism through children's book illustration</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>This case study describes the impact of Grobler's practice-as-research conducted through development of illustrations for a book targeted at an international children's readership of 5 to 11 year olds. Providing 'an African retelling' of Aesop's fables and intended to stimulate children's playful engagement with African cultures, the book's and Grobler's illustrations' overt agenda was to promote and promulgate intercultural understanding and multiculturalism. Impact has been achieved through initial publication and international distribution of <i>Aesop's Fables</i> in English and subsequent republication in a further nine editions and six languages in the period. Additional impact was derived from Grobler's invited presentation and discussion of his approach to developing his illustrations in the context of international exhibitions and professional fora in Europe.</p> <p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Grobler's research through practice set out to explore and develop visualisation of a retelling of Aesop's fables from an 'African perspective', responding to the sixth century BC Byzantine scholar Planudes' description of Aesop as a Black man and the fourth century BC Greek historian Herodotus's account of Aesop's life. Illustrations were developed to respond to, and interact with, author Beverly Naidoo's written narratives. As a 21st century contribution to contemporary retellings of the fables, the core aspiration of Grobler, Naidoo and their publisher, Frances Lincoln, was to achieve written narratives and visual images (and textual interplay between them) that would encourage children, internationally, to engage with African cultures, from African perspectives, through the medium of the picture book. This involved contemporary reconceptualization, for children, of stories embedded in the formation of Western culture and widely popularly assumed to be a product of it. Grobler conceived of his task, within the context of this collaborative project, as being to develop illustrations that were informative, elaborative, decorative, confirmative, extensive and purposefully contradictory.</p> <p>In intended playful interaction with Naidoo's written narratives - which incorporated glossaried South African regional dialects and languages - Grobler's illustrations deployed geometric shapes, patterning, decoration and a palette drawn from traditional Southern African cultures. The narratives introduced animals from this region, often echoing European/westernised equivalents conventionally featured in the fables - jackal (fox); warthog (boar); duiker (deer) - and Grobler developed illustrations with the aim of achieving similar visual introduction, quotation and allusion. He sought to reinforce Naidoo's written narratives' 'sense of place' through depiction of: regional vegetation (Tamboti, Acacia, Aloe, Banana); arid landscapes (the Savannah, veld or Karoo); traditional dwellings; elements of regional costume and artefacts (pots, woven carpets); and incorporation of Black human characters exclusively. He set out playfully to destabilise dominant, Western-centric post-colonial tropes of interaction between caricature, folk art and ostensibly 'African' content with the aspiration of sensitising young readers, internationally, to the possibility of the African origin of some of Western culture's most well-known moral tales.</p> <p>A broad context for Grobler's research is provided by the rich, continuous history of illustration of the fables since the advent of the printed book, and similarly longstanding parallel interest in Aesop's 'origins'. Instances of contemporary illustration drawing on or constructing African 'settings' for the fables, however, are rare (eg Richard Johnson's illustrations for <i>The Mouse and the Lion</i> in Saviour Pirotta's 2005 Kingfisher published <i>Aesop's Fables</i> ; Jamal Koram's <i>Aesop: Tales of Aethiopia the African</i>, 1989). In this context, Grobler's project is distinctive and particular: in response to his own, extensive research of the history of Anglophone and Francophone children's picture books in Africa, his eclectic mix of imagery and decoration set out to achieve a textual 'reading' experience that was inherently multicultural in its origins and approach. Conducted in 2009 and 2010, while he was Senior Lecturer in Illustration at the University of Worcester, the research resulted in production of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A cover illustration, portraying, at the front, the presumed originator of the narratives – Aesop –

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as a black man in East-African dress, sitting on the branch of a tree and interacting with a gathering of African animals from the narrative and, at the back, a decorative frame alluding to the patterns of African fabric and accommodating the blurb.

- End papers with decorative frames alluding to the patterns of African fabric, with portrayals of African animals and plants from the narrative.
- Title page and second title page with hand lettering and caricatured portrayal of African animals from the narrative.
- Contents page.
- Double page spread including an address by author Beverly Naidoo and a full-page illustration of the presumed originator of the narratives, Aesop, sitting as slave/hostage on the back of a leopard.
- 21 double page spreads with narratives illustrated as vignettes or block illustrations in decorative frames with hand lettering of titles.

This research built on Grobler's longer-term project to promote, through illustration, multiculturalism and consciousness of narratives derived from so-called "developing countries" (eg illustrations for *Fussy Freya*, 2008, ISBN 978-1-84507-511-8 and *Today Is My Day*, 2003, ISBN 81-86211-76-4). He is currently working on a second project with Naidoo as author, to develop illustrations for a second volume of rewritings of African folk tales, for publication by Frances Lincoln in 2015.

3. References to the research

Aesop's Fables, Beverly Naidoo (author) and Piet Grobler (illustrations), Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2011, 48 pages with 30 colour illustrations, hardback, 270x214mm. ISBN: 9781847800077.

Invited lecture

'Brown Frogs? Thoughts on Africa in Pictures' (focussing on *Aesop's Fables* illustrations), Annual Baltic Meeting of Illustrators, Gdansk, 27-28 October 2011.

Book reviews

Africa Access Review, March 22, 2012: <http://www.africaaccessreview.org/aar/detail.aspx?r=2736>

University of Arizona College of Education International Collection of Children's and Adolescent Literature blog, *Worlds of Words*: <http://wowlit.org/blog/2013/04/22/inquiry-into-cultural-authenticity-in-traditional-literature-aesops-fables/>

Prizes

Aesop's Fables was awarded the USA Parents' Choice Silver Award in 2011 (<http://www.parents-choice.org/aboutawards.cfm>).

Aesop's Fables was included in the USBBY (USA Board on Books for Young People) 'Outstanding International Books' list, 2012 (http://www.usbby.org/list_oibl.html).

4. Details of the impact

Grobler's illustrations appeared in finished form in the book *Aesop's Fables* published by Frances Lincoln (author: Beverley Naidoo; illustrations: Piet Grobler; editors: Janetta Otterbarry and Judith Escreet; pub 2011). Frances Lincoln is the most prominent UK children's book publisher with the overt remit of promoting multiculturalism. The book was subsequently translated into Swedish by Birgitta Gahrton (pub Raben & Jögren, Stockholm), Danish by Vagn Plenge (pub Hjulet), Dutch by Koos Meinderts (pub Lemniscaat, Rotterdam), Afrikaans translated by Kobus Geldenhuys (pub Human & Rousseau, Cape Town), Italian translated by Michela Orazzini (pub Il Leone Verde), and Brazilian Portuguese translated by Isa Mesquita (pub Endicoes SM). The original Frances Lincoln edition of 7,800 copies has been distributed in Australia and the USA as well as the UK, and a second English edition of 3,000, published by Human & Rousseau, has been distributed in Southern Africa. Approximately 30,000 copies of the book were distributed worldwide in the REF period.

In Europe, *Aesop's Fables* received favourable reviews in the UK in the Summer 2011 edition of *Armadillo* magazine, in *Carousel* and in the Winter 2011 edition of *The School Librarian*. Grobler was invited, in the REF period, to exhibit illustrations from *Aesop's Fables* and subsequent work for picture books with African themes in a public exhibition to be held at the Kinderbuchhaus im Schneiderhäusl, Oberndorf in August 2013. Alongside, he was invited to lead a workshop for 12 professional illustrators to explore the re-presentation of 'African' content for a Western readership' (although he was ultimately unable to do so as a result of unanticipated personal circumstances).

In Spain, three illustrations from *Aesop's Fables* together with other examples of Grobler's work were included in a public exhibition, *IllustraMundos*, held at Colegio de Fonseca, Universidad de Santiago de Compostela (1st March-20th May 2012). The exhibition brought together the work of eleven illustrators (Grobler and: Joanna Domanska, Poland; Carme Solé Vendrell, Catalonia; Antonio Seijas and David Pintor, Galicia; Monica Weiss, Argentina; Machiel Braaksma, The Netherlands; Fernando Vilela, Brazil; Elena Odriozola, Basque Country; Kristina Sabaita, Lithuania; Marc Taeger, Switzerland) and, as well as a daily throughput of visitors, attracted 95 organised group visits from primary schools, high schools, associations working with children with disabilities, and professionals associated with the book- and illustration industries. The exhibition web site attracted nearly 14,000 visitors; interviews with each participating illustrator were featured on the Campus Culturae Youtube channel (the University's TV channel accessible to the entire university community and its visitors), with a recorded 2,256 people watching Grobler's interview. The Facebook site for the exhibition received nearly 7,000 visits. The exhibition was funded by The Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency of the EU (EUROPA – EACEA). In January 2014, the University of Santiago de Compostela will open the Museo Internacional de la Ilustración – a virtual museum of picture book illustration, including three of Grobler's *Aesop* illustrations on long-term loan.

In The Netherlands, the Dutch version of *Aesop's Fables* (published as *De Hond, de Haan en de Jakhals*) was reviewed in the magazine, *Leesgoed* (No 6, p42, 2011), in the weekly newspaper *Het Goede Leven* (review, Jant van der Weg, 11 November 2011, p20) with a weekly distribution of over 3,000, and in the newspaper *Sneins Petiele* (5 November 2011, p27), with a weekly distribution of 20,000 copies in Friesland. There was a review www.jaappleest.nl (18 October 2011) by Jaap Frisio, radio journalist and jury member of Woutertje Pieterse and Brabantse Jeugdliteratuur literary awards. The September 2011 newsletter of the quarterly magazine, *ZAM Africa* offered copies of the book to all new members and the daily newspaper *Volkskrant* (6 August 2011, p76) included a review by Pjotr van Lenteren (*In de Afrikaanse fables van Aisopos is de vos een jakhals*). The paper's daily distribution is over 263,000 copies. A chapter of the book including one of Grobler's illustrations was printed *Entoentoen* (January 2012), a bi-monthly magazine designed to promote reading which sells some 5,000 copies per issue via subscription to children's book-stores and public libraries in the Netherlands.

In the USA, *Aesop's Fables* was reviewed by Maria Tatar in the *New York Times, Sunday Book Review* (10 November 2011) and by Prof Barbara Lehman in the online magazine *Africa Access* (22 March 2012), a magazine with the remit of helping schools, public libraries and parents improve the quality of their children's book collection on Africa. It also received reviews in *Kirkus Reviews* (1 Oct 2011; online, 14 Sept 2011), was the recipient of a Parent's Choice Silver Award, 2011 and was included on the USBBY (US Board on Books for Young People) list of outstanding books in 2012.

In South Africa, 6,000 copies of *Aesop's Fables* have been sold in Afrikaans and English. It was reviewed in the *Pretoria News*, which has a daily circulation of over 100,000 (9 January 2012) and *The Citizen (CitiVibe* section, 8 September 2011) which has a daily circulation of 443,000. It was the subject of an article in the monthly women's magazine, *Sarie* (21 September 2011), which has a monthly circulation of 103,700.

Aesop's Fables has been bought extensively by libraries, internationally, thereby significantly extending the reach of its impact: 1,000 copies by libraries in the UK; 320 by libraries in Denmark and many more in Sweden; 1,235 by libraries in the USA and in Brazil.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Prof Thomas van der Walt, former Board member, International Research Society for Children's Literature; Editor, *Mousaion: South African Journal for Information Studies*; Editorial Board member, *Sankofa. A Journal of African Children's and Young Adult Literature*; founder and Board member, *Bibliodef South Africa*; founder and organiser of annual Unisa Storytelling Festival for children, University of South Africa. (The significance of Grobler's *Aesop's Fables* illustrations to the role played by children's books in promoting multiculturalism and intercultural understanding).

Janetta Otter-Barry, publisher of Janetta Otter-Barry Books, an imprint of Frances Lincoln Children's Books, and publisher of *Aesop's Fables*. (The importance of Grobler's work on *Aesop's Fables* to the educational 'project' of Frances Lincoln Children's Books, the largest UK publisher of children's books overtly committed to supporting diversity and multiculturalism; the global reach, impact and standing of *Aesop's Fables*).

Liz Page, Executive Director, International Board on Books for Young People. (The significance of Grobler's *Aesop's Fables* illustrations as a contribution to multicultural education through children's books and children's reading; the significance of the illustrations to discussion amongst those professionally involved in the production, distribution and use of children's books – publishers; writers; illustrators; librarians; teachers – of children's engagement with books and reading and the value and nature of that engagement to contemporary society and individual development).

Prof Xose Antonio Neira Cruz, Faculty of Communication & Media, Santiago de Compostela, Spain, Director of the EU-funded, pan European *campUSCulturae* project to support minority cultures and languages and multicultural exchange, housed by the University of Santiago de Compostela, and organiser of the associated *IllustraMundos* exhibition. (The contribution made by Grobler's *Aesop's Fables* illustrations to a major public exhibition of world illustration addressing multiculturalism and intercultural tolerance; the peer recognised international quality of Grobler's research and its public impact through book publication, including publication of *Aesop's Fables*).