

# Innocence Lost and the Landscapes of Darkness: Shedding light On Embedded Political Themes in Illustrated Narratives

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**Abstract.** This paper addresses the depiction of themes of Imperialism and Colonialism in Twentieth Century Children and Adult Narratives and explores the relationships between historical, political and social events and their impact on the writers and Illustrators who reflected such attitudes of the time. Underpinned by theoretical perspectives of writers including Edward Said, Chinua Achebe, Ariel Dorfman and Herbert Kohl, an exploration of both covert and overt themes embedded within narratives is undertaken and discussed. Analysis of books including the Babar stories and *Tin Tin In The Congo* questions the offensive representations of Africans and asks whether such representations should be suppressed with regards to the contemporary audience. Illustrator Catherine Anyango and writer David Zane Maikowitz' interpretation of Joseph Conrad's *Heart Of Darkness* in the form of a graphic novel is discussed as an important testament to the darker truths of the white European occupation of The Congo and another, more recently illustrated version of Conrad's novel by Sean Mc Sorley is also explored. The paper analyses these classic tales through a 'Post – Colonial' lens.

**Keywords.** Imperialism, Colonialism, Children's Narratives, Babar, Tin Tin, Edward Said, Joseph Conrad, Herbert Kohl, Catherine Anyango, Sean Mc Sorley, Ariel Dorfman, Chinua Achebe, Congo.

## Introduction

Illustrated books often contain themes that are reflective of social and political ideologies of the time, sometimes these themes are transparent, clearly communicated and included as an intentional attempt by writers to expose their readers to emergent progressive thinking and movements and to radical ideas not yet accepted in the main stream. Such themes are described in the book *Radical Children's Literature* by Kimberley Reynolds in which she states that children's literature has often been the catalyst for social and intellectual change. In such groundbreaking books subjects may cover challenging themes, which amongst others may include feminist perspectives, domestic abuse (as represented in the powerful picture book *Angry Man* by Svein Nyhus) and environmental and activist issues. Other books have themes and messages embedded within them that are not so explicit and which at the time they were written may have seemed innocent and inoffensive but when revisited and analyzed through a Post Colonial lens, might be reinterpreted and re evaluated in an attempt to uncover particularly unsettling themes. Two such troubling and interconnected themes are those of Imperialism and Colonialism and these will be explored later, in more depth. In *Empire's Children: Empire And Imperialism in Classic British Children's Books*, M. Daphne Kutzer defines the meanings of Imperialism and Colonialism: 'In general, I mean "imperialism" to have a broad and inclusive definition, to include the advocacy and glorification of military force to both expand and maintain the empire; the promotion of the racial superiority of white Europeans, and especially Englishmen, over darker-skinned non-Europeans.' [1] In her description of colonialism Kutzer cites Edward Said's theory that Colonialism comes about as a consequence of Imperialism and furthermore 'the implanting of settlements on distant territory ... the accumulation of colonies, formal or informal, make up an empire.' [2]

The first and subsequent *Babar* books will be discussed in addition to *Tin Tin In The Congo* by Herge, Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart Of Darkness*. These books are used in an attempt to discuss Colonial and Post Colonial perspectives. Although some of the books examined were written at a time of Colonial rule, the Graphic Novel version of *Heart Of Darkness* by Conrad, Anyango and Zane is included in an attempt to open up discussion about sensitive themes which were originally suppressed and to highlight the importance of books which attempt to address brutal injustices.

## Elegant Elephants

The landscapes of Children's literature and picture books are not always constructed as magical worlds that are somehow immune from the impact of political and social events and as their authors are also influenced by world events and consequently internalize these experiences, it seems inevitable that the stories they write might reflect prevailing attitudes and perspectives of the time. Classic books loved by generations of readers that may originally have seemed to be very innocent, when revisited and re evaluated within current historical, social and political frameworks and with the knowledge of hindsight can, from a contemporary perspective, be seen to contain unsettling and offensive content. One such book that has

been read by generations of children drawn to the attractive visual aesthetic and appealing characters and which under the scrutiny of deeper analysis can be seen to contain underlying themes of Imperialism and Colonialism, is the first story in a series that illustrates the journey of the civilization and transformation of an innocent little elephant by the name of Babar. Writers including Ariel Dorfman and Herbert Kohl have analyzed and documented the more troubling aspects of these seemingly charming stories and made visible the uncomfortable allegorical meanings behind the tales of the infant elephant who was made an orphan after his mother was hunted and shot in the African jungle where they once lived peacefully. The first and subsequent books document the radical transformation of the naked infant elephant that over time, adopts the mannerisms of the Bourgeoisie, dresses as a ‘dandy’ and is taught to stand upright like the humans amongst whom he lives. His transformation takes place after he has been removed from both the jungle and his family and taken to live with the supposedly kindly, wealthy ‘Old Lady who lived in the big city’.

‘Babar was written in the same year as the Paris Colonial Exposition (1931), an event that functioned something like a visual report card intended to display the so-called successes of the colonial powers. Each colonizing country was given a pavilion in which to showcase their stories of successful transformation of savages into civilization. France itself shipped in artists, thinkers, and entertainers from its then 47 colonies to entertain the crowds. About 9 million people came to see Moroccan architecture, Madagascar artists, Vietnamese films — all being celebrated as French achievements’ [3]. Chilean born author Ariel Dorfman and progressive American educator Herbert Kohl both analyze and question the themes of Colonialism and Imperialism which run through Babar and other tales written for young children and teenagers, including *The Lone Ranger* and certain Disney animations, containing narratives with uncomfortable themes that the contemporary reader would most likely find unsettling — particularly as the indigenous people of both Africa and America are represented as being without a voice. To address the balance, the Graphic Novel ‘*Heart Of Darkness*’ based on the original novel by Joseph Conrad and reinterpreted by illustrator Catherine Anyango and writer David Zane Mairowitz is also discussed later, as an example of a more conscious ‘Post Colonial’ attempt to explore the violence and horrors of the Belgian occupation of the African Congo and to provide a more truthful visual retelling of historic fact that has often been suppressed, particularly within the context of children’s books and elsewhere in an attempt to distort truth. Another version of Conrad’s classic novel, published by The Folio Society in 2014 and Illustrated by Sean Mc Sorley will also be discussed.

In her book, ‘*Three Centuries Of Children’s Books In Europe*’ first published in 1959, Bettina Hurlimann’s interpretations of the Babar stories are written in a manner perhaps reflective of the time. She describes the first book as being ‘delightful’ and ‘innocent’ and of author De Brunhoff as being attributed with similar characteristics. The innocence she writes of here is a term that is often applied to children and within the context of childhood. Author and Professor Perry Nodelman suggests that children are often represented and responded to as being almost a sub – species who are notably different from adult humans. Hurlimann’s analysis of Babar alludes to the Utopia of *The American Dream* and also suggests that children’s picture books are powerful in the role they play in shaping attitudes and aspirations of the child’s mind, albeit without their understanding or permission. ‘Those children who take such delight in the adventures of an enterprising elephant partake without realizing it in the evolution of an ideal society’ [4]. The ideal society she describes does not acknowledge the harm caused by the hunters’ imposition on the peaceful community of elephants living in the African jungle, neither does she mention the violence perpetrated on Babar’s mother, his losses and the separation from his family and homeland. She suggests that it is Babar himself who is hungry to be civilized and to adopt the ‘superior’ attributes of the human, an interpretation that contradicts the analyses of both Dorfman and Kohl who suggest that there are darker forces at play here. Hurlimann’s perspective also frees the perpetrators from accountability for their actions. Kohl was of the opinion that Babar was covertly coerced into the control of ‘The Old Lady’. Although elsewhere in her description of Babar and De Brunhoff himself, Hurlimann does also seem to contradict her self and acknowledge that the author was perhaps not as innocent as she formerly seems to suggest: ‘People have not often made the attempt of sneaking political ideas into books for such young children,’ and ‘Political didacticism is so neatly camouflaged in his books that it goes unnoticed’ [5].

Figure 1: *Histoire De Babar* – Jean De Brunhoff (1931)

Reading between the lines, another interpretation of the veiled messages encoded in the first Babar book describing the young elephant’s induction into civilization, might be to reevaluate them as an allegory for

Imperialistic impositions in Africa. In a chapter of 'Cultural Readings Of Imperialism ' by Edward Said, Bhikhu Parekh writes about the white European colonization of India and Africa and suggests that many Europeans at that time perceived the Indigenous people as savages - child like and lazy, incapable of moving their societies forward in the ways in which Europe had done, due to their paucity of technologies and being unable to manage their own land and lacking in an understanding of world history. Parekh further states that their own traditions and religious beliefs were deemed vastly inferior to those held by the colonizing Europeans and Christian missionaries. Perceiving the African people to be sub human seemed justification for the arrogant and greedy colonizers to dehumanize the indigenous Africans and feel entitled to take what they wanted from the country with brute force and rule according to their own laws.

Parekh describes how Philosophers John Stuart Mill and John Locke divided human societies into distinct groups - those who were civilized and those who were not. Mill considered most European countries at that time to have reached a certain level of ' maturity '. By contrast non-European societies were all backward ' and their members were in a state of ' nonage ' or ' infancy '. Mill did not think much of Africa, in his words a 'continent without a history since backward societies lacked the capacity for self-regeneration, Mills argued that they needed to be civilized by outsiders ' [6]

Other stories embodying Imperialistic and Colonialist perspectives include 'Tin Tin In The Congo ' by Belgian author and Illustrator George Prosper Remi, whose pen name was Herge. His interpretation of European rule in the Congo, was recounted through the adventures of hero Tin Tin and his trusty companion Snowy, who venture into the Congolese Jungle to impose their superiority and ' civilizing ' presence on the local African communities. Their superior status as white Europeans is suggested almost immediately and within the first few panels of the story. Negative and offensive visual depictions of Africans appear throughout the illustrations. A foreword in the book by translators Leslie-Lonsdale Cooper and Michael Turner state that the young Herge was reflecting colonial attitudes of the time and it soon becomes clear that the superiority of the white characters and paternalistic attitudes they display are reinforced throughout the story and that these are characteristic of colonialist themes. 'Tin Tin in The Congo ' was originally serialized in the children's supplement to 'Le Vingtieme Siecle ' in 1931 and was soon after available as one continuous story in book format .

One could say that the visual representation of Tin Tin is a caricature, as are other characters in the story, but the depiction of the African faces is particularly troubling, with similar stereotypical features seen in drawings and animations elsewhere at this time. In the image above Tin Tin is dressed in a safari suit wearing the Pith hat and hunting gear associated with the typical colonial white hunter and he is being carried in a sedan by the black characters, to reinforce his status and superiority to them. The lips of the men carrying Tin Tin are drawn as exaggerated large pink ovals and their eyes depicted as round circles wide and staring, which has the effect of an appearance of low intelligence. This representation of the black characters as being inferior to the white character of Tin Tin is troubling from the perspective of a contemporary reader. Elsewhere in the story, even Snowy (*the dog*) is deferred to by one of the African characters who addresses him as ' Master '. Within the first few panels of the story, a black member of the cabin staff of the ship in which Tin Tin and Snowy set sail for the Congo sets the tone for the rest of the tale as he addresses Tin Tin as ' Master ', a clear reference to the ' Master / Slave ' relationship between Africans and Europeans under colonial rule.

In the frames above, we see Tin Tin referring to the African village as being under his (Colonial) rule and the visuals reinforce stereotypical representations of the black characters behaving in a violent manner in order to settle disputes with Tin Tin suggesting that 'they ' are fighting wherever they go. In the second panel, the black boy is judged by the *dog*, Snowy, as not looking ' very bright '. These negative depictions of the Africans casts light on prevailing attitudes of the time.

The works of the popular children's book author Rudyard Kipling, have been subjected to harsh criticism due to Imperialistic themes, most notably seen in his book ' Kim ' set in the 1880's and 1890's. Although very much a reflection of his time, Kipling was born in Mumbai in 1865, died in 1936 and lived for part of his life in India, writing classics including ' The Jungle Book '. More recently, Kipling was described as ' Imperialist '. M. Daphne Kulzalo writes that Kipling's book ' Kim ' is notable for being contextualized within an Imperialistic framework. In the story, Kim is represented as being superior to the Indians in the story regardless of their status or age. He is a light skinned outsider, having been born to an Irish father and then orphaned, he is free of family attachments aside from the woman who brought him up as child –

the owner of an Opium den. Victorians at the time of writing, perceived the Irish to be animalistic and charming and these traits, in addition to others attributed to Kim include his cunning nature. It is worth noting the two covers below, in their representations of Kim – the older version published in the early 1950's visualizes Kim as Indian in appearance, and although one of the boy's positive characteristics was his chameleon - like ability to integrate into a diverse range of cultural groups, the photographic representation more closely represents the skin tone and eye colour of an Irish boy.

Figures 5 and 6: Kim Rudyard Kipling

In his essay 'Kim And Orientalism' Patrick Williams presents a contradictory interpretation from Abdul JanMohamed who, commenting on the novel claims Kipling managed to create 'a positive, detailed, non-stereotypic portrait of colonized people that is unique in colonial literature' [7]. Williams does not share this view and goes on to say that elsewhere in the novel, there is evidence of stereotyping which is extremely damning of Orientalism and he illustrates this claim through his description of the colonizer's perception of Orientals as being duplicitous and renowned for lying. Williams suggests that Kipling depicts Kim as having been negatively influenced by living in India, to the extent that he 'lied like an Oriental' [8] and goes on to make an astonishing comparison: 'The English do eternally tell the truth' [9]. Williams also points out that although the British thought themselves superior to the Indians they ruled and they certainly had more power in terms of money and technologies, their lack of understanding and knowledge of those they had colonized when faced with language, culture and religious practices rendered them inferior. Although Kim's character is drawn as being anti – authoritarian and he is represented as an individual rather than a stereotype, ultimately his actions in the story can be seen to serve British rule.

Like many other stories that cast Europeans as heroes and indigenous people such as Africans or Native Americans as savages, animations, picture books, comic books and film have historically suppressed and over looked key parts of historical narratives that have since then been re evaluated by key political, progressive and philosophical thinkers. One only has to look at the visual representations of a variety of illustrated books written during the Victorian era through to the 1930s and 40s to find non- white, non - European characters depicted as racial stereotypes who are mostly represented as inferior, barbaric and as 'The Other'.

### **Dark Hearts**

Joseph Conrad's controversial novel 'Heart Of Darkness' has been both defended and criticized widely by writers interpreting the challenging themes tackled in the narrative. Although the book is an exploration of colonization and oppression, Edward Said suggests that it is deeply flawed and that Conrad can only see 'a world in which every opposition to the West only confirms its wicked power. What Conrad could not see is life lived outside this cruel tautology' [10].

In a more contemporary retelling of 'Heart Of Darkness' illustrator Catherine Anyango has created a powerful illustrated interpretation of Joseph Conrad's dark representation of the colonization of the African Congo in the form of a Graphic Novel, with text adapted by David Zane Mairowitz and excerpts included from Conrad's 'The Congo Diary' which documents his experience of traveling to The Congo in 1890. The Graphic Novel is published by Self Made Hero and Anyango, working in collaboration with Zane has created a visually foreboding, powerful and oppressive interpretation of the original story through the creation of a series of expressive, atmospheric drawings. Her interest in film and its relationship to illustration is influential throughout and clearly visible in terms of how she designs the layout of the panels and pages; she employs a range of pacing, sequential and cropping techniques to create drama and build tension and works with media including graphite and charcoal to create the granular, almost dream-like images that seem to form in dark clouds on the page, with figures emerging from these and occasionally coming into focus. 'That sets up her aesthetic for the book as a whole: a murky monochrome vision; subliminal connections influenced by avant-garde cinema; surreal mismatches of scale that allude to colonialism's distortions of moral perspective.' [11]

The novel itself, hailed by one leading Conrad scholar as 'one of the most important short novels in the English language' has been strongly criticized by the late Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian author of one of the first novels to be published in which Africans are depicted as complex and multifaceted 'whole' people rather than two – dimensional caricatures. Achebe writes, 'Heart Of Darkness projects the image of Africa as "the other world", the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality' [12]. Achebe suggests that Conrad's

perspectives are channeled through the voice of the narrator Marlow in his story as a device to distance himself from the views of Marlow, but as Achebe points out, Conrad does not offer an alternative viewpoint to either Marlow or any of the other European character's perceptions of the African characters. Marlow, in particular, describes them as 'savages' who make grunting sounds to communicate with one another and whose eyes roll and limbs flail in a frenzy. Narrator Marlow's description of an African who having been trained, helps with a boiler on the ship is very troubling: 'He was there below me and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat walking on his hind legs' [13]. This comparison to a dog walking on its hind legs, brings to mind the infant Babar being taught to walk on his hind legs, during the process of his own 'civilization'.

Through a post-colonial lens and in sharp contrast to Conrad's biased written descriptions of the Africans, Anyango's visual depictions of the Africans offers a more realistic representation in that she humanizes them and unlike Conrad who seems to focus on their dehumanized, savage-like characteristics, highlights their physical vulnerability through portraying them walking in chain gangs, physically cowed and impacted upon through carrying heavy loads, unarmed (unlike their white 'Masters') and wounded with weapons.

Achebe labels Conrad as being racist and points to the regular use of the word 'nigger' and 'savages' in the novel 'Heart Of Darkness'. Descriptions of the Africans as having few other traits apart from being uncivilized and backward, runs counter to Achebe's historical knowledge of a tribe known as the Fang people, living close to the river Congo at that time who were masters of the sculptured form and who created a mask that was given to Maurice Vlaminck in 1905, around about the same time that European Art was being reinvigorated by African Art and also at the inception of Cubism. Achebe refers to the traveler to a foreign country that has a closed mind, alluding to Joseph Conrad's flawed literary creation, Marlow and by association to Conrad, himself.

In a Guardian review of her visual interpretation of 'Heart Of Darkness', Michael Faber extols Anyango's drawing skills and ability to create a sense of dread throughout the book, but suggests that Mairowitz's editing of the text from Conrad's original novel makes the reading somewhat disjointed and that certain key points have been overlooked altogether. The use of the word 'nigger' that Conrad employs with such frequency in the original novel has been censored, perhaps lessening the impact of the obscene dehumanization of the African slaves. Faber further suggests that the Graphic Novel may have been more successful had it been produced as a wordless narrative and criticizes what he feels to be the visual intrusion of the text which detracts from Anyango's atmospheric images, of which he says could successfully stand alone as images in a gallery.

Figures 7 and 8: Heart Of Darkness Joseph Conrad, Catherine Anyango, David Zane Mairowitz (2010)

Catherine Anyango, of Kenyan and Swedish descent explained that she did not object to Conrad's use of the word 'nigger' in the original text, suggesting that he included the word and its frequency of usage to reinforce the dehumanization of the Africans by the Europeans colonizing the Congo – a perspective that has been challenged elsewhere by Chinua Achebe. 'Heart Of Darkness' was Conrad's fictional response to his voyages to the Congo and is a testament to the callous exploitation of indigenous people. The book depicts examples of the historic plundering of the region of the Congo, in this case for Ivory, the widespread exploitation of natural resources and the misuse of the Congolese as slaves, of whom many were murdered, tortured, raped and maimed through the process of colonization. Frantz Fanon gives a powerful description of the impact of the colonizing process: 'Colonial domination, because it is total and tends to oversimplify, very soon manages to disrupt in spectacular fashion the cultural life of a conquered people. This cultural obliteration is made possible by the negation of cultural reality, by new legal relations introduced by the occupying power, by the banishment of the natives and their customs to outlying districts by colonial society, by expropriation, and by the systematic enslaving of men and women' [14].

Based on Conrad's original fictional novel, Anyango and Zane's adaptation takes the reader deep into the heart of the Belgian occupation of the Congo and vividly illustrates the exploitation and violence inherent in this undertaking. In her interpretation of the story Anyango visualizes the brutality of the relationships between master and slave. Her expressive depictions of the black slaves rendered in charcoal, graphite and ink are not caricatures but believable representations of individuals - their vulnerabilities are visible. She depicts them as human beings engaged in a range of activities, bent double bearing heavy loads, following deferentially behind their white 'masters', or chained together with hunters pointing guns at them, a far cry from the caricatured, stereotypical depictions of black slaves in Herge's comic book 'Tin Tin In The Congo' of which Anyango has described as 'ridiculous'.

Anyango's visual depictions of the Congolose are shadowy and ghost like in places, similar to grainy photographs. Images of them include slaves chained together, depersonalized and walking through anonymous landscapes or carrying large, heavy tusks, their faces are often blurred and of less character than the white Belgians, who for the most part are represented in a more detailed style, perhaps to represent and reinforce the Belgian's perceptions of the Africans as anonymous and lacking in individuality. The Africans are often depicted as physically smaller in scale than the Europeans, to amplify the striking contrast of the power dynamics between both groups and the representations of the colonizers often dominate the frame and in some scenes, fill the whole frame.

Anyango and Zane's interpretation explores relationships between the white European perpetrators and the victimized slaves and includes representations that do not gloss over the historical truths of violence, oppression and domination that has been suppressed in earlier representations of the colonization of Africa within the field of much literature for both adult and child audiences. For example, the Babar Stories start with the removal of the young elephant from the Jungle and tell the story of his gradual 'civilization' through his relationship with his benefactor, the 'Old Lady' who teaches him to become an 'adult' in a civilized society. In his book 'The Empire's Old Clothes' author Ariel Dorfman discusses how such narratives contain embedded themes that suggest Africa is metaphorically represented as a child and Europe as an adult and this ties in with the views of writers such as Chinua Achebe. Such narratives have been repeatedly recycled throughout history, with the supposedly 'uncivilized countries' being colonized by white Europeans, who in an attempt to impose their own cultural identity onto a country, systematically undermine the invaded cultures, traditions and practices through the use of force and re education. Psychological, physical and spiritual territories are also invaded, in the case of Africa with the arrival of European missionaries who impose their mostly Christian doctrines upon the Africans, negating the indigenous people's spirituality and beliefs and replacing these with Christian values.

Another, more recent interpretation of Heart Of Darkness, was commissioned by The Folio Society in 2014. The illustrator Sean Mc Sorley won the annual Folio Society competition whilst studying for his MA. His aesthetic is a mixture of mono print and digital collage, which enabled him to create atmospheric and sometimes ambiguous images. Mc Sorley had read the novel whilst studying English Literature at degree level and prior to embarking on his Masters in illustration. The predominant use of the complimentary colours red and green throughout the illustrations, combined with the strategic and limited linear drawings and textures, create unsettling atmospheres and aid in the cohesiveness of the series of images. In places, the rust-like textures have an appearance of blood and it is difficult to know whether or not violence has occurred. There is psychological space within the images for a reader to project them selves into the story and imagine the perspectives of both the African slaves and the Europeans.

### **Suppression Or Inclusion**

Progressive American educator Herbert Kohl, in the provocatively titled 'Shall We Burn Babar?' speaks about revisiting the Babar books as an adult when he had children of his own and recounts having loved them as a child. He now questions the suitability of such books being available to children and this theme will be explored in more depth later, whereby he suggests new directives for exposure to and engagement with these stories. Similar to Dorfman's interpretation of the Babar stories, Kohl is critical of both the embedded themes found within, which run parallel with the colonization of Africa and of the lightly veiled implications that Africans were, to use Rousseau's paternalistic and insulting linguistic terminology, 'Noble Savages' who needed to be civilized and indoctrinated into the ways of the European. Kohl draws attention to a notably disturbing illustration depicting the younger Babar and Celeste driving out of the forest in a car, wearing smart Parisian clothing, whilst his mother follows behind, running naked on all fours. The message at this point is clear, Babar is now newly civilized and has taken on the mantle of the sophisticated white European, whilst his mother is an inferior African who is represented as naked, childlike and uncivilized, running on all fours in a manner similar to a crawling child.

Kohl interprets the character of 'The Old Lady' as being an allegory for Capitalism and power. Babar's creator De Brunhoff does not explain where her wealth comes from, but it is clear that she holds power over Babar as she controls the money and he has none of his own, but is well provided for in terms of food and shelter. Dorfman reinforces this viewpoint further by referencing the visuals which most clearly depict the messages conveyed in the illustrations, 'they form an indispensable nexus between nudity and clothing, between backwardness and development, between the forest and the Old Lady. You could almost say that it is the cruel persecution by men that urges the elephants to depend on her. Only if they progress

will these devastating events not be repeated. Only if they equal Europe, and manifest all the evangelical signs of inclusion in the civilized world, will the executioner, and therefore the victim, vanish. The message is: assimilate. [15] This perspective is shared by Amílcar Cabral, who describes Imperialism as the domination and often genocide of a country's indigenous people by a foreign dictatorial force who impose their values and beliefs and suppress those of the 'other'. 'This, for example, is the case with the so-called theory of progressive *assimilation* of native populations, which turns out to be only a more or less violent attempt to deny the culture of the people in question [16].

'How To Read Donald Duck' an anti-imperialist book written by Chilean authors Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, along with other books containing leftfield political themes, were banned and burned in Chile in the 1970s and many Chilean leftfield authors, artists and thinkers were imprisoned, tortured and sometimes killed for challenging the dominant political thinking at the time. Certain picture books, in particular, were condemned as containing Marxist ideologies. Dorfman and Armand claimed that Disney stories aim to sanitize childhood experiences and that Disney comics and animations are embedded with one-sided imperialist perspectives which indoctrinate children with such values and therefore suppress insight into broader political themes. The writers suggested that children consequently internalize such frameworks for the world and later impose these onto their adult worlds and as a consequence of such indoctrination they propose that such narratives infantilize adults. They claimed that the narratives running through Disney Comics encouraged capitalism, suggested that America was a superior force in the world and encouraged children from other parts of the world to aspire to the American way of life and to reject their own cultures as being inferior. Armand and Dorfman criticized the content and themes as being one-dimensional and of suppressing the more challenging and colourful experiences of childhood.

There are parallels here with the theories of Educator and Philosopher Matthew Lipman, who introduced the concept of teaching Philosophy and critical thinking to young children as an antidote to accepting stories at face value. Lipman used picture books as an analytical tool and encouraged children to discuss and unpick the deeper meanings embedded within certain stories. In his book 'The Empire's Old Clothes', published in 1983, Dorfman revisits his critical analysis of popular culture as imposing a set of rigid perspectives on the reader. He writes, 'Mass Media Fiction, as opposed to Art, leaves hardly any space for interpretation by the audience.' [17]

## Conclusion

In Catherine Anyango and David Zane Mairowitz' retelling of Conrad's 'Heart Of Darkness' we find a narrative which more truthfully reflects the actions of white Europeans in Africa at a point in history where Empires were being built at the expense and suffering of indigenous people and animals. Instead of representing the Africans as barbarous savages, they have been humanized through Anyango's expressive visual representations. They have not been subjected to caricature or visualized as savages, thus making the story and the events that unfold very uncomfortable reading. This interpretation of Conrad's classic novel is powerful because it attempts to tell some rather unpalatable truths about the acquisition of power and wealth by white Europeans. Through a post-colonial lens, Anyango instills in the African characters a humanity missing in both Conrad and Herge's representations.

'In the United States today there is a tendency to reject the insulting racial stereotypes so common in the thirties and forties. Just look at The Travels Of Babar. Remember the cannibals who wanted to devour our King and Queen of the tropical island without realizing that they were dealing with already civilized flesh.' [18] In a revised version of 'The Empire's Old Clothes' Dorfman also points out that for Babar's 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary the original caricatured visual representations of black characters was suppressed. 'This procedure of admitting the negative features, and consigning them to a remote past, can also be found in a large portion of contemporary mass market children's literature, but with a different twist.' [19] Such negative and damning truths were suppressed in stories such as the Babar books, Tin Tin In The Congo and Rudyard Kipling's stories for children. Herbert Kohl, in the concluding chapter of his book 'Shall We Burn Babar? Questioning Power In Children's Literature' recounts a conversation he had about the first story in the Babar series: 'I remember talking about Babar with a friend of mine who is a black South African from Capetown. I showed him the book, and he stopped at the second page, the one where the hunter is shooting Babar's mother. He told me that if children in his community saw that hunter, dressed in safari clothes with his white pith helmet, their response would not be sympathy with Babar and sadness over the death of his mother so much as hatred of the colonial with a gun.' [20]

Kohl finally questions whether the original Babar books should be destroyed, as they are so offensive to Africans, but also questions the validity of such censorship. He suggests an alternative to this, which would be to store them in a private library and allow them to be read by children under supervision by teachers in

an attempt not to suppress history, but as a way to teach and encourage the development of critical thinking skills. In the spirit of the progressive educator of Philosophy Matthew Lipman, Kohl believes in using picture books as a valuable educational tool to open up discussion around challenging themes. Like Lipman, he believes that young children should be taught to evaluate words and pictures critically, rather than taking them at face value. Within the context of group learning, he creates opportunities for children to learn about and question cultural and political themes embedded in stories and enables them to make connections and associations and to read between the lines. Kohl proposes that children intuitively know when a picture book is telling a story that involves inequity but also helps them to address what is missing, as in the scene of the killing of Babar's mother by the hunter. Kohl points out to them the truths that are not being told and in doing so, helps the child gain an understanding of the bigger picture of historically devastating events.

David Zane Morowitz and Catherine Anyango's powerful interpretation of Conrad's 'Heart Of Darkness' , although not suitable for a very young audience due to its highly disturbing content and aesthetic, gives the African slaves a place in history and presents a more accurate picture of their experiences. Anyango highlights the more disturbing language used to describe the Africans in Conrad's original narrative, 'One of the main criticisms of the book is the way that Conrad describes the 'natives' – criminals, enemies, rebels, savages, niggers ... On the surface these are negative, a close reading reveals that he uses the words to draw attention to their hollowness, and undermine the regime that has made them acceptable' [21]. Unlike Achebe, Anyango defends the original book with all its flaws, although she acknowledges the often difficult content, 'It would be sad to dismiss the book on racist terms, because it deals with the complexities of our prejudices towards people. Our attitudes, which are not always as clean cut or as pleasant as we would like to believe'[22]. Her interpretation and acceptance of the story demonstrates a sophisticated psychological understanding of the complexities of human nature and the importance of acknowledging historical truths, no matter how disturbing they might be.

Anyango goes on to question whether or not Conrad's book of the Belgian occupation of The Congo was or was not racist. The character Marlow in the story is an autobiographical representation of Conrad himself and he includes language that would have been used at the time to describe the African slaves. Anyango points out that the white characters are represented in a negative light too, but that the representations are not loaded with linguistic terminology as to render them less than human, as with the Africans. 'By presenting Marlow as a realistic Victorian with unformed views, and avoiding fantasy, he gives the events and horror an extra ring of truth, a weight and authority. Along with the Casement Report, *Heart of Darkness* exposed the true nature of the Belgian occupation to the rest of the world. Thirty years later the ridiculous Tintin in the Congo was commissioned to show the occupation as a great and benign civilising force.' [23] She defends the original novel by suggesting that it was Conrad's intention to show, through the character Marlow, the true horrors of the occupation, whereas Achebe believes that Conrad's views were closely aligned with his fictional narrator.

Author Perry Nodelman takes the theme of colonization further and draws parallels between the Colonialization of Africa by Europeans and that of children's minds by adults. He questions whether children behave the ways they do because of our perceptions of them. 'The irony in that is as obvious as it is depressing: if our thinking about children is an act of colonization, then it is in fact ourselves we are Colonizing, ourselves we are oppressing—albeit at one remove.' [24] Nodelman, commenting on Edward Said's theories about Orientalism , describes the European's perception of Oriental people as the 'other' , inferior and weak and how , in a similar way , adults perceive children as being passive , inferior and weak compared to themselves . He claims that the stories we give our children to read is a form of imperialism in that we, as the adults who are presumably in possession of superior knowledge, write the stories and content that they read and that children themselves play no role in this process. What might be considered to be a 'good' story is one in which the child is taught to be selfless and moral. Perhaps this is why books in which children are portrayed as powerful and expressive, such as in Maurice Sendak's anarchic 'Where The Wild Things Are' were considered to be so threatening that at the time of its first publication, the book was banned from libraries. M. Daphne Kutzer comes to a similar conclusion as Nodelman, suggesting that children are colonized by parents who project their hopes, values and expectations onto them and expect them to uphold these once they reach adulthood . 'But children's texts provide a cultural mirror for adult fears and desires. They are important cultural artifacts and can have a lasting effect ...' [25]

The innocence of childhood may well be a myth, constructed by adults as a denial of the reality of life from a child's perspective – one might also say that the representation Conrad brought to his readers of the African characters in 'Heart Of Darkness' were mythological, but rather than innocents they were represented as monsters. Most children's books are created by adults and are reflective of this mythology of innocence and characters often model behaviours that adults would like to see in children. Progressive



thinkers such as Matthew Lipman and Herbert Kohl suggest that children should play a more active role in the analyses of stories and that they are far more capable of understanding underlying themes such as inequity, than we give them credit for. Stories such as ‘ Babar ‘ were written at a time when uncomfortable themes were not deemed suitable for inclusion or discussion, hence the suppression of the facts of the colonization of Africa and the truth of the brutal killing of Babar’s mother. Information relating to the more uncomfortable facts of Colonization and Imperialism are mostly suppressed in these stories. Like many other stories that cast Europeans as heroes and indigenous people such as Africans or Native Americans as savages, animations, comic books and film have historically suppressed large parts of narratives that are now being called into question. Ariel Dorfman writes about the Lone Ranger stories as an example of narratives that aimed to suppress a more truthful representation of facts and discusses themes including the representations of the passive behaviour of the Native Americans who, according to the storylines in these comics, did not seem to protest at the colonization of their lands.

‘Perhaps what we call "child- hood" is always an imaginative construct of the adult mind, always being moved not only outwards to blind us to our actual perceptions of contemporary children but also backwards into the past, to blind us to our memories of our actual past experiences. Perhaps there never was a childhood as innocent, as creative, as spontaneous as adults like to imagine. Perhaps children are always more like adults than adults are ever able to see. ‘ [26] This exploration of the intertwined themes of Colonialism and Imperialism began with the suggestion that a series of supposedly innocent stories about a young elephant in the African jungle were really an allegory relating to the Colonization of Africa. The journey has taken us to the unsettling territories of Joseph Conrad’s classic ‘ Heart Of Darkness ‘ and the supposedly lighthearted but questionable interpretation of the European colonization of Africa within the playfully rendered story of Tin Tin’s expedition to the African Congo. We have finally landed in the psychological territory of the child’s mind and might now begin to question the impact children’s literature might have on that permeable and malleable space and liken it to the European imposition of values and power onto Non European cultures as a way to understand the power imbalances between adult and child. Progressive thinkers such as Perry Nodelman suggest that the relationship between children and adult authors is Imperialistic in as much as the writers are in a position of power in which they are able to impose their own political, social and moral perspectives and values into the material that children consume and ultimately internalize as their own. In this concluding statement, Nodelman presents us with a challenging question:

‘ By now I’ve persuaded myself that child psychology and children’s literature are imperialist activities; I hope I’ve persuaded you. And most of us at least claim to dislike imperialism. So what should we do about it? What *can* we do about it? ‘ [27]

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