The Colonial Child Hero: Evolution Of Power, Identity, And Representation In Graphic Literature

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Abstract - Children's graphic narratives continue to serve as powerful cultural instruments that shape young readers' perceptions of identity, belonging, and difference. This paper examines how colonial ideology persists and evolves by analysing three influential works from different historical moments: *The Adventures of Tintin*, *Hilda*, and *Amulet*. While *Tintin* openly encodes imperial superiority through racial caricature and civilisational hierarchy, *Hilda* represents a seemingly progressive shift in which the Other, trolls, elves, and giants are reimagined as benign and adorable, yet still positioned as emotionally volatile communities requiring guidance from the white child protagonist. *Amulet* extends this logic into twenty-first-century fantasy, embedding racial ordering and humanitarian conquest within transmedia world-building and the chosen-child narrative. Across these texts, the child hero remains the central arbiter of morality, knowledge, and civilisation, while non-human or non-Western figures are regulated through rescue, assimilation, or domestication. Drawing on Cultural Studies and postcolonial theory, particularly the work of Stuart Hall, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Perry Nodelman, the paper traces a genealogy of the colonial child hero and argues that contemporary children's media does not abandon colonial ideology but normalises it through affect, empathy, and fantasy. The study foregrounds graphic storytelling as an active cultural archive that transmits power relations to new generations of readers.
Keywords: Cultural Studies; Orientalism; Othering; Children's Literature; Graphic Narratives; Colonial Imagination; Representation

I. Children's Graphic Narratives, Culture, and the Colonial Imagination

Children's literature has long functioned as more than a site of entertainment or moral instruction; it operates as a powerful cultural apparatus through which ideas of identity, belonging, and difference are introduced and naturalised at an early age. Within Cultural Studies, childhood is increasingly understood not as an innocent or apolitical category, but as a deeply ideological space where dominant social values are rehearsed, internalised, and transmitted. Graphic narratives aimed at children, in particular, combine visual and verbal modes to produce meanings that often appear self-evident, emotionally persuasive, and resistant to critical scrutiny. The evaluation of children's literature raises the concern that this genre remains tainted by colonial ideology, even in texts that present themselves as progressive, inclusive, or culturally sensitive.

Drawing on three influential graphic narratives from different historical times in the calendar, Hergé's *The Adventures of Tintin*, Luke Pearson's *Hilda* series, and Kazu Kibuishi's *Amulet*, the paper traces the evolution of what may be termed the colonial child hero. While the overt racial hierarchies of early twentieth-century colonial texts have transformed but the building pillar and structure of power remains consistent. The grand similarity in the selected narratives, the child protagonist is positioned as the moral, epistemic, and

civilisational centre of the story. In the contrast, every other character from the protagonist, the racialised, non-Western, or non-human figures are rendered as Others who must be corrected, guided, domesticated, or assimilated. Over time it is not the presence of colonial logic, but the representational strategy through which it is communicated that is changed. Cultural Studies examines this persistence of colonial ideology in children's media. Stuart Hall emphasises that representation is not a neutral reflection of reality but an active process of production and fixation of meaning. An ideological work is created repeatedly by associating images, narratives, and symbols with certain bodies, spaces, and behaviours with normalcy, authority.

Panels, framing, colour palettes, and character design subtly guide the reader's emotional responses, shaping perceptions of who belongs, who leads, and who must be managed. Edward Said's theory advances and illuminates how representational practices operate and settle. Orientalism, as Said argues, is a knowledge system that constructs the Orient or a non-Western world as inferior, irrational, exotic, or dangerous in contrast to a rational, progressive West. While Said's work focused primarily on adult literature, art, and political discourse, its implications are equally relevant to children's culture. In graphic narratives for young readers, Orientalist logic often appears in softened or symbolic forms: through caricature in early texts, through fantasy creatures and mythical races in contemporary works, or through imagined worlds that reproduce civilisational hierarchies under the guise of adventure and empathy.

The transition from explicit colonial propaganda to subtler forms of ideological reproduction is central to this study. Hergé's *Tintin* series represents what may be described as the high colonial moment of children's literature. In texts such as *Tintin in the Congo*, racial hierarchies are overt, caricatured, and unapologetic. European knowledge is positioned as universal truth, while colonised peoples are infantilised, ridiculed, or depicted as incapable of self-governance. Violence, surveillance, and control are framed as necessary components of civilising the colonial space, and the child hero becomes the ideal vehicle through which imperial authority is rendered innocent and benevolent. By contrast, Luke *Pearson's Hilda* series emerges within a post-colonial, liberal-multicultural cultural moment that explicitly rejects overt racism. At first glance, *Hilda* appears to challenge hierarchical thinking through her emphasis on empathy, coexistence, and respect for difference. A closer reading reveals a subtler form of colonial logic at work. The non-human beings like trolls, spirits, elves and other mystical creatures are coded as emotionally volatile, culturally rigid, or politically immature. Every character and being in *Hilda* remain dependent on the leading character, the child hero which is a white child to mediate conflicts and restore order. Through emotional intelligence, reason, and moral authority, qualities consistently embodied by Hilda, power is exercised while being subtle and open. This is known as Soft-Colonialism where control is not achieved through force and law or making one feel and prove inferior but through empathy and inclusion rather than force. Kazu Kibuishi's *Amulet* series extends this logic into 21st-century literature and shows the evolution and customisation of the intent in the globalised fantasy landscape. Set in world populated by different species and cultures, *Amulet* seems to celebrate diversity and hybridity. The narrative structure continues to stay inclined to privilege the human child hero as the rightful leader and moral centre of this complex universe. Emily, the protagonist of the graphic novel series *Amulet,* is selected as the bearer of the amulet is framed as destiny and not given any lawful or rationalistation or inclusion of a political choice, naturalising her authority and legitimising her intervention, valuing non-human lives only if they align with the human child hero. In *Amulet*, the colonial ideology is reframed as humanitarian

responsibility where intervention, control, and even violence are justified as necessary for the greater good.

Child hero as a civilising and enlighten figure is persistent across these texts, which highlight the concept of the "hidden adult" in children's literature. Ideological frameworks beneath narratives of innocence and adventure, children's texts inevitably reflect adult assumptions about the world. Childhood culturally associated with purity, morality, and trustworthiness enables the figure of the child hero to become a vehicle for ideological transmission. When power is exercised by a child, it appears natural, deserved, and non-threatening. The Other is never entirely excluded it is simultaneously feared and desired, embraced and controlled driven by the idea of ambivalence and mimicry. In *Hilda* and *Amulet*, this ambivalence manifests through characters who are lovable yet unruly, powerful yet in need of guidance. As a colonising ground, inclusion is offered on the condition of not challenging the authority and manner of the central protagonist. Hybridity, rather than destabilising power, becomes a means of managing it. Sara Ahmed's work on affect helps explain why these narratives are so effective. Emotions such as empathy, fear, affection, and concern are not neutral responses but cultural forces that shape political attachments. By encouraging young readers to feel sympathy for the Other while simultaneously accepting the authority of the child hero, these texts produce what may be called affective consent to inequality. The reader learns to care without questioning who holds power.

By bringing together Cultural Studies, postcolonial theory, and children's literature criticism, this paper positions children's graphic narratives as active cultural archives that transmit evolving forms of colonial ideology. Rather than marking a departure from imperial thinking, contemporary texts reveal how colonial logic adapts to new historical conditions, becoming more subtle, more emotional, and therefore more difficult to detect.

II. Tintin and the Colonial Pedagogy of the Child Hero

Hergé's *The Adventures of Tintin*, particularly *Tintin in the Congo* (1931), stands as one of the clearest examples of colonial ideology embedded within children's graphic narratives. Created during the height of European imperial expansion and Eurocentric knowledge development. The text functions not merely as a reflection of colonial attitudes and now in the current time the intention of Eurocentric discourse, as an active pedagogical tool that introduces young readers to racial hierarchies, civilisational binaries, and the moral legitimacy of European domination. Hergé constructs a colonial world-view wherein Europe occupies the centre of discourse and controls reason, authority, and knowledge, while the colonized world is rendered childish, chaotic, and dependent. Tintin white European reporter, is positioned as morally incorruptible, intellectually superior, and universally competent. His childhood is not incidental; it is precisely what enables colonial authority to appear innocent and benevolent. As Perry Nodelman reminds us, "children's literature is an ideological form, deeply implicated in shaping children's understanding of the world and their place within it" (*The Hidden Adult*). Tintin's authority is never questioned or objected within the narrative, it is reinscribed through repeated demonstrations of his competence pitted against the supposed incompetence of colonized subjects. This dynamic reflects the Orientalist logic identified by Edward Said, whereby the West defines itself through the constructed inferiority of the Other.

Among the most controversial and telling sequences in *Tintin in the Congo* comes in the classroom episode, Tintin plays educator and civiliser, where Hergé creates a whole institutional image that builds on the emotion ad innocence of the characters and the actual reader, where the protagonist Tintin proclaims, "Today I am going to talk to you about your fatherland: Belgium". This scene crystallizes the epistemic violence, knowledge flow as intended in Eurocentric discourse, it is unidirectionally from the European child to the

colonised subject, reinforcing the idea that Europe is both source and destination of cultural meaning. The classroom becomes a microcosm of colonial governance, with education serving as ideological discipline rather than empowerment. As Stuart Hall articulates, "representation is the production of meaning through language, discourse, and image"; this scene fixes Europe as the centre of knowledge and authority. On the level of visual representation, colonial difference is inscribed throughout the narrative. African characters are rendered in heavy caricature, with simplified facial expressions and interrupted speech, rendering them cartoonish, two-dimensional creations rather than flesh-and-blood human beings. These representations illustrate what Hall calls stereotyping, which "reduces people to a few simple, essential characteristics which are represented as fixed by nature". Central to such operations is humour. Slapstick violence committed against colonized bodies is rendered comic release, and the child reader is encouraged to laugh rather than to register the cruelty of such representations. When Tintin commits violence, it is framed as corrective or educative rather than cruel; the domination exercised by the civilized subject is thereby justified.

Throughout the narrative, colonized people are framed as thankful recipients of European intervention. Submissive rhetoric and other forms of praise toward Tintin, often articulated through deferential dialogue like "You are good, master" (Hergé), reinforce a paternalistic structure wherein the colonized subject exists primarily to affirm the benevolence of the coloniser. Edward Said's observation that "the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (*Orientalism*) becomes unmistakably visible in such moments. Colonial inequality is not elicited here as injustice but as natural and beneficial on both sides. Spatial organization in the text further considers Tintin's authority. Tintin travel and create new boundaries of his own expanding world and define the African landscape without restriction, while indigenous characters remain confined to villages, jungles, and ritual spaces. The casual ways Tintin kills animals are framed as sport or necessity, much like the way colonized people are treated as dispensable lives within a hierarchy of value. This freedom of movement symbolizes power and possession and decision of value, turns colonized land into a site of European adventure. Animals are no different, facing a similar logic.

It is this particular ability to disguise imperial domination as moral clarity that makes Tintin especially influential in children's culture. Tintin informs his young readers that leadership, intelligence, and moral authority are essentially European attributes, while non-European characters exist to be guided, disciplined, or corrected. Jack Zipes observes, "Stories for children are never innocent; they are infused with the values and assumptions of the societies that produce them" (*Sticks and Stones*). In graphic form, this lesson is amplified, embedding ideology within the visual cues operating on an almost subconscious level. Such operations make Tintin not just a fictional character but a cultural symbol. JeanMarie Apostolidès states, "Tintin embodies the moral certainty and civilizational confidence of Europe at the height of its imperial power" (*The Metamorphoses of Tintin*). This is a mythic quality, which explains the text's enduring presence within global popular culture. Though the political and colonial empires collapsed the ideological structures such texts created and propagated continues to circulate through cultural forms such as children's literature. Contemporary graphic stories like *Hilda* and *Amulet* shed the overt racism and caricature of *Tintin*, but they still are infected with the colonial and Eurocentric discourse traits, they retain its core structure. Such text continues to imagine and sell a child hero as mediator, civiliser and moral authority. In this sense, Tintin became a milestone text that created the ideological blueprint that the future texts adopted and refined and softened but did not

destroy. This colonialist logic is transformed rather than refuted in Luke Pearson's *Hilda*, where power is exercised through empathy, cuteness and liberal multicultural discourse.

III. Hilda and the Politics of Soft Colonialism in Contemporary Children's Fantasy

Luke Pearson's *Hilda* series marks an important shift in the representational strategies of children's graphic narratives, away from the overt racial caricature and imperial confidence of early colonial texts such as *Tintin* toward an empathetic, liberal, and inclusive vision of cultural difference. *Hilda* is celebrated for manner of addressing ecological sensitivity, emotional intelligence, and child-centred storytelling. Looked through Cultural Studies and a postcolonial lens, the series discloses a subtler but no less powerful form of colonial logic. *Tintin's* authority is rooted in imperial confidence and rational superiority; that of *Hilda* emerges through affect. *Hilda* reconfigures through what might be termed soft colonialism, far from dismantling hierarchical structures of authority, a mode of domination exercised through mediation. Non-human beings-trolls, elves, giants, spirits-are consistently figured as culturally rigid, emotionally volatile, or politically immature. They are never demonized, but neither are they ever fully autonomous. Conflicts are resolved only when Hilda intervenes, restoring balance according to her own moral framework. This dynamic presses closely on what Homi Bhabha identifies as the ambivalence of colonial discourse, in which the Other is at once welcomed and controlled, embraced yet rendered dependent (Bhabha) One of the most recurring figures of Otherness in the series is the troll. In *Hilda and the Troll* and *Hilda and the Midnight Giant*, trolls are depicted as ancient, powerful, and emotionally reactive beings tied to land and instinct. Not portrayed as inherently evil, their lack of rational communication positions them as obstacles to social order. Hilda's calm reasoning and empathy repeatedly emerge as the solution to their disruptive presence. Hilda explains her intervention in terms of fairness and understanding, insisting that conflict can be resolved if "everyone just listens to each other" (Pearson). This language of mutual respect, while seemingly progressive, ultimately privileges Hilda's mode of reasoning as universal. Such techniques in narrations seem benign but continue as biased notions and logic, such as the troll's worldview is acknowledged only insofar as it can be translated into human-centred logic. As Clare Bradford notes, contemporary children's texts often present Indigenous or non-dominant figures as "repositories of emotion or spirituality rather than agents of political power," a pattern that Hilda replicates through fantasy metaphor (Bradford). The rigid bureaucratic rules and invisible borders, elves represent a form of cultural otherness that is simultaneously comic and limiting, but such characteristics are shown from a single lens of judgment and othering and inferiority. The implication is clear: difference is acceptable, even charming, but it requires mediation by a more flexible, emotionally intelligent subject. Their obsessive adherence to paperwork and regulation, which is their natural take and character, renders them incapable of adapting to change without Hilda's intervention. In *Hilda and the Black Hound*, Hilda repeatedly negotiates on their behalf, navigating systems they themselves cannot effectively manage. Maria Nikolajeva's observation that power in children's literature often operates through voice and perspective is particularly relevant here, as Hilda's viewpoint consistently frames what is reasonable, ethical, and just (Nikolajeva).

Hilda's unique spin from earlier colonial narratives is its emphasis on coexistence rather than conquest. Within colonial adventure narratives, the freedom of movement acts as a marker of authority; The land may be shared, but its meaning and organization remain uneven. Hilda's ability to cross boundaries, enter forbidden spaces, and negotiate multiple worlds is an utterance of power in itself. Trolls get relocated, giants disappear, and non-human beings adjust their behaviours to accommodate human settlements. This form of narrative control aligns with Stuart Hall's claim that representation does not reflect

difference but instead produces it. Hall articulates, "Difference is constructed through representation; it is not simply found in the world" (*Representation*). In *Hilda*, this difference is rendered safe and consumable through aesthetic softness and emotional warmth. The visual style, muted colors, and gentle humour operate to neutralise conflict, to make inequality appear harmonious. Perry Nodelman's observation that apparent simplicity in children's texts often conceals complex ideological work holds especial pertinence for Hilda. Innocence gets framed repeatedly as moral lucidity, situating her judgments as trustworthy. When she speaks, the narrative listens. When she decides, the world adjusts. This dynamic manner captures what Jack Zipes identifies as a core pedagogical function of children's narratives, which "teach children what to desire, what to fear, and whom to trust" (*Sticks and Stones*). This affective strategy is central to the text's ideological effectiveness. As Sara Ahmed submits, emotions are political forces that "shape the surfaces of bodies and worlds," that direct how subjects are oriented toward others (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion*). Children's literature scholars have long noted that innocence itself operates as a mode of power. In Hilda, children are taught to trust empathy-but only when it is exercised by the right kind of subject.

Colonial ideology has not disappeared; it has been refined, softened, and rendered more palatable for a contemporary audience attuned to diversity and inclusion. *Hilda* appears to reject the colonial arrogance of earlier texts; it ultimately preserves the structure of the colonial child hero. Power is not asserted through violence or explicit hierarchy but through emotional intelligence, mediation, and moral authority. Between the explicit imperialism of *Tintin* and the globalised fantasy of *Amulet*, *Hilda* shapes the canvas of how colonial logic adapts to new cultural conditions. These dynamics are further transformed within twenty-first-century fantasy narratives, where diversity, trauma, and humanitarian intervention become the dominant modes through which power and belonging are negotiated.

IV. Amulet and the Humanitarian Logic of the Contemporary Colonial Child

Kazu Kibuishi's *Amulet* series represents the most contemporary phase in the development and evolving of the colonial child hero. Relocating imperial logic within the expansive terrain of high fantasy and globalised visual culture. Widely read, translated, and circulated across national boundaries, *Amulet* exemplifies how children's graphic narratives in the twenty-first century negotiate questions of trauma, power, leadership, and belonging within a framework that appears inclusive. The legitimisation of authority through the figure of the chosen child, and the management of difference through assimilation and humanitarian intervention softens the power but intensifies the effect. *Tintin's* overt colonial pedagogy or *Hilda's* empathetic mediation, *Amulet* embeds colonial ideology within a rhetoric of protection, destiny, and moral responsibility.

The narrative centres on Emily Hayes, a human child selected by a powerful amulet that marks her as a "Stonekeeper." Authority is promoted not in a political or social context but in the context of fate. The mythic justification of power reiterates what Farah Mendlesohn defines as the portal-quest fantasy; the choice of Emily by amulet does not involve consent, negotiation, or group decision-making, a natural and inevitable quality that the protagonist the child protagonist enters a new world and takes over central authority is precisely because of her outsider status (Mendlesohn), is the narrative justification of her right to lead, intervene, and ultimately rule. Hilda adopts a format that can be characterized by Edward Said as the process of re-tooling domination into moral obligation whereby power is not applied as brute force but as an act of moral guidance being necessary (Orientalism). Alledia is a fantasy world inhabited by a variety of races and species such as elves, robots, animals and hybrid creatures, all structured in a moral and political hierarchy. Hilda poses as a diversity, difference is highly controlled where individuals and societies

are prized in terms of their obedience to the mission of Emily. Any opposition and challenge to her authority is labeled and put into perspective as threats, corrupted, and those who acquiesce receive safeguarding and assimilation. Colonialism is therefore reintroduced as a benevolent leadership.

The growing ability of Emily to destroy is in a form of a burden she must suffer and not as a decision. The use of violence in Amulet is always supported by the rhetoric of humanitarianism. Wars are not waged to conquer but to protect, secure and to avoid greater damage. Strengthening the argument of the narration, the amulet is a reminder that she will have to make hard choices, that being a leader means being able to inflict violence in the name of the greater good (Kibuishi). This is reminiscent of what Lauren Berlant refers to as cruel optimism or white skin burden in which subjects are still tied to the structures that hurt other people since they offer stability or survival (Berlant). Colonial intervention is then reinterpreted as an unwillful obligation, which hides the forceful impact. The purpose of Emily is not to destroy all or any of the structures but to put them in its place with something more ethical that is founded on her own; a colonial fantasy of reform, as opposed to decolonisation. It is not the issue of domination but the issue of the person who dominates. According to the article by Ebony Elizabeth Thomas on the subject of contemporary fantasy, the stories that focus on marginalised worlds usually testify to moral authority that belongs to characters that are allied to whiteness and human normativity (Thomas). Even though the problems faced by Emily are established in advance, her point of view is put in the background alongside those of the people she is ruling. This hierarchy is supported by the visual rhetoric of Amulet. The amulet is itself a kind of epistemic control, which is given visions, knowledge and power that others have no access to. In every single time a decision was to be made, Emily was always in the middle of the panels, and the other characters surrounded her, which visually supported her power. Stuart Hall, as we should not forget, representation cannot exist without power; who is the viewer, who is the knower, and who is the decider are all political positions (Representation). Accessibility to knowledge in Amulet is concentrated in the child hero and this supports a top-down approach of governance. Whereas in Tintin, which removed colonial trauma and Hilda, which tonified it with emotion, Amulet explicitly takes trauma on as a storyline. The tragedy of Emily, her fear and her moral confusion is prefigured, giving her a certain emotional depth. The reader is made to sympathise with the burden of Emily instead of doubting the structural conditions that put such power on her hands. Trauma turns into a plot excuse of subjugation. According to Sara Ahmed, emotions may serve to establish the relations which they seem to criticize (The Cultural Politics of Emotion). On this aspect, Amulet helps young readers to understand that being a leader is related to sacrifice and that inequality has to be tolerated to be necessary. As Dimitra Fimi observes, global fantasy often absorbs non-Western motifs while preserving Western narrative dominance (Fimi). This series, *Amulet* also reflects the logic of globalised cultural production, created by a Japanese-American author within the U.S. publishing industry, *Amulet* draws on a hybrid aesthetic that blends Western fantasy traditions with visual influences from manga and animation. The hybridity in *Amulet* appears to challenge Eurocentrism but ultimately reinforces it by creating all tangents come from a human protagonist whose authority aligns with Western liberal ideals of leadership, choice, and individual destiny. Cultural difference becomes a resource rather than a challenge to power. Efficiently contrasting *Hilda*, show coexistence is achieved through negotiation, *Amulet* presents stability as the outcome of decisive leadership. The Other is not merely mediated but reorganised under a new moral regime. Assimilation replaces dialogue. Dialogue is celebrated only once it has been disciplined.

V. From Empire to Empathy: The Colonial Child Hero

Read together, *The Adventures of Tintin, Hilda,* and *Amulet* reveal a refinement of colonial narrative ideology techniques. Across nearly a century of children's graphic storytelling, the figure of the child hero remains remarkably stable as the locus of moral authority, epistemic certainty, and cultural legitimacy. Only the mode through which power is exercised and justified. In *Tintin*, colonial dominance is overt, racialised, and unapologetic; in *Hilda*, it is softened through empathy, mediation, and liberal multicultural discourse; in *Amulet*, it is fully absorbed into a humanitarian logic that frames domination as responsibility. Tintin's authority is grounded in European rationality and imperial confidence. Hilda's power emerges from emotional intelligence and moral sensitivity. Emily's legitimacy in *Amulet* is framed as destiny, trauma, and reluctant leadership. The colonial ideology has not disappeared from children's literature but has adapted and evolved into shifting cultural sensibilities, becoming increasingly subtle and emotionally persuasive. All three texts centre the child protagonist as the primary agent through whom order is restored and meaning is produced. Despite these differences Stuart Hall describes each protagonist occupies privileged representational position, from which they define the norms of behaviour, justice, and belonging (*Representation*). The Other whether racialised colonial subjects, magical creatures, or non-human species is never allowed equivalent narrative authority. Instead, difference is managed through caricature, cuteness, or conditional inclusion. The representational strategy of Othering undergoes significant transformation; *Hilda*, difference is rendered endearing and emotionally rich, yet politically contained. Trolls, elves, and giants are lovable precisely because they are non-threatening; their emotional excesses and cultural rigidity position them as needing guidance. *Tintin*, difference is created and propogated through caricature and ridicule, reinforcing a clear civilisational hierarchy. *Amulet* expanded into a complex multi-species universe, where hierarchy persists and builds through moral stratification. Loyalty, usefulness, and submission to the central mission become the criteria for belonging. Orientalism is not limited to specific images or stereotypes as Edward Said reminds us, but functions as a system that "makes domination appear natural". Through different aesthetic and narrative means each text strengthen the Eurocentric vision building spatial politics that illuminate this continuity. Hilda's ability to cross borders human and non-human, legal and forbidden marks her as an exceptional subject, while others remain bound, stuck and controlled by territory and rule. Tintin's unrestricted movement through colonised space contrasts with the spatial confinement of indigenous characters. Emily's command over vast regions of Alledia reinforces her role as a centralising force in a fragmented world. As postcolonial critics have noted, the ability to move, map, and reorganise space has long been a marker of colonial authority (Boehmer). Children's graphic narratives reproduce this logic by granting the child hero spatial freedom while restricting the Other.

Affective politics play an increasingly prominent role as the texts move closer to the present. Where *Tintin* relies on humour and adventure to normalise violence, *Hilda* deploys empathy and emotional warmth, and *Amulet* foregrounds trauma and moral struggle. By inviting readers to feel sympathy for the child hero's burden, contemporary texts encourage acceptance of unequal power relations as necessary and even virtuous. Sara Ahmed argues, emotions do not simply soften power; they shape attachments to it (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion*). The reader is taught not to question authority, but to understand it. Children's literature theory helps explain why this structure is so resilient. Perry Nodelman's concept of the "hidden adult" suggests that children's texts often reinforce dominant ideologies precisely because they appear simple and benign. The child hero becomes a conduit for adult assumptions about leadership, morality, and cultural hierarchy. Across *Tintin, Hilda,*

and *Amulet,* a place which is consistently organised around a centre-periphery model, with the child hero at the centre and the Other at the margins. Jack Zipes similarly argues that children's narratives function as cultural scripts that teach readers "how to see the world and their place in it" (*Sticks and Stones*).

What emerges from this comparative reading is a genealogy of colonial imagination rather than a story of ideological rupture. The decline of overt racism in children's literature does not signal the end of colonial thinking; instead, it marks its transformation. Power becomes less visible, less confrontational, and therefore more difficult to resist. Empathy replaces authority, inclusion replaces exclusion, and destiny replaces domination, but the underlying hierarchy remains intact. As Homi Bhabha's work on ambivalence suggests, colonial discourse survives not through rigidity but through adaptability, constantly reshaping itself to meet new historical conditions (Bhabha). By situating Tintin, Hilda, and Amulet within a single analytical frame teaches young readers how to recognise difference, how to feel about it, and ultimately how to manage it. The colonial child hero, far from being a relic of the past, remains a central figure in contemporary storytelling reassuring, empathetic, and deeply political. The concluding section reflects on the broader implications of these findings for Cultural Studies, children's literature, and decolonial pedagogy.

VI. Conclusion: Rethinking Childhood, Power, and the Afterlives of Empire

Children's graphic narratives continue to function as powerful cultural sites where colonial ideology is not dismantled but reconfigured. Through a comparative analysis of *The Adventures of Tintin, Hilda,* and *Amulet*, the paper has traced the evolution of the colonial child hero from overt imperial pedagogy to soft liberal mediation and, finally, to humanitarian leadership framed as destiny and responsibility. The aesthetic language of these texts changes dramatically across time but the underlying structure of power remains strikingly persistent. The child protagonist in the selected texts and if spoken in whole children's literature, occupies the centre of moral authority and epistemic control, while racialised, non-Western, or non-human figures are positioned as subjects to be corrected, guided, or assimilated. The movement from caricature to empathy marks a significant transformation in representational strategy which is an action of ideological rupture. *Tintin* openly reproduces racial hierarchies through visual caricature and pedagogical domination, reflecting the confidence of high imperial culture. *Amulet*, operating within a globalised fantasy economy, absorbs colonial logic into narratives of trauma, protection, and humanitarian intervention. *Hilda*, emerging within a postcolonial and liberal multicultural moment, replaces domination with empathy, framing power as emotional intelligence and moral clarity. These texts demonstrate how colonial power adapts to historical and cultural shifts, becoming increasingly subtle, affective, and difficult to contest.

Drawing on Cultural Studies and postcolonial theory, the analysis has shown that childhood itself functions as a powerful discursive category through which authority is naturalised. The child hero's innocence renders power benign, leadership inevitable, and inequality acceptable. As a result, young readers are not only entertained but trained to recognise hierarchy as moral order and intervention as care. The persistence of the colonial child hero within such narratives raises urgent questions about how cultural difference is represented, who is permitted to lead, and whose voices remain marginal. In an era dominated by visual media, transmedia storytelling, and algorithm-driven cultural consumption, children encounter narratives that increasingly blur the line between inclusion and control. Recognising these patterns is a crucial step toward developing a more critical, decolonial literacy that enables young readers to engage with stories not only as imaginative worlds but as political, experiencing and learning, texts.

A re-evaluation of children's graphic narratives within Cultural Studies is necessary, not as marginal or secondary cultural forms, but as central sites where power, identity, and belonging are actively negotiated. By exposing the afterlives of empire in contemporary children's storytelling, the study reaffirms the need to interrogate how seemingly progressive narratives continue to shape the cultural imagination in ways that reproduce global hierarchies. To rethink childhood, then, is also to rethink the stories through which the world is first made meaningful.

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