

Globetrotters and Exotic Creatures: The Imaginary Others in Dr. Seuss[❖]

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ABSTRACT

Over and above the linguistic pleasures he offers, there seems to be something exotic, a play of the foreign and the familiar, in Dr. Seuss's picture books. Drawing on Christina Klein's concept of "Cold War Orientalism," this essay attempts to situate or contextualize the Asian or exotic others in three of Seuss's books of the 1950s. They are *If I Ran the Zoo* (1950), *Scrambled Eggs Super!* (1953), and *On Beyond Zebra!* (1955). It seeks to consider how exoticism may be utilized as a textual strategy for self-identification in the three books, and how the exoticism deployed is connected with the cultural politics of Seuss's times. By attending to the cultural politics of the Cold War, the essay recognizes that Seuss's books are products of historical and social circumstances, demanding a further understanding of the contexts surrounding textual representation. It suggests that Dr. Seuss not only appropriates exoticist codes of cultural representation but also converts them into tropes representing new experiences for the children who learn to read.

KEYWORDS: Dr. Seuss, Cold War Orientalism, exoticism, picture books, children's literature

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In his 2002 essay “No Matter How Small: The Democratic Imagination of Dr. Seuss,” Henry Jenkins contextualizes Dr. Seuss’s (aka. Theodor Seuss Geisel) writings for children, reading them along with the postwar discourse of “democratic” parenting. Rather than a hero or an exemplar for the future, Jenkins argues, Seuss is an artist “who struggled in his life and his work with the problem of how one might foster a more democratic American culture” (192). He suggests, “Seuss, in many ways, never escaped the blindnesses that crippled the utopian dreams of his generation. He found it difficult, in the wake of the Second World War, to separate his conception of democracy from American nationalism” (192). Years later, in his exploration of the racial imagination of Dr. Seuss, Philip Nel concurs, saying that even when he wrote books designed to challenge prejudice, Seuss “never fully shed the cultural assumptions he grew up with,” and that he “was likely unaware of the ways in which his visual imagination replicated the racial ideologies he consciously sought to reject” (“Was” 76, 81). Nel acknowledges that Seuss may work toward the ideal of multicultural America, but “the complex relationship between his liberal Democratic politics and his visual style creates work that quietly preserves what it ostensibly opposes” (95). Jenkins’s and Nel’s observations shed important light on the ambivalence of Dr. Seuss as part of the democratic or racial imaginary of American culture. They pick out not merely the political unconscious or unseen blind spots embedded in the seemingly innocent texts but also the inevitable complicity a children’s book writer may get involved in unknowingly.

To carry on the dialogue, this essay suggests that apart from the democratic or racial imaginary of American culture, there still remains something exotic, a play of the foreign and the familiar, in some of Seuss’s books. Although my understanding of *Dr. Seuss* resonates with that of Jenkins and Nel, the contribution I’d like to make to this conversation is to connect Seuss with a larger social world and, through this connection, come closer to understanding how the Seuss phenomenon is marked by the impossibility of a clear separation between the USA and the rest of the world, say, Asia.¹ Texts, as Edward Said

¹ The term Asia is not simply a geographic term, but also “a synonym for the Asiatic East as a whole, or taken as generally denoting the distant and exotic” within the occidental imagination (Said 74). As early as Aeschylus’s play *The Persians*, the earliest Athenian play extant, Edward Said indicates that Asia is depicted as “the hostile ‘other’ world beyond the seas.” In *The Bacchae* of Euripides, the very last one extant, Dionysus is connected with his Asian origins, “the strangely threatening excesses of Oriental mysteries” (56). As Said suggests, “the two aspects of the Orient that set off from the West in this pair of plays will remain essential motifs of European imaginative geography” (57). Firstly, “A

argues, “can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse” (94). Jenkins and Nel have demonstrated the discursive terrains that Seuss’s books have implicated, such as democratic parenting and race issues. As Dr. Seuss achieves iconic status in children’s literature, one may well argue that his oeuvre provides obvious venues for a popular understanding of the exotic others² imagined in American culture. Further, coupled with the international context of children’s book production, Seuss’s books are now not merely used in the United States, but also marketed, circulated, consumed and translated into versions in many other countries of the world. Donald Pease, Professor of English at Dartmouth, observes that “Dr. Seuss’s works, which have changed the way children everywhere learn how to read, have been translated into fifteen languages” (ix).³ It is at least necessary to temporalize Seuss, seeing his works as products in a “historical life-process,” by examining how Seuss’s works are connected to a larger world and further how the exotic others become figured in his books for children (Mitchell 175). This essay recognizes that Seuss’s books for children are products of historical and social circumstances or component pieces of larger cultural formations, demanding a further understanding of the contexts surrounding textual representation and a closer look at the verbal and pictorial texts therein. “Beneath the guise of their own ‘innocent’ fun and through their association with children,” Nel suggests, toys and children’s books are adept at—borrowing a phrase from Robin Bernstein’s *Racial Innocence* (2011)—mystifying “racial ideology by hiding it in plain sight” (“Was” 76). Rather than

line is drawn between two continents. Europe is powerful and articulate; Asia is defeated and distant.” Secondly, “there is the motif of the Orient as insinuating danger. Rationality is undermined by Eastern excesses, those mysteriously attractive opposites to what seem to be normal values” (57).

² Thinkers, like Lacan, Levinas, Derrida, and Foucault, have theorized the concept of the “other” in the ways we make sense of the world. There is insufficient room here to review their theories of the other. Alison Mountz’s “The Other” reviews the development of the notion of the other in social science. Here, in Seuss’s stories under discussion, when used as a noun, the other(s) refers to the people and creatures that are different or distinct from the boy narrators. As a verb, othering is for the boy narrators a process of casting those people and creatures into the role of the “other,” and establishing their own identities. In other words, an array of other peoples and creatures are central to how the boys form their identities in Seuss.

³ By the time of his death in 1991, says Philip Nel, “Dr. Seuss” was a multimillion-dollar industry, and Herb Cheyette of Dr. Seuss Enterprises estimated that over 400 million Dr. Seuss books had been sold in 1998 (*Dr. Seuss* 131). Additionally, new media forms as well as movie versions of Dr. Seuss’s books have been emerging in recent decades. For some of the spin-offs from Dr. Seuss’s books, see the webpage of *Seussville*, the official website of Dr. Seuss, published by Random House Children’s Books.

focusing on the parenting or racial discourse *within* the United States, this essay argues that Seuss's exoticism is "hidden in plain sight," and that his books create for American children the exotic things, places and peoples *outside* national boundaries. A closer look at how the exotic others are presented in his children's books may give us a better glimpse than we have had before of how Seuss was connected with the cultural politics of his time.

To address the issue of the exotic other in Seuss, this essay takes up Christina Klein's conceptualization of Cold War Orientalism as the point of departure to read three of Seuss's children's books written in the 1950s. Its purpose is not to take his books as a window into Asian societies and cultures, but to problematize Asia as a named space in Seuss by considering how the exotic others can be textualized for self-fashioning in children's books. This essay attempts to look at the way in which the construction of the exotic others in Seuss has been infiltrated with the Orientalist ideology of his time. The first section turns to the discursive context of Cold War Orientalism posited by Klein and expanded on by other scholars. This sets the stage for the second section, which aims to theorize or explain the globetrotters and strange creatures prevalent in three of Seuss's books produced during the early 1950s. The essay suggests that Seussian exoticism is part of Cold War Orientalism, a style of children's stories built upon the distinction between the self and the others *outside of the country*.

I. Dr. Seuss and Cold War Orientalism

Cold War Orientalism, as defined by Christina Klein, was tied to United States foreign policy in negotiating the complicated international engagement in Asia between the end of the Second World War and the early 1960s (5). Containment and integration are commonly understood to be the two ideological foundations of US postwar foreign policy during the Cold War.⁴ The former featured the Soviet Union as aggressive and expansionist, promoting a crusade against communism anywhere in the world, whereas the latter portrayed the United States as defensive and democratic, creating a campaign to forge bonds with peoples engaged in anti-colonialist struggles. After the Second World War, the United States expanded its power in Asia to an

⁴ See Leffler and Painter, especially 222-28.

unprecedented degree. Apart from politics and “military aid” to countries around the globe, the Pacific Rim, especially Japan and Southeast Asia, became “a highly profitable region” for American policymakers in the postwar years (Lee 156). In its strategy for global reconstruction, “the redeployment of Japanese capital” and “direct US investment in the Pacific Rim” became two major sources of profits for American corporations (156). Tilting toward the global imaginary of integration, Klein turns to look at the representation of Asia in the popular culture of the Cold War era. The proliferation of popular American representations of Asia, Klein suggests, exists in tandem with the expansion of US power into Asia during the Cold War. According to Klein, the middlebrow intellectuals repudiated imperialism as an acceptable model for East-West relations, but they produced what Mary Louise Pratt has called a “narrative of anticonquest” built within a sentimental framework (13).⁵ Sentimentalism is not a pejorative term to denote a false or shallow emotionalism, but is, as Klein suggests, “a complex cultural mode” (14). Sentimental narratives, suggests Klein, tend to focus not on the lone individual but on the “self-in-relation”; they uphold human connection as the highest ideal and emphasize the forging of bonds and the creation of solidarities among friends, family, and community (14). Not only is the sentimental a universalizing mode that recognizes a common and shared humanity by exploring how bonds are forged across a divide of difference—of race, class, sex, nation, religion, it also features human connections characterized by reciprocity and exchange, often of a personal, intellectual, or material nature. In addition, emotions serve as the means for achieving and maintaining this exchange; the sentimental mode values the intensity of the individual’s felt experience, and regards sympathy as most important (Klein 14). Klein is keen to suggest that “the sentimental could serve as an instrument for exercising power” (15).

⁵ Klein suggests that the middlebrow writers, artists or intellectuals formed the intellectual wing of postwar American society. According to Klein, the middlebrow was “a cultural formation,” a synthesis of the traditions of left and right internationalism (63). Middlebrow shares defining characteristics. First, it was the culture of a professional-managerial middle class who made literature and fine art more accessible to the public. Second, middlebrow was eager to prove that its nation was an international power, culturally as well as politically. Third, middlebrow had its educational imperative and promoted middle-class and international respectability in ways that made learning pleasurable. Fourth, it was committed to moral uplift, and affirmed “what it saw as the eternal, universal values that united all human beings across time and space” (Klein 64-65).

In her formulation of a model of sentimental education as part of integration, Christina Klein refigures Edward Said's theory of Orientalism in the context of the United States of the postwar era. Said has identified binary oppositions as integral to European Orientalism, "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (3). Guided but not limited by Said, Klein defines the United States as "a nonimperial world power in the age of decolonization," arguing that the American government continued their project of postwar imperial expansion in Asia and the Pacific while simultaneously projecting the image of the United States as a benevolent peacekeeper (9). In contrast to nineteenth-century European imperial powers, the leaders of America's postwar expansion generated "a wide ranging discourse of racial tolerance and inclusion that served as the official ideology undergirding postwar expansion" (Klein 11). As Klein suggests, "Middlebrow intellectuals eagerly embraced these ideals of tolerance and inclusion, and largely framed their representations of noncommunist Asia within them" (11). Klein has illustrated the middlebrows' cultural engagements during the Cold War with popular cultural products such as novels (*The Flower Drum Song*, *The Ugly American*), musicals (*The King and I*, *Flower Drum Song*), magazines (*Reader's Digest*, *Saturday Review*), and travel writings (*The Voice of Asia*). For Klein, "the distinctive form of Orientalism that middlebrow Americans produced and consumed during the early Cold War period must be seen, then, as working through a logic of affiliation as well as through one of difference" (16).

Despite the compelling illustrations of Cold War Orientalism, however, children's books are excluded from Klein's discussion. Julia L. Mickenberg, in her sustained study of the cultural politics of children's literature during the Cold War, argues that progressive influence in the children's book field became evident in the postwar period. She suggests, "Belief in interracial and international cooperation formed the basis for the sentimental logic of integrationism that undergirded American relations with our less modernized (i.e. younger) friends in the Third World" (131). In the merit criteria for children's books, for example, organizations began to publish lists of children's books for "brotherhood," and "international understanding," or a book "that furthers understanding and appreciation among peoples of different racial, religious and cultural backgrounds" (Mickenberg 131-32). Furthermore, progressive or liberal influence was also striking in books themselves and

discussions about children's books. Dr. Seuss is mentioned in passing among the liberal writers⁶ who believed that "both laughter and poetry were essential elements of growing up," and among writers who wrote books which "positively portrayed labor or taught something about race relations" (105).

To move one step further, this essay suggests that Dr. Seuss, a favorite writer of children's books in the United States, is an excellent case in point in the context of Cold War Orientalism. Seuss recognized children's reading as part of the national infrastructure and saw writing for children as a mission. He notes, "Children's reading and children's thinking are the rock bottom base upon which the future of this country will rise. Or not rise" (qtd. in Nel, *Dr. Seuss* 61). Apart from the five titles published before the Second World War, Seuss wrote and illustrated thirty-nine books between 1947 and 1990.⁷ *The Cat in the Hat* (1957), which made Dr. Seuss a household name in the United States, came out as American public schools were seized with the Cold War fear of the "Russian menace" (Marcus, *Minders* 210).⁸ In 1984, the year *The Butter Battle Book* (1984) was published, Seuss was awarded a special Pulitzer citation "for his special contribution over nearly half a century to the education and enjoyment of America's children and their parents" (qtd. in Cohen 359). To the well-known examples Klein has given, I would like to add that Dr. Seuss, a children's book writer keenly attuned to the politics of the day, may well be examined in the discursive context of Cold War Orientalism.

In reality, the term Asia is not a sign or a geographical indication, but a place or a historical presence for Seuss. An exuberant traveler, Seuss had travelled to thirty countries in Europe, the Middle East and Latin America between 1927 and 1936, and he kept "spinning the globe for more" whenever he could (Morgan and Morgan 79). In 1953, the year following the American Occupation of Japan (1945-52), a phone call brought postwar Japan "nearer and cheaper" for Dr. Seuss when he was offered a contract with *Life*, a middlebrow

⁶ Besides Dr. Seuss, Lois Lenski, Florence Crannell Means, John Tunis, and Lucy Sprague Mitchell are liberal writers praised in left-wing venues. Their works illustrate a belief that "children were autonomous beings, independent-minded, concerned with social justice, and entitled to know something about the way the world works—ideas fundamental to the social vision of the Left" (Mickenberg 104).

⁷ Over a dozen of his books, which he did not illustrate, were published under a range of pseudonyms including Rosetta Stone and Theo LeSeig. For a comprehensive list of the books by Dr. Seuss, including those published posthumously, see Fensch 210-12.

⁸ As Leonard Marcus notes, "By the fall of 1958, American's concerns about their children's reading skills had been subsumed by a larger, still more alarming national worry." He also adds, "Early deficiencies in reading skills now came to be seen as an underlying cause of greater educational failings with potential life-and-death consequences" (*Minders* 210).

(or right-wing) magazine, which dealt extensively with Asian affairs. He was commissioned to go there and write about how the years of American occupation influenced Japanese schoolchildren (136). In March 1953, less than eight years since the first atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Seuss and his wife Helen Palmer embarked on a six-week journey to such cities as Kyoto, Osaka, and Kobe. According to their biographers, Seuss was “torn between awe and laughter” by the banquet their Japanese publisher gave in a lavish geisha house. His wife called their journey “the craziest operation we’ve ever embarked on . . . Life couldn’t be stranger if we were in Tibet” (136).⁹ Seuss and his wife must have been happy to marvel at the wonders they found in Japan.¹⁰

More than that, Asia is also a source of inspiration for his creativity. *Horton Hears a Who!*, which appeared in 1954, grew out of his visits to Japanese schools. The book is laudable for its story about the friendship a huge elephant named Horton makes with the tiny residents of Whoville, which he cannot see but hear. Horton’s endeavor to overcome opposition to save Whoville implicates a new role the US assumes in the decolonizing world. Further, Seuss dedicates the book to his “great friend” Mitsugi Nakamura, a Kyoto University professor (Morgan and Morgan 145). In contrast with the caricatures of the Japanese he drew in the editorial cartoons for *PM*, a liberal-leaning newspaper during the Second World War, the dedication of a postwar picture book to a Japanese friend can be considered, to some extent, a sign of reconciliation or some kind of new understanding Seuss gained in his cross-cultural encounter.¹¹

⁹ Seuss was not the only one children’s book writer who toured Asia in the early period of the Cold War. Munro Leaf and Helen R. Sattley also visited Asia in a Cold War context. Leaf, commissioned by the US Department of State, toured East and South Asia, including Taiwan in 1964. Sattley talked to educators and administrators on childhood and American children’s books while visiting Taiwan in 1966. See Wu.

¹⁰ Not only did Seuss travel to Japan, but his books were also introduced to Japan in the postwar era. *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*, for example, was translated by Ōmori Takeo and published in 1949, during the SCAP (Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers) Occupation, an era in which “American” or “democratic” values resonated with the Japanese people. The Japanese version was published when the Japanese people began to question the image of the emperor, and the Occupation government worked to install a new image of the Japanese monarch (Angles 171). *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* demonstrates the follies of the monarchy, revealing that the imperial position is “derived from the people and not necessarily superior to it” (172). In examining the history of Japanese translations of Seuss, Jeffrey Angles suggests that Japanese versions of Seuss have functioned in ways “in relation to the ideological climate of their own particular time” since they were introduced into Japan in the postwar Occupation era (166).

¹¹ Seuss made ethnic caricatures when working as a political cartoonist between 1941 and 1942 to convince Americans of the need to look at the peoples outside of the country. In his wartime cartoons,

However, one story that comes out of his trip to Japan does not mean that the exotic in Seuss are necessarily referential to any particular territory in Asia. In her reading of *Horton Hears a Who!*, Ruth MacDonald asserts that Whoville is representative of Japan, a nation for which Seuss must have had a fondness. MacDonald writes, “The diminutive stature of the Whos resembles the Japanese at the time, not only because Orientals are physically smaller than Caucasians and blacks, but also because as a world power, the Japanese were without influence or sympathy in the world community after World War II.” She also furthers her argument, saying that Seuss, through Horton, “points a finger directly at the United States as a superpower who must therefore also be a protector of smaller governments’ rights to exist” (76). At first glance it appears to be a crude simplification, equating fictional characters to historical realities, reading an animal fantasy as a political fable. It is critical to view Seuss’s work within the context of its time because a children’s book cannot be made in a vacuum. But it cannot be reduced to a mere reflection of historical realities even if a children’s book cannot free itself from the ideological assumptions of the culture that shapes it. On second thought, it is indeed hard to assert that the characters of the Whos and Elephant Horton are equivalent to the Japanese and the United States because a children’s book is not merely a mirror held up to reality or a window to the world. But it is also hard *not* to acknowledge the fact that *Horton Hears a Who!* is a literary or cultural construction produced in the 1950s. It may be wrapped in the form of a political fable, and yet it would inevitably take the geopolitics of the Cold War as the potential ground for its narrative, either directly or implicitly. That Horton and the Whos have their literal analogue in the geopolitical map of the world can serve as a synecdoche for the signification of the Cold War. The analogy may now be evident, but it does not prevent us from exploring it in a discreet manner.

the Japanese are caricatured figures with slanted eyes hidden behind thick glasses, a piggish nose, brush mustache, and lips parted. They are often called “Japs” (Minear 119). No wonder that Minear finds it a surprise that “a person who denounces anti-black racism and anti-Semitism so eloquently can be oblivious of his own racist treatment of Japanese and Japanese Americans” (121). Actually, earlier in the 1920s and 1930s when he drew as a humorist for magazines, Seuss also created cartoons at the expense of ethnic difference. Today perhaps all those cartoons fall prey to racism. Nevertheless, it is important to note that of German descent, Seuss experienced anti-German prejudice personally during World War I. As a liberal, he argued for equal treatment of peoples in America and around the world as indicated in his children’s books. Therefore, the essay claims that it is necessary to temporalize Seuss, putting him and his works into historical perspective. A liberal artist like Seuss may be smitten by his blindness to racism unknowingly. For samples of Seuss’s early cartoons, see Cohen 33, 204-21, 240-41.

Although a long span of Seuss's writing career may be contingent on the Cold War, I will not survey all of his books but concentrate here on three of Seuss's books written right before and after his travel to Japan, between 1950 and 1955, examining the way in which the exotic others are figured in Seuss along with Klein's formulation of Cold War Orientalism. The three books are *If I Ran the Zoo* (1950), *Scrambled Eggs Super!* (1953), and *On Beyond Zebra!* (1955), which have been less studied than *The Cat in the Hat* and those written thereafter. To put the three postwar books under discussion into perspective, *If I Ran the Zoo* and *Scrambled Eggs Super!* were released just before Seuss's journey to Japan. The former was one of the five honored nominees for the Randolph Caldecott Medal in 1951, and the latter was written during the time when he was consumed by the difficult production of his first feature-length fantasy film *The 500 Fingers of Dr. T*. Different from the *Zoo* and *Eggs* books, *On Beyond Zebra!* was written and released two years after Seuss came back from his journey to Japan. All three books belong to a distinct cultural moment in which Asia and the Pacific held an unprecedented fascination for many Americans after the Second World War.

What the three postwar books have in common is that each of them features a boy narrator who finds something lacking in their normal experiences and embarks on a kind of quest for some marvelous wonders in far-off lands. The three books do not have the overt social commentary found in Seuss's anti-war storybook such as *The Butter Battle Book*, a light-hearted satire of the senseless arms race between the United States, the Soviet Union, and their respective allies during the Cold War. They may be seen as rhyming stories that are less concerned with a global audience than the construction of an American childhood from the point of view of young boys. In each story, however, the boy's ebullient imagination of leaving for strange places, seeing weird creatures, and seeking rare collectable items vividly echoes what Michel de Certeau calls "the joyful and silent experience of childhood . . . to be other and to move toward the other" (110). Seuss writes as if constricted by the conventionality of the mid-twentieth century,¹² in an exuberant and exclamatory manner to evoke a strong desire to embrace the spectacle he offers, the sense that *outside over*

¹² In his overview of the Little Golden Books of the mid-twentieth century, Leonard Marcus notes that young readers encountered few unconventional role models in the books. The picture of American society is often presented as an idealized but essentially here-and-now world in which "[f]athers went to work while mothers stayed at home, did the cooking and shopping, and looked after the children" (*Golden Legacy* 94).

there is full of wonders. In the following sections, I will explore, respectively, two major themes of the stories—moving beyond neighborhood and building bonds with others.

II. Moving Beyond the Neighborhood

When read in the context of Cold War Orientalism, the boy characters' passion and pursuit can be regarded as part of a more general process by which the United States expanded to new territory to consolidate their bond with peoples around the world. With the general rise of nationalism in the age of decolonization and the specific expansion of the US power into Asia following the Second World War, the topic of looking beyond the neighborhood for strange and wonderful creatures *from remote places* became an attractive subject for a well-travelled children's book writer like Seuss. The geographical imaginaries of the three postwar books can be seen by comparing them with those of the prewar period, such as *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* (1937) in which Seuss sets his story about the wild fantasy of a boy named Marco who walks every day on the same street of a small American town. Marco is admonished by his father to keep his eyes open to see what he can see. But he cannot help letting his imagination run wild, coming up with "outlandish tales" that turn "minnows into whales" (Dr. Seuss, *And*). Marco imagines "a Raja, with rubies, perched high on a throne" on a blue elephant, and he also imagines "a Chinese boy who eats with sticks."¹³ It comes as no surprise that strange people far away appear in his fantasy for a local parade. The stereotypical images of the Asian serve as a vehicle for the boy to conceive a far-off world that is impossible for him to reach in person. And all that he imagines about a fabulous parade is merely set on the quiet street in the small town where he grows up and goes to school.

If he makes a start on exoticism in the 1937 book characterized by provincialism, Seuss continues to use it as a textual strategy to shape the boy characters' self-identification. This encounter with the exotic permeates many of his books, starting with *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* through *Oh the Places You'll Go* (1990), but nowhere is more evident than the

¹³ Critics such as Charles Cohen and Philip Nel remark that Seuss removed the offensive term "chinaman," as well as the image of the pigtail, which first appeared in the 1937 edition, but the chinaman's hat still remains in the picture. See Cohen 221; Nel, *Dr. Seuss* 109.

three books which feature the grandiose vision the American boys create out of their conspicuously childish fantasy or tall tale. Gerald McGrew of *If I Ran the Zoo*, motivated by his desire to win favor with the townspeople, may be kin to Marco, who submits himself to parental authority in Seuss's 1937 book. For McGrew, the reason behind the new zoo is to "make people talk," and "make people gawk" (Dr. Seuss, *If*). To get the approval of the adult may be still in the vein of Seuss's first book, but *If I Ran the Zoo* is an obvious attempt to diminish a sense of provinciality when McGrew dreams about spending time globe-trotting rather than walking on a local street. In contrast, the parental authority steps out when Peter T. Hooper of *Scrambled Eggs Super!* and the young narrator of *On Beyond Zebra!* enjoy telling tall tales with their peers.

However, what underlies the three stories is an insatiable desire to achieve remarkable success. Despite the fact that all that happens is deep in his imagination or in his tall tale, McGrew or Hooper reveals his strong desire to assert himself as a hunter or collector who frequents remote places to capture fanciful creatures or unusual eggs and bring them back. Attracted to the pride the zookeeper displays, McGrew drifts into exotic reverie, conjuring up a vision in which he becomes the zookeeper of the best ever zoo. McGrew claims that he'll never stop until he builds "a zoo better than Noah's whole Ark," "the goldarnest zoo / On the face of the earth," until "these wonderful, marvelous beasts that he chooses / have made him the greatest of all the McGrewses" (Dr. Seuss, *If*). Similarly, Hooper is not content with the eggs of a plain common hen. He believes that "a cook has to hook the best eggs ever laid" in order to make "a scramble *more* super than super" (Dr. Seuss, *Scrambled Eggs*). Hooper professes to have been to all the possible nooks of the world to hook the best eggs ever laid to make the best scramble that's ever been made. This is also true of the young narrator of *On Beyond Zebra!*, who is not satisfied with the confines of the ordinary alphabet, urges his very young friend Conrad Cornelius o'Donald o'Dell, who learns to spell, to "go beyond Z and start poking around" (Dr. Seuss, *On*). He keeps encouraging his young friend to go beyond Z, noting "It's high time you were shown / That you really *don't* know all there is to be known."

The three books, whose function fluctuates between instruction and entertainment, contain graphic descriptions of strange creatures from odd places, and provide young readers with geographical imaginaries of the world. In *On Beyond Zebra!*, its narrator takes his friend o'Donald o'Dell to "scramble

through swampf and through swumpf,” and seek “Glikker who lives in wild weeds,” “Nutches who live in small caves,” and “Quandary, who lives in the ocean.” Similarly, Hooper hunted the best eggs “along wild tangled trails, / Through gullies and gulches, down dingles and dales” (Dr. Seuss, *Scrambled Eggs*). He wriggled his way and crawled at a creep “through a forest of ferns that was forty miles deep.” While collecting the eggs of “the three-eyelashed Tizzy,” which are quite hard to reach, he rode on the top of “a Ham-ikka-Schnim-ikka-Schnam-ikka Schnopp.” For McGrew, “A four-footed lion’s not much of a beast. / The one in my zoo will have *ten* feet, at least” (Dr. Seuss, *If*). To find “some beasts of a much more un-usual kind,” such as an Elephant-Cat, or a long-neck canary, he will not just go “from Texas to Boston” or to “the Far Western part of south-east North Dakota,” but also “go places quite out-of-the-way,” and “go places no others can get to.” He’ll go “Up past the North Pole, where the frozen winds squeal,” and he’ll go to “the African island of Yerka,” to “the Desert of Zind,” to “the Jungles of Hippo-no-Hungus,” to “the Wilds of Nantucket,” to “the far-away Mountains of Tobsk / Near the River of Nobsk,” and to the “countries that no one can spell / Like the country of Motta-fa-Potta-fa-Pell.”

Such a wide variety of imaginary places and strange creatures exemplify more than entertaining phonics but also constitute the creatures and the lands that are the most remote from the boys. These strange creatures and outlandish places arguably help define the American boys who are eager to move beyond the neighborhood. As Said has argued, “imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away”(55). Each boy’s self-fashioning occurs not merely at the point of imagining about his encounter with far-off others, but also the moment when he accounts for the tasks he undertakes to possess them. To the boys, their self-fashioning is, though not exclusively, in the language they use. The boy characters seem to be constricted by the conventionality of the everyday chronotopes, claim that they undertake a series of adventures to move beyond their neighborhood, and eagerly embrace something exotic in far-away places. From the first moments, the encounter with the everyday (the city, zoo, the vacant lot, and the eggs) mobilizes in the boys’ cravings for the extraordinary, the exotic, cravings that sit in an uneasy relation to their mundane realities.

As Klein suggests, many middlebrow writers of the 1950s used the travel genre to explore the issues that shaped America's postwar relations with the nations of Asia, including the increasing presence of Americans in Asia (103). This can be applicable to Seuss, who demonstrates his awareness of the pedagogical implications of an exoticism tailored to young readers by having the three postwar stories revolving around journeys to faraway places and encountering animals or strange creatures. The three stories continue the pattern of representation—cumulative tale—that Seuss has adopted, but they also differ from their predecessors in significant ways. In his earlier books, Marco imagines a fancy parade in the street and assumes that McElligot Pool located in the town may be connected with the river or the sea far away. In contrast to Marco who never travels the world but commutes between home and school, the boy narrators in the three books of the 1950s are highly mobile, enjoying sufficient freedom, at least rhetorically, to move from one place to another. Their stories usually begin in a kitchen, a classroom or a zoo inside a town in America. But the boy's imagination always transforms a seemingly provincial life into an exciting journey full of adventures and wonders. The home-away-home motif is present in the stories, but compared to stories presented in chronological order, the narrative is made up of vignettes which appear fragmentary and disoriented. Each narrative vignette is characterized by a series of mini-quests, each of which features the boy's visit to a far-off land inhabited by exotic creatures. The three books feature motifs and narrative patterns evocative of the cumulative tale, tell adventure stories, and highlight the boys' quests for self-affirmation in a world transformed by travels and encounters between cultures. By emphasizing *the faraway places* where the items or creatures have been collected, the boy narrators map for the reader a world outside the borders of the nation. The boys' adventures, knowingly or otherwise, promote trips to areas of the world which few Americans visit and impress the young readers with an awareness of their nation's new global stature. McGraw expresses desires to travel to any place in the world to collect fantastical creatures. Hooper tells about how he travelled great distances and discovered a variety of exotic birds and their eggs. Conrad Cornelius o'Donald o'Dell is also helped by his friend to go beyond Zebra into "brand-new wonderful" places around the world.

Just as the Cold War is commonly characterized as a state of tension between democracy and communism, so a simplistic binary opposition between

good and bad can also be detected in the boys' adventures. As the Red Scare or hysteria over the threat from the Communists swept the United States during the Cold War, the boy characters in Seuss learn to protect themselves and are very cautious when traveling around the world. When going beyond Zebra, o'Donald o'Dell will learn not just the letter SNEE, but also Sneedle, "a terrible kind of ferocious mos-keedle / Whose hum-dinger stinger is sharp as a needle" (Dr. Seuss, *On*). In spite of his attempt to capture fancy animals, McGrew must also try every possible means, building "a Bad-Animal-Catching-Machine" to capture beasts that are "ugly and vicious and mean," and "coax a beast out of his cave with a wonderful meal" (Dr. Seuss, *If*). Similarly, Hooper must be very careful to escape "the frightful Bombastic Aghast" that is mean and fast and get its egg (Dr. Seuss, *Scrambled Eggs*). Hooper does not take eggs from the Twiddler Owls because "the eggs of those fellows who twiddle / Taste sort of like dust from inside a bass fiddle." He also passes up the eggs of a bird called a Stroodel because its eggs "are goeey like glue and they stick to your fork" (Dr. Seuss, *Scrambled Eggs*). Though mentioned briefly in a wide array of strange animals, the bad animals, dangerous insects, and rotten eggs are arguably most emblematic of the threats or perils the boys must learn to recognize and overcome while moving beyond national borders.

III. Building Bonds with Others

Despite the lurking menaces, the three stories seem to resonate with the history of the US-Asian contact zone during the 1950s, keeping the global imaginary of integration and its structure of feeling. All of them happen to hail travel for its unique ability to move across all boundaries in ways that build bonds with people in different places, if taken seriously. Unlike Marco who thinks in narrowly "isolationist" terms, the boys in the three postwar stories travel great distances and direct the American reader's attention to the world outside the nation's borders. As indicated by the three stories, the boys' self-expression is premised upon the invention of exotic others. The boys are the so-called "little ambassadors" whose international movements could be seen as "symbolic gestures" to reaffirm and strengthen bonds with people around the globe. They engage themselves in encounters with friends and helpers who share common interests. Their journeys seem to be shaped by what Klein calls "a global imaginary of integration" (22). As an imaginative, discursive

construct, Klein suggests, a global imaginary defines the primary relations among peoples, nations, and regions “not as isolated entities but as interconnected with one another” (23).

In the three postwar stories, the boys appear free of fear of foreigners, and friends from far and wide come to help them with their jobs. Only by creating such bonds, the boys suggest, could their goals—building a zoo or having “a scramble more super than super”—be achieved and sustained. To make an unprecedented zoo, McGrew gains help from peoples in the African island of Yerka and “the helpers who all wear their eyes at a slant” (Dr. Seuss, *If*). Eight Persian princes help bring creatures (a Gusset, a Gherkin, a Gasket, and a Gootch from the wilds of Nantasket), and a foreign soldier brings back a Russian Palooski. More than that, a chieftain comes back with him when capturing a scraggle-foot Mulligatawny from the Desert of Zind. Similarly, when Hooper needs more eggs, he calls on the help of some friends he knows from around the world. In the knowledge that the job is “too big for one fellow to do,” Hooper telegraphs to some friends near Fa-Zaol, which is ten miles or so beyond the North Pole, and some fellows in Zummz help capture special eggs and mail them to the boy by Special Delivery (Dr. Seuss, *Scrambled Eggs*). “With the help of some friends,” he also secures the egg of a Moth-Watching Sneth, an awful big bird. A fellow, named Ali, even comes a long way to “climb the steep crags and the jags of Mt. Strookoo” to fetch him the egg of a Mt. Strookoo Cuckoo. The brave Ali fights his way through as the cockoos “jabbed at his legs and they stabbed at his cheeks” with their beaks. He suffers without yielding and endures patiently to send the boy the egg for his “Special de luxe à-la-Peter T. Hooper.” The examples above suggest that capturing animals or collecting eggs represents for the boys opportunities to forge emotional and intellectual bonds with the people living in the regions outside the national borders. Over and above the linguistic pleasures, Seussian language also serves as a tool of establishing the others by inventing for young American readers “the rest of the world,” by inviting them to imagine places and peoples and creatures that are “rich and strange,” ready to signify “a global imaginary of integration.”

Noticeably, the *othering* of people and places out there, whether deliberate or otherwise, is established with a combination of words and pictures. For Seuss the pictorial signs frequently serve as visual illustrations to flesh out the verbal signs in his children’s books. Pictures of wacky creatures and weird things are

always made to complement the coined words.¹⁴ In the limited scope of a picture book, the reader's understanding of the exotic others comes from the boy's account, not from any attempt to elicit responses from the foreigners out there. The peoples and creatures who live in far-away countries are always silenced and are presented only through the boys' stories. In contrast to the articulate boys, the exotic others are rendered as inarticulate or unable to communicate verbally. Pictorially, on the other hand, Seuss is interested in those moments of contact between the boys and other peoples in the rest of the world. Everything in their account of the exotic is given pictorial illustration, which is understood as a form of significant seeing. In *On Beyond Zebra!*, Seuss even invents a twenty-letter alphabet, and each fanciful letter is drawn with flourishes and peaks so it resembles "an elaborate monogram, 'perhaps in Old Persian'" (Morgan and Morgan 152). To see is for Seuss to secure what might otherwise be deemed as implausible. The peoples, places and creatures he invents are imaginary, but they seem to be *out there*, to be graspable when they are pictorially represented in the print version.

Further, in the best Orientalist fashion, Seuss shows that they look happy or proud when working with the boys. One striking example can be found on one double-page spread of *If I Ran the Zoo* where McGrew is shown as a harvesting hunter "with the helpers who all wear their eyes at a slant," coming down from the top of a faraway mountain. Dressed in a kind of official dress worn by the military official in the Qing Dynasty, one helper is shown carrying for the boy a fine fluffy bird on the verso page; dressed in a wide-sleeved kimono, three helpers march in wooden clogs, following the cage which carries the fine beast captured on the recto page. The position of the American boy in relation to the helpers is evident in *If I Ran the Zoo*, where the boy holding a gun stands proud at the top of the cage holding the prize that the boy intends to take home. The picture reveals how images of exotic places are never innocent in a picture book. Rather it reveals more about the narrator-protagonist than the helpers, especially when the narrator-protagonist is the object of a self-representation. This scenario presents an image of a self-confident white American boy, a powerful image to establish and maintain American selfhood. The boy's adventures affirm his need—and ability—to establish bonds of

¹⁴ While presiding over the Beginner Books, Seuss laid down strict rules for the books: "there would be no more than one illustration on any page; the text should not describe anything that was not pictured so that children could work out the story from the illustrations alone; and the design of each pair of facing pages would interlock as an artistic unit" (Morgan and Morgan 160).

connection, both real and imagined, to helpers around the world. They also delineate a world where people and resources could move easily across geographical or national boundaries. While the boy presents himself as hunting and collecting items in faraway lands, he seems to be blind to the ways in which the others help shape what he is, beginning with his craving to present his collection(s) to his compatriots.

However, a significant shift in tone occurs in *On Beyond Zebra!*, given that the boys' adventures are predicated upon their bonds with others. If it is hunting or collecting that gives McGrew and Hooper their purpose of self-fashioning, it is the broader perspective that a different language counts in the 1955 book. McGrew fantasizes traveling around the world searching for fantastic creatures, and Hooper recalls the daring adventures recently undertaken—collecting a wide variety of fancy eggs. The two boys present themselves as restless, adventure-minded explorers who search around the world and collect creatures or items they desire. In contrast to McGrew's expansionist reverie and Hooper's daunting exploits, the unknown narrator, a friend of Conrad Cornelius o'Donald o'Dell, does not aim for the items or creatures available, but for new horizons and new experiences. Different from the boy who dreams or brags to a girl, the boy narrator in *On Beyond Zebra!* addresses Conrad Cornelius o'Donald o'Dell, a very young friend who has just mastered the alphabet. Rather than hunt and collect elsewhere and gather things to take back to his homeland, the boy narrator in *On Beyond Zebra!* aims to urge his pupil to see the limit of the twenty-six-letter system. His little friend has just mastered the alphabet and claims to know "everything anyone knows / From beginning to end. From the start to the close." The narrator encourages his friend to go beyond "Z is for zebra" if Z is as far as the alphabet goes. He reiterates that if he, like most people, stops only at twenty-six letters and the set of rules, his world would be limited by the one language he can use, and limited due to that language's inability to capture the depth and breadth of other worlds. He prompts his friend to "explore! Like Columbus! Discover new letters!" The letter WUM, for instance, is for Wumbus, a high-spouting whale who lives high on a hill, and VROO is for Vrooms, who are two brothers living on a world near the sun. Other than telling his friend some brand-new words he might spell, the narrator also leads him around and tries hard to show the things beyond Z that most people do not know. He takes his friend to seek new or unknown "experience" and "value" elsewhere, going together down to "the underground

grotto in Gekko” and soar to “a world near the sun.” Having been led past Zebra as far as he could, his friend finally says, “This is really great stuff! / And I guess the old alphabet / ‘ISN’T enough!”” The movement from the zoo book through the egg book to the beyond-the-alphabet book provides a sense of the ethically edifying significance that attaches to the boy narrator and his young friend in the book.

IV. Coda

This is by no means an exhaustive study of the exotic others in Seuss’s children’s books, but an argument for thinking about his children’s books and the culture of the Cold War through a close reading of one particular feature of his works. A closer look at the three postwar children’s books by Seuss is not to suggest that the tone shift in the three adventure stories is attributed to Seuss’s journey to Japan where he enjoyed a warm friendship with a university professor in Kyoto. Rather, an investigation of the exotic others in these examples prevents us from homogenizing different kinds of others and helps to underscore the historical, cultural work involved in children’s book production.

Drawing on Christina Klein’s thesis of Cold War Orientalism, this essay argues that the Asian or the exotic appear to be figured as hyperbole rather than absence, caricature rather than exclusion in Seuss. As Klein suggests, the Cold War is not merely a historical era defined by the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, but “a chapter in the ongoing process of globalization” (16). The boys’ quests and their fascination with the exotic others do not seem to be simply innocent, but form part of the problematic cross-cultural politics whereby cultural differences are co-opted and integrated. The three books, like many cultural texts of the mid-century, “performed a certain kind of cultural work,” and “helped to construct a national identity of the United States as a global power” (Klein 9). As the essay has shown, Seussian exoticism of the mid-1950s is the product less of a mode of aesthetic perception than of a self-confirmation through the imaging of cultural others.

Rather than do the artist and his books a disservice, this essay suggests that Dr. Seuss not only is subject to Cold War Orientalism, but also actively manipulates or appropriates exoticist codes of cultural representation in his books for children in the immediate years following the Second World War. An artist who was keenly attuned to the politics of his day, Seuss overtly or latently

translates Cold War ideology into the stories that young readers could imagine and participate in. In his emphasis on the new perspectives that goes beyond Z, Seuss simultaneously converts them into tropes representing new experiences for children who learn to read. The exotic others that the essay has explored continue to develop in his later works where Dr. Seuss brings together more heterogeneous collections of talking and non-talking creatures around the world. But that is another story.

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