

Beasts Within and Beasts Without: Colonial Themes in Lothar Meggendorfer's Children's Books.

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Abstract

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ABSTRACT

Lothar Meggendorfer (1847–1925), an innovator in the field of children's books, found colonial themes useful to teach and to entertain children about being civilized. Given the representations of colonialism in the visual culture of turn-of-the-twentieth-century Europe, this is not surprising. Yet his books have long been admired for their mechanics, while their content has been both excised and ignored. Nonetheless, Meggendorfer extensively used animals to represent colonial hierarchies, and while his books tell us little about animals or others associated with animals, they reveal the colonial thinking in Wilhelmine Germany in the age of so-called new imperialism.

The culminating moveable image in Lothar Meggendorfer's early twentieth-century *Immer Lustig! Ein Ziehbilderbuch* featured a tortoise (Figure 1). This was a typical subject for the great German innovator of the pull-tab book, who returned time and time again around the turn of the twentieth century to animate and depict animals. The tortoise in *Immer Lustig!* was in danger, a state milked for humor in Meggendorfer's one hundred or so children's books. A tug on the pull tab at the bottom of the page set its limbs to flailing in agitation. The enormous reptile was in the clutches of a boy from the German colony of Cameroon, who was "so black and hungry," the two-verse accompanying stanza explained, that the turtle was afraid of being devoured. Meggendorfer has not asked the child reading and playing with the mechanical book to identify with its African counterpart; rather, he has directed the reader's/animator's sympathies towards the distressed animal. The Cameroonian child has, in fact, been equated to an animal himself with the use in the poem of the verb *fressen*, which describes an animal eating.¹ This image served assumptions held by Germans as well

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