

Celesteville, from Le Roi Babar. © Heirs of Jean de Brunhoff.  
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# Babar and the *Mission Civilisatrice*: Colonialism and the Biography of a Mythical Elephant

*Stephen O'Harrow*

Babar inspires an autobiographical note: I have three children, two grown and one still at the age of wonder. I have read the Babar stories with all of my children and all of my children, as I did, found Babar wonderful, although each child reacted to the stories in a different way. Some of the things I find I need to say about the stories may lead the reader to construe this article as an attack on the work of Babar's creator, Jean de Brunhoff.<sup>1</sup> This is far from the case. De Brunhoff was an artist. His Babar books are works of art (in the genre of Milne and Winnie-the-Pooh), rather more fireproof, or at least critic-proof, than run-of-the-mill children's books. Doubtless, Babar's popularity will endure as long as children anywhere can take delight in the adventures of a friendly elephant who can ride a bicycle dressed as a *boulevardier*. Who could fail to be charmed?

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And a note on method: life writing implies, above all, a series of choices. One must choose what to include and what to leave out. Even assuming one has access to all the facts, which one never does (not even in autobiography), and that certain choices are not imposed by the material itself, which they almost always are, one can never tell all, nor would one wish to, for to tell all would produce chaos. So some things are left in and some things are cut out. What one chooses to include is literary capital, even more elementary than one's interpretation of events, and it is this inventory of inclusion that should be at the root of biographical criticism. The proposition applies to all life stories, whether fictitious or not. It denotes a process crucial to every philological inquiry, for instance Biblical exegesis, where understanding of

the synoptic Gospels turns on what they have all chosen to include—knowing what value to place on events included in some and not others is the essence of the enterprise.

At any point in history, the life writer's choices, whether conscious or unconscious, are affected by many things, but none so subtle and pervasive as the *zeitgeist*, the spirit of the times. It is this spirit which allows us to swim like fish in a river—we may think that we are making some headway, and compared to the other fish, perhaps we are, but if the river is flowing in the opposite direction faster than any fish can swim, in reality we are going backwards.

By all accounts, Jean de Brunhoff (1899–1937) himself was *parfaitement charmant*. His photos are striking: slim, handsome and well-dressed, with an undeniably aristocratic *air*.<sup>2</sup> We know from the few biographical notes available that he was a somewhat shy, well-educated man, from a family with professional connections in the Paris art world, and that he was married into a *bon bourgeois* family of similar social standing.<sup>3</sup> It is said that he and his wife Cécile (née Sabouraud), their families, and their circle of friends considered themselves social progressives, and like many French people of the day who had witnessed the Great War, basically pacifistic. In other words, they were swimming upstream at a faster rate than a number of their contemporaries.<sup>4</sup>

But what of the *zeitgeist*, in which direction was it flowing? Cécile de Brunhoff first invented Babar the elephant in a story to read to her children sometime around 1930/31.<sup>5</sup> Her husband, Jean, was an artist by profession but unable to live on his earnings from the arts—he and Cécile and their children received an allowance from their parents. When Jean thereupon created the illustrations, he still intended them as a treat destined for his own children alone. At this point (1931), family friends in the publishing business prevailed upon de Brunhoff to put the Babar book in print, and its success was both immediate and surprising. In the short period from 1931 until his death from tuberculosis in 1937, Jean made his lasting mark as the creator of five more Babar books, text as well as illustration.<sup>6</sup> Thus, if we wish to know the spirit of the times that enveloped the process of creating Babar's universe, we must look at the France of the period of Jean de Brunhoff's life, and especially the France of the early and mid-1930s.

As film critics have often noted, nearly everywhere in the Western world, the financial malaise of the post-1929 era created a vast new audience wishing to make their escape from depressing reality by entering the cinema.<sup>7</sup> Publishers, too, found the book-buying public would respond favorably to works that could paint a world with some reassurance. What could possibly reassure the potential purchaser of children's books in the France of the early thirties more than confirmation of the warmth and safety of the traditional foyer and a rehearsal of France as the light of the civilized world? Apart from the intrinsic appeal of anthropomorphic animals, elephants oh-so-light-on-their-feet, happy endings, and de Brunhoff's ingenious illustrations, there was the actual content of the stories to be considered, and this content was in harmony with the times.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, France ruled an empire second only to that of Great Britain. French possessions could be found in Africa, Asia, North and South America, and in the islands of the Atlantic, the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, and the Pacific. Something on the order of fifty nations, states (independent and semi-independent), and colonial entities used French as an official language. The supposed virtues, both economic and moral, of the French colonial system and its contribution to national defense had been the subject of frequent reiteration in both French schools and the French press for the several decades leading up to the early postwar period, but the Parisian public's (indeed the whole nation's) awareness of France as a colonial power was (re)awakened on a scale never seen before by the 12,000 exhibitors at the Exposition Coloniale Internationale of 1931, a vast event which took over almost a square mile of the Bois de Vincennes and officially attracted some 33,489,902 visitors—a figure equal to more than three-quarters of the national population of the period.<sup>8</sup> The exotic animals alone, elephants head and shoulders above the rest, formed the basis and the bulk of what was to become the great Paris Zoo, the Jardin Zoologique du Bois de Vincennes.

Speaking of a malaise in the body politic in general and especially among the French intellectual elite, Janet Horne notes a "high level of national anxiety" in the years just following the Great War, an anxiety which gripped even those with the most firmly republican sensibilities (people of Jean de Brunhoff's circle). One surmises from her investigations that the colonial

exhibition itself, not unlike the Babar books, should be viewed largely as an act of reassurance, even as the republican establishment sought to “avert the specter of national decline by embarking on a quest to secure a Greater France.” This “Greater France” was a “renaissance of the colonial ideal.” It denoted a “figurative geography,” which “implied that campaigns for domestic reform and colonial expansion were part of the same overarching quest for the national renewal of France” (Horne 21 *et seq.*).

Reassuring as it was to various aspects of the French psyche, republican as well as imperial, the Exposition Coloniale Internationale not only presented a live experience of exoticism to the visitor, offering an assortment of publications emphasizing the flora and fauna of France’s colonial territories, but it also proffered a huge array of edifying pamphlets with titles such as *La pénétration scolaire en pays Cambodgien et Laotien* and *L’œuvre civilisatrice et scientifique des missionnaires catholiques dans les colonies françaises*. One could say with little fear of contradiction that extolling exoticism and the benefits of French control of exotic places was at the heart of the exhibition. The impact was undeniable. Whether the de Brunhoff family itself, resident in the Paris region in 1931, was taken up with the spirit of the exhibition one cannot yet affirm, but it would be fair to surmise that a large number of Jean’s future readers were so engaged.<sup>9</sup>

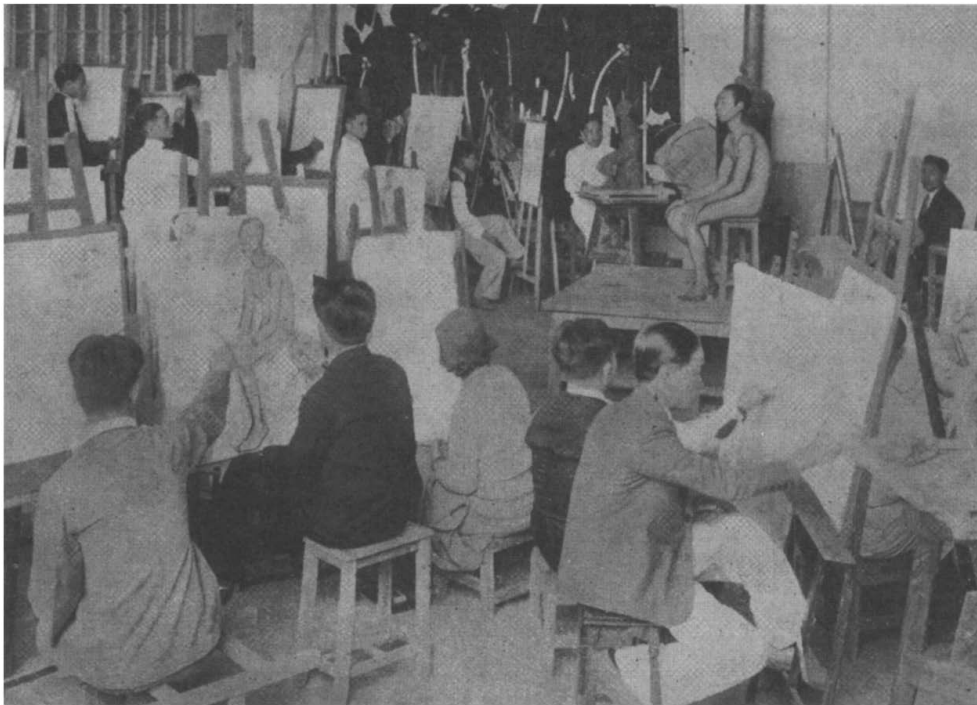
Thus, it is clear that two seminal ideas were floating freely in the Paris atmosphere by the end of the year 1931. The first notion was that under the tutelage of France were many lands full of wondrous beings. The second idea was that, in the presence of the French civilizing genius, the fact that France was in control of a goodly portion of the exotic world was, doubtless, a “good thing”—good for France, but even more importantly, good for the future of the exotic places of the world and their many inhabitants.

And there was a third “big idea” which had already attained widespread acceptance in official scientific circles and had also gained some measure of respectability in other French epistemic communities before the end of the nineteenth century: “acclimatizationism,” the repertory of theories and practices that underpinned the effort willfully to imprint on any particular organism, in the words of the noted French naturalist Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, “modifications which render it able to

live and to perpetuate its species under new conditions of existence" (Osborne 2). In fact, it was in the environs of that Vatican of acclimatizationism, the Jardin Zoologique d'Acclimatation in the Bois de Boulogne, much older than the zoological gardens at Vincennes,<sup>10</sup> that wild animals such as elephants could first be viewed by the Parisian public on a regular if somewhat limited basis. And in spite of the spread of more modern genetic theories, the basic mind set that could be labeled acclimatizationism could still be detected in quantity in the French zeitgeist by the first third of the twentieth century.

Since the Gallicization of colonial peoples, or at least of colonial elites through education (the practical application in life of what happened to Babar in fiction), was basic to the French colonial *œuvre*, it can be said that notions of the ultimate feasibility of acclimatizationism summed up what many saw as the prospects for the "*Mission Civilisatrice*." As Osborne observes:

Lamarckian, near-Lamarckian and neo-Lamarckian ideas were firmly rooted in France. For these reasons, France and its empire, and not the empires of Great Britain and Germany, formed the international epicenter of the acclimatization movement. (174)<sup>11</sup>



*Drawing class, late 1920s, Université Indochinoise de Hanoi, École des Beaux Arts (Indochine Française, Section des Services 130).*

But one need not have subscribed wholeheartedly to all aspects of these ideas to have been subtly invaded by them, and one need not have been wholly conscious of their influence for one to have created works of fiction that resonated to such notions pervading one's reading public.

How did Babar's appeal "resonate" and what has it to do with life writing? To answer these questions, we must look at the content and technique of the early Babar books, the ones which first created the character and his milieu for the children of France, and eventually the children of the world.

As noted by Ann Hildebrand:

The first flush of Jean's genius vitalizes the three stories that establish Babar's character, his physical world, and the themes both de Brunhoffs will sound. In fact these stories are the heart of the Babars, the most interesting to thoughtful readers and students of the elephant utopia, and basic to an appreciation of the saga. (23)

The titles in question are *The Story of Babar*, *The Travels of Babar*, and *Babar the King*. In addition, there is much to be drawn from *Babar and His Children*.<sup>12</sup> Let us review each of the first "foundational" three in enough detail to permit further discussion; even readers familiar with the texts may wish to refresh their memories with the details.

*The Story of Babar* (1931)—a baby elephant (Babar) is born to a loving mother in a tropical forest (location unspecified). After he has grown a bit, his idyllic childhood among other elephant children is brutally cut short by human hunters who shoot Babar's mother. Babar runs to escape from the forest and happens upon a city which is much like Paris. In the city, he sees well-dressed humans and wishes he could partake. A patroness (*La Vieille Dame*, "The Old Lady") takes kindly to him and gives him her purse. He buys clothes (including spats and a bowler hat), has his picture taken in them, eats *patisserie*, is taken to her home, learns to sleep in a bed (in pajamas!), is schooled, holds forth conversationally in her *salon*, drives about in a small red roadster (she "gives him anything he wants"), and generally lives the life of a well-kept Parisian man-about-town. But he pines for his forest homeland. One day, two of his elephant cousins, Céleste and Arthur, somehow make it to town looking for him. Overjoyed to see them, Babar passes on to them the urban(e) French virtues of *couture* and *cuisine*. Properly fed and dressed, they are happy together at

the patroness's home when their elephant mothers suddenly appear at the door, looking cross. It is time to go home. Babar and The Old Lady will miss each other—who knows what the future will bring? Babar and his now civilized (*i.e.*, dressed) cousins drive upright in the roadster down the Gallic tree-lined route home, their naked mothers running along behind on all fours. When they arrive home, it transpires that the old King of the Elephants has died and the elders are looking for a new king. Since Babar has returned an educated almost-man from the metropole, he is acclaimed King. He announces that, on the drive home, he and Céleste have become engaged and if he is to be King, then she must be Queen. Again the crowd proclaims its assent. There is organized a gala coronation-cum-wedding, after which, Babar and Céleste hold hands in neo-marital bliss under a starry sky and look to the future.

*The Travels of Babar* (1932)—Babar and Céleste are off on their honeymoon in a balloon. They drift over a town which looks for all the world like Biarritz as seen from the air by St. Exupéry. Then they drift out to sea where they are downed in a storm and land on a sizable desert isle. They hang their wet clothes up to dry. Babar, with his boy-scout talents, sets up camp, and Céleste sees to the meal. While Babar is away on a reconnoiter, Céleste goes to sleep. Dark, woolly-headed cannibals appear, tie her up, and ignorantly try on articles of the elephants' clothing. Babar returns, routs the savages, and saves his bride. It is time to leave. Babar and Céleste hail a passing whale and she gives them a ride on her back. She then deposits them on a tiny rock island while she goes off to forage in the deep, promising to return. She is unreliable, and Babar and Céleste are stuck. Fortunately, a passing three-funneled *paquebot*, looking for all the world like the *Normandie*, comes to their rescue (see also Hildebrand 32), but, now divested and sans regalia, they are taken for mere animals and stowed in the hold in a straw-lined quasi-cell. Once ashore they are turned over to a circus, from which they escape back to the home of The Old Lady, who joyfully takes them in and provides all that is needed. Once again in proper surroundings, they even go skiing in a place that cannot be far from Mont Blanc. But the time eventually comes to go home to the Land of the Elephants. Babar and Céleste invite The Old Lady to return with them. When their aeroplane lands, they find a devastated country without flowers and birds. It transpires that the (Germanic-looking) rhinoceroses led by Rataxes have declared war and invaded. Céleste and The Old Lady take care of the wounded. Babar decides upon a ruse (disguising his soldiers to look like monsters) and defeats the rhinoceroses bloodlessly. Victory



is declared, The Old Lady is rewarded with honors for her assistance, and the story closes as Babar invites her to remain with them to help him establish happiness in the kingdom.

*Babar the King*<sup>13</sup>—Peace is at hand and The Old Lady is in residence as royal advisor. Babar wanders by a large lake and dreams of building his city—up to this point there are no buildings in the Land of the Elephants, only the occasional temporary Africanesque royal enclosure. Then we see coming a caravan of dromedaries, carrying the returning baggage from Babar’s and Céleste’s turbulent honeymoon: crates filled with clothes and tools, things needed for the new lifestyle of the civitas, records, hats, and trumpets, dresses, suits, materials, paint boxes, drums, fishing tackle and rods, ostrich feathers, tennis rackets, and the like. Everyone pitches in joyfully in the construction of “Célesteville,” while The Old Lady plays edifying Victrola recordings. The result is an elephantine metropolis, a quintessential colonial capital dominated at the top of the page by a Palais du Travail (with school, studios, and library) and a Palais des Fêtes (with facilities for music, dance, theater, cinema, and the circus), flanked on either side by Babar’s royal dwelling and the residence of his chief advisor, The Old Lady. In three tiers descending the page come the individual but totally identical houses of his subjects—“chaque éléphant a sa maison.” Babar also distributes gifts, including serviceable work apparel and beautiful rich garments for holidays. Babar decrees a reunion in the gardens of the Palais des Fêtes, where every elephant will dress up. The gardeners are hard about their task of arranging nature *à la Versailles*; the schoolchildren practice the ancient chant of the Mammoths.<sup>14</sup> The Sunday fête goes very well, with magnificent costumes, delicious cakes, and children’s songs. The next day the elephant children are back to school under the tutelage of The Old Lady. Elephants too old to go to school chose a trade, from farmer, cobbler, street cleaner, or mechanic, through musician and clown, to doctor, sculptor, and academician. It is explained that each person has a role in this well-ordered society and each serves the other in some way. The old male elephants play bowls, the children play with the clown, and the King and Queen play tennis with an officer and his wife. All elephants attend the theater, themselves outfitted in gowns, tiaras, and evening dress, where they watch elephantine players in Molièresque attire. Naughty children play in the wake of the street-cleaner but redeem themselves by playing cello and violin and so earn a trip to the pastry shop. There is a distribution of school prizes. The talents and virtues of the mechanic, the sculptor,

and the painter are featured in the king's mechanical horse, which he will mount the next day on the anniversary of the foundation of the capital. Reviewing the great procession Babar, surrounded by dignitaries and boy scouts, watches as the honor guard and then the other estates parade by—workers grouped in allied trades, mechanics and chauffeurs, painters and sculptors, clowns and actors, gardeners and farmers, pastry cooks and chefs, followed by a sign reading "UN pour tous/ TOUS pour un." Pachyderm military units are represented by uniforms such as those of the Macedonian Phalanx, a cross between the Garde Républicaine and Buckingham Palace units in busbys; a troop of Czarist Hussars; a group of French Equatorial African Infantry; and, in the dim background, what appears to be members of the Greek Orthodox clergy. It is a glorious day but soon thereafter misfortune befalls The Old Lady in the form of a snakebite, and Babar's dear old friend Cornélius loses his house to a conflagration. Babar tries to sleep and falls into a nightmare in which the demons of fear, indolence, anger, ignorance, laziness, cowardice, sickness, discouragement, anger, despair, and stupidity assail him. They are driven off by the angels of virtue, courage, patience, learning, labor, goodness, intelligence, hope, love, health, joy, happiness, and perseverance. In the end, his sick friends recover, and Babar and his elephant elite are instructed by The Old Lady: "Do you see how in this life one must never be discouraged? . . . Let's work hard and cheerfully and we'll continue to be happy." And since that day, "over in the elephant's country, everyone has been happy and contented."

The qualities which have endeared Jean de Brunhoff's work to the international public for some years, the attractiveness of his illustrations as well as the obvious tenderness and good will of the Babar stories, go a long way towards obscuring some of its inherent basic contradictions. The chief contradiction centers on a confluence of attitudes. De Brunhoff's elephants may be animals *de jure*, but they are people *de facto*. As the elephants are presented to their readers,<sup>15</sup> their behavior is to be judged by the same standards as human behavior. The elephants are, as such, the real central human focus.

On the rare occasions that non-Western human figures do appear in de Brunhoff's early stories, they are woolly-headed savages with walk-on parts.<sup>16</sup> Both from the structural and representational points of view, these characters are entirely incidental. The real "other" in the Babar stories is then the elephant; the elephant exists in contrast to humans not in the

way that animals really contrast with *homo sapiens*, but as certain groups of people contrast with other groups of people.

Apart from incidental savages, among *homo sapiens* in the Babar stories there is but one group: clothed, presumably-educated, presumably-civilized Caucasoid beings, who walk upright in a Gallic setting and manipulate human artifacts. Among elephants there are two sub-groups: educated, clothed, civilized beings, walking upright and manipulating human artifacts; and uneducated, naked, less-than-civilized elephant/animal beings, apt to be instructed in walking upright and manipulating human artifacts.<sup>17</sup> Further, those elephants who are already civilized have become so through human intervention, and these now superior elephants have as their mission the civilizing of the others. The beneficence of the situation is clear as long as the reader shares the notion that civilization as here defined is a “good thing,” which any benighted tropical group who did not enjoy its fruits would desire.

What does “civilization” look like in 1931? It looks French. Technology, couture, cuisine, and enlightened order is imposed on what would otherwise be chaos. It is a quintessentially French civilization we see in the Babar books, one herewith imposed on the delightfully exotic world of the same kind depicted at the Exposition Coloniale Internationale. Further, it is the civilization of republican France, bringing to its recipients not only the delights of arts refined and mechanical, of attire and the properly laid table, but also the social virtues of opportunity and order, nothing less than the justice of an ideal polity, the one which so many longed to see emerge after the horrible sacrifices of the Great War.

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**King Babar, Masculine Hero.** Any child exposed to the nationally decreed history curriculum of the republican schools in the first part of the twentieth century will be familiar with stories from the exemplary lives of men who were both figures of contemplation and of action, often surprisingly (and safely distant) royal figures. Typical of those portrayed were Charlemagne, the warrior king, secretly learning to write on the *ardoise* he kept under his pillow; Philippe-Auguste, fathering the great institutions of Paris; and Bonaparte, doing what he did so well to further the military and centralized institutional glory of France—*passons sur le reste*. Many of these were stories

wherein the schoolchild could witness the *ipsissima verba* (real or imagined) of Great Kings, men to whose personal acts, apart from warfare and diplomacy, were attributed profound effects on the formation of the national consciousness and every Frenchman's mortal self-apprehension.

However, and perhaps unlike their Anglo-Saxon counterparts, paradigmatic French schoolbook heroes were often noted as well for their royal frailties, qualities which rendered them all the more human and believable, in essence *plus cherissable*.<sup>18</sup> One thinks immediately not only of Charlemagne's shy attempts to overcome his own unlettered condition, but also the popular portrayal of the ease of conscience shown by Henri IV in 1593, as he converted to Catholicism in order to consummate his coronation ("*Paris vault bien une messe*"). One is witnessing here the kind of historical construction comfortable to modern republican eyes; who else but an Henri IV, the king who wore his religion so lightly, could have had the generosity of spirit to have promulgated the Edit de Nantes?

Therefore, if one is to begin a series of stories for children based on the life of an original hero, that hero must hold within his heart an ideal, but he cannot be perfect; he must at the same time be human (even if he is an elephant) as well as humane. In *The Story of Babar*, Babar studies to better himself but also succumbs to luxury and is torn between the comforts of the city and the call of home. In *The Travels of Babar*, he must humble himself in a silly costume, unable to prevent his wife from being exhibited as a danseuse; while in his circus captivity, he begins to lay his plans for escape. In *Babar the King*, he must cope with fire in the capital and other apparent failures, leading him to toss and turn with nightmares. And in *Babar and his Children*, the King of the Elephants is assailed with doubts as he awaits the arrival of his firstborn.

Nevertheless, decisiveness in the face of danger should win out. Early in his exemplary reign, Babar successfully fends off the evil, Germanic-looking rhinos led by Rataxes. And if we turn to the A-list in the catalogue of French heroes, we find it filled with the names of the people who defended the nation against foreign menace, starting from the earliest conceivable moment. The very first "Frenchman" in schoolbook histories, the epitome of "*nos ancêtres, les Gaulois*," is invariably Vercingétorix, who in 52 B.C.E. battled Julius Cæsar at Alésia.

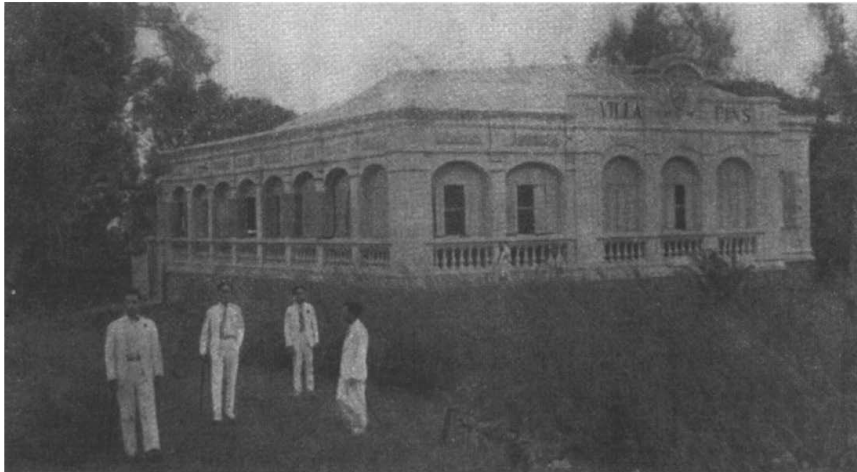
There is Clovis in 486 at Soissons against the Romans. Then Charles Martel ("the Hammer") fends off the Saracens in 732 at Tours. The latter, of course, is followed by Charlemagne, who conquers barbarians of various stripes, seconded by Count Roland holding the pass against the Basques at Roncesvalles in 778. And this is only the beginning.

Just as Babar does, the leaders of exemplary lives, in French tales as elsewhere, often found cities.<sup>19</sup> Babar names his new Jerusalem "Célesteville" after Céleste, who nursed the wounded while the rhino hordes threatened. The association of women with cities in French myth-making is evident: French school children have always learned of Geneviève, patron saint of Paris, who warned the city when Attila and the Hunnish hordes threatened; and of Jeanne d'Arc, who lifted the siege of Orléans when the unwashed English threatened the city.

So we can affirm that any number of elements which de Brunhoff chooses to include in the exemplary life of Babar—the occasionally weak "humanity" which accompanies his heroics, his founding of a city in association with a female character, his fighting off an enemy clearly foreign—would not be unfamiliar to either a schoolchild or his parents, who by 1931 had been exposed to such tales drawn from his own nation's glorious past.

**King Babar, Urban Civilizer.** Without rehearsing the many Gallic benefits which Babar brings to the elephants, we are struck by the fact that most, if not all, are illustrated in his establishment of Célesteville, with its education, arts, and parades, its hierarchical yet peaceful social order, its useful labor, its regular gardens and pleasant public spaces. Rural elephant life is left largely unmentioned and presumably unchanged. The few glimpses we see of it in royal trips to the countryside help confirm this view. One can only suppose that de Brunhoff was unconscious of how closely the Land of the Elephants, with its gleaming capital and undeveloped hinterland, paralleled the actual growth of the French colonies, or would foreshadow that of the independent Third World nations which succeeded them. And yet, one cannot contrast the Hanois and Dakars of either yesterday or today with their respective rural surroundings and not find a convincing mirror of the Land of the Elephants.

From Babar's own earliest experience in the metropole, his mentor and patroness was The Old Lady. She finances his education and his acculturation, as well as his boyish whims.



*Université Indochinoise de Hanoi, Colonie Scolaire de Doson (Indochine Française, Section des Services 129). Note the resemblance to Célesteville's Palais de Fêtes.*

When the time comes for him to return to his country and establish his elephantine utopia, he brings The Old Lady back. Reminiscent of saintly nurses behind the lines at the Somme, she along with Céleste acts at first as a nurse to the elephants wounded in their clash with the Germanic-looking rhinos. Peace re-established, The Old Lady plays soothing music on the phonograph for the elephants as they labor at the construction of the new capital. Finally she is ensconced in Célesteville as the grand advisor to the king, with her own residence, close to his and much larger than that of the run-of-the-mill elephant citizen. Once Babar's queen delivers her first children, The Old Lady doubles as nursemaid to the royal children.

Janet Horne's observations regarding the relationships between the feminine, the colonial, and republican reformism are brought to mind.

From the 1889 International Exposition to the 1931 Colonial Exhibition . . . France's empire formed a pervasive subtext of the reform discourse . . . of the metropole. Practical efforts to promote both colonial expansion and metropolitan reform were also linked in fundamental ways. Republican campaigns for social betterment and the impulse to consolidate the empire constituted two primary and recurrent vectors of the national renewal of France, expressed in a variety of guises. Both reformers and colonialists used gendered discourse to justify their policies by grounding them in broad, essentialist norms that portrayed women primarily as mothers but also as messengers of social mediation and modernity. (42)

In sum, de Brunhoff's Babar, this elegant creation, charms and delights and his stories will endure, not unlike the greats of French literature, because of the basic "humanity" of his elephant characters. The life de Brunhoff has offered us is that of a boy who, with a generous measure of assistance, overcomes hardship. He shows innate strength of character, but a character well-shaped and enhanced by a civilized education, graced by a feminine muse. And so he can grow to be a king.

Because Babar is both a visual work and a work of words, the elements which de Brunhoff chooses to include can be apprehended in ways spoken and seen, but in whichever medium they appear, they conspire to illustrate a life most easily measured by a reader familiar with other lives drawn from the mythos and the cultural reservoirs of French history, lives similarly constructed, and the elements of Babar's life are put together in a way uniquely consonant with the spirit of the times and congenial to the social and political surroundings of his biographer.

A man's (an elephant's) goodness may be innate, yet it can only flower in the proper social surroundings. Where these surroundings are lacking, in places yet benighted, they must be introduced.

## NOTES

1. The Brunhoff family name seems to be of Swedish-Baltic origin, and the particle "de," if it is indeed original, may not actually be "noble" in the French sense and thus merit use of the lower case. But the author here prefers giving the house of Brunhoff the benefit of the doubt, so in this article the particle is not capitalized.
2. See the photograph of the dapper young Jean de Brunhoff in Weber 12.
3. Particularly Weber 13–31 and Hildebrand 1–22.
4. Contemporaries like Céline, whose rantings against the "debased" social order of post World War France were made flesh during the Vichy, and which continued to resonate widely in anti-republican quarters for at least four decades; they are best illustrated in *Voyage au bout de la nuit*.
5. Where Madame de Brunhoff got the name "Babar" is anyone's guess—it was probably chosen for its lumpy, pachydermal sonority—but there was in point of fact an historical Babar or Babur whose name may have inspired her choice; he was the great Mogul Emperor, 1483–1530.

6. After the war, his legacy was taken up by his highly talented artist son, Laurent de Brunhoff, who has given the world approximately thirty more Babar titles to date.
7. Unfortunately for artists like de Brunhoff, museums and art galleries did not cater to a mass audience, and those art collectors who were still buying did not come from situations from which they sought escape.
8. The exhibition was not without its critics. The Surrealists Breton, Aragon, Eluard, and Char, among others, circulated a pamphlet entitled "Ne visitez pas l'Exposition Coloniale."
9. A brief list of twentieth century French and francophone colonial expositions and exhibitions with colonial displays suggests how pervasive this spirit was:
  - Exposition Universelle d'Hanoi \* 1902–1903
  - Exposition Universelle et Internationale de Liège \* 1905
  - Exposition Nationale Coloniale de Marseille \* 1906
  - Exposition Internationale Aéronautique (Paris) \* 1908
  - Franco-British Exhibition (London) \* 1908
  - Exposition Universelle et Internationale de Bruxelles (Brussels) \* 1910
  - Exposition Nationale Coloniale de Marseille \* 1922
  - Exposition des Arts Décoratifs (Paris) \* 1925
  - Exposition Internationale Maritime et Coloniale d'Anvers (Antwerp) \* 1930
  - Exposition Internationale Industrielle de Liège \* 1930
  - Exposition Coloniale Internationale (Paris) \* 1931
  - Exposition de Bruxelles (Brussels) \* 1935.
10. The Jardin Zoologique d'Acclimatation was founded in 1854, while the Jardin Zoologique du Bois de Vincennes really only became the major attraction it is today three-quarters of a century later.
11. Osborne's book contains undoubtedly the fullest and best discussion of these issues in print today.
12. Originally *Histoire de Babar* (1931), *Le Voyage de Babar* (1932), *Le Roi Babar* (1933), and *Babar en Famille* (1938, *opus posthumous*). For the original French and U.S. publishing information, see the Bibliography.
13. As Hildebrand notes, *Babar the King* is "the philosophical center of the Babar saga" (36).
14. The doubtlessly facetious assertions of August A. Imholtz, Jr., notwithstanding, the lyrics are nonsense, or at the very least, not Sanskrit (see also Hildebrand 159).
15. It might be noted that as in all commercial children's literature, Babar's real readers, in the first instance, were the parents of the children for whom the stories were theoretically written.



16. It must be said that in the most recent editions of the original stories available from Hachette Jeunesse in France, most such egregious references have been deleted. But so have many of de Brunhoff's more memorable renderings, such as the dream diptych from *Le Roi Babar*, leading the reader to wonder whether these editorial decisions were not rendered more palatable to the publishers by the very fact of their making the productions considerably more economical.
17. As noted by Hildebrand (39), hats are among the most important articles of clothing, conferring dignity of rank upon the pachyderm in question. The civilization of the rhinoceri, it might be noted, displays Teutonic gear.
18. Royal names of less-than-heroic dimension abound; French children were most familiar with Pepin the Short, Louis the Stammerer, Charles the Bald (also Charles the Fat), Louis the Hard-Headed (the throne of France also rejoiced in a Fat Louis), and the like.
19. But these exemplary lives needn't be absolutely "historical" as we normally construe that term. In many ways, the greatest of all mythic lives in the Western tradition, the mythic life of Christ, is usually portrayed as the greatest of all exemplary lives. One can make a strong case for His "Kingdom of Heaven" to have been modeled if not foreshadowed on earth by the ideal community built among His followers. And on down throughout the Western tradition, both secular and sacred, a legion of new Jerusalems is scattered as the result of the activity of heroes.

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