

Szymon Ostrowski 

Nicolaus Copernicus University, Poland

OF DUCKS AND NATIONS AND DESTINIES: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORIES AND THE CRITICISM OF THE UNITED STATES' COLD WAR POLICIES IN CARL BARKS' DONALD DUCK COMICS

ABSTRACT

The main objective of this paper is to analyze classic Disney comic book stories by writer/artist Carl Barks and to determine how their author emphasized issues and theories related to international politics of the 20th century such as the Cold War, colonialism, dependency theory, etc. Because Barks' works focused on developing countries and political and economic relations of societies and nations, certain parallels between US politics and comic plots can be found. In order to determine what issues were reflected and how they were presented, plots of selected comics were analyzed through a set of questions about Donald Duck, his family and their role in the world where one can find communist countries, developing societies and dependencies between men, corporations, national identities and post-colonial states.

Key words

IR; Cold War; post-colonialism; dependency theory; Walt Rostow; worlds system theory; developing countries; Carl Barks; Donald Duck; Scrooge McDuck

Introduction

Donald Duck, Walt Disney's ill-tempered character in a sailor's suit has appeared in over 100,000 comic book stories (Statystyki, 2010). They not only talk about treasures and hilarious adventures, but also focus on the Korean War ("Paperolipiadi", n.d.) or describe how financial bonds work ("*Zio Paperone e la valanga dei BOP*", n.d.). The main goal of this paper is to address political themes in the works of American cartoonist Carl Barks, the actual father of a number of Disney's comics that many know and love even today. He is the creator of such characters as Scrooge McDuck, Beagle Boys, Gyro Gearloose, or Magica De Spell. In his comics written between 1942 and 1973 ("Carl Barks", n.d.) Donald Duck, his nephews and Uncle Scrooge, the richest duck on Earth, travel around the world in search of amazing treasures. Many of their adventures portray very unfair and exploitative relations between the Ducks and the Natives of tropical countries the characters visit. Other stories seem to criticize the American policy towards the Soviet Union on the one hand, and to praise the Wild West era on the other. These and other themes can be found in Barks' stories written between 1947 and 1959, which some consider as the best period in his career ("100 najlepszych", n.d.).

The adventures of Barks' characters are intertwined with the portrayal of political and economic relations between different nations and countries; they also explain such concepts as colonialism and the Cold War. In this context one can ask what is the value of 1947–1959 Donald Duck stories by Carl Barks for international relations and political studies researchers? If Barks decided to write and draw comics about interactions of American ducks with the inhabitants of colonial and postcolonial territories, he was likely to be politically biased. As mentioned earlier, in Barks' stories the Ducks cause chaos and numerous catastrophes when the Western lifestyle is confronted with the views of developing countries' citizens. It can be assumed that Carl Barks criticized the colonial model of international relations by using elements of several international relations theories; thus his views on developing countries were ahead of his times.

The objective of the research is to analyze Barks' stories and to determine whether his adventure comics include any elements of international relation theories and whether they comment on contemporary American policies towards the Soviet Union, Native Americans and developing countries. The analysis will

seek elements of political science and concepts from international relations in Donald Duck's adventures, as most of his travels abroad were undertaken for financial motives or the plots used the tropes of Wild West-like characters exploring exotic locations in order to find treasures.

In order to achieve this objective, a qualitative content analysis of stories written by Carl Barks between 1947 and 1959 was conducted, where each story was considered a research unit. A research tool prepared for this paper was a set of questions that can be asked about the stories with regard to the comic plot, characters and their portrayal. What values does Donald and his family represent? What are the values of the Natives Donald meets? How are the Natives portrayed? How can one describe relations between the Ducks and the Natives? Can one describe them in context of international relations' theories? How is the Wild West described in Carl Barks' works? How is communism represented in Carl Barks' works, if at all? What do Barks' works say about the United States' role in world politics and in the Cold War? In addition to the above set of questions, the author also asks whether Barks' education and views is in any way related to the themes used in his Donald Duck comics. Here a valuable source of information and context is Carl Barks' biography.

Barks was born in 1901 in a family of poor farmers. At the age of 15 he had to leave school and go to work. He often changed jobs, but his drawing hobby provided him with financial stability. His work as a freelance cartoonist allowed him to gain employment at Walt Disney's studio in 1935 as a writer and storyboard artist (Svane, n.d.). In 1942 Dell Publishing printed the comic book *Donald Duck finds Pirate Gold*, drawn by Barks based on a rejected cartoon script. The publisher loved his work and hired him to work on a monthly Disney comics' magazine, in which Barks started developing a separate universe around Donald Duck. For instance, Donald met his rich Uncle Scrooge in the 1947 story *Christmas on Bear Mountain* (Christmas on Bear Mountain, n.d.).

To present more engaging stories, Barks started exploring Scrooge's persona, giving him an enormous Money Bin, a wide rogues' gallery, and a back-story of a Scottish shoe shiner making a fortune during the Gold Rush in Yukon. Until 1959 Barks had been writing cult-classic stories about globe-trotting adventures of Scrooge and Donald ("Carl Barks", 2000). The artist quitted making comics entirely in 1973. At the time of his retirement, Barks became widely popular, also in Europe, where he had a great influence on many authors of Duck comics. Barks passed away in the year 2000 ("Carl Barks", 2000).

Barks was not a formally educated man. Everything he knew, he had to learn in his free time, without any help from teachers or academics. In one of many

interviews, he stated: “They [fans] must have thought I was a tremendous intellectual. And I never had time to be one even if I could have.” (Phant0mDuck, 2017). He also claimed that he never included any agenda or deeper meaning in his stories. One can thus assume that if there are political biases in Barks’ works, they could be unintentional. However, is that so?

1. Carl Barks on human nature

Barks’ Disney comics can be considered as fables or parables. Just like Donald Duck stories fables are short and are supposed to reinforce rules of behavior. Just like characters in fables, the Ducks personify some values or attitudes towards certain values, such as life or money, and each Duck story contains a moral. On the other hand, just like in a parable, Barks’ plots seem to juxtapose attitudes and truths that can be considered as “opposite” (Meano et al., n.d.). Good examples of such stories are long adventure comics that often put together different, antagonistic lifestyles. Those lifestyles can be represented both by individual characters and groups.

The best example of this literary treatment in Barks’ comics is the antagonism between Donald and Uncle Scrooge. Any money Donald earns, he spends on pleasures, while Old Uncle Scrooge is very rich, but also greedy and stingy. These opposites usually are the base for complex, 20–30 page-long stories. For instance, *The Second-richest Duck* (“The Second-richest Duck”, n.d.) points out that Donald can spend some money to buy soda, but Scrooge is so greedy that he reads old newspapers found in the city park. In another story, Barks presents McDuck’s rivalry with another rich duck who claims to be richer than Scrooge. Donald’s uncle wins, but it costs him much effort just to discover that the difference between the millionaires is a piece of string. Barks says: “Scrooge’s attitude is unhealthy and leads him to unnecessary struggle” (Gwiazda, 2019).

Before determining whether Barks’ fables are set in any political context, his characters should be analyzed in terms of politics and values. Starting with the core figure of this universe, Donald Duck, one can make some interesting observations. Donald’s number one motivation is to earn money in order to ensure a good life for him and his nephews. Because of his clumsiness or simply bad luck, he keeps losing his jobs and has to try to succeed in yet another workplace. Donald can be considered as a model working class member because he is always a physical worker and he is unable to change that (“Working class”, n.d.). Even Uncle Scrooge hires him rather as a porter or “coin shiner”, never considering Donald to be the heir of his fortune (“Some Heir over the Rainbow”,

n.d.). Thus Donald Duck in Barks' stories resembles an average working-class American, hard-working, but with very little influence on "greater events" due to his lack of resources.

In the context of international politics, a more interesting character is Scrooge McDuck. Firstly, his origins – a poor Scottish boy looking for wealth in the United States – are the embodiment of the "American dream" trope (American dream, n.d.). In fact, through the Klondike Gold Rush episode (Rea, n.d.), Carl Barks changed Uncle Scrooge into a "dime novel hero" (Dime novel, n.d.), a frontiersman in the style of Davy Crocket, Buffalo Bill and other similar figures of American folklore. In *Back to Klondike* the reader finds out that in 1897 Scrooge McDuck was not only an Argonaut, but also a short-tempered adventurer ready to fight any obstacle or even to break the law in order to achieve his goals (Gwiazda, 2018 (a)).

Secondly, elderly Scrooge is a prominent international figure as a multibillionaire who owns companies around the world. Scrooge builds a corporation that produces, buys and sells almost everything, almost everywhere. A perfect illustration of this is the story *King Solomon Mines*, in which Scrooge and his family travel around the world just to inspect his businesses set in many different locations (Gwiazda, 2020 (a)). That makes Uncle Scrooge a natural element of the "Duck universe international relations". The McDuck Corporation affects the global economy and can influence world politics through its resources and connections. In fact, with his Money Bin, Scrooge can be richer than some countries (Viotti & Kauppi, 2012).

On their travels, Donald and Scrooge are accompanied by Huey, Dewey and Louie, Donald's young nephews. The triplets' role in the stories kept changing over time: they started as naughty jesters, causing their "Uncle" many troubles ("Spoil the Rod", n.d.). Everything changed with the introduction of the Junior Woodchucks scout group to the comics. When the boys started devoting their time to scouting, they became more aware of the world around them. Thanks to the "Junior Woodchuck Guidebook that is never wrong" (Gwiazda, 2018 (b)), they not only gained significant knowledge, but also became more tolerant and invested into events so greatly that in story *Land of the Pygmy Indians* Huey, Dewey and Louie become the voice of old McDuck's conscience (Gwiazda, 2020 (b)). Altogether, one can consider Junior Woodchucks as an embodiment of hope that people are keen to put in the younger generation as Barks made those boys better than Scrooge and Donald would ever be: smart, empathetic, and tolerant.

The descriptions of Barks' Natives and inhabitants of developing countries follow a certain pattern. Natives can be classified into two groups, depending

on their portrayal. The first type can be called simply “Savages”, who may be enemies of friends but always share the same mental and physical features. Short and with big noses, they seem to be caricatures of the native populations of Africa or South America. Additionally, “Savages” appear as silly and superstitious; the Ducks find it easy to trick them by offering small gifts or pretending to be their gods. Good examples of this trope in Barks’ comics are the denizens of Plain Awful from *Lost in Andes* and the Natives of Hondorica from *Secret of Hondorica*. The first group is very keen on mimicking lifestyles of visitors which they only superficially understand. They also eat square eggs but need the Ducks’ help in finding square hens (Gwiazda, 2020 (c)). In turn, Hondoricans are aggressive and superstitious. They attack a helicopter believing it is their evil god, and it is easy to trick them with a simple disguise (Gwiazda, 2019).

The second group is “Noble Savages”. This trope, also popular in Westerns, originates from the belief that due to their bond with nature, American Natives are innocent, physically perfect and spiritually superior to the Europeans (“Noble Savage”, n.d.). Barks willingly used this trope in his stories in order to point out the contrast between the Ducks and Natives. In *Tralla-La*, Scrooge discovers a Tibetan valley inhabited by lean ducks that live in happiness due to rejecting material goods. Before accidentally ruining that utopia, McDuck lives among them and finds happiness as well (Gwiazda, 2020 (d)).

As they truly admire Noble Savages’ way of living, the Ducks give an impression that they are very uncomfortable with living in a modern society in Duckburg. Recurring motifs in Barks’ stories include Donald romanticizing the Wild West, Scrooge’s nostalgia for the time he spent in Klondike, and the triplets’ sympathy towards animals and forests. The Ducks understand nature as an environment native to them – but at the same time as an obstacle. Here both Barks and his Ducks seem to agree with American historian Frederick Jackson Turner, who was famous for promoting the notion of the Wild West as a constant struggle between white man and nature understood as weather, animals and plants as well as Native Americans. For Turner, it was this struggle that determined the greatness of the American nation (Turner, 1893). Donald dreams about that greatness, which Scrooge experienced when he was Donald’s age, while the triplets grow up exposed to a similar concept, even though boys seem to be aware of its falsity. These beliefs push the Ducks to seek a substitute for that simple life leading to greatness. This is why Scrooge comes back to Yukon when the opportunity arises, Donald becomes a sheriff in *Sheriff of Bullet Valley* (Gwiazda, 2020 (c)), and wherever the older Ducks go, Huey, Dewey and Louie follow.

Still, Barks was very pessimistic about that search for an ideal. Whenever Donald and Scrooge encounter a Native or developing society, their modern nature wins, and the Natives lose. In *Tralla-La* Scrooge shows the inhabitants of the fabled land a bottle cap. It soon becomes the first coin in Tralla-La, and thus Scrooge McDuck ruins the utopia he desired to find so much (Gwiazda, 2020 (d)). In *City of Golden Roofs* greedy Donald and Scrooge actually rob the treasury of an Asian kingdom Tangkor Wat and incite a revolution there as the people do not want to serve their king anymore. Meanwhile, the Ducks just escape with the treasures, leaving the chaos-ridden nation behind (Gwiazda, 2020 (a)).

Carl Barks' fables seem to carry a very pessimistic message about human nature and the Western world. People desire greatness, but their understanding of it is corrupted, leading to harm and disaster. Sometimes this disaster is not intended; it is like the ancient notion of fate that even the richest duck in the world cannot avoid. Barks appears to be aware that colonialism is built on Westerners' desire to be wealthy, powerful and great. The foundation of his stories is the awareness of human flaws and biases, mostly stupidity and pride, which lead to disasters. Yet at the same time the author is biased himself. His portrayal of Asians and Native Americans is scarcely better than blackface style (Kaur, 2019). Still, there is more to say about Barks and his relation to exotic countries. What else do his works say about the colonial system?

2. Carl Barks on international relations

As the previous section established, recurring themes in Disney comics written by Carl Barks are colonialism and the world perceived through the lens of Turnerian thought. Let us focus on the first of those aspects to determine whether Barks criticized the imperial model of politics just because "it was bad", or whether he implemented any actual elements of international relations theories. Before embarking on a search for the answer, an overview of different stands on the matter of colonialism is necessary. Three theories are of particular interest here: modernization theory, dependency theory, and world-systems theory.

Modernization theory is based on the notion that there is only one linear way for societies to develop and it is the way of Western (European) countries. This theory was at the peak of popularity in the first decades after World War II, inspiring in 1960 Walt Rostow to define the five stages of economic growth: *traditional societies* following basic social and economic norms; *preconditions for take-off*, which means creating a basic economy framework such as the financial system; the *take-off* stage of common growth; the *drive to maturity* stage,

involving reduction of poverty; *high mass consumption*, i.e. the peak of development, obviously achieved by then in Western societies such as the United States (Heywood, 2011).

According to Andrew Heywood, “modernization has traditionally worn a western face” (Heywood, 2011). This applies not only to economics but also to culture and politics. The greatest sin of modernization theory and of the Western world was the belief that they were right while others were wrong. This pride is perfectly illustrated by Francis Fukuyama’s end of history theory. For Fukuyama, the collapse of the Soviet Union was a definitive victory of international liberalism and capitalism that would spread all around the world. Yet the 21st-century wars in the Middle East have proved Fukuyama wrong (Basu, 2012). According to Jim George, modernization theory is a “celebration of western modernity” that fueled the Cold War (Reus-Smit & Snidal, 2008). Yet despite all the criticism they received, Rostow’s thoughts are an important element of development theory in economics, which seeks solutions to help poor countries develop and become richer. Rostow’s theory deeply influenced neoliberals and the entire American politics of the 1970s and 1980s as well as the way of thinking about development in general (Heywood, 2011).

Dependency theory opposes modernization theory. It also attempts to determine the roots of poverty and underdevelopment but does not put the blame on the rejection of Western liberal values. According to dependency theorists, the Global South countries are a reservoir of cheap labor and natural resources that the Global North willingly and consciously exploits for their own profits. According to Krishna Swamy Dara, wealthy countries use numerous strategies in order to maintain this circle of dependency through military or economical actions (Basu, 2012). One can argue that Western countries do not have to do anything to maintain this status but the relation between the rich and the poor countries remains colonial in its nature. If not for colonialism, countries of the Global South would perhaps not be underdeveloped in the first place. Goldstein and Pevehouse (2014) quote the example mentioned by Dara – Western corporations supporting local capitalists who get richer and in return maintain a status quo more profitable for their sponsors.

On the basis of dependency theory, world-systems theory was created in 1974. According to sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, the world’s economy makes one world-system or economy-system. Within it, countries are divided into three different groups: the *core* which is the Western world, rich and technologically advanced; the *periphery*, which includes developing countries that offer cheap labor and resources; and *semi-periphery*, comprising mostly post-Soviet countries

that combine the features of *core* and *periphery* (Heywood, 2011). One can use this theory to explain historical events that form what Wallerstein calls *cycles of hegemony* and to analyze the rise and decline of numerous empire-worlds (Gałganek, 1992). By perceiving hegemonic systems in terms of *cores*, *peripheries* and *semi-peripheries*, it is possible to describe local or continental powers or illustrate the capabilities of global corporations.

The relation between Barks and broadly understood modernization theory was widely covered by Daniel Immerwahr in his paper *Ten-Cent Ideology: Donald Duck Comic Books and the U.S. Challenge to Modernization*, in which he connected Barks' conservative views with criticism towards development in general. Immerwahr rightly notes anti-modernism of Uncle Scrooge comics; however, analysis from the perspective of international relations' theories is still needed (Immerwahr, 2020). For instance, *Tralla-La* is a perfect illustration of modernization that causes a political and economic disaster.

As described earlier, when the Ducks find a mysterious Tibetan valley where possession is an unknown concept, Scrooge wants to stay there, tired of the loud and stressful modern world. However, he soon accidentally introduces a metal bottle cap to the denizens of Tralla-La and offers it as a gift to one of those tall, spiritually superior ducks. Later, this bottle cap becomes the most valuable item in the valley, causing turmoil and confusion among the Tibetan-like Natives who discover what money and trade are. To calm them down, Scrooge offers them a "rain of caps" from the airplane. So many metal pieces fall onto the ground that they harm crops and animals; Tralla-La finds itself on the brink of disaster, while Scrooge and his family have to escape from the wrath of no longer peaceful Natives (Gwiazda, 2020).

This story can be considered today as a polemic with Rostow's concept of five stages of development (or maybe it was actually Rostow who argued with Barks, as the comic book was published 6 years ahead of his theory). The Ducks encounter a *traditional society* that bases its existence on agriculture and simple agreements. They give the Natives *preconditions for take-off*, but the *take-off* itself never comes. The concept of currency and its value becomes in fact a source of greed and chaos that not only harms crops but also the society itself. Many questions can be raised at this point. Would this development have succeeded if it had been introduced differently? Did the residents of Tralla-La need development at all? Barks clearly points out that the tall ducks of Tralla-La had lived in peace and happiness until Scrooge appeared. This not only marks Carl Barks as a conservative anti-modernist but also a supporter of the belief that there are no better or worse cultures, just different ones.

Another case of criticism of modernism and modernization theory can be found in *City of Golden Roofs*. It is not only an interesting example of Barks' conservatism revealed in his works as the story mocks calypso music and the musician Harry Belafonte ("Muzyka pop i inne paskudztwa", 2020). In the comic, Donald sells American reel recorders with Jamaican music to Asians in French Indochina, which is on the one hand an interesting observation of cultural globalization (Heywood, 2011). On the other hand, the comic describes how modern audio equipment turns a centuries-old monarchy into a chaotic bunch of dancers who no longer recognize any political power over them.

However, the story does not only mock pop music, or shows how modernization in Western style can be harmful for cultures that significantly differ. It also illustrates perfectly how colonialism and dependency theory work in practice. When the Ducks arrive at the fabulous palace of Tangkor Wat, the heart of an ancient kingdom isolated from the world, Donald starts to sell his recorders that turn out to be very popular. Only the king is not pleased; his people have abandoned him and their tradition for calypso music. At this point, good old Uncle Scrooge appears and offers a large furnace. The king buys the furnace and uses its heat to calm people down. However, the heat also melts down the eponymous golden roofs. Liquid gold flows down into a barrel that Scrooge takes with him as a payment (Gwiazda, 2020 (d)).

Scrooge and Donald make small fortunes on the harm to Tangkor Wat they both caused. Just like in Swamy Dara's observation, the Ducks create circles of dependency in order to acquire goods possessed by Asians, mostly jewelry and gold worth much more than recorders and the furnace. Donald Duck makes calypso music popular among people out of time, and Uncle Scrooge uses this situation to benefit from the king's misery. Both of them are unaware of the consequences of their actions. It is truly interesting that this story and dependency theory were both created in the late 1950s but they needed time to be rediscovered and gain importance (Munro, n.d.). What is more, Barks was aware of its bias when writing the story. As he explained years after its first publication, "Ancient kingdoms and cultures of a beautiful people were about to be steamrolled by modernizers" (Barks, 1983). In sum, *City of Golden Roofs* is a critique of modernization theory and globalization as a phenomenon, contains elements of dependency theory, and was created in order to reflect the author's political views.

It is impossible to find any direct reference to world-systems theory in Barks' works as the theory was developed after Barks' retirement. Still, Uncle Scrooge's economic empire can be considered as an economy-world on its own. *The core* of it is Duckburg, where Scrooge built his Money Bin. From this giant building

McDuck controls his financial machine, and obviously stores his fortune in an enormous vault. *The semi-periphery* is any place where McDuck's businesses are located but do not hold a monopoly. In this category are Global North's countries, the 20th-century First World, and some parts of the Third World. As the stories take place during the Cold War, Eastern Europe, Russia and China are excluded from Scrooge's economy-world. The true periphery in this take is the Global South, or the post-colonial countries. For the Ducks, these territories mimic the American frontier ripe for conquest, and are "underdeveloped" in comparison to the semi-periphery that is both the First and the Third World as well as the Duckburg-core that is an American metropolis. This can be observed particularly in *King Solomon Mines*. Scrooge's *semi-periphery* includes not only Alaska and Arizona, but also India, Bolivia, Sweden and some locations on the Sinai Peninsula. Later the Ducks find themselves in Kashmir, Greenland and New Guinea (Gwiazda, 2020 (d)).

It is clear now that Carl Barks' stories reflect in some way several international relations' theories. As they are fables about Americans contrasted with the inhabitants of the Global South, they have to include such concepts as modernization and dependency. What is surprising is the mixture of awareness and obliviousness demonstrated by the author. On the one hand, *Tralla-La* and *King Solomon Mines* contain elements of specific theories, yet Barks claimed those stories were just a "silly bunch of gags". On the other hand, the intention evident behind *City of Golden Roofs* was to point out the threats posed by modernization as well as the absurdity of modern art, particularly music. However, while the latter story contains very clear references to dependency theory, it was not Barks' intention to talk about circles of dependency. It can be concluded that Barks as an author was at least partially aware of the contemporary political agenda. In terms of international relations between the Global North and South, he realized the general dangers that modernization carried for poor countries but his knowledge about specific mechanisms was scarce and they were presented incidentally.

3. Carl Barks on the United States' role in world politics

"I think the philosophy in my stories is conservative-conservative in the sense that I feel our civilization reached a peak about 1910. Since then we've been going downhill", Barks explained in one of the interviews (Ault, 2003). In 1910 Barks was just 9 years old, so it is not unusual that he felt nostalgic about the time of his childhood. As mentioned earlier, Donald and Uncle Scrooge are also very

nostalgic about their past or periods they never lived in; Donald Duck in particular seems to glorify the Old West and its myth. In the story *Sheriff of Bullet Valley* his dream about carrying a big iron on his hip and a duel with hoodlums at high noon comes true.

Sheriff of Bullet Valley seems to be an innocent tale about a duck/man who is fascinated with the Western genre and who gets himself in trouble. In the context of the previous section it also becomes another anti-modernist comic presenting a hero devoted to tradition, who beats a villain breaking the peace of eponymous Bullet Valley with technology used to commit crimes. The triplets reveal that a dishonest rancher steals cattle with a futuristic marking ray, but Donald is the one who captures him thanks to his stubbornness and knowledge about Western movies (Gwiazda, 2020 (c)). Again, it is a love letter to the Turnerian cowboy/frontiersman – in Barks' opinion, a perfect citizen who takes care of his community and pathologies that harm it (Valenzzano & Engstrom, 2014).

Additionally, *Sheriff of Bullet Valley* can be read as a statement that American pre-1910 politics was perfect. Until then, the United States had been self-limited in international relations because of the Monroe Doctrine, the rule enunciated by US President James Monroe that determined relations between Americans and Europeans. In Monroe's understanding, the United States should consider any action of Europeans against the Global West as hostile towards the US as well. Still, the United States should isolate themselves and do not interfere in Global East affairs (Monroe, 1820). The doctrine remained in force for almost one hundred years, making both North and South America a stronghold owned by the United States ("Doktryna Monroe'go", n.d.).

The Monroe Doctrine was scrapped before Barks' eyes. He was a teenager when *Lusitania* was sunk by Germans and his country joined World War I in 1917, and as an adult he had to read in the newspaper about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor base in December 1941, which started the American war effort. The most beloved comics authored by Barks were created during the terms of two influential presidents, Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower. Truman introduced his own doctrine, which involved the United States in a struggle with the other world superpower, the Soviet Union (Truman, 1947). So called *containment* was a series of political actions that was supposed to stop Soviets' political and territorial expansion (Kenan, 1947). Judging from his comics, Barks had strong reservations about this; his frustration was put into 1957's *A Cold Bargain*.

The story starts with Uncle Scrooge buying out the world's supply of bombastium, a mysterious, newly discovered element that has to be kept frozen and whose properties are unknown. McDuck wins an auction against a politician

from the communist country of Brutopia. In order to keep bombastium in safe subzero temperatures, the Ducks decide to transport the element to Antarctica. During the journey, they have to face Communists twice. Firstly, Brutopians attack their ship but manage to steal only a ball of colored ice. Secondly, the enemies attack Scrooge at the South Pole, but give up when they discover the true characteristics of bombastium: it can be used only to produce ice cream, which Brutopians are not interested in. In the end Scrooge sells bombastium to an ice cream producer and makes a profit (Gwiazda, 2020 (b)).

On the one hand, *A Cold Bargain* is a model anti-communist cultural text. The Brutopian politician looks and reacts exactly like the then leader of the Soviet Union, Nikita Krushchev. He is bald and nervous, and he evidently hates Scrooge, calling him “imperialist”. He also seems incompetent. At the beginning of the story he states there are just five “happy citizens of Brutopia”, and his operation of stealing bombastium from the Ducks seems to be very costly. In other words, Communists waste money and resources only to fail in their efforts to acquire an element that has no useful application for their military or industry. On the other hand, although it may not be obvious at a first glance, the American Ducks are unnecessary in this story. If Scrooge had not won the auction, bombastium would have been bought by Brutopians. Sooner or later, they would find out that the element is not radioactive and has no strategic potential. Communists would probably sell bombastium away just like Scrooge did or open an ice cream factory. One way or another, Brutopians would waste time, efforts and resources to acquire an element that just changes the taste of water.

It may seem absurd, but in Carl Barks’ opinion the best development in the Cold War would be if the United States abandoned the arms race. As the story of bombastium demonstrates, he thought that the Cold War just slowed down the collapse of the Soviet Union. Whether this opinion was correct or not, it is outstanding that such a thought could be found in a comic book addressed to children. Carl Barks in the 1950s was criticizing American engagement in political affairs that diverged from James Monroe’s concept of American international politics. Along with the statements included in *Sheriff of Bullet Valley*, Barks presents here an interesting but jarring image of America. It is a country that has no interest in international affairs and its greatest resources are simple, but hardworking and courageous people. Perfect Americans according to Barks would also take care of nature and would have never started the genocide of Native Americans in the first place. In *Land of Pigmy Indians* Barks introduces a nation of Indian-like dwarfs who are defenders of nature. Scrooge tries to fight with them, but the Pygmies manage to drive him away from their lands instead

(Gwiazda, 2020 (b)). This story carries a partly apologetic, partly ecological message: white men and Natives should live in peace and together take care of the environment that is the ultimate wealth.

Conclusions

Carl Barks' Disney comic books are much more complex than they appear at a first glance. They are clearly something more than *Race cars, lasers, airplanes* (Slurpy Studios, 2018). Their author liked to claim that they were not biased and were just innocent funny stories. However, Barks often included in his works interesting themes touching upon international politics in general. He was completely aware of anti-modernist narration of Uncle Scrooge's adventures. On the other hand, he seemed unaware of implementation mechanisms that were described in scientific literature sometimes years after his stories, such as Rostow's stages of development or dependency theory. His works reveal also the awareness of nostalgia for the Wild West. *A Cold Bargain* in fact criticizes the United States' abandonment of isolationism in favor of (in Barks' opinion) pointless rivalry with the Soviet Union. Still, Barks' plots and drawings are set in a simple tone and rather unambitious. Because of colonial tendencies in the portrayal of Natives and developing countries' inhabitants, Donald Duck comics belong to the same category as dime novels, Westerns or explorer stories, similarly to works by Jules Verne, Carl May, Arthur Conan Doyle and Robert E. Howard. Donald Duck could be an adventurer like Conan the Barbarian, and Uncle Scrooge could be a character in *Around the World in Eighty Days*. They dream about greatness and simpler life – yet instead they rob Natives of riches and that peace, in the end gaining absolutely nothing.

Do Barks' comics have any value for international relations research? It seems they do. They present in a basic way certain mechanisms that could be observed in the past and present all over the world. In his stories, one can find globalization, tolerance, intolerance, neo-colonialism, and political superpowers. This is what Barks' fables are about; a simple man and his desires in a dynamically changing and diverse world and politics. There are also dozens of continuators of Barks' works – people like Don Rosa, Romano Scarpa or Marco Rota – who keep sending Donald, Scrooge and the triplets on new adventures while presenting different approaches to those characters and the world they are living in.

However, Barks' works are not the only cases of texts of culture for children that contain some serious political commentary and bias. For instance, the French comic series *Asterix* is firmly based on France's attitude towards its

neighbors and contains a commentary on political problems. One of the best instances is the 1981 story *L'Odyssée d'Astérix*, also known as *Asterix and the Black Gold*. The plot presents Asterix and Obelix's journey to the Middle East in search of "rock oil", an important ingredient of druid Getafix's magic potion. The heroes fail in their quest, but the druid manages to replace "rock oil" with beetroot juice. It is obvious that "rock oil" stands for oil/petroleum, and that Albert Uderzo's story is inspired by the 1973 and 1979 oil crises, whose aftermath kept shocking the world even in the early 1980s. Altogether, *Asterix and the Black Gold* is a satirical praise of biofuels, just like Barks' *Cold Bargain* was a satirical commentary on the Cold War (Uderzo, 2012).

Other, more subtle cases of political commentary and bias can be found in the British *James Bond* film series. On the surface, the stories about MI6 Agent 007 are already biased by Britons' inferiority complex. The first novels by Ian Fleming as well as the movies they inspired appeared in the 1950s and 1960s respectively. It was a time when the United Kingdom's superpower status became questionable. While British importance in global politics was diminishing in favor of the United States, on pages of novels and in cinemas James Bond was saving the world from mad scientists and Communists. The best illustration here is probably the 1967 movie *You Only Live Twice*, in which Bond has to prevent a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union. In the movie, British Intelligence reveals that the barely avoided war was part of a Chinese plot (James Bond 007, 2021). Another trope important for the whole Bond series is the inferiority of the CIA to MI6. James Bond often works in the United States, yet American spies always act as mere sidekicks or even damsels in distress for Agent 007, which can be seen in 1964 *Goldfinger*, 1973 *Live and Let Die*, or 1989 *Licence to Kill*. In other words, British spy movies were supposed to heal the wounds inflicted by the post-war world to Britons' national identity. In contrast, Barks approaches the idea of national identity differently. As the Americans' national ego has never been wounded, he rather celebrates it, like for example in *Sheriff of Bullet Valley*.

Still, those two cases of French and British cultural texts offer more interesting areas of work on national identities and international politics of those two nations. The key questions are: what is the relation between the respective portrayals of France and Great Britain in fictional media and the actual political role of these states at the time of publication? What is the purpose of idealization of the nations in fictional media? What does it mean for the audience of those fictional media? What does it mean for political science and international relations? Does it change anything at all? Is the cultural significance of those texts

the same as that of Barks' works? Barks' Uncle Scrooge reacts to a different situation for a different nation than James Bond does, while Asterix seems to be even more "international" and "nation-free" than Donald Duck and Agent 007 as he represents an extinct Celtic tribe. He can address many problems that concern any people of the 20th and 21st century in general. In further analyses the context that includes the authors' nationality, their views and historical background, as well as the *zeitgeist* of an era in which the cultural text was created can be crucial in determining not only what influenced the work but also what political message could be read in it by its contemporaries and today.

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