

Screening Nature in Walt Disney's *Bambi* (1942) and Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* (1972): An Ecocritical Approach to Enviro-toons

Marwa Essam Eldin Fahmi¹

Abstract

The current study is an attempt to fill in a gap in Ecocriticism which until recently has focused on literature defined as Nature Writing; poetry, fiction and drama. Yet, with the move toward ecocritical Film Studies, there is a place for work on animated feature films. The premise of the study is the ethical and environmental implications as exemplified in the two selected enviro-toons: Disney's *Bambi* (1942) and Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* (1972). The depiction of the wilderness and the representation of nonhuman animals provide a rich context to investigate ideology and power to explore oppressive practices of contemporary society. The selected enviro-toons strongly articulate ecological crisis – hunting, species loss, pollution, deforestation and overproduction. Consumption is driven by the industrial capitalism's profit motive and the "jobs –jobs –jobs" rhetoric adopted by the industrialist Once-ler in *The Lorax*. On the other hand, *Bambi*, the Prince of the Forest, stands for the environment as an ecological sublime – that is – the Wilderness trope is worthy of awe and wonder. The distinct language of animation is evidently defined by multiple characteristics. Animation is a culturally determined vocabulary, interpreted and applied differently by individual animators, hence, all animation inevitably carry some form of authorial signature or/and "studio style". Herein lies the choice of the two enviro-toons; Disney's 'realist' style fits into orthodox animation while that of Dr. Seuss is 'abstract' and 'experimental'. Therefore, the focus is on the poetics of enviro-toons, that is, not only what cartoons show but how they show ecocritical sensibility and how it affects the way of 'seeing' and understanding the human/nonhuman world.

Keywords: Animation Aesthetics - Enviro-toons – Ecocriticism – Disneyque – Seussology

1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale and Scope

The term 'environment' has come to prominence to conceptualize the physical world. In *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture and Environment* (2001), Lawrence Buell's enmeshment of nature and culture suggests an environment that is an amalgamation of the "brown landscapes" of industrialization and the "green landscapes" of the natural, physical world" (Buell, 2001, p.7). The physical environment is still recognizable as a force that impacts humankind daily with cyclones, floods, and droughts therefore, the environment is not static but in a constant state of flux, a "mutual constructivism" where the environment is shaped by, but also helps shape culture" (Buell, 2001, p.6). In *The Environment Imagination* (1995), Buell states, in this manner, that "environment and place are as much social, cultural and ideological entities as they are physical one" (Buell, 1995, p. 36).

Ecocritical awareness of non-human world has begun with the definition of nature first offered by Romantic writers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: "Romantic hated how industrialization made previously beautiful places ugly, and they rejected the vulgarity of those who made money in trade" (Russell, 1996, p. 653). Modern environmental criticism promotes anti-industrial argument "deploying concepts of nature as a moral and psychic norm" (Italics mine, Clark, 2011, p. 18).

¹ College of Foreign Languages & Translation, MISR University for Science & Technology, Giza, Egypt.
E-mail: marwa.fahmy@must.edu.eg

Pastoral is a universal form of environmental imagination and it has become almost "synonymous with the idea of (re)turn to a less urbanized, more 'natural' state of existence" activating "green consciousness" (Buell, 1995, p. 31). It is worth mentioning that the Romantic ecology is not simply a retreat from society into spiritual transcendence, "not a flight from a material world", but it is "an attempt to enable mankind to live better in the material world by entering into harmony with the environment" (Bate, 1991, p. 40). This proto-ecological anti-industrial approach endorses the naturalness of the local life and rebuts the view of the natural world as another silenced 'Other'. Since ancient times, European and other cultures have used universal tropes and myths that have shaped human environmental imagination such as Garden, Wilderness, and Virgin Land to describe their relationship with land and nature. Ecocritics speak for animals or non-human creatures whose exploitation is often closely interlinked with the exploitation of nature.

There has been a proliferation of environmentally themed children's literature (in genres including fiction, non-fiction, films and picture books) over the last year of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first to address ecological issues as cautionary tales: "children's literature offers one of the most extensive sources for the study of ideas about nature, the environment sources, ecology and the role of humans in relation to all of these" (Lesnik-Oberstein, 1998, p. 216). The depiction of the wilderness and the representation of nonhuman animals provide a rich context to investigate ideology and power to explore oppressive practices of contemporary society. The selected enviro-toons strongly articulate ecological crisis – hunting, species loss, pollution, deforestation and overproduction. Consumption is driven by the industrial capitalism's profit motive and the "jobs –jobs –jobs" rhetoric adopted by the industrialist Once-ler in *The Lorax*. On the other hand, *Bambi*, the Prince of the Forest, stands for the environment as an ecological sublime – that is – the Wilderness trope is worthy of awe and wonder. The principal questions to be explored to screen nature are:

- How do cartoons work on viewers? How do they generate meaning and affects (sentiments, emotional responses, desires, motivations, sensibilities)?
- Is nature given a perspective in the enviro-toons? Do we see through the eyes of the animals or other creatures? Is this supposed to be realistic or not? What effect does this have?
- How do the enviro-toons define the ecojustice problem? Do they offer conclusion or appropriate solutions?
- How do cartoons (especially USA animation over the past century) engage audiences in consideration of environmental topics?

Ecocritical debate provokes new readings of human/nature relations in motion picture. Therefore, the focus of the present paper is on the poetics of enviro-toons, that is, not only what cartoons show but how they show ecocritical sensibility and how it affects the way of 'seeing' and understanding the human/nonhuman world. Finally, the current paper is an attempt to fill in a gap in Ecocriticism which until recently has focused on literature defined as Nature Writing; poetry, fiction and drama. Yet, with the move toward ecocritical Film Studies, there is a place for work on animated feature film.

1.2 From Ecocriticism to Ecoanimation

Historically, Western beliefs in the right to exercise dominion over the environment have been shaped by Greco-Roman traditions which privileged humans as the "measure of all things" as indicated in the Judeo-Christian beliefs derived from the biblical Book of Genesis 1:26 to assert the anthropocentric position of human mastery and control over the natural world (Stephens, 2006, p. 40) in a hierarchical relationship that perpetuates the ideologies of Utilitarianism and within the dominant discourse of industrialism. In *The Politics of the Earth* (2005), John Dryzek identifies human needs and demands being continually satisfied through the manipulation of the environment within the following Promethean metaphor: "In Greek mythology, Prometheus stole fire from Zeus and so vastly increased the human capacity to manipulate the world" (Dryzek, 2005, p. 51). Dryzek's metaphor is underpinned by an assumption that humans' role is to have dominion over a cornucopian environment. This Western legacy of tragic anthropocentric discourse has led to monologic and 'readerly' tales of humans overcoming difficult odds to succeed in the end, thereby; it has led to environmental devastation. With the rise of the environmental movement, ecology has become popular and adopted by other critical discourses such as Feminism, Postcolonialism and Animal Studies. Ecocriticism - as a discipline – is an ecological growth of Post-Structural criticism that studies human representations of nature and it has begun as a mode of literary criticism committed to observing narrative patterns and stories that impact human awareness of and engagement with environments.

In the "Introduction" to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), Cheryl Glotfelty explains that Ecocriticism is rooted in a desire to contribute to the kinds of cultural changes that lead to changed actions: "How then can we contribute to environmental restoration, not just in our spare time, but from within our capacity as professors of literature?" (Italics mine, Glotfelty, 1996, pp. xx-xxi). When literary studies have seized ecology, Ecocriticism has emerged to study the relationship between literature and nature taking "an earth-centered approach" (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xviii). Man - being part of the ecosystem - is "neither master nor slave to it, but simply one part of an intricate system" (Klue, 2008, p.1).

Ecocriticism originated in the USA largely from the need to study environmental non-fiction called Nature Writing. Ecocriticism's formal beginnings are often identified with the founding of the organization ASLE: "The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment" in 1992, followed by the organization's journal, ISLE: "Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment" in 1993 and with the publication of Cheryl Burgess Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's anthology *The Ecocriticism Reader* regarded as a landmark in literary ecology in 1996. Ecocriticism's aims are fairly simple: to provide a home, a community and some academic legitimacy for the work of a new generation of literary scholars who have discovered, discussed and interpreted literary texts about environment; second, to examine representations of nature and environmental values in literary texts; third, to explore the interconnections between nature and culture; fourth, and most important, to respond to environmental problems and "contribute to environmental restoration" (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xxi). Initially, this Ecocriticism attention has focused primarily on the environmental literature of adult. Slowly, an affiliated Ecocriticism of children's environmental literature began with a special issue of *The Lion and The Unicorn* on "Green Worlds: Nature and Ecology" (1995) and another special issue on "Ecology and the Child" in *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* (Winter 1994-1995). Although Ecocriticism has its origins in literature, it has been taken over and redefined with several other disciplines such as Ecoanimation - a sub-genre of Film Studies - due to the growing presence of ecology as an academic discourse and the recent celebration of environmentalism. An ecocritical look into cartoons has begun to unfold within the field of what has been called 'enviro-toon' which examines cartoons with obvious environmental messages as themes.

Enviro-toons are "animated short or feature films that address environmental concerns" (Murray & Heumann, 2007, p. 2). The term 'enviro-toon' was coined by cultural critic Jaime Weinman who sorts animation into two simple categories. Some cartoons are useful for depicting the complexity of ecological issues. Others represent "a terrifying type of kiddie show" (Weinman, 2004). Weinman claims that enviro-toons "never preach" and "not only humanize nature but comment on abuse of nature and the natural, especially by humans" (Murray & Heumann, 2007, p. 2) and do engage with repercussions of progress in the modern and postmodern world. Just as verbal texts are ideologically laden, visual scenes are bound up with ideologies of the culture in which they are produced, circulated and read. In *Animation and America* (2002), animation theorist Paul Wells argues that the best animated films "offer the greatest potential for expressing a variety of divergent points of view, while at the same time accommodating a dominant paradigm of established social meaning" (Wells, 2002a, p. 13). As Wells suggest, a cartoon's "very status as an animation asks an audience to re-perceive supposedly everyday issues, themes and knowledge" (Wells, 2002a, p. 6).

The current study dips its toes into Ecoanimation to endorse an environmental consciousness of seeing "problems from a synoptic contextual perspective" (Brereton, 2005, p.11) as well as from a textual one in order to promote an ecological meta-narrative connecting human with their environment. A visual ecocritical approach attends to "the logic of the image, specifically because images have effects that words do not, effects that have 'real' ramifications" (Dorbin & Morey, 2009, p. 25). Pro-environment discourses present multimodal ecological cartoons as manifested in ecocatastrophe represented by the loss of Edenic environment that is at odds with economic imperative of advanced capitalist societies. Post-war enviro-toons of the 1940s and 1950s offer strong critiques of "environmental devastation and negative consequences of progress" (Murray & Heumann, 2007, p. 52) and have taken strong stands on Conservation issues: "environmentalism was a growing concern before, during, after World War II, at least in the world of animated film" (Whitley, 2008, p. 68).

2. Animation Aesthetics: 'The Art of Movement'

I mean by animation aesthetics the amalgamation of character design, music, images and sounds as signs to convey subtly the artists' consciousness, styles and animated space. The semiotician Yuri Lotman regards animation as a specific system:

"[T]he animated cartoon is not a variety of the feature cinema but represents a quite independent form of art, with its own artistic language [and] the basic property of the language of animation is that it operates with a sign of a sign" (Lotman, 1981, pp. 36-37). Academic work on animation, as a subset of Film Studies, is interesting as it encourages a reexamination of the question: are such neglected subjects areas 'worthy' of academic study? In *Animation, Art and Industry* (2012), Maureen Furniss declares that "bringing objects to life – has fascinated humankind since its earliest days [and] throughout the years, animated movement has been employed in religious, scientific, educational and entertainment contexts to explain everything from the spirit world to the mechanics of mundane objects" (Furniss, 2012, p. 8). Despite being described as children's entertainment, animation was not originally aimed at a child audience. It is a significant part of the development of popular cinema.

In *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics* (2008), Maureen Furniss states that by the 1910s cel and paper animation dominated the form. she explains that cel animation (today largely displaced by computer animation) is so called because animators draw objects, subjects and background on separate sheets of transparent celluloid acetate sheets called cels (patented by Earl Hurd and J. R. Bray in 1915) which are laid on top of one another in order to save time in an extra ordinarily labor intensive medium (one second of film can equal 12-24 individual drawings) (Furniss, 2008, p. 16). In *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings* (1994), Charles Solomon writes that animation creates the 'illusion of life' and it does this through movement. He adds that there are two distinguishing characteristics: first, the image is photographed on film 'frame by frame' and second; in consequence, the illusion of motion is created cinematically rather than recorded. He analyzes that in animation, a special camera is used that can photograph one frame at a time. Between exposures, the animator incrementally moves an object: it can be cels, puppets, clay, sand or paper cuts outs, but the basic principle is that the illusion of motion is constructed. That is, rather than photographing something that is already moving, movement is created in the camera through stop-motion photography, or the photographing of an object frame by frame (Solomon, 1994, pp. 9-12). Animation is not "the art of drawing that move, but rather the art of movements that are drawn. What happens between each frame is more important than what happens on each frame" (Solomon, 1987, p. 11). Thus, animation is art in movement and more precisely, it is the 'art of movement' and the term 'animated film' means not "just cartoon, but any motion picture film" and "animation [have] become recognized as a distinct type of filmmaking" (Thompson, 1980, p.106).

In *Understanding Animation* (1998), Paul Wells elucidates that animation is derived from the Latin term 'animare' meaning 'to give life to', that is, animation infuses the inanimate with 'spirit' (Wells, 1998, p. 10). He alludes to the unique abilities of animation to "redefine the everyday, subvert our accepted notions of 'reality' and challenge the orthodox understanding and acceptance of our existence". Animation offers limitless possibilities and it does not confined to temporal or spatial continuities, in other words, animation's ability is "to violate and compress any notion of time and space" (Wells, 1998, p. 19). This underlies the freedom of expression articulated through animated films or cartoons: the rejection of definite form challenging social order, the use of metamorphosis and the ability to assume any shape and volume, a condition labeled 'plasmaticness' (Wells, 2002b, p. 41). Animation comes in many possible styles and modes as it can be lyrical, abstract, experimental or non-narrative. It is evident from this idea that animation is a medium which is capable of telling stories in a variety of ways. The idea of a "story" can therefore be understood as "a sequence of events taking place over a period of time; events can be presented in a multiplicity of ways in animation, to convey different meaning and/or emotion while utilizing distinctive characteristics of animated narrative such as metamorphosis, fabrication, associative relations, sound, symbol, and metaphor (Wells, 1998, p. 68).

Wells categorizes animation into three areas: orthodox (narrative based on cel animation), developmental (narrative based clay, puppet, collage animation) and experimental (non-objective, non-linear or abstract animation). He specifies two extremes of animation: orthodox and its antithetical equivalent as experimental which frequently strives for an opposite effect. The in-between of these two extremes would be regarded as developmental:

Criteria for Orthodox Animation:

Configuration: Figures/Characters which are identifiable as forms we understand, e.g. people and animals.

Specific Continuity: Logical narrative continuity i.e. character and context remain consistent throughout.

Narrative Form: A 'story' established by the specific continuity of creating a situation, problematizing it, and ultimately resolving it.

Evolution of Context/ Absence of Artist: Content prioritized over construction: prioritized narrative, character, and style; rarely privileging the significance of their creation and creator.

Unity of Style: Mode of construction remains visually consistent.

Dynamics of Dialogue: Characters often defined by key aspects of dialogue. On the other hand, experimental animation typically presents the representations and scenarios which are more symbolic and arbitrary where the meaning often has to be interpreted by the viewer.

Criteria for Experimental Animation:

Abstraction: Abstract representation of forms we recognize resisting orthodox configuration.

Specific Non-Continuity: Rejection of logical and linear continuity and prioritizing the illogical, irrational, and/or multiple continuities.

Interpretive Form: Audiences are required to interpret the work on their own terms or terms predetermined by the artist.

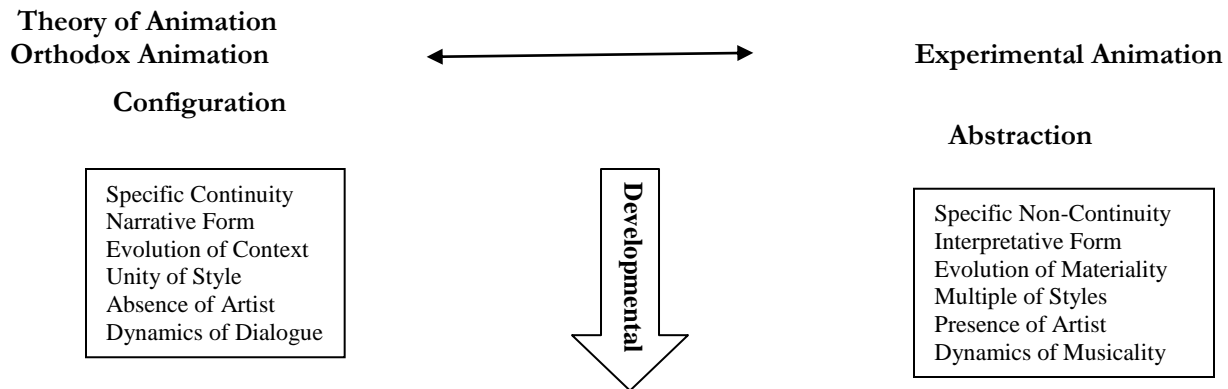
Evolution of Materiality: Concentration paid to the construction of the piece; audiences are made aware of the materials used in its creation

Multiple Styles: Combination and mixing different modes of animation.

Presence of the Artist: Individual expression of artist drawing attention to the relationship between the artist and the work.

Dynamics of Musicality: Strong relationship between music and animation.

Wells's theory of animation can be configured in the diagram below:



Sourced from - Wells, Paul (1998). *Understanding Animation*, London and New York: Routledge, p. 36

Orthodox animation generally refers to animation that effectively seems more conventional and marketable than its counterpart. With more iconic depictions of characters, objects and locations, it describes the sort of animation one could usually expect to see on television or in the cinema. On the other hand, experimental animation typically presents symbolic representations and the meaning often has to be interpreted by the viewer. Animation is an articulate language used to repress rationality; experimental animation can arguably achieve this more effectively with its abstract nature.

The distinct language of animation is evidently defined by multiple characteristics. The language of animation remains "particularly expressive with modernist credentials: enunciating difference and otherness while employing storytelling devices such as metamorphosis, sound, metaphors, symbols etc." (Wells, 1998, p. 21). With two opposing extremes of animation, orthodox and experimental, the way in which these devices are used to tell a story varies tremendously as exemplified in the two selected enviro-toons. It has been argued by some film historians, such as William Moritz, that true animation is in abstract form, this can be counter-argued by the fact that animation in essence means "to give life to"; in many ways orthodox animation achieves this more believably with further emphasis placed on the notion of character, configuration, and importantly movement - which will always remain a key defining element in animation (Wells, 2002b, p. 6).

My study considers animation as a form in light of media scholar Marshall McLuhan's categories of "hot" or detailed, high resolution media and "cool" or low resolution media. Hot and cool media differentiate between a high-resolution medium that frames reality with so many details which the audience might accept more passively and low-resolution medium that requires audience to work furiously to fill in its details (McLuhan, 1964, pp. 17-18). A hot medium explodes human experience in a physical and cultural sense. It is a medium "that extends one single sense in 'high definition'".

McLuhan uses the term "high definition" to refer to media jam packed with data, rife with details packing more pixels, facts or bits of data per inch than ever (McLuhan, 1964, p. 22). The hot medium, McLuhan argues, also shares some of the attributes that Roland Barthes describes as those of a "readerly" text. A "readerly" text plunges its user into "a kind of idleness – he is intransitive [and] instead of functioning himself, instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, he is nothing more than a referendum" (Barthes, 1974, p. 4). In contrast, cool medium sketches symbols of realities they represent: "imagination is put to work on behalf of filling in the blanks" creating a richer experience and the audience are invited to join the narrative" (McLuhan, 1964, p. 23). With this rationale, hot-medium can be seen as a monologic discourse while cool-medium can be regarded as dialogic and pluralistic so as to build heightened awareness through subtle messages about the power of nature over human world and the need for controlling human intervention as well as human exploitation.

Furniss's series of questions are useful to set the juxtaposition between *Bambi* and *The Lorax* regarding their inner build: "any analysis of the structural design of a work should consider first its primary function. Is it to entertain a wide audience? Is it to experiment and uncover new techniques or ways of thinking?" (Furniss, 1998, p. 97). Disney's studio stands for the commercial animation with its constant rhythm and continuous regularity since orthodox animation prioritizes character construct and self-contained narrative. Within the illusion of realism framework, Wells believes that Disney's animation can be called "hyper-real" (Wells, 1998, p.25). He means that Disney's animated space is artificial and it exists independently of the real world, yet, it represents reality. In contrast, *Seussology* represents animation structure that is non-realistic, complex and fantastic since experimental animation prioritizing the illogical and the irrational.

Ultimately, animation is a culturally determined vocabulary, interpreted and applied differently by individual animators – hence, all animation inevitably carry some form of authorial signature or/and "studio style". Herein lies my choice of the two enviro-toons; Disney's *Bambi* (1942) and Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* (1972), that is, Disney's 'realist' style fits into orthodox animation while that of Dr. Seuss is dialogic, abstract and experimental. It is noted that Disney "insisted on verisimilitude in his characters, contexts and narratives" picturing "animated figures to more like real figures and be informed by a plausible motivation" (Wells, 1998, 23).

3. Disney's *Bambi* (1942): A Signifier of a Sentimental Nature

In *The Idea of Nature in Disney Animation* (2008), David Whitley refers to the historical/political background of Disney's *Bambi* (1942) which is considered as an allegory for post-war Europe. The bombing of Pearl Harbor had brought the United States decisively into engagement in World War II. Just as war ravaged communities, so too the forest community to overcome the threat posed by Man, the villain who is morally flawed: "Though *Bambi* is not in any obvious sense about war, its feeling for a pure, natural world that is a retreat from aggressive and predatory human instincts" (Whitley, 2008, p. 74). *Bambi* belongs to the features of wartime years and it suffered from financial disappointments partly due to the higher production costs and loss of European markets caused by World War II. In the face of this war, *Bambi*'s artists dipped into the magic well in search of a more humane ideal and found it in a vision of nature that emphasizes family, community and peaceful existence. Thus, *Bambi* is a somber allegory on human violence and it breaks away from "cartoonish animals and creates something more realistic" (Johnston & Thomas, 1990, p. 142). *Bambi* acquires iconic significance within discourses and debates about hunting and it could lay claim to being the most important of all Disney's films dealing with wild nature in which Man is always referred to as "He" – Man is the predatory god of this harsh world. Ralph Lutts acknowledges that *Bambi* has become "one of the most emotionally, powerful national symbols of nature, one that motivates deep concern and dedicated action to promote wildlife" (Lutts, 1992, p. 160).

The role of fantasy is pivotal to expose anthropocentric sentiment towards forest animals with human attributes. The masterpiece shot visualizes the fearful stare of the grazing deer. *Bambi* and his mother are shown eating the new spring grass that is emerging in the snowy open space of the meadow. This medium shot - angled from somewhat above the ground level so that we look down on the grazing animals - is distinctive and makes the viewer keenly aware of their weakness. The effect is reinforced in shots which show the adult deer raising her head repeatedly and apprehensively as she scrutinizes the landscape for signs of possible menace. A few seconds later, the animals flee in alarm and the camera follows their flight at medium distance in a continuous tracking shot. *Bambi*'s mother's death takes place off camera while the viewer continues to follow the young deer's flight to safety in the heart of the forest. At this point, the surroundings are delineated in full sensuous detail.

The richness of 'home environment' is poignant. The snow - which begins to fall heavily - blurs perception of the surrounding environment in a mode that is analogous to eyes becoming watery with grief. This visual metaphor is an emblem of the paradigmatic Western trope that associates the environment to the female or tends to gender the physical world as female. Yet, coding nature as female is not just Western but universal apparently through the association with nature's reproductive capacities. In "Naturalized Woman and Feminized Nature" (2000), Kate Soper claims that the female metaphor identifies the environment with a body of scientific laws, principles, and processes. The environment is, therefore, understood as an object of scientific scrutiny and experimentation. The gender metaphor is extended when understandings of the environment as a sexual object are prompted by spatial associations that link female metaphors of the environment with physical territory (Soper, 2000, p. 139). Understood in both these ways, the environment may be realized as "the potential spouse of science, to be woven, won, and if necessary forced to submit to intercourse" or a "source of erotic delight" in the sense of territory that can be penetrated, tamed and tilled (Soper, 2000, p. 141). However, further semantic tension arises when the environment is represented metonymically in line with the Romantic tradition as mother. Nature to Wordsworth is "a mother-goddess who teaches the soul serenity and joy, and never betrays the heart that loves her" (Gleckner & Enscoe, 1962, p. 17) as revealed in *The Prelude*. Nature is also seen as "a quasi-religious mysticism" (Darcy, 1995, p. 214) worthy of respect and reverence. In this sense, *Bambi* is "a version of Eden myth" (Whitley, 2008, p. 61) and the forest is conjured with "a kind of joy and lyrical delight appropriate for the representation of unfallen nature within paradise" (Whitley, 2008, p. 61). The rise of nature worship in many ways reflects a "foreboding of impending loss, a melancholic anticipation of the advances of natural world" (Bunce, 1994, p.191).

Biophilia is interrelated with anthropomorphism to enhance environmental awareness. Anthropomorphism includes personification, characterization and narrative structure and it is also inseparable from the wildlife filmmaking process. When animals are placed on film, they are removed from their natural context and are placed within a human construct of characterization and personification, emotive music and the imposition of a narrative structure – all place human-like motivations and emotions on animals (Mitman, 1999). How animals are anthropomorphized on screen may reveal more about the filmmakers' choices and cultural background than the reality of natural world and animal biology. *Bambi* is a "Disneyfied animal" (Cartmill, 1996, p. 162) and the shaping influence of the use of anthropomorphic trope lies not only in overt expressions of personification, but also in the animal protagonist's ability to think, feel, communicate and behave as human. In springtime, forest animals – Faline, Thumper and Flower - become crazy with love and encounter their beautiful romantic counterparts. When *Bambi* looks in the pond, he sees Faline's reflection; he repeatedly looks at both his and her reflections. After Faline's laugh, *Bambi* stops in wonder and blinks twice. However, their courtship is quickly interrupted and challenged by an aggressive older stag named Ronno who attempts to force Faline away from *Bambi*. *Bambi* successfully manages to defeat Ronno in a battle and earn the rights to the doe's affections. The only natural predator represented is the owl that is "a kind of grumpy, middle-aged guardian of forest life, the most aggressive act is to hoot at a group of amorous birds who are disturbing his spring time peace" (Whitley, 2008, p. 61).

Bambi is constructed around the cycle life of *Bambi* baby, young, adult. Nested at his mother's side, the animated fawn is troubled by cartoon droplets of rain falling. The soundtrack punctuates the falling raindrops with the notes of a clarinet and a full orchestra plays "April Showers", a merry tune. *Bambi* is afraid but his mother is calm. Rain is simply part of nature's cycle in this rhapsodic depiction of the Wilderness. The fierce storm stops and gentle creatures of the forest emerge from nests and thickets. All is lovely and serene in the visually stunning forest drawn with what was in Walt Disney's 1942 feature-length animation *Bambi*, an unprecedented attention to realistically drawn detail. The serenity of the opening scene contrasts starkly with *Bambi*'s later visits to the meadow, a wonderful place made tense by the potential danger. The meadow menace is also chaotic and thoroughly human. On hearing the sounds of the gunshots, forest animals flee and Young *Bambi* asks his Mom about this danger: "Man [dramatic pause] was in the forest", Mom explains. In this enviro-toon, invisible humans are villains who shoot and set fires to threaten the forest animals: "Human beings are mere interlopers in nature, their presence in the movie reduced to the feet of the hunters who kill *Bambi*'s mother and later start the devastating forest fire [bringing] only death and destruction to the pristine Eden inhabited by the benign and gentle animals" (Ingram, 2000, p. 19), thus, the message is a jeremiad; an awe-inspiring natural balance is in peril because of human actions. *Bambi* (1942) can be read as a monologic enviro-toon that perpetuates a romanticized view of nature and positions human species as corrupt and callous in a visual eco-tragedy. *Bambi* proposes that humans and nature remain separate. The monologic stand reveals that there is no move toward interdependence between human and non-human.

This one-dimensional grid of intellectual paradigm does motivate "deep concern and dedication action to promote wildlife", but this sentimental image is a distorted one since "the reality of nature as understood by contemporary scientific ecology is chaotic and unstable" (Ingram, 2000, p. 19). With this rationale, Lutts writes that the film is "an empty symbol because the concept of nature that Disney's fawn represents is impoverished [hence] Bambi motivates, but it does not educate, it may stimulate action, but not understanding" (Lutts, 1992, p. 169). The film is "impoverished" as key elements in the real natural world are seen through a seriously distorting lens despite the artistic care to render a whole range of details naturalistically.

Bambi is based on children's novel by the German writer Felix Salten that was first published in English in 1928. Many children's books portray the natural world as a benign Garden of Eden, but the forest in Bambi is no such place. Death, even violent death, is accepted as part of the natural scheme of things. However, humans are depicted as apart from, and alien to, Bambi and his fellow forest dwellers. Humans are super predators who wreak havoc on the entire forest. Salten's negative view of humankind's relationship to the natural world in the aftermath of World War I is not surprising, as he was one of many Europeans of his time who imagined solace of a natural world devoid of the inhumanity of humankind. The original novel, written for an adult audience, is considered too "grim" and "somber" for the young audience Disney was targeting (Barrier, 2003, p. 269). Disney's version severely downplays the naturalistic and environmental elements found in the novel giving it a lighter and friendlier feeling.

The addition of two new, sweet and gentle forest characters - Thumper the Rabbit and Flower the Skunk - contributes to give the film the desired friendlier and lighter feeling. The storyline of the film is different in its message. As in biblical Eden, Disney's nature's predatory, stinging and biting are almost absent. By taking away predators and equating predation to a mortal sin, Disney emphasizes Man's interaction with nature as one that can only be viewed as evil. The change in the storyline allows for differences in the message which the audience receives. For instance, in the book, the lessons of survival portray man as evil but also as a force to be overcome, while in the animated film, the lack of life lessons turns man into only an evil force that cannot be beaten. The old Prince - Bambi's father - teaches Young Bambi about snares, how to free another animals and how to avoid the traps of men. When Bambi is later shot by a hunter, the Prince shows him how to walk in circles to confuse the man and his dogs until the bleeding stops, and then takes him to a safe place to recover. They remain together until Bambi is strong enough to leave the safe haven again. When Bambi has grown gray and is "old", the old Prince shows him that man is not all-powerful by showing him the dead body of a man who is shot and killed by another man. When Bambi confirms that he now understands that "He" is not all-powerful", the stag tells him that he has always loved him and calls him "my son" before leaving to die. In *Wildlife Films* (2000), Derek Bousè believes that Salten's book- being based mostly on the Post-World War I gloom - is an allegory for the "cold aura of pessimism" (Bousè, 2000, p. 142) of Post-War Europe. He also ponders that "Salten's Bambi, for decades seen as a realistic portrayal, is essentially a tale of friendship and community in the woods". This idea of friendship and community supports Salten's theory of creating an allegory for Post-War Europe based on the strong community ties that tended to develop in Post-War societies. Just as war ravaged communities, yet banded together to rebuild after World War I, so too did the forest community to overcome the threat posed by Man. Disney added a new ending to Salten's book: one of renewal and regeneration within Bambi's growth into adulthood, thereby, the enviro-toon becomes one of the cycle of life.

The question that poses itself: is it right to judge fictional narratives for children according to rigorous criteria for verisimilitude? To my mind, it is very important to put in consideration the historical and political background of this eco-tragedy that drove the animators to follow that naturalistic and realistic pattern. The animation was released when U.S. military forces faced off against the Nazis in World War II. Bambi's setting seems, at first, far removed from the horrific landscapes of war-torn Europe. Birds sing and forest animals frolic relentlessly in a romanticized nature. The eco-tragedy conjures nostalgia for nature prophesying ever worse disasters to come unless human societies repent for their sins against nature and setting a harmonious relationship with the natural world. Disney's animation evokes a sense of a lost world of rural and small town American values. Nature as mother environment is pristine, abundant and bucolic. The Wilderness trope depicts environment as bountiful, a metaphor of female/mother earth and pastoral wilderness fulfils a psychological need of biophilia, a love for the countryside. Cartmill postulates that Bambi has "deep influence on modern attitudes toward hunting, wildlife and the wilderness" (Cartmill, 1996, p. 180). He argues that Bambi has channeled a "philosophical era with a perspective that lauded the natural world as a special, mystical realm not available to human beings who have polluted nature through culture, technology and waste" (Cartmill, 1996, p. 180).

Finally, Bambi goes to extraordinary lengths to imbue the natural environment depicted with a strong sense of realistic detail and Disney's animation is known for its rural and pastoral *mise-en-scène*, yet pleasing to the eyes conducting 'anti-hunting' propaganda. Lutts states that "The Bambi complex, Bambi factor and Bambi syndrome" are used interchangeably for sentimental sympathetic attitudes towards wildlife especially deer" (Lutts, 1992, p.50). Lutts continues that these terms are usually used "derogatorily and reflect a backlash against the humane, anti-hunting and preservationist values and the excessive sentimentality that Bambi has often come to symbolize" (Lutts, 1992, p.50). Bambi vilifies hunting and human hunters – delineated as shadowy murders – who burn down the animals' forest, thus, valorizing the rights of animals more forcefully than those of Man. Bambi's mother is killed by Mr. Man and his sweetheart by Mr. Man's dog, finally his terrestrial paradise is destroyed by Man's fire. The enviro-toon's fire images could be thought of as wholly congruent with what has become "the dominant ideological position by the 1930s and 1940s; fire seen as a destructive force with a detrimental and potentially devastating impact on wilderness environment" (Whitley, 2008, p. 70).

4. The Lorax (1972): From Ecotopia to Dystopia

The Lorax (1972) is an animated musical television special word by word adaptation of Dr. Seuss's picture book *The Lorax* (1971) that marked the rise of the environmental movement in the seventies. Seussology refers to the artistic renderings of Dr. Seuss, the pen name of Theodore Seuss Geisel (1904-1991), a political cartoonist and animator. It focuses on the political and moral dilemmas of modern American over-consumption/capitalist ethics. *The Lorax* (1972) is about the rampart consumerism that serves as a sign of progress and devastation of natural world. *The Lorax* leaves the viewers feeling ambivalent about the price of progress. Industrialization has widened the gap between nature and culture, between humans and the natural world. Nature, then, is seen as either a resource to be exploited or an enemy to be controlled.

Dr. Seuss - speaking through his fanciful character the Lorax - warns against mindless progress. *The Lorax* and the *Once-ler*, as characters, are products of a playful imagination that is apparently nonsense, but this nonsense is taken seriously. Habitat destruction is set in an imaginary location where the enigmatic Lorax 'speaks for trees'. This fantastical environment is inhabited by odd names and make-believe creatures. Dr. Seuss's works are characterized by being "big noise" with "noisy pictures and noisy language" (Nel, 2004, p.195). Dr. Seuss's energetic language and colorful illustrations seem to "affirm the child's need to make a mess, if need be" (Nel, 2004, p. 195). He applies a "complex interweaving of symbolism and anagrams establishing a distinguished style typical Seussical" (Nel, 2004, p. 195) that relies heavily on exaggeration as a poetic device, humor and absurdity. The surreal enviro-toon is a metaphor of the environment as a 'resource'. The silky threads of the Truffula trees provide the entrepreneurial *Once-ler* with the perfect 'resource' for making the useless garment 'Thneed'. The large scale production of these garments eradicates the Truffula trees and creates a toxic environment incapable of supporting the 'poor-Smomee Swans' or the 'Humming-Fish' whose "gills are all gummed". The *Once-ler* presents an economic growth model that incorporates mastery without any notion of sustainability. This spots light on the folly of human mastery over the environment:

The *Once-ler* acts as a colonial landlord advocating a Promethean discourse based on the ideological assumption of human's dominion over the bountiful environment. The *Once-ler's* entrepreneurial ability to create a demand for the useless garment 'Thneed' and the acquisitiveness of the consumers who purchase it ensure the destruction of the resource that produces the garment. The suffering and disappearance of the Truffula trees underscore anthropocentrism at its ugliest. The opening scene draws on the apocalyptic trope to depict both verbally and visually an ecocatastrophe where "no birds sing excepting old crows". It is, Dylan Wolfe argues, "the collision of ecology and the American myth that produces this 'ecological jeremiad'" (Wolfe, 2008, p. 14). The visual significance of the opening scene is that the long shot dwarfs the boy against a vast wasteland. The boy is shown as a small figure, looking up at the sign of "The Street of the Lifted Lorax", to trigger the viewers' curiosity and guide them to the old *Once-ler's* Lerkim. The boy looks tiny occupying little space in the wasteland scene, but his visual perspective leads the viewers from the frame story into the story of the Lorax. The narrative progresses through a series of flashbacks to describe how the impoverished environment has come into being and in so doing, the enviro-toon gives an ecological account of the importance of preserving biodiversity. By concluding with the opportunity to restore the balance by planting the last Truffula seed, it also conforms to environmental discourses of equilibrium and harmony. Within the visual dramaturgy and the theorization of the object in animation, the Truffula tree and the garment 'Thneed' are objects with personalities. The very engine of animation is to prescribe agency to objects to explore the "privileged relation between the object and its use and application in animated cartoon" (Cholodenko, 1991, p. 31).

The specific use of material objects works as a counter-realism to the orthodoxies animation. Giving life to a wide array of objects such as the sweeter-like object Thneed and the marketing slogan 'You need a Thneed' signify the adulteration of natural resource, capitalism and exploitation of the environment. There are other objects such as Snuvv, Whisper-ma-phone, Super-Axe-Hacker. The imaginary city is full of colorful images of the Brown Bar-baloots, the Swomee-Swans and the Humming-fish as well as plants like Gickle-grass, Truffula trees, places like Lerkim, North Nitch, and South Stitch. To maintain the quality of experimental animation, Dr. Seuss gives little priority to the notion of character, but instead, he uses them for symbolic meaning to subtly 'speak' the narrative. Dr. Seuss himself comments upon his art: "I like nonsense; it wakes up the brain cells. Fantasy is a necessary ingredient in living, it is a way of looking at life through the wrong end of a telescope which is what I do, and that enables you to 'laugh at life' realities" (Geisel, 2005). Dr. Seuss intentionally portrays concepts and ordinary relationships in an exaggerated manner to evoke a multilayered and in-depth representation of ecological crisis.

The Lorax – as an experimental enviro-toon – relies upon musicality within non-linear structure. Musicality tempers the mood encouraging the viewers to decode and draw imaginative inner meaning from the animation. As a dialogic enviro-toon, there is a strong relationship between music, image and narrative resulting in a sophisticated form of rhythmical montage with the development of leitmotifs. Sound pattern is a recurring element and a crucial ingredient in creating neologisms to unleash linguistic creativity. Nel observes that

The Once-ler's machinery goes 'Gullpity-Glupp' and 'Schloppity-Schlopp' which has the effect of 'glumping the pond where the Humming-Fish hummed!' The Lorax himself, choking on the 'smogulous smoke', speaks with a 'cruffulous croak'. The verb 'glumping' sounds like dumping clumps of goo, 'smogulous' turns 'smog' into an adjective, and 'cruffulous' sounds like crusty, huffing, wheezing old man. These words not only sound like what you mean – they're fun to say ... Taking rhyme, alliteration, consonance, and assonance to their logical extremes, Seuss reduces words to distracting from sense (Nel, 2004, p. 26).

Dr. Seuss has embedded many upbeat, loud and attention-grabbing elements as manifested in the words of the Once-ler: "And, for your information, you Lorax, I'm figgering on biggering/ and BIGGERING/and BIGGERING/ and BIGGERING/ turning MORE Truffula Tress into Thneed/ which everyone, EVERYONE, EVERYONE needs". Obviously, nonsense animation can be seen as a "heretical mission" (Andreson & Apseloff, 1989, p.94). The Lorax – as an example of an enviro-toon – exhibits the spirit of playfulness to rearrange the familiar world or to "challenge the 'sense of the adult world'" (Cott, 1983, p. 28).

The solution to the ecological crisis offered at the finale is very limited and incomplete. The repentant Once-ler hands off the environmentalist boy the last Truffula tree seed. Although the boy remains silent throughout the visual narrative, he activates the Once-ler's storytelling. The boy stands at the spot from which the Lorax has departed to reinforce moral responsibility. What if the Once-ler emerged from his Lerkim, returned the boy's payment for narrating in flashback the story and joined the boy in planting the last Truffula seed to ensure the Truffula forest's regeneration? The solution would become one of intergenerational action. Even the indignant Lorax does nothing to face the Once-ler's damage of nature. The Lorax's credibility and sharp tone are not appealing to the Once-ler's beliefs of progress and exploitative nature. Both are failures since they have not grasped that the ecosystem includes not only plants and animals, but also themselves. The Once-ler imposes upon himself a state of isolation due to his overwhelming sense of materialism. The Lorax vanishes to an unknown place and instead of 'speaking for the trees', he would have created a strong collaborative strategy to 'speak with others' to fight the Once-ler's colonialism and ecological damages.

5- Conclusion

Ecocriticism has grown much broader in diversity and in scope to include all forms of literature as well as the visual and performing art. Recently, Animation Studies have been seen as separate from Film Studies. In *Film Art: An Introduction* (2004), David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson show how discussions of the animated film have evolved from mere nods to chapter sections that indicate how much animation has distinguished itself as a valid filmic form. What is unique is that ecoanimation lends itself to "investing the worlds of inanimate objects, of animals, of nature with real spirit and character" (Clarke, 2004, p. 2).

The present study proposes an ecocritical reading to two enviro-toons to conceptualize the environment as a resource to underscore ecodegradation due to a greedy and selfish Once-ler who devastates a blooming landscape in an 'abstract' animation. Not only does Dr. Seuss tell fantastical tales of far-away places but he also illustrates a unique visual language that carries his stories to new heights of artistic expression. Surrealism provides the foundation from which he builds the structure of *The Lorax*. The structure is analogous to a dream-like state to underlie hidden sentiments beyond the orthodoxies of language. The child character has a central role in environmental awareness and activism, thereby, child and nature can be seen as "a joint construction of the essential" (Lesnik-Oberstein, 1998, p. 208). The presence of the human agency can establish *The Lorax* as a dialogic enviro-toon to set an example of 'restrained anthropocentrism' to acknowledge warning signs in order to take an action. Discourses of sustainability have a threefold purpose: to offer hope of human survival; to critique environmental exploitation; and to propose human action to avert or redirect environmental crisis. The pro-environmental discourse towards 'eco-consciousness' develops attitudes of care and environmental awareness. This highlights the differences between 'strong anthropocentrism' and 'weak anthropocentrism', the latter is favored by environmental ethicists to bring the natural habitat back. In contrast, *Bambi* is a monologic biography in photographic realism. Disney's mimesis and linear structure do not require deep interpretation and since it is only a warning with no handy action plan, there is no path to human redemption to exist in a world that upholds 'strong anthropocentrism' as a discourse of human dominion over nature. Disney's *Bambi* is a blatant critique of hunting practices, yet it presents "a visual poem exalting the glory of nature as seen in the cycle of seasons" (Maltin, 1980, p. 66). *Bambi* is as an example of wildlife enviro-toon that utilizes natural and non-human landscape as a central motif in which stylized animals give way to more realistic portrayals – animals are given distinctively human voices and emotions.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Celia & Apseloff, Marilyn (1989). *Nonsense Literature for Children: Aesope to Seuss*. Hamden, Conn.: Library Professional.
- Bambi* (1942). Directed by David Hand. United States of America: Walt Disney Productions.
- Barrier, Michael (2003). *Hollywood Cartoons: American Animation in its Golden Age*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Barthes, Roland. (1974). *S/Z: An Essay*. Richard Miller (trans.). New York: ill & Wang.
- Bate, Jonathan (1991). *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition*. London: Routledge.
- Bousè, Derek (2000). *Wildlife Films*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Bordwell, David & Thompson, Kristin (2004). *Film Art: An Introduction*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Brereton, Pat (2005). *Hollywood Utopia: Ecology in Contemporary American Cinema*. UK: Intellect.
- Buell, Lawrence (1995). *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, Harvard University Press.
- Buell, Lawrence (2001). *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture and Environment in the U.S.A and Beyond*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, Harvard University Press.
- Bunce, Michael (1994). *The Countryside Ideal: Anglo American Images of Landscape*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Cartmill, Matt (1996). *A View to a Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature through History*. USA; Harvard University Press
- Clark, Timothy (2011). *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Clarke, James (2004). *Animated Films*. London: Virgin.
- Cholodenko, Alan (1991). *The Illusion of Life: Essays on Animation*. Sydney: Power Publications.
- Cott, Jonathan (1983). *Pipers at Gates of Dawn: The Wisdom of Children's Literature*. New York: Random House.
- Geisel, Theodor Seuss (2005). *Theodor Seuss Geisel: The Early Works of Dr Seuss*. Miamisburg, Ohio: Checker Book Publication.
- Darcy, Jane (1995). "The Representation of Nature in *The Wind in the Willows* and *The Secret Garden*". *The Lion and The Unicorn*, Vol. 19, No.2, pp. 211-222.
- Dorbin, Sidney & Morey, Sean (2009). *Ecosee: Image, Rhetoric Nature*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Dryzek, John (2005). *The Politics of Earth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Furniss, Maureen (2008). *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*. New York: John Libbey.
- Furniss, Maureen (2012). *Animation, Art and Industry*. United Kingdom: John Libbey Publishing Ltd.
- Gleckner, Robert & Enscoe, Gerald (1962). *Romanticism: Points of View*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

- Glotfelty, Cheryl (1996). "Introduction". *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens: University of Georgia.
- Ingram, David (2000). *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema*. Exeter, U. K.: University of Exeter Press.
- Johnston, Ollie & Thomas, Frank (1990). *Walt Disney's Bambi: The Story and the Film*. New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang.
- Klue, Rachel (2008). *Man's Return to Nature*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Lesnik-Oberstein, Karin (1998). *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*. London & New York: Zed Books.
- Lotman, Yuri (1981). "On the Language of Animated Cartoons" in *Russian Poetics in Translation*.
- Lawrence O'Toole Michael and Ann Shukman (Eds.). Oxford: Holdan books, pp. 36-39.
- Lutts, Ralph (1992). "The Trouble with Bambi: Walt Disney's Bambi and the American Vision of Nature". *Forest and Conservation History*, Vol. 36, No. 4, pp. 160-171.
- Maltin, Leonard (1980). *Of Mice and Magic: A History of American Animated Cartoon*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- McLuhan, Marsall (1964). *Understanding Media*. New York: McGraw-ill.
- Mitman, Greg (1999). *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film*. Cambridge; Harvard University Press.
- Murray, Robin & Heumann, Joseph (2007). "Environmental Cartoons of the 193s, 40s, and 50s: A Critique of Post-World II Progress". *ISLE*, Winter Vol.14, No. 1, pp. 51-69.
- Nel. Philip (2004). *Dr. Seuss: American Icon*. London: The Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd.
- Russell, Bertrand (1996). *History of Western Philosophy*. London: UnWin Hymn.
- Seuss, Dr. (1971). *The Lorax*. New York: Random House.
- Salten, Felix (1928). *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Soper, Kate (2000). *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*. London: Routledge.
- Solomon, Charles (1987). *The Art of the Animated Image: An Anthology*. Los Angeles: American Film Institute.
- Solomon, Charles (1994). *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*. New York: Random House.
- Stephens, John (2006). "From Eden to Suburbia: Perspectives on the Natural world in Children's Literature". *Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature*, Vol. 16, No. 2, ACLAR, Melbourne.
- The Lorax (1972). Directed by Hawley Pratt. USA: Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), (TV).
- Thompson, Kristin (1980). *Implications of the Cel Animation Technique: The Cinematic Apparatus*. London: MacMillan.
- Weinman, Jaime (2004). "Things That Suck: The Smoggies". *Something Old, Nothing New: Thoughts on Popular Culture and Unpopular Culture*. Blogspot. <http://zvbxrpl.blogspot.com/2004/09-things-that-suck-smoggies.html>
- Wells, Paul (1998). *Understanding Animation*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Wells, Paul (2002a). *Animation and America*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Wells, Paul (2002b). *Animation: Genre and Authorship*. London, New York: Wallflower Press
- Whitley, David (2008). *The Idea of Nature in Disney Animation*. UK: Ashgate Press.
- Wolfe, Dylan (2008). "The Ecological Jeremiad, The American Myth, and the Vivid Force of Color in Dr. Seuss's The Lorax", *Environmental Communication*, Vol. 2, No. (1): pp. 3-24.