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Cidalia Pina is a Geography major with a minor in Earth Sciences with an Environmental

concentration. This essay was completed as the final paper for Dr. James Bohn's seminar course: The Walt Disney Company and Music. Cidalia learned an invaluable amount about the writing and research process from Dr. Bohn. Both his class and submission to the *Undergraduate Review* have been a rewarding and positive experience. Cidalia will always be grateful for Dr. Bohn's wisdom, direction, and encouragement, without which, this paper would not have been published. Cidalia would also like to thank her husband Dave for his strength and support and their four children Lukas, Mason, Ian, and Emma for providing the never-ending inspiration to pursue her academic goals. This journey is a gift from all of them.

Disney brings nature and environmental issues to the forefront with its non-confrontational approach to programming meant for children. This opportunity raises awareness and is relevant to growing environmental concerns. However this awareness is just a cursory start, there is an imbalance in their message and effort with that of their carbon footprint. The important eco-messages that Disney presents are buried in fantasy and unrealistic plots. As an entertainment giant with the world held magically captive, Disney can do more, both in filmmaking and as a corporation, to facilitate a greener planet.

"Disney is a market driven company whose animated films have dealt with nature in a variety of ways, but often reflect contemporary concerns, representations, and shifting consciousness about the environment and nature." - Wynn Yarbrough, University of the District of Columbia

In what some consider Walt Disney's crowning achievement, *Bambi* is a magical and artistically inspirational wonder. However, is *Bambi* Disney's fantastical depiction of real nature or more Disney sentimental magic? This magic does not come from a wish or a wand, rather in the simple hand-drawn animations and artfully selected score. Disney carefully captured animal behavior and placed viewers deep in the forest with an immersive experience. The audience remains in the forest with the animals and forgets there is a world outside. Before computer manipulated graphics, with animated technology that we know today, Disney created a film with heartwarming and lovable creatures, sharing their lives in front of an impressionist backdrop. *Bambi* is a coming of age story, as we share in the lives of woodland animals, and witness a little fawn born a prince, survive and grow to be a strong and stately buck.

Equally beautiful to the artistic animations are the musical scores chosen for the film. The film is comprised mostly of instrumental scores, with the exception of the main title and opening score "Love is a Song" and the finale score. The two other songs in the film with lyrics occur in the spring scenes of the movie "Little April Showers" and "Let's Sing A Gay Little Spring Song" and again in *Bambi* and *Faline's* romance scene "I Bring You a Song." Each score and song artfully blends instrument selection with the scene content. During each scene music complements the film to deliver lyrical emotion. For example, the heralding trumpets are used beautifully to emote majesty and strength in

the “Gallop of the Stags” and “The Great Prince of the Forest.” The more gentle and playful variations are reserved for scenes in which Bambi is playing with forest friends and discovery of their forest habitat. Strings and percussion instruments like the cymbals and triangle are perfectly chosen to illustrate the thunderstorm claps, and the raindrops falling during “Little April Showers.”

A film for children that features a happy baby deer Bambi, his friends Thumper, a rabbit, and Flower, a skunk, is not just a story about the lives of woodland animals, but also carries a message of conservation. The film takes place in a forest much like that of our North American wilderness. Images of Half Dome and El Capitan place the story in Yosemite National Park, causing the audience to feel protective of the habitat that Bambi dwells in. We recognize from the film that man does not belong in this environment and his portrayal is one to introduce the viewer to the concept of a Disney villain. Man is not only hunting Bambi and his friends, but in this film he also irresponsibly starts a forest fire. Effective and realistic, as this happens frequently, but sometimes hunting is part of conservation efforts not only to protect the forest, but also keep animal populations healthy and thriving. Man and wolves are the few natural predators deer have. When there is a healthy balance in nature, it is these predators that keep deer populations in a healthy range, and it is also part of the natural selection to prey on sick or weak animals. When there is an imbalance, either by removing or redirecting the natural predator process, the deer population can become overrun and create a different problem for our forest environment.

Overpopulation of deer can threaten our forest, as deer can consume underbrush, native plants and damage tree stock when they browse or strip bark off the lower trunk portion, causing enough damage to kill the trees. In a collaborative effort with the United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, the National Park Service concluded that in the last two decades, “an increasing deer population has prevented the ability of native forest to grow and mature and has reduced habitat for a range of native wildlife species” (National Park Service).

David Whitley discusses the “Eden” myth in his analysis of *Bambi*, and Disney’s “sentimental distortion of nature,” echoing the sentiments of many critics that Disney’s film is an appeal to our emotion and introduces concepts that distort our reality as a movie viewer (Whitley). In the original book by Felix Salten, the fire scene was absent, but chosen in the film to portray man as the evil element. In the movie *Bambi*, Disney uses fear with this sentimental view of nature (Yarbrough). Man did not need to be portrayed as the evil character. Man can and often are a

part of the conservation of our deer population and preserving the natural environment. Disney only needed to look to nature as a cue if they needed a villain factor in the film. Bambi and his forest family face the evils of starvation, overpopulation, disease and climate change that threaten their habitat. This would have been a more natural and realistic depiction of life in the forest.

Natural force is utilized in Disney’s film *The Lion King* where the young lion cub, Simba, has to learn important lessons and how to survive in the hostile African savanna. In Disney’s “Circle of Life” story the animal characters learn lessons about misuse of natural resources, and what happens when a kingdom is ruled by greed (*The Lion King*). Simba the young prince, loses his father the King, and blames himself for the accident. His uncle, Scar, the primary villain of the story, wants to take over the kingdom and urges Simba to run away. Scar wants to be the heir to the throne and considers Simba an obstacle to his ascension. Simba escapes Scar’s plan, but is still morally responsible for leaving his kingdom and their survival in his uncle’s corrupt control. Simba stays away and chooses to live his life carefree in an attempt to forget his problems. When Simba ignores his destiny as future king, the pride suffers as Scar depletes the land and their home of all the natural resources. The movie demonstrates what happens when poor management, greed and carelessness are practiced instead of management by sustainability and a balance of nature. Simba also learns not to run away from his problems, but rather to confront them, though it means having to take responsibility for his actions. When he realizes the pride needs him, he confronts his fear and fulfills his destiny as future King.

The ecological message in the film, although told through challenges that the animals face in Africa, is one meant to implicitly warn humans of their impact on the environment. However, scenes from the movie are hard for a young viewing audience to grasp. Betrayal from a family member, an uncle, death of a parent that a child is meant to feel responsible for, and understanding our role in death and rebirth through “Circle of Life” concepts are heavy subject matters to explore in a film that targets a young viewer.

Despite the emotional understory for young viewers, *The Lion King* is another cinematic achievement for Disney with a visual feast in terms of animation and music. The complex theme of life and death are made light in songs like “Hakuna Matata” that has an upbeat rhythm and memorable lyrics. Musical score and song also punctuate the dark scenes of the movie, when Scar sings “Be Prepared” (*The Lion King*). When Mufasa dies, and Simba blames himself, we feel his pain through the music. A choir that has theocratic tones accompanies the score. This

element in music could symbolize the concepts of Christianity's ideas of sacrifice, death and even murder. While the plot of *The Lion King* clearly parallels *Hamlet*, the fratricide also recalls Cain and Abel. Like Cain and Claudius, Scar, the fraternal archetype in this story, is motivated by jealousy and greed, and he murders his brother Mufusa to gain his throne. In fact, the wound that gives Scar his name could be seen as the mark of Cain (Bohn). The violent, dark and sobering score emphasizes the darkness of Scar's character, Mufasa's senseless death by a ruthless brother, and the total loss and devastation for Simba.

The opening sequence is one of the most breathtaking and inspiring songs and scores to accompany a Disney movie. In the "Circle of Life" sequence at the start of the movie, through the sunrise on the horizon of the majestic African landscape, to the animal parade honoring the birth of Simba, we are reminded the film has an environmental theme. Humankind could take notes from the fact that not every animal is friend or foe, and there is respect for his or her place in the animal kingdom. The balance of nature, although a baboon would not likely embrace a lion, is the message here, and when the balance is destroyed we have lost our place in this great "Circle of Life" (*The Lion King*).

Nature's balance and imbalance is explored in the Disney film *Pocahontas*. It is a story about English settlers discovering America, specifically early Virginia; and upon landing in the new world discovering a native people. Disney explores historical context in the film and makes an attempt to deliver environmental themes in the frame of the story. Pocahontas has a love and respect for nature, a relationship that is spiritual with the natural world around her. She is brave and courageous and open-minded, all the qualities that would create a great heroine for a Disney film. However the movie's eco- messages are lost among the "magic" and with the historical inaccuracies and stereotypes the movie fails to deliver the more important overall attempt of awareness of the natural world.

Despite the flaws in writing and message falling short, the animation is beautiful and the music does more to bring ecological awareness than the characters do. Native Americans are portrayed in the movie as living off the land with agriculture, instead of the more accurate hunting and fishing. They were also portrayed as "savages," misunderstood and ignorant (*Pocahontas*). The white men are again portrayed as the oppressive and violent fools, moving in and stealing the land of the native people. Their only hope is for the beautiful and barefoot princess of the woods, Pocahontas, to mediate between the white people and her native family. Disney again brings their magic to film, but not in a sensible way. Furthermore, the animals are anthropomorphic and seem to be Pocahontas's pets.

In a movie about nature's balance and respect, this would be far from the truth. The real-life Pocahontas was a young girl and did not have a romance with John Smith, nor did she have magical trees that were filled with the spirit of her grandmother to guide her. However, when Pocahontas sings "Colors of the Wind" we understand the bigger message of the film is the necessity of understanding our environment, the need to protect and preserve it for the future (*Pocahontas*) respect for the natural world around us, respect for each other and a respect for the cultural differences that make each of us unique. During the song "Around the River Bend" Pocahontas describes life as about making choices that are expected of her as a member of her tribe, versus those that are unexpected, challenging but fulfilling (*Pocahontas*). She comes upon a split in the river, and the proverbial choice: will she take the wide and even path or choose the narrow and winding path? In the film and in real-life, Pocahontas may identify with the more narrow and challenging path. With the film's stereotypes and inaccuracies, and their need to remake history into a fairytale, Disney has chosen for this film, the wide and expected path.

In 2008 Pixar Animation Studios and writer Andrew Stanton released the movie *WALL·E*, a love story between two robots. Stanton started developing this story during the production of *Toy Story* in 1994. *WALL·E* (Waste Allocation Load Lifter Earth-Class) is a robot left behind on a post-apocalyptic Earth that has been rendered uninhabitable because of over-consumerism and un-recycled waste left behind by humans. The *WALL·E* robots are left behind to clean, pick up, compact and stack trash into giant piles in an effort to clean up the Earth and make enough room for life again. The character *WALL·E* is the only unit left working on the desolate planet, and is truly alone with the exception of his friend the cockroach. Humans have escaped into space on the *Axiom*, sponsored by the big-box corporation "Buy-n-Large", which is responsible for assisting human consumerism (*WALL·E*). The humans have been in space so long with machines doing everything for them they have atrophied into shapeless blobs.

When *WALL·E* finds a living green plant while boxing up trash, the movie changes direction and sets in motion the revival of the planet. *WALL·E*, fascinated with finding the plant, gently transports it back to his recycling-truck home. *EVE* (Extraterrestrial Vegetation Examiner) is launched as the plant is detected from space. *WALL·E* falls in love at first sight with *EVE*. The infatuation is underscored in one of only three lyrical scores from the movie. It is an old song performed by Louis Armstrong called "La vie en Rose." *EVE* is the first and only visitor *WALL·E* has had to the abandoned planet. He tries to impress her with his collection of recycled treasures, but she remains unaffected, until *WALL·E* offers her the plant, the

item she has been sent to Earth to retrieve. EVE retrieves the plant and shuts down while she waits for the ship to return to collect her and the plant. WALL·E cannot let EVE go, so he stows away and follows the ship back to deep space where they rendezvous with the Axiom.

The plant found on Earth is meant to signal its survival, and that Earth can once again be habitable. AUTO is the automatic pilot and the main antagonist of the film (Disney). AUTO takes the command to “never return to Earth at all cost,” literally, and tries to prevent the Axiom from returning. In this film, despite the portrayal of humans as lazy, and technologically dependent on computers, they turn their thinking around and help WALL·E and EVE return home. Two passengers on the ship, John and Mary, who usually go about their automated day with no change, become more aware of their surroundings, noticing the pool and windows for the first time, after interacting with WALL·E. The Captain of the ship, who also interacts with WALL·E, together with these two passengers, all begin to ask questions, and rebel against the system that held them dependently captive. In a key scene the Captain argues with AUTO that he “no longer wants to just survive, he wants to live” (*WALL·E*).

Stanton never intended to create an environmental message in this film (Stanton). It is a love story. He wanted to tell a tale about a lonely robot left behind looking for humanity through the trash he collected and dreaming about a companion. WALL·E was programmed to clean, but was left on Earth so long he takes on human traits from the influence of his job, those remnants of humanity left behind, and the music and video he plays over and over. “Put On Your Sunday Clothes” is a song about leaving the old behind and trying something new, and it is WALL·E’s inspiration. The song “It Only Takes a Moment” is chosen when WALL·E and EVE have found each other and say “I love you, by holding hands” (Stanton). These songs are both sung by Michael Crawford from *Hello, Dolly!*

Lastly, the end credits have some of the best art sequences that describe how humans established a home on the Earth again. Alexander Ulloa, contributing writer for the title sequence review website, *Art of the Title*, describes the work:

Something beautiful.

Jim Capobianco’s end credits to Andrew Stanton’s *WALL·E* are essential; they are the actual ending of the film, a perfect and fantastically optimistic conclusion to a grand, if imperfect idea. Humanity’s past and future evolution viewed through unspooling schools of art. Frame after frame sinks in as you smile self-consciously. It isn’t supposed to be this good but there

it is. This is art in its own right. Peter Gabriel and Thomas Newman’s song, “Down to Earth” indulges you with some incredibly thoughtful lyrics and, from the Stone Age to the Impressionists to the wonderful 8-bit pixel sprites, you are in the midst of something special. In a great and successful attempt to preserve our likeness through the lens and canvas of art history, Jim Capobianco, Alex Woo and many others have rendered something epic; art without sublimation and an imprint of hope. (Ulloa)

Andrew Stanton understood that viewers may doubt mankind’s success upon returning to the planet, so it was a way to finish telling the story. The artwork end credits at the conclusion of the movie illustrate an evolution of civilization through music and art styles, and it is stunning.

One of the best features of this film is that it speaks to adults and their actions even if these complicated undertones do not reach the target audience. Children understand the message of friendship that WALL·E and EVE share. Whatever the intention of the film, the strong messages left with the viewer is that human consumption, waste and decisions by humankind can have long and devastating impacts to our Earth. Part of that message also conveys that it is never too late, mistakes and choices can be reversed to promote better environmental practices and choices for our future. Disney could keep this in mind when they package films for release with promotion products less than healthy for our environment. For example, the *WALL·E* movie was distributed with plastic watches that contained non-replaceable batteries. The Disney conglomerate and its commercialism is overrun with plastic waste, marketing trinkets and toy products from China, that litter our landfills.

Disney has made strides with *Disney Nature* and the conservation efforts of the Disney World Wide Conservation fund. Documentaries that promote environmental issues and conservation of resources, such as the films *Earth* and *Oceans* bring awareness and help to spread efforts for preservation of our planet. Other documentaries that bring us closer to wildlife like the films *Chimpanzee* and *African Cats* also demonstrate great care and effort by divisions of Walt Disney to growing concerns of natural habitats.

There is much debate surrounding global warming, and the negative effects of greenhouse gases on our planet. Whether the causes are natural and/or anthropogenic, scientists are concerned with increasing amounts of CO₂ in the atmosphere, and its contributing relationship with a warming trend. In the year 2010, the measurement of GHG (green house gases) with MtCO₂eq (metric ton of carbon dioxide equivalent), was

measured at 50,101 MtCO₂eq worldwide. The USA used to report the highest numbers of emissions, but has made great efforts in reducing its numbers. In 2010 the United States measured 6,714, the country of France 538, and the country of China, which now leads the world with output, reported totals at 111,181 MtCO₂eq (Europa). In their 2010 Corporate Citizenship Report, The Disney Corporation, including: business offices, retail stores, cruise ships, parks and resorts, reported just over 550 MtCO₂eq (Disney). Which means Disney, as a company, is producing more MtCO₂eq than the whole country of France. Reports of Disney's consumption and waste, as measured by CO₂ emissions, can put in perspective just how much Disney as a corporation affects our planet.

Disney's carbon footprint is enormous and they own the responsibility of balancing what they take with what they give back to the Earth in a healthy way. The message they send is a conflicting one. Efforts in environmental research and conservation and preservation can be easily undone without real efforts of eliminating waste. Disney imagineers and animators bring magic to the screen and light the lives of children everywhere. A world free from needless waste and consumerism, one governed by less greed and more artistry in making our planet green would be the best story to tell our children and future generations of fans. It could be the greatest fairy tale they write.

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