Nature and culture: an ecocritical approach to Moana and Princess Mononoke

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Preddiplomski i sveučilišni studij anglistike (dvopredmetni)

Daniela Lubina

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Diplomski rad

Student/ica: Mentor/ica:

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Zadar, 2022.

Izjava o akademskoj čestitosti

Ja, **Daniela Lubina,** ovime izjavljujem da je moj **diplomski** rad pod naslovom **Nature and culture: an ecocritical approach to Moana and Princess Mononoke** rezultat mojega vlastitog rada, da se temelji na mojim istraživanjima te da se oslanja na izvore i radove navedene u bilješkama i popisu literature. Ni jedan dio mojega rada nije napisan na nedopušten način, odnosno nije prepisan iz necitiranih radova i ne krši bilo čija autorska prava.

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Zadar, 15. rujna 2022.

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1. Introduction

Since ancient times, people have utilized universal tropes and mythologies to define the world, nature, and their relationship with the land, which have molded human-environmental imagination. With the increase in the number of inhabitants on Earth and their economic and cultural development, there has been a greater and greater adaptation of nature to human life needs. Such changes did not go unnoticed. Concerned about the future of nature and humanity, critics began to write down their observations and warn people of possible negative consequences. That is how ecocriticism was born - a literary study that focuses on representing the environment in literature from an earth-centered approach (Garrard 3). Ecocritics question how nature is depicted in the text, how concepts such as dwelling or wilderness vary over time, or how open is the subject of detailed literary analysis. Ecocriticism has gained popularity due to the environmental movement and has influenced various critical studies like feminism, postcolonialism, and animal studies. It began as a form of literary criticism dedicated to studying narrative patterns and storylines that influence human consciousness and engagement with their surroundings.

This paper will cover the emergence of ecocriticism and discuss popular culture, mainly animated movies. From *Bambi* (1942) to *Back to the Outback* (2021), cartoons have often been filled with animals. Ecocriticism or Ecocinema, to be precise, questions the representation of these animals and their role in, hopefully, raising environmental consciousness.[1] The theoretical background will be discussed, from the emergence of ecocriticism to its implementation in cinema, and then applied to two animated movies: Disney's *Moana* (2016) and Studi Ghibli's *Princess Mononoke* (1997). Moana will be analyzed with Pacific customs in mind, from the art of sailing to the importance of folk tales in understanding nature. Apart from that, the role of Mother Nature will be examined from the ecofeminist perspective mentioned later in the text. Princess Mononoke will be seen from a religious point of Shinto – the representation of gods, spirits, and animals (not) living in harmony with people. An essential part of the discussion will be dedicated to Hayao Miyazaki's animation style and new nature narrative different from the

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[1] Eidt, Stephanie A. *Disney's Animated Animals: A Potential Source of Opinions and Knowledge*. Diss. Malone University, 2016.
Moreno-Tarín, Sara, Tatiana Pina, and Martí Domínguez. "Worlds apart, drawn together: Bears, penguins and biodiversity in climate change cartoons." *Public Understanding of Science* 30.4 (2021): 384-399.
Phillips, Meagan. "Animating Animals: Exploring Modes of Animal Representation in Classic Animated Children's Films." (2016).

widespread Western one. Also, the other objective is to compare the two studios' approaches to nature regarding their animation tradition and directors. The premise is that Studio Ghibli portrays environmental issues with more attention, while Disney stays within its happy-ending princess tropes.

2. Theoretical background

According to Marland, ecocriticism is a general term for various critical approaches that analyze the interpretation of the human-nonhuman relationship in literature and other cultural forms, mainly from the perception of anxieties about humanity's damaging effect on the biosphere (846). All of this demonstrates that, while ecocriticism is still an emerging discourse, it has deep historical origins. Since the beginning of these disciplines, the concept of nature has been a prominent concern for literary critics and intellectual historians. This shows how radical the current movement is compared to previous practice. Even though there are ongoing disputes over what ecocriticism is, how it emerged, and in which directions it should develop, "the marked increase and sophistication of environmentalism as an issue within literary and cultural studies" (Buell 3) is undeniable. It emphasizes the need to address how environmental issues were mostly ignored in eminent academic and cultural studies in the 1980s.

Since its founding in 1992, the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment has dominated academic discussions about ecocriticism. It is the first professional organization founded by ecocritics. It has regular conferences and publishes a journal with literary criticism, creative writing, and environmental education and advocacy articles. Romantic poetry, wildland stories, and nature writing dominated many of the earliest ecocritical writings. Nevertheless, in recent years, ASLE has broadened its area of study to include cultural ecocriticism, which now includes zoos, theme parks, and shopping centers, in addition to popular scientific literature, film, television, and art. To provide readers with as accurate analysis as possible, ecocritics consider different cultural changes and settings "in which the complex negotiations of nature and culture take place" (Garrard 4).

As a result, the first wave of ecocriticism, particularly in the United States, concentrated on depicting the world beyond the text in literature, devoting much of its energy to the quest for literary forms that could best transmit an environmental message. As ecocriticism evolved, these social, economic, and sexual politics problems emerged more forcefully on both sides of the Atlantic. Deep Ecology was one of the main branches that emerged during the first wave (Garrard 21). It calls for the "recognition of intrinsic value in nature" (Garrard 21) and blames

the Western human-nature dichotomy for most natural catastrophes. To minimize the instrumental approach to nature and potential hazards, deep ecologists demand "a return to a monistic, primal identification of humans and the ecosphere" as well as "the shift from a human-centered to a nature-centered system of values" (Garrard 21).

However, it fell short as ecocritics began questioning the movement's theoretical constraints, heralding the second wave of ecocriticism. Organicist approaches to thinking about the environment and environmentalism have been questioned by second-wave ecocriticism. Critics argue that the natural and artificial worlds have long been confused. Both sectors are as linked as they have ever been. Bennett argues that "social ecocriticism is needed if we are to successfully incorporate urban environments within the domain of ecological criticism" (32). Second-wave ecocriticism has concentrated powerfully, for example, on locating vestiges of nature within cities and exposing crimes of eco injustice in getting to society's marginal roots.

Nevertheless, critics cannot agree on what comprises each wave due to a blurred succession of perspectives. Though the second wave changed ecocriticism, it retained components of the first, such as a sense of nature's universal physical presence, deepening and refining its engagement with form, and the search for the environmental imagination. It diverged in its re-engagement with critical theory, which it had first resisted. To increase the number of new social and environmental perspectives on nature, ecocriticism offers different theoretical and critical approaches, including ecofeminism and postcolonial ecocriticism. In the general overview of the second wave, Marland analyzes a few innovations in ecofeminism that indicate its significance in the ecocritical trajectory.

2.1. Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism and postcolonial ecocriticism were two significant areas of cultural theory that were well established and well-positioned to bring awareness of how nature had been manufactured and utilized to reinforce dominant ideologies of gender, class, and race. Nature is a domain of diverse exclusions and control for nonhumans, various human groups, and areas of existence (Marland 852). As a result, racism, colonialism, and sexism have derived and focused on portraying sexual, racial, and ethnic disparities as bestial. On the contrary, "the body construed as a sphere of inferiority, as a lesser form of humanity lacking the full measure of rationality or culture" (Marland 852). Garrard highlights the importance of paying attention to ways in which different cultures shape nature. Since some cultures are more powerful than

others, they "might potentially confront or subvert environmentally damaging practices" to conform to their norms (8-9).

"Deep ecology blames anti-ecological attitudes and practices on the anthropocentric dualism of humanity/nature, but ecofeminism also blames the androcentric duality of man/woman" (Garrard 23). The former considers human rationality superior to nature's "immortal soul", while the latter gives men authority over women believing that they have weaker biological traits. "Ecofeminism recognizes that these two arguments share a standard underlying master model: women are closely related to nature, the material, the emotional, and the particular" (Warren 129). On the contrary, Davion notes that: "men have been associated with culture, the nonmaterial, the rational, and the abstract, and this should suggest a common cause between feminists and ecologists" (qtd. in Garrard 23). Ecofeminism attempts to illustrate that "the concept of women's possession is similar to natural resource possession" throughout the investigation of environmental problems; these two processes are regarded concurrent (Hodosy 29).

> "The unsettling of binaries such as culture/nature, male/female, mind/body, civilized/primitive, self/other, reason/matter, and human/nature is one of feminist and ecofeminist thought's essential contributions to current ecocriticism." (Marland 850)

"Although some ecofeminists have embraced and celebrated the idea of woman as closer to nature, others have resisted the implications of biological essentialism included within this approach, labeling it as a motherhood environmentalism" (Marland 852). Assuming that women have been connected with nature and that each has disparaged the other; in that situation, attacking the hierarchy by inverting the terms and exalting irrationality, emotion nature, and the human or body over reason, mind, and civilization may appear worthwhile. Some ecofeminists, particularly those who promote radical ecofeminism and goddess worship, have taken this approach.

2.2. From ecocriticism to eco-animation

As a new cultural discipline, dominant critical schools, such as new historicism, feminist critique, and postcolonial criticism influenced ecocriticism. These critical groups have all been committed to political aims to uncover and expose the systems of power and oppression since the second part of the twentieth century. Aside from that, they wish to highlight oppressive language methods and map the opportunities for resistance in every aspect of human life,

including race, class, and gender. Due to growing interest in nature and ecology, ecocriticism has dramatically developed as an academic and critical discourse. It has been intertwined with various other disciplines, including film and animation, which led to the arrival of a new sub-genre of Film Studies – Ecoanimation often referred to as 'enviro-toon' (Fahmi 82). This field of study analyses cartoons with clear environmental concerns as themes.

Some of the questions that occupy envirotoons include: how nature appears in this film; what function the physical world plays in the act; are the storytelling values consistent with ecological principles; and how the cultural analogies of the earth impact the film's representation of nature. Also, they question how the movie's technology has influenced our relationship with and representation of the natural environment. The critics are interested in whether Hollywood movies help or hinder the spread of environmental awareness and to what degree consumer culture impairs popular film's portrayal of nature.

Enviro-toons are short or feature-length animated films that address and help convey the complexities of environmental issues (Murray and Heumann 2). Enviro-toons never lecture or force viewers to accept the imposed message. To continue, they not just humanize nature but focus on the human exploitation of it and interact with the contemporary and postmodern world's ramifications. Visual scenes, like verbal ones, are entwined with the culture's beliefs in which they are created, transmitted, and read. Considering that the animation lexicon animators use is culturally driven, one must note that each animator will have their personal or studio style. Therefore, ecoanimation focuses on aspects of nature enviro-toons show, the manner of portraying them, how they express the environmental sensibility, and how it influences people and their understanding of the natural world.

One of the main issues that ecocritics focus on are simplified portrayals of environmental issues, beautified depictions of nature, or adorable representations of wildlife. Cartoons like *101 Dalmatians (1961), The Jungle Book (1967)* and *The Aristocats (1970)* blurred the distinction between human nature and other forms of nature (Prévot-Julliard et al. 2). In all listed movies, animals are anthropomorphized with the ability to behave, think and act like people. They are deprived of their animalistic instincts and wild appearance. In their research, the authors focused on the reduced representation of nature in Disney animated movies created over 70 years (Prévot-Julliard et al. 1). They questioned "the presence of green nature in the film," focusing on both the natural and domestic environment, and "the complexity of drawn nature" regarding the detailed and "species richness" (3). They concluded that all of

the above reduced significantly with years. This may result in alienation from nature, leading to challenges in differentiating between 'real' and modified nature.

Thanks to these animated movies, the environmental movements of the 1960s and 1970s became increasingly more prosperous for new ways of depicting nature in mostly children's cinema. The recent period appears to have offered the most favorable environment for children's ecocinema, as some of the most overtly ecocritical kids' movies have been made during this time. *Wall-E* (2008) is an instance of ecocinema aimed at kids depicting a world where humans have devasted the earth and went in search of a better life. Upon turning back, they are trying to restore the disrupted balance and rehabilitate the world. This is an exciting contrast to older times in which movies delivered delicate, allegorical narratives starring cute forest animals. The story acknowledges the current danger that problems like pollution pose and even seem to assume that humans will not be able to face these challenges effectively.

The rising diversity of environmental ideas and perspectives in animated movies with environmental themes is significant. Considerable concern exists over whether these modern animated movies depict environmental challenges in a way that would enable informed, productive participation among coming generations (Thevenin 150). It is important to notice how eco-cinema depicts these challenges in a fashion that will most likely help prepare young viewers for educated, effective engagement in the environmental debate, given the potential usefulness of such representations.

3. Depiction of human-nature relationship

Most animated movies that use a melodramatic narrative style to discuss environmental issues are Western and American studio productions, with Disney being the most influential. In these stories, Moana included, a hero (partnered with nature) faces out against a villain (representing destructive environmental practices), where good triumphs over evil in the end. Meanwhile, the audience is entertained by spectacle, including gorgeously animated action sequences, songs, and dance performances. The triumph of the protagonists over their evil counterparts represents the ideological success of the environmentalists. Viewers are told a tale in which one character's action—singing, caring for a plant, or making a sacrifice—resolves the problem at hand. These narratives, at best, fall short of accurately portraying communities' continuing, coordinated, collective involvement in environmental challenges. At worst, audiences may not feel as compelled to learn about or participate in real-world conflicts because these storylines so forcefully resolve these issues on-screen (Thevenin 157). Portraying nature

and its supporters as heroes while at the same time depicting industry and humans as villains, films generate a struggle that stimulates the audience. Still, it also suggests that the environmental debate is a simple "war between good and evil" (Thevenin 157). While such representation may offer optimism to an invigorated audience, it more likely delivers fictional, simplistic, idealized victory rather than the motivation needed for people to engage in wanted activism.

Bettleheim addresses the significance of how simplified, polarized characters in these cartoons are used to reflect complex moral and ethical dilemmas (9). In contrast to how we all are in life, the characters are not good and evil at the same time. There is only good or bad in a person; there is no gray area. These polarity sets do not accomplish much on their own. It is how the movie sets them in motion and combines and contrasts them with one another in creative and exciting ways that enable the story to create the tensions and conclusions that make for a satisfying viewing experience for the audience (Ivakhiv 7). If the figures were drawn more realistically, with all the subtleties that define real people, children, who make up the majority of Disney's audience, would be unable to recognize the difference between the two so effortlessly. Bettleheim argues that since children lack the mental capacity to understand complexity, moral and ethical dilemmas must be represented in stories in a way that is easy for them to understand. Thus, melodrama is ideal for suggesting environmental discourse to young audiences thanks to its straightforwardness in conveying moral dilemmas. Lastly, Western eco-cinema frequently uses melodrama to bring the story (and implicitly, the ideological conflict) to a clear conclusion. The films must conclude with a happy ending to conform to the melodramatic norms and the anticipations of most spectators. This prevalent approach restricts viewers from engaging in conversation linked to serious environmental challenges. "If the ultimate goal of eco-cinema is to inspire viewers to reevaluate their interactions with nature and engage in environmental activism, it would seem that the joyful, tidy endings of these enjoyable films are failing to achieve this goal" (Thevenin 157).

While Western animated movies focus on melodrama as a tool for representing nature-human conflict, Eastern animation studios like Ghibli rely on allegory. Individuals stand in for various ideologies in these cases, making the topics more challenging for viewers. The film's ecological viewpoint indicates neither the victory nor defeat of nature. Unlike Disney, Studio Ghibli approaches nature and conflicts more realistically. Neither nature nor humans are romanticized; instead, each group is doing its best within its own worldview and limited knowledge. With such a gray area, viewers are challenged to independently derive meaning

from presented characters and scenes. The audience is also taught that not every conflict has a happy ending, making them more prepared for 'the real' world. Also, viewers are not forced to choose sides but are challenged to be unbiased and see the characters' strengths and weaknesses. More effectively addressing these issues is Miyazaki's Princess Mononoke, which presents its viewers as an engaged audience, promoting their participation in the environmental conversation.

4. Disney's Moana

In their interview for *Den of Week*, Moana directors Ron Clements and John Musker discuss their project and influences on Moana. Both have been working at Disney for over 40 years, with Clements starting his animation career in the early 70s under the mentoring of Frank Thomas, one of the Nine Old Men (Kaye par.1). Their collaboration flourished in 1986 when they created The Great Mouse Detective (Kaye par.1). Clement and Musker's fascination with the ocean can be seen in *Little Mermaid* (1989), where most of the plot is happening 'under the sea.' This time, they decided to go a step further and make a completely CG movie that would have the ocean as one of the characters (Radish par.2). The inspiration for this idea comes from a relationship that Pacific islanders have with the ocean. While they were on the journey to Pacific Islands, Clements and Musker noticed how "people talked about the ocean as if it were alive. They caressed it and had these personal relationships with it, so we knew we wanted the ocean to be a character in the movie" (Radish par.11) Speaking of inspiration, Clements explains that "they wanted to make a movie based on Pacific tradition which later resulted in taking a trip to islands such as Fiji, Samoa, and Tahiti" (Radish par.8). He then goes on to explain that they wanted to record Pacific tradition which is mostly oral. No one knew why the pause of thousand years with no voyaging happened (Kaye par.7). In Moana, they give meaning to this pause and, in a way, resolve the mystery around it and label it an 'origin story.'

The story of Moana begins with a tale of endless greed and exploitation of nature for humankind's selfish benefit, leading to a climax of environmental protection and connectivity with nature. The movie's central character is the chief's brilliant daughter, Moana, who lives in Motunui, the perfect picturesque island of Indigenous Pacific paradise. When demigod Maui steals Te Fiti's - the mother nature's - heart, the darkness spreads across the island Motunui forcing its villagers to explore and expand in order to survive. The analysis of Studio Disney's animated movie Moana begins with the discussion of Pacific customs focusing on the art of sailing, why it is the essential feature of the movie, and how the studio incorporated it into the

story. Apart from that, a small section is dedicated to folk stories depicting gods and demigods. Also, the portrayal of nature as mother nature will be discussed, and the significance of the main hero, Moana, in the film's eco-feministic view.

4.1. Pacific tradition

"Polynesia" is a phrase used to define the culture, values, and customs of the native people of the ethno-geographical group of Pacific islands. Poly means "many" and "nsoi" means "islands" in Greek (Kahn et al. par1). It includes a sizable triangle of the eastern central Pacific Ocean. The Polynesian environment presented difficulties for early ancestors who settled on the western islands some 3000 years ago. Since access to different needs for human habitation was difficult, Polynesians had to make most of the plants and animals they had. Such a challenging environment significantly impacted upcoming Polynesian life and culture (Kahn et al. par.2).

It is essential to mention that Polynesian culture was heavily influenced by Western colonialists who came in the 18th century, mainly from Britain, France, and the United States (Kahn et al. par.3). From that point, Western imagination of Polynesia continued to be idealized for more than 200 years. People started reading reports from colonialists[2] who romanticized the nature and life of Polynesia, which was portrayed as abundant and carefree.

The idea of an almost blissfully easygoing way of life on a beautiful island, free from any harsh extremes of any kind, continued into the 21st century in the popular imagination thanks to tourist iconography, musicals, and films. Traditional Polynesian cultures were sophisticated, highly specialized, and suited to surroundings that may be hostile, far from being the idyllic paradise that Westerners imagine (Kahn et al. par.7).

Polynesians are trying hard to preserve many of their traditions despite the fact that colonial history and Western imagination have led to significant cultural change. Since the 1960s, there has been a proliferation of native Polynesian writing - the oldest of which frequently pitted native people against the colonist (Kahn et al. par.11). This slowly changed with recent writing focusing on the complexities of colonial relationships and contemporary

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[2] de Bougainville, Louis-Antoine. *The Pacific Journal of Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, 1767-1768.*
Carrington, A. H. "A note by Captain James Cook on the Tahiti creation myth." *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 48.1 (189 (1939): 30-31.
Cook, James, et al. *The Journals of Captain Cook.* Penguin, 2003.

problems. It highlights the significance of oral tradition and indigenous belief systems of Polynesia that are deeply rooted in traditional culture.

In the case of Moana, Pacific Islanders exercised their type of possession by deciding how Disney would portray their collective story.

"While they treat the participation of Pacific Islander scholars in the creation of the tale as an elite privilege, it ought to be a right to include and respect Indigenous people when depicting Indigenous stories." (Sebring 4)

The same critique can be applied to the racist portrayals of indigenous people in *Peter Pan* (1953), white colonists in *Pocahontas* (1995), and the celebration of slavery in *Song of the South* (1946).

In the years after, Disney tried to redeem its history of cultural misappropriation by taking a more considerate and delicate approach to narrating its stories, particularly those based on Indigenous communities. Moana marks a turning point in a handful of significant ways in this approach. It is the first Disney animated feature to have a cast entirely made up of performers of Polynesian heritage. The only exception is American actor Alan Tudyk, who provided the voice for Heihei, a dimwitted but endearingly charming chicken. The insistence on Pacific voices being part of the Moana project shows how Pacific Islanders choose to participate in the decision-making process and therefore control how their culture is represented to some extent (Tamaira 311). Considering Disney's history of representations of Indigenous stories, Pacific people made sure that such mistakes were not repeated in Moana and, therefore, exercised their own appropriation by claiming control over how the media behemoth would convey their collective story.

4.1.1. The art of sailing

"Moana" comes from the proto-Polynesian language and means "water beyond the reef, ocean" (Tamaira 300).

"It is a cognate in several Polynesian languages from all around the Pacific. It serves as a helpful language cue for recalling early peoples' excursions "beyond the reef" of their home shores to establish on the world's largest ocean islands." (Tamaira 301)

Some critics note the historical contradiction that in the time of Western geographical discovery of Polynesia, the native, once renowned for their nautical prowess, only understood

the essential elements of seafaring near the coast – later revealed by Moana's act of voyaging. This background history is forcefully evoked by the fact that the art of sailing has been forgotten on Moana's island, and there are symptoms of an imminent ecological crisis (Hodosy 92).

Open-sea navigation, frequently seen as another type of art, was practically extinct but later restored in 1973 thanks to a group of individuals who established The Polynesian Voyaging Society in Hawaii. In order to test different theories and practices regarding traditional seafaring, they constructed canoes and sailed them, applying old navigation methods (Kahn et al. par.14).

The project was later used to instruct young students on how to build and sail these traditional canoes. The process emphasizes learning by observing and listening to elders while following cultural rules. This led to expanding maritime knowledge and experience, which helped them address and deal with current cultural challenges, leaving them with a sense of cultural identity (Kahn et al. par.11). Sailing was more than navigating, as Maui says: "*It's called wayfinding, Princess. It's not just sails and knots. It's seeing where you're going in your mind... Knowing where you are... by knowing where you've been"* (Moana 51:57 - 52:08).

Maritime tradition pervades other forms of culture, such as food production, social structure, and "mechanisms for coping with the human problems of shipwreck, separated families and even death" (Kahn et al. par.16). This aspect of culture is introduced in the movie by Moana's mother Sina retelling the story of chief Tui's loss of his best friend:

> *He took a canoe, Moana. He crossed the reef and found an unforgiving sea. Waves like mountains. His best friend begged to be on that boat. He couldn't save him. He's hoping he can save you. Sometimes, who we wish we were, what we wish we can do is just not meant to be.* (Moana 15:25 - 16:03).

4.1.2. Folk tales

"Polynesians also exhibited a profound interest in the supernatural, which they viewed as part of the continuum of reality rather than as a separate category of experience" (Kahn et al. par.19). Gods and monsters, human success and failure, voyaging, and settlement were always part of the Pacific folklore. They were passed from generation to generation through art, dance, drama, and songs, with each generation adding and changing the events, plots, and characters over the centuries. The audience is introduced to this right at the beginning when grandma Tala retells the story of the demigod Maui. The tale describes the origin of the islands created by

goddess Te Fiti as well as the theft of her heart. This concurrence of the movie's beginning and a tale is a strategic move to show how younger generations, in this case, Moana, change and enrich traditional fables. Speaking of Grandma Tala, she can be seen as a connection to old customs and legends. Also, she believes that, after her death, she will return to earth as a ray, which happens later in the movie, proving that the spiritual and natural worlds are connected. Apart from supernatural stories, people were told stories of tribe origins as well - the island where they lived, their travels, and the building of villages after settlement presented using the song *We know the way* (Moana 24:07 - 26:01).

"Polynesian children were generally born into a large and warm family environment" (Kahn et al. par.37). From an early age, children from different families were put into groups where they would learn how to socialize, play and listen to folk tales. The most loving relationship of all was the one between grandparents and their grandchildren. As seen from the interaction between Grandma Tala and Moana "these relationships were often characterized by humor, bantering, and teasing, all of which provided vehicles for teaching traditional lore and providing technical training" (Kahn et al. par. 37). It seems like Moana trusts her grandma, who taught her the history of her people and constantly encourages her to go on a journey.

4.2. Ecofeminism in Moana

Te Fiti, the motif of the deity in the story, described in reviews as an "enormous monster" or "the creator of the universe," plays a crucial role in the movie's narrative (Hodosy 89). She is referred to not only as a woman or a creator but also as Mother Nature. Her heart is the central point in the story since it is a vital organ in many sensible living beings, a source that keeps life flowing. It possesses the power to create life in different forms of nature, such as water, fire, earth, vegetation, and the Sun.

The demigod Maui steals her heart, hoping that by using such power, he will become loved by people who once rejected him. This corruption is facilitated to fulfill the demands of humanity, even though it stems from the deeds of a deity (Sebring 26). Te Fiti shared her life with the planet, not hoarding power for herself. Maui's selfish desires risk the collective's environmental security through his activities. As Gramma Tala retells, "some began to seek Te Fiti's heart" (Moana 01:22 – 01:24), the exploitation of the feminine body—the mother island— emerges in the story. Rather than working with Te Fiti, Maui wants to possess her abilities.

The causal link between the stealing of the heart and the lack of fish seems to put the context in question. Simply put, the story's theft from nature is a metaphor for exploiting natural resources. The vanishing of fish and the wilting of coconut trees — Moana's other important food source — is a logical outcome of the exploitation process, which began in the distant past. As a result, it can almost exclusively be read as a foreboding symptom of ecological collapse.

On the other side, there is Te Ka, whose malevolence is discovered during the fight with Maui due to her desire for the heart. Te Ka is Te Fiti, and the birth of the darkness is the creation of Te Ka when the heart is stolen, which is unknown to the audience at the moment. A mythical-metaphorical belief that most of the Polynesian islands came from the water due to volcanic activity may be implied by the representation of Te Ka being a lava monster (Sebring 26). Greenery, connected with a bountiful environment and lushness, turning to stone foreshadows the upheaval and denotes the loss of life.

"Te Fiti" is a Polynesian term that refers to any remote location. "Her name signifies the journey necessary for the recovery of her heart to save the islands" (Sebring 26). Moana rebels against the rules and goes on a mission to return Mother Nature's stolen heart. Her act can simply be translated as restoring the proper interaction between humans and nature to avoid total disaster. As a result, Moana's rebellion against the island's regulations is an example of eco-consciousness expressed in contrast to her contemporaries' environmentally damaging habits and beliefs, which could be interpreted as a metaphor for the present day. Also, it is a good metaphor for transitioning from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric perspective on nature (Hodosy 90).

4.2.1. Moana and Mother Nature

Te Fiti's gender is significant because it accentuates her relationship with the heroine. The movie's depiction of Mother Nature as a woman, who briefly emerges as a giant version of Moana, directly impacts the ecological idea. Because it is so natural for Moana to be the ruler of a community — a privilege granted to men in patriarchal civilizations, including Polynesia historically — Nature should be granted the same privilege, based on the similarity between Te Fiti and Moana. The film's famed feminist propensity to emphasize women's capabilities and their sometimes thankless role in history is aided by helping audiences notice Moana's achievement.

This is related to the status of women in that historical period as well as the position of Nature in Western science and philosophy over the previous two centuries. The world is in disorder because of her exploitation and the masculine takeover to subjugate the feminine essence. Although the movie does not claim that the lengthy dominance of men in human cultures is parallel to the subjugation of nature, all of these may easily be described as ecofeminism. Nature's emancipation is linked to women's emancipation in the narrative solution (Hodosy 95).

There is no doubt that Moana is somewhat different from other classical Disney princesses; she is in no way passive, waiting for the prince to save her; she is courageous, decisive, and stubborn. She embarks on a journey and a quest to save her people, but she encounters many challenges along the way. She develops into the person she was destined to be because of her attributes of perseverance and deep empathy. She is a bit unique because of all of those things. However, Musker admits that he wants Moana to share the place with other princesses (Kaye par.7). This is not unusual if we consider their long involvement with Disney. Disney is known for their princess tropes; in the end, Moana fits it perfectly. She is a kind, empathetic princess who believes she is destined for more. Even Maui mocks her when she asks him to teach her sailing:

Moana: Okay, first... I'm not a princess. I'm the daughter of the chief.

Maui: Same difference.

Moana: No.

Maui: If you wear a dress, and you have an animal sidekick... you're a princess. You're not a Wayfinder. (Moana 52:09 – 52:18)

5. Ecocriticism in Japan

There is a more than a thousand-year-old literary tradition in Japan that emphasizes the importance of nature - tanka or haiku being one of them (Yuki 2). There is almost no literary work that does not involve nature at some point or another. Even though literary study of nature and ecocriticism may have something in common, the latter characteristically accompanies a concern about environmental crises. Perhaps this gray area between the two led to Japan's late development of ecocriticism. "Environmentally oriented literary criticism did not exist in Japan until it was imported from the United States in the mid-1990s" (Yuki 2), with the exception of a few enthusiastic literary studies focused on environmental concerns.

Furthermore, literary periodicals and journals published special issues on literature and the environment, presenting important literary and scholarly works in translation to a curious public—again, mainly from the United States. By making many vital works of literature that focus on the environment available to a Japanese-speaking audience, the translation boom of the 1990s significantly contributed to the popularization of the concepts of nature writing and ecocriticism (Yuki 3). After translations, the critics moved to compare the West and East literary works. The focus was on studying the notion of the environment in the texts as well as the language used for its representation. Only after ten years did domestic Japanologists consider ecocriticism a potential analytical instrument for literary studies focusing on the environment.

The book *Kankyo to iushiza* (2011) – the collection of 23 essays, most of which were written by experts on Japanese literature, serves as the foundation for the developing discipline of Japanese ecocriticism. It should be noted that topics like contemporary depictions of wild nature, everyday nature, and the environment as cultural representations are similar to ecocritical contexts everywhere in the world. In reality, ecocriticism is already beginning to be recognized by Japanologists as a powerful tool for discussing the hierarchical, dogmatic, and urban-born conceptions of nature that have shaped Japanese literary heritage. Perhaps this work marks the beginning of Japanese ecocriticism, which is likely to change scholarly priorities as well as the theoretical landscape in as-yet-undefined ways.

Yuki argues that literary depictions of coded or "second nature" should be considered more because their ideological components have not yet been thoroughly explored. Haiku and other Japanese literary genres are dominated by coded nature. Thus Yuki's comment could be a reference to the peril of the West's romanticization of an Eastern creativity and imagination. Since coded nature, particularly that of Romanticism, has remained a contentious issue in American and British ecocriticism, it follows that the theoretical frameworks created by these two ecocritical movements will help examine Japanese written work from an ecocritical perspective. This can prove that discussions between literary scholars who are interested in nature writing, apart from their disciplines, can result in a fertile intellectual climate for literary environmentalism. Overall, growing Japanese ecocriticism will be an innovative force in ecocriticism, aiding in redrawing a conceptual landscape of human relationships with the environment, relying on an examination of conceptually appropriated ideas like East and West or Christianity and Shintoism.

6. Studio Ghibli

Studio Ghibli was established in 1984 in Tokyo and managed by directors Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata. Their animation films deal with stories about post-war Japan and environmental concerns, including the long-term effects of industrial waste (*Nausicaä*I, 1984) the damage caused by atomic bombs (*Grave of the Fireflies*, 1988), the relationship between nature and artificial intelligence (*Castle in the Sky*, 1986), the resistance of animals to habitat loss (*Pom Poko*, 1994), and the clearing of forests by industry (*Princess Mononoke*, 1997). Aesthetics are derived from the printed culture of manga, the spiritual principles of the Shinto religion, and the influences of Western styles and animation principles.

Recent scholarly research[3] have focused on the formation of a "new nature narrative" (Thevenin 150), particularly in the animated movies made by Japan's Studio Ghibli, where Hayao Miyazaki, the director of Ghibli, places a strong emphasis on ecology in his works. This is true of the films' depictions of nature, their participation in environmental studies, as well as the portrayals of the relation between parts and the whole, society, humanity, and the environment. In order to produce a sort of "modern myth," Miyazaki's work is recognized for its singular fusion of postmodern, multicultural cinematic storytelling with Shinto practices and ideas, particularly the tradition's reverence for nature. Miyazaki's body of work is often prized due to the elegance of his animation technique and the intricacy of topics like gender, culture, history, violence, and the environment central in his movies.

Hayao Miyazaki, a director and animator, is arguably the most well-known Japanese filmmaker of the 20th and 21st century, having produced films that have received widespread critical acclaim and financial success. Miyazaki can be seen as promoting deep ecology, considering his view that nature has its own intrinsic value rather than existing merely for human benefit. In spite of the fact that many of his movies have a strong environmental message, such categorization of Miyazaki's environmental viewpoint is a little bit oversimplified. Miyazaki is difficult to place within an existing ideological framework for

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[3]Napier, Susan Jolliffe. "Confronting master narratives: History as vision in Miyazaki Hayao's cinema of de-assurance." *Positions: east asia cultures critique* 9.2 (2001): 467-493.

Norman Çelik, Sibel. "Miyazaki and the West: A Comparative Analysis of Narrative Structure in Animated Films for Children." *İleti-ş-im* 9 (2008): 11-30.

Wu, Cheng-Ing. "Hayao Miyazaki's Mythic Poetics: Experiencing the Narrative Persuasions in Spirited Away, Howl's Moving Castle and Ponyo." *Animation* 11.2 (2016): 189-203.

environmental issues. The reason for this may lay in the depth and breadth of Japanese ecocritical thought's history discussed earlier.

6.1. Princess Mononoke

Princess Mononoke (Mononoke-hime) was created in 1997, the same year that Studio Ghibli finalized its distribution contract with Disney. Disney hoped to cut Princess Mononoke to fit their classical princess as well as remove bloody scenes as they were too violent for children. However, Miyazaki declined such a suggestion to keep the movie as authentic as possible. Mononoke-hime is his most mature work that demonstrates his abilities as a writer and animator at their peak and represents his most uncompromising stance on modernity's environmental dilemma. Capitalism, industrialization, and democracy are in inexorable conflict with the sacred world of the primeval forest. Mononoke-hime won the Japanese Academy Awards in 1998, a first in an animation film (Abbey 113).

The name "Mononoke" refers to monsters often found in stories of the Muromachi era (1392–1573), which is the setting of the film. To be precise, a Mononoke is an animal spirit that is not necessarily well disposed toward humans. Mononoke is the drama of the unsolved clash between human civilization and the natural law of the gods, the clash which cannot be portrayed without violence. The Muromachi era (1392-1573) serves as the purposeful temporal backdrop chosen by Miyazaki for Mononoke (Abbey 113-114). The relationship between people and nature was drastically shifting in Japan during this period as it was a time of immense upheaval. The movie starts with the text introducing the given period:

> *In ancient times, the land lay covered in forests, where, from ages long past, dwelt the spirits of the gods. Back then, man and beast lived in harmony, but as time went by, most of the great forests were destroyed. Those that remained were guarded by gigantic beasts who owed their allegiance to the Great Forest Spirit, for those were the days of gods and demons.* (Mononoke 0:33 – 0:45)

The beginning of the Iron Age coincided with the Portuguese importation of hand cannons or weapons in 1543 (Wright 8). In contrast, Miyazaki appears to represent a change in the balance of power in the escalating battle between nature and newly industrialized humanity rather than attempting to portray the age historically accurately. So it came to pass that humanity started a fight with the kamigami or wild gods.

6.2. Miyazaki's way of portraying conflict

Ghibli's films rely on diverse narrative traditions combining elements of Western narrative that emphasize the conflict of good and evil while at the same time including the philosophical and cultural traditions often related to the East - Shintoism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. For young audiences, in particular, the rejection of straightforward ideological viewpoints offers a novel way to address environmental challenges. In order to more effectively confront current environmental issues, Miyazaki's films respond to the request for a "new nature narrative," where old narrative traditions and ideological formulations of the West are compromised (Thevenin 159). He looks to step further than focusing just on the human-nature relationship by introducing spirits, animals as gods, and the forest as an entity of its own. Knowing that Miyazaki permits such intricacy in his works shows both his belief in the engagement of young people with the subject and his sense of obligation to fully prepare them (in his own modest manner) for that engagement. His intricate animated features stand in stark contrast to the overly straightforward, ethically happy-ending movies that dominate the Western industry and influence viewers' engagement in environmental conversation.

Princess Mononoke elevates outsiders to the status of heroes while dispelling the preconceptions that typically surround such figures. The movie most forcefully conveys this point by contrasting the relationship between respectable employment as a means of reducing poverty and the harm that industry causes to the environment. The story follows the journey taken by Prince Ashitaka, the story's culturally and "racially othered protagonist" from the Emishi - a distant and disadvantaged ethnic group (Smith and Parsons 28). One day a demon boar attacked his village and injured Ashitaka's arm by inflicting a curse on it. Because of this, he is forced to leave the village and look for the "... evil at work in the land to the west" that cursed the boar in the first place (Mononoke 9:33 – 9:35). Nago was shot by Lady Eboshi, the ruler of Iron Town, and became a demon as a result. Lady Eboshi may be portrayed as an evil anti-environmentalist because she forces deforestation. However, deforestation is needed in order to reach the mines required for improving Irontown and the life of its citizens. She has helped lepers and despised prostitutes by giving them a job, a place to live, and a community.

On the other hand, animals, gods, and spirits in the forest resent her. San, the princess from the title, is a human raised by the wolfs after her parents left her. Moro – her mother wolf, took her soul – and now she can communicate with animals in the forest. Lady Eboshi, the mother figure in Miyazaki's film, is in conflict with nature. A motif in Miyazaki's movies pits

girl protagonists like San against ruthless women, moving the emphasis "from gender (female vs. male) to generation (youth versus age), creating a vision of empowerment for powerless young" (Smith and Parsons 28). Furious with Lady Eboshi's actions, San tries to kill her to stop deforestation and save her home. However, she never succeeded in her attempts as Ashitaka stands in her way. He is neither on Lady Eboshi's nor on San's side. During the conversation with Moro, Ashitaka expresses his frustration with people and forest not living in harmony. Moro explains that such harmony is impossible since humans are selfish and greedy, while animals are stubborn and protective. Miyazaki uses Ashitaka to bring awareness that there is no simple good or bad. Miyazaki leaves room for contemplation by leaving him unbiased and ending the movie with both sides as losers. After the deer's head is stolen, he, the same as Te Fiti transforms into a demon taking away life from everything surrounding him, including Irontown. After San and Ashitaka return the head, he disappears, and life comes back; grass turns green, and plants grow, but the forest and Irontown remain destroyed.

6.3. Shintoism

This part of the paper focuses on the elements of the traditional Shinto religion and the manner in which Hayao Miyazaki incorporated them into his works, particularly Princess Mononoke. Miyazaki's films are known to encourage the beauty of living in harmony with nature while ironically undermining Japanese cultural myths. The most common one being the image of an idealized ancient Japan living in harmony with nature.

Shinto is one of the world's last remaining animistic faiths. It has endured into the 21st century in Japan, despite official attempts to suppress or absorb its doctrine. It predated Japanese history and was most likely introduced to the archipelago by early Mongol inhabitants in the Yamato Valley (Wright 2). Except for the concepts of worshiping and honoring the kami (gods), appreciation for nature, and the practice of cleansing rituals, it is widely recognized to have no doctrine. Shinto shrines may be found across Japan's countryside as well as in the country's many highly populated cities, demonstrating the endurance of this millennia-old belief system in adapting to a hyper-technological present.

Natural events, particularly awe-inspiring in these ancient times, were given the title of kami, or gods, and were sometimes supposed to have the ability to speak. Around the time these ideas emerged, it was thought that reverence for the kami was intricately linked to people's love of nature. 'Kamis' can be defined as the spirits housed in shrines as well as the entities of heaven and earth that occur in ancient scriptures. The written character for kami can literally be

translated as "above," giving rise to the concept of "god" or "deity." However, kamis are neither omniscient nor remote in the Christian or Muslim sense but were regarded in the same way as Greek gods. Same as them, they communicate with mortals and are capable of understanding human emotions. This relationship was defined as 'oya-ko' or communication from ancestor to descendant or parent to child. Humans and kami had a sense of intimacy and goodwill; the kami were respected and honored but not feared (Wright 3).

Awe-inspiring qualities can be found in all kinds of beings, including humans, animals, plants, oceans, rivers, and more. The nature in question in Princess Mononoke is a forest with its animals, spirits, and other deity beings. Besides kami, Miyazaki introduces 'kodama' – forest spirits with tiny bodies and big skulllike heads. Kodamas are indicators that the forest is healthy and alive. While the wounded soldier is afraid of them, Ahitaka respects them, and in return, they show him the way out of the forest.

Miyazaki utilizes these figures to symbolize more than just respect for kami. A non-intellectual understanding of spirituality that separates it from institutionalized religion, in general, is another idea he provides. By depicting nature as a place filled with spiritual creatures and gods, Miyazaki introduces the religion of Shinto, which helped people perceive their relation to nature as something worth cherishing. "The word nagare, meaning flow, summarizes this concept and leads to the idea of vital connections between the divine essence of the kami, post-mortem souls and the living, and the inner and outer worlds" (Wright 3). The worldview of the ancient Japanese did not rigidly distinguish between the physical and the spiritual, nor between our world and an ideal one. His films essentially seek to captivate the audience with a feeling of spirituality that rejects the dogmas and orthodoxies of organized faiths and politics. Instead, the viewers are encouraged to seek the original, primal condition of spiritualism in human history and how it might be experienced now.

7. Conclusion

Ecocriticism has advanced significantly beyond analyzing depictions of nature in poems, fables, and novels to studying human-nature relationships, representations of animals, and positions of indigenous people and females in ecocinema. It developed many branches, one of them being deep ecology which advocates the intrinsic value of nature rather than its exploitation for human needs. Both Moana and Princess Mononoke preach in favor of deep ecology by moving the focus from the human-centered to nature-centered approach. Ecofeminism played an essential role in ecocriticism, analyzing the position of women within the human-nature relationship.

The suggestion that women are closer to nature is implied in both movies – Moana and San play a vital role in preserving the environment. They, better than other characters, communicate with nature and understand its needs. When analyzing male characters, they are not against or disconnected from nature but are somewhat in the shadow of female protagonists. Maui may appear to be a villain at first, but he quickly redeems himself by helping Moana. He understands the constellations, the sea's current, and the wind's strength, but still, the sea chose Moana. Also, Ashitaka helps both female characters, San and Lady Eboshi, rendering him impartial in the conflict between humans and nature. Except for ecofeminism, part of postcolonial ecocriticism has been included in the movies mentioned. There is a focus on indigenous groups that are thought to be, same as women, closer to nature. Ahitaka is from the Emishi tribe, which worships animal gods, rides red elks, and foretells the future using herbs and stones. The tribe of Motunui is dedicated to preserving their tradition of harvesting coconuts, dancing to ancient songs, waving baskets, and fishing. As Moana's father, chief Tui, says: "Tradition is our mission" (Moana 7:45 - 11:15).

Western cartoons often have black and white characters frequently engaging in a conflict where good always wins. Even though Moana has a happy ending, the characters in the movie may not be just good or evil. Maui is initially portrayed as a villain, but his act is not purely 'evil' or selfish after all. He was trying to help people and make their lives easier. During the song *You're welcome*, the audience can see all the good deeds Maui has done for humanity (Moana 38:30 – 41:05). Additionally, because he had lost the heart, he was unable to return it when things went wrong, and Te Fiti turned into Te Ka. However, when the opportunity to help Moana emerged, even with initial hesitation, Maui decided to help. Last but not least, Te Ka is not as bad as she seems, despite being depicted as a wicked lava monster. She was protecting

herself and wanted vengeance after what Maui had done to her. This is a freindly reminder that nature can 'fight back' when treated badly. So, in in addition to improving the representation of indigenous people, Disney also attempted to make its portrayals of characters more realistic.

Miyazaki creates an erasure of difference, but he uses it for good. This is made possible by Ashitaka and San's liminal placement. Ashitaka sits in a region where culture (the residents and jobs of Iron Town) and nature coexist (the forest). "San is, located between human and animal because of her conflicting upbringing, but also between nature and culture by accepting Ashitaka's love" (Smith and Parsons 34). The line that separates these binary concepts is shown in Princess Mononoke to be both rough and fluid, which dissolves distinctions.

An interesting part of both movies are for sure depictions of spirits and gods who played an important role in understanding the nature from past to present. Moana is taught from an early age how her island was created; she is acquainted with the history and religion of her people. Songs, dances, crowning rituals, the possibility to turn into animals after death, and perceiving the sea as an entity of its own are all part of Pacific folk tradition. Moana can communicate with her grandma's spirit and the ocean due to her connection with nature. While spirits may be moderate in Moana, they are typical in Princess Mononoke. None of the characters question their existence; they are omnipresent. It is important to mention that Disney has not always focused on religion since Hayao Miyazaki's work has always incorporated Shintoism and spiritualism in one way or another. This may be why spirits in Princess Mononoke seem more 'natural' than in Moana.

The movies represent many methodological strategies for promoting environmental awareness through entertainment. The western production portrays identity politics in a distinctly conservative manner and feminizes nature in a somewhat 'cute' way. In contrast, Hayao Miyazaki's picture elevates nature and alludes to unavoidable socio-cultural distinctions. In Princess Mononoke, the headless form of the Shishigami, the united force of life and death, decimates Iron Town and the forest as his death spreads across the surrounding area. In both instances, humanity's excessive consumption of natural resources unleashes supernatural powers of destruction.

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8. Nature and Culture: An Ecocritical Approach to Moana and Princess Mononoke: Summary and key words

Growing environmental concerns made writers and critics think about the human-nature relationship. This led to the emergence of ecocriticism- a critical study that focuses on nature representation in literature. Even though it originated in the West, The United States, it spread to other parts of the world, reaching the East and Japan. As it developed, ecocriticism influenced other fields like TV, animation, and cinema. With the urge to introduce children to the environmental crisis as soon as possible, animators and directors started working on cartoons focusing on those. Different representations of nature have been applied, one being nature as 'Mother Nature,' the image of which is debatable to ecofeminists. The question is how these animated movies depict nature and how this depiction influences children's understanding of nature and the environment. Since every studio has its own style, influenced by the culture within which it exists, the primary objective of this thesis paper is to analyze how the depiction of nature is related to culture and vice versa. Also, the other objective is to question how this connection is represented in animated movies focusing on different customs of the Pacific – the art of sailing and folk stories about deities and nature - and religions of the East – mainly Shintoism with forest spirits and animals - applied to Disney's Moana and Studio Ghibli's Princess Mononoke.

Key words: ecocriticism, ecofeminism, nature, cartoons

9. Priroda i kultura: Ekorkitički pristup Moani i Princezi Mononoke: Sažetak i ključne riječi

Sve veća zabrinutost za okoliš navela je pisce i kritičare na razmišljanje o odnosu čovjeka i prirode. To je dovelo do nastanka ekokritike – kritičkog osvrta koji se fokusira na prikaz prirode u književnosti. Iako je nastao na Zapadu, u Sjedinjenim Američkim Državama, proširio se u druge dijelove svijeta, dospjevši na Istok i Japan. Kako se razvijala, ekokritika je utjecala na druga područja poput televizije, animacije i kina. Sa željom da djecu što prije upoznaju s ekološkom krizom, animatori i redatelji krenuli su raditi na crtićima s navedenom temom. Primijenjene su različite reprezentacije prirode - jedna od njih je priroda kao 'majka priroda', čiji prikaz ekofeministice smatraju diskutabilnim. Pitanje je kako ovi animirani filmovi prikazuju prirodu i kako taj prikaz utječe na dječje razumijevanje prirode i okoliša. Budući da svaki studio ima svoj stil, na koji utječe kultura unutar koje postoji, primarni cilj ovog diplomskog rada je analizirati kako je prikaz prirode povezan s kulturom i obrnuto. Također, drugi cilj je ispitati kako je ta veza predstavljena u animiranim filmovima koji prikazuju

različite običaje Pacifika – umijeće plovidbe i narodne priče o božanstvima i prirodi – te religije Istoka – uglavnom šintoizam sa šumskim duhovima i životinjama –primijenjenim na Disneyjevu Moanu i Princezu Mononoke Studija Ghibli.

Ključne riječi: ekokritika, ekofeminizam, priroda, crtići