“What Kind of Movie is This?: Bambi’s Rise to Fame and Controversy”

By:

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Bambi’s Beginnings

_Bambi: A Life in the Woods_ was written in Vienna, Austria in 1923 by Felix Salten. The book came to America in 1928 where it was translated into English. Salten tells the story of a young deer named Bambi and his fight to survive in a world where “Man” is always present as a source of danger. In 1933, the film rights to Salten’s book were bought by Sidney Franklin of MGM Studios. Sidney Franklin was a producer and director at MGM and had intended to make the book into a live-action feature film. Realizing the futility of attempting to bring _Bambi_ to the screen in live-action, Franklin sought out Walt Disney. Disney jumped on the opportunity to make Salten’s novel into one of his next animated films and in 1935 the rights transferred to Walt Disney Studios with Franklin as a creative consultant. The result of Disney’s decision to acquire the rights to Salten’s book was one of the top grossing films of all time and the culmination of the “Golden Age of Animation” at Walt Disney Studios.

Doe-Eyed Beginnings
From the beginning *Bambi* was marked with criticism. While *Snow White* was in the animation stage of production, Disney decided that *Bambi* would be the second feature that his studio would release. His animators, though, were not as sure. The two biggest problems that they faced were creating a storyline where none existed and animating the woodland animals while making them the real and believable characters as they are in Salten’s book.

**The Pre-Screenings**

In April 1939, the team working on the film had enough footage ready for a short viewing by a select audience. The consensus was that the animals had to be real and yet caricatured and that Bambi had to act more animal like. A few weeks after the first showing, the first third of the film was shown to Disney, the story men and directors, and the supervising animators. The main problem that plagued the audience was the amount of drama in the film, stemming from the death of Bambi’s mother. Bambi’s mother had to become a more caring character and the danger presented by man had to be established as more convincing. Prior to *Bambi*, cartoons were centered on gags and funny antics, featuring cutesy, humanized animal characters.

On February 28, 1942, *Bambi* was shown to a preview audience at a theater in Pomona, California. Comment cards and questionnaires were distributed to the viewers, who had mixed responses. The controversial scene of the death of Bambi’s mother caused little reaction among the audience. While the animators were disappointed with the preview, Disney added no new footage, though he edited a few scenes to make things flow more smoothly. Finally, on August 13, 1942, *Bambi* was ready to be released.

**Public Release and Problems**

Bambi’s public release was met with more mixed reviews. The film met with great criticism from the hunting community, who complained that the film depicted the sport in a negative light by portraying hunters that used irresponsible practices such as starting forest fires, and using hunting dogs. In addition, Bambi has been criticized as too emotional for small children. These issues continue to reemerge in the present, as Bambi remains one of Disney’s popular animated characters.
“What Kind of Movie is This?” *Bambi’s* Rise to Fame and Controversy

In 1931, a twelve year old boy in West Orange, New Jersey shot and killed a friend after viewing Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studio’s *The Secret Six*. The outrage caused by the shooting prompted local officials to ban further gangster films from the city. The incident did more than spark local censorship of a genre of movies. It demonstrates the impact that media, specifically movies, can have on the audience. This exposure to media begins almost from birth and helps to shape how children view their environment.

One of the biggest influences comes from cartoons. Animated film has existed as long as live action film and the man responsible for some of the most influential of this type of media is Walt Disney. Since the late 1920s, Disney’s cartoons have enthralled millions of children and adults world wide. It was during Disney’s “Golden Age of Animation” that one of the most influential films was released—*Bambi*.

*Bambi: A Life in the Woods* was written in Vienna, Austria in 1923 by Felix Salten. The book came to America in 1928 where it was translated into English. Salten tells the story of a young deer named Bambi and his fight to survive in a world where “Man” is always present as a source of danger. In 1933, the film rights to Salten’s book were bought by Sidney Franklin of MGM Studios. Sidney Franklin was a producer and director at MGM and was responsible for such films as *Private Lives* (1931), *Ninotchka* (1939), *Mrs. Miniver* (1942), and *The Yearling*

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1 Ollie Johnson and Frank Thomas, *Walt Disney’s Bambi: The Story and the Film* (New York: Stewart, Tabori, and Chang, 1990), 139.
Franklin had intended to make the book into a live-action feature film. Soon after realizing the futility of attempting to bring *Bambi* to the screen in live-action, Franklin sought out Walt Disney. Disney jumped on the opportunity to make Salten’s novel into one of his next animated films and in 1935 the rights transferred to Walt Disney Studios with Franklin brought on as a creative consultant. The result of Disney’s decision to acquire the rights to Salten’s book was one of the top grossing films of all time and the culmination of the “Golden Age of Animation” at Walt Disney Studios. *Bambi* has been the subject of much literature discussing the meaning and themes in both the book and the movie. The film has also gone on to impact the culture we live in and the way future and present generations view man’s interactions with nature.

Disney’s *Bambi* is much more than a children’s classic. Both the book and the film are a study of nature and the impact humans have on the environment. Felix Salten and Walt Disney both create different messages of nature in their stories of *Bambi*. These differences are discussed in the works of Ralph H. Lutts, Derek Bousè, Matt Cartmill, and David Whitely. Each author presents a view which fully analyzes the differing versions of *Bambi* and looks at the reasons behind why they are portrayed in this way.

In his article, “The Trouble with Bambi: Walt Disney’s *Bambi* and the American Vision of Nature,” Ralph Lutts describes the meaning of the book by Felix Salten and the movie by Walt Disney. In Salten’s book the main theme is the problem of “Man” and Bambi must learn the solution to this problem. Bambi’s answer to this question, Lutts points out, is a religious one. When Bambi’s father shows him the dying human against the tree Bambi concludes, “there is

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Another who is over us all, over us and over Him.” From this dialogue between father and son, Lutts concludes, “The lesson, of course, was intended for Salten’s readers. Humans and deer, he was arguing are equal before the eyes of God.”

Both the book and the movie present humans as intruders into nature and into Bambi’s world, though in the movie humans are the only intruders. Lutts pointed out this lack of predation in the Disney version. The movie turned Bambi’s world into an unreal fantasy world where death only occurs at the hands of humans. By taking away predators, Disney emphasizes the anti-hunting message that is apparent in the book and the movie. This lack of predators also turns predation into a moral flaw. Lutts demonstrates this with a children’s book that appeared as a spin off of the movie. In “A Day in the Forest with Bambi and Thumper,” a fox tries to eat Thumper and Bambi and his father save him, “Flower describes it as a ‘very mean fox,’ and it is obvious that the fox is morally flawed. But what alternative has the fox? Predation must be akin to original sin in this moral universe.” By taking away predators and equating predation to a mortal sin, Disney is emphasizing Man’s interaction with nature as one that can only be viewed as evil.

Lutts believes that the main point of the book is a cycle of survival lessons for Bambi. He begins as a newborn and learns to live by himself in the forest with the ultimate lesson of being alone. The book ends with Bambi becoming the new prince of the forest. The movie, on the other hand, is treated differently. Instead, Disney’s focus is the cycle of life and on the love story between Bambi and Faline with the anti-hunting message as a back story. The movie begins the cycle with the birth of Bambi and the cycle ends as he stands on a cliff while Faline gives birth to

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5 Ibid., 167.
6 Ibid., 167.
7 Ibid., 165.
8 Ibid., 165.
his children. Bambi’s life has come full-circle and the audience has seen him grow from a child into an adult and have a family of his own. The change in the storyline allows for differences in the message 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 movie the lack of life lessons turns man into only an evil force that cannot be beaten.

Conversely, in *Wildlife Films*, Derek Bousè describes Salten’s book as intended for adults, where death is the central theme. He uses an article from *Field & Stream* that states, “death is the central theme of Bambi…fears dying, or dies in terrible agony in almost every chapter.” Bousè also points at Salten’s book being based mostly on the post-World War I gloom, that the book is an allegory for the, “cold aura of pessimism,” of post-War Europe. He also believes 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 support the theory that Salten was creating an allegory for post-War Europe based on the strong community ties that tend to develop in post-War societies. Just as war ravaged communities banded together to rebuild after World War I, so too did the forest community to overcome the threat posed by man.

For Bousè the movie takes on a different tone than the book. The message of anti-hunting is the central theme for Disney. The animals take on more human characteristics, as Disney imagined, “animals with quirky, amusing, personalities.” Bousè again attributes most of the gloom in the movie to the atmosphere created by the onset of World War II. When *Bambi* was

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9 Ibid.,164.
11Ibid.,142.
12Ibid.,158.
13Ibid.,142.
going into production the Germans had attacked Poland. Nazi atrocities were being discovered and Bousè believes that this may have accounted for the dark theme of the movie.\(^4\)

The time periods in which the book and movie were created were transitional times in Austria and the United States that can be characterized by human struggle. In 1923, when Salten wrote \textit{Bambi: A Life in the Woods}, Austria was in the process of rebuilding their war torn country from the bottom up. European literature had taken a dark and pessimistic turn that can be seen in the works of Salten, Erich Maria Remarque, and Siegfried Sassoon.\(^5\) One of the best European examples of this tone is the classic wartime novel, \textit{All Quiet on the Western Front} by German author Erich Maria Remarque.\(^6\) The book questions why wars are fought and the price at which they are won and lost. The ending continues the pessimistic tone when the main character is shot while reaching for a butterfly, the last piece of beauty on the frontlines.\(^7\) Similar themes are brought up in Salten’s book such as the question of why man kills and the overarching theme of death.\(^8\) When Walt Disney Studios began production of \textit{Bambi}, Hitler was beginning his conquest of Europe, revolutions were occurring world wide, and an overwhelming feeling of fear had settled in most areas as the threat of a second world war became a reality. In the different decades the potentially evil side of humanity was brought to light and the versions of \textit{Bambi} reflect this belief of the worst side of humans.

One aspect of the movie that is absent from the book, which Bousè adds is the idea of renewal and regeneration. Sidney Franklin, who had been brought on as a consultant in the

\(^4\)Ibid., 142.
\(^6\)In 1930, Universal Pictures would turn the classic into a film by the same name. It would win two Academy Awards, Best Picture and Best Director of 1930.
Lew Ayres and Louis Wolhelm, \textit{All Quiet on the Western Front}, DVD, directed by Lewis Milestone (Universal City, California: Universal Cinema Classics, 2007).
\(^7\)Remarque, Erich Maria, \textit{All Quiet on the Western Front} (New York: Ballantine Books, 1987).
making of *Bambi*, “explained to Disney that the audience, ‘loves to feel they have seen a cycle
completed, and that they have seen the whole life of a character.’” From Franklin’s advice
Disney added a new ending to Salten’s book, one of renewal and regeneration, where previously
there had been none. Adding the new ending, Disney is able to follow Franklin’s advice. The
audience sees Bambi’s growth into adulthood and the making of his family. With this addition,
the story becomes one of the cycle of life, as Ralph Lutts has also pointed out.

Matt Cartmill’s book *A View to a Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature through
History* takes the interpretation of both Lutts and Bousè and develops them more fully. Man is
not only evil in Cartmill’s view of Salten’s book; he is portrayed as treacherous, dangerous, and
corrupting. He is treacherous when he imitates Faline’s call and Bambi follows. He is dangerous
and corrupting when he domesticates Faline’s brother Gobo. Gobo is released back into the
forest and, believing man to now be his friend, he walks into the meadow where he is shot.

Cartmill describes Salten’s book thus, “The forest world…only provides a backdrop of
intense color and beauty in front of which his animal characters suffer and bleed and limp and
die awful, uncomprehending deaths.” Similar to Bousè, Cartmill sees death as one of the
central themes of Salten’s book. Every chapter of Salten’s book contains at least one instance of
death. In one particularly gruesome chapter Man enters the forest and indiscriminately shoots
everything that moves. Salten describes many of the deaths in gory detail with emphasis on the
suffering that the animals go through during their last minutes of life.

Disney’s version of *Bambi*, Cartmill asserts was not always as dark as the final cut turned
out to be. “The early sketches preserved in the Disney Archives generally follow Salten, but they

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20Matt Cartmill, *A View to a Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature through History* (Cambridge,
21Ibid., 163.
focus more closely on the survival lessons that Bambi gets from the other forest creatures.”

After 1939 the script took a turn to focus more on anti-hunting and human cruelty. Prior to this, the script focused on the characters antics, which caused it to be more comedic than dramatic. This change in Disney’s story of Bambi emphasizes the impact humans can have on nature and the devastation they can potentially bring.

Cartmill discusses how this is not the only example of human intervention in nature being portrayed as evil. A 1939 MGM Academy Award nominated cartoon called *Peace on Earth* told the story of animals celebrating after the demise of humans brought about by war. The cartoon features two young squirrels whose grandfather is telling them a bedtime story. They ask him who man was and he tells them how humans were constantly at war with one another. This constant warfare eventually led to the destruction of the human race and a scene depicts the last two humans killing each other from opposing trenches. After the humans are dead the animals emerge from their hiding places and rejoice at the end of mankind—the land belongs to the animals again. The animals dance around the war carnage and make homes from the scattered remains of civilization. (see fig. 1) The cynicism which is prevalent in *Bambi* and *Peace on Earth* can be attributed to the start of World War II and is also seen in many other films produced at the time.

Lutts, Bousè, and Cartmill all have a similar interpretation of *Bambi*. David Whitley takes a wholly different view in his book *The Idea of Nature in Disney Animation* and discusses the world in which Bambi lives as a fantasy world where humans are never regarded as good. Whitley believes that Salten’s book portrays a selective view of human interaction with nature.

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24 Ibid., 172.
and that it heightens, “the audience’s feelings for a natural world that is entirely separate.”

In essence, he is saying that the book creates a nature that humans cannot be part of, where humans are only viewed as evil. Salten’s use of predators in his book also questions morality in nature. To exemplify this Whitley uses the example of a newborn Bambi watching a ferret catch a mouse. This question of morality in nature creates a philosophical meaning. It is necessary for some animals to kill in order to survive, whereas man is portrayed as hunting only for pleasure and control. This meaning is not apparent in the movie where the lack of predators, with the exception of man, makes it impossible. The film, therefore, is focused more on anti-hunting and human cruelty to nature.

Whitley attributes many of the themes in Disney’s Bambi as product of its time. He talks about domestic policy in relation to Yosemite National Park and their elimination of large predators and strict forest fire prevention codes. These same themes are mirrored in the movie by the lack of predators within the animal world and by the absolute destruction brought about by the forest fire at the end of the movie. Not only do the themes in the movie mirror policies at Yosemite, Whitley points out, but the art mirrors the look of the National Park, with its steep cliffs, broad rivers, and rocky terrain. Whitley believes that it is the comparison to Yosemite that makes the film American and brings in American ideas.

Since Bambi was released in 1942 many interpretations of both the original 1923 book and the film have been published. They all vary in their idea of what Bambi means and was meant to represent. These interpretations range from Ralph Lutts’ religious overtones, Derek Bousè’s death theme, Matt Cartmill’s treacherous human, to David Whitley’s fantasy view of

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27 Ibid., 67.
28 Ibid., 64-67.
29 Ibid., 65.
30 Ibid., 64.
nature. Each of these views fully analyzes the meaning of both versions of the story Bambi and why both are portrayed the way they are. What these interpretations lack, though, is an analysis of the reception of the movie. How this story of a young deer’s life became a children’s classic despite the criticism it came under due to its subject matter, in the form of box office numbers and film reviews. After it was released Bambi had a huge impact on the future of the environmental movement and had met with many criticisms along the way to being one of Disney’s animated classics.

When Walt Disney acquired the rights to Felix Salten’s Bambi: A Life in the Woods from MGM in 1935 he began right away putting together a team of animators and writers to work on the film. Disney’s plan was to have Bambi become the studio’s second animated feature length film after Snow White.\(^3\) Problems with the script, the animation, and budget issues for Walt Disney Studios would cause Bambi to become the sixth animated feature released by Disney.\(^2\) When Bambi was released in 1942 it had taken seven years and over $2 million to make.\(^3\) The last movie of the “Golden Age of Animation” at Walt Disney Studios, today Bambi is viewed as a children’s classic and cultural icon, but as with most great works of art the road to greatness has been paved with struggle and criticism. The impact Bambi has had on audiences is visible from the harsh criticism it has received before and during production, the rapidly growing anti-hunting movement, and the public view of the National Park Service’s forest fire prevention policy throughout the decades.

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31 According the American Film Institute a feature length film has a runtime of 40 or more minutes.

32 Bambi would also be the last film released by Walt Disney Studios until the 1950 release of Cinderella. The exception is Victory Through Air which was made at the request of the United States Military during World War II. Ollie Johnson and Frank Thomas, Walt Disney’s Bambi: The Story and the Film (New York:Stewart, Tabori, and Chang, 1990).

Even from the beginning *Bambi* was marked with criticism. When *Snow White* was beginning the animation stage of production, Disney decided that *Bambi* would be the second feature his studio would release. His animators, though, were not as sure. Ollie Johnson and Frank Thomas, two of the supervising animators of the movie, talk about the staff’s reaction to Disney’s pronouncement in their book *Bambi: the Story and the Film*. “‘We’re not even sure *Snow White* will go over- what’s he doing planning a second feature already.’ ‘There’s no story for an animated film.’ ‘It’s not a story at all.’ ‘Who can animate deer?’”

The two biggest problems that Disney’s animators faced were making a storyline where none existed and animating the woodland animals while making them the real and believable characters as they are in Salten’s book.

Salten’s book was centered around Bambi and is a series of lessons he must learn on his path to becoming the wisest deer in the forest. Johnson and Thomas explain, “This was not a dramatic plot filled with passions and actions as much as a mosaic of isolated adventures and as most producers said, quite impossible to make into a movie.” Disney chose Perce Pearce, David Hand, and Larry Morey to be in charge of this impossible task. This decision was a result of the work each had done to create the personalities of the seven dwarves in *Snow White*. Disney wanted them to create strong personalities for the characters and to add humor that was absent from the book.

In order to fully advance the story, Disney decided to push back the release of *Bambi* and make *Pinocchio* the second in line to be released. “As a leading story man said, ‘*Pinocchio* was a picture Walt knew how to make, while *Bambi* still baffled him’” *Bambi*, while still a fantasy, dealt with themes and ideas that were more realistic than previous Disney

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35 Ibid., 106.
36 Ibid., 110-112.
37 Ibid., 113.
storylines. None of the *Silly Symphony* shorts had contained themes of death and human intrusion in nature. For Disney, *Bambi* would be the first of its kind.

In April 1939, the team working on the film had enough footage ready for a short viewing. A select audience was chosen and composed of Don Graham, an art instructor at the studio, and Rico Lebrun, an expert animal draftsman Disney had brought in to help train his animators to draw wildlife. After viewing the available footage the consensus was that the animals had to be real and yet caricatured and that Bambi had to act more animal like.38 A few weeks after the first showing, the first third of the film was shown to Disney, the story men and directors, and the supervising animators Eric Larson, Milt Kahl, and Frank Thomas. Aside from the problems with the characterization of the young animals, the main problem that plagued the selected audience was the amount of drama in the film.39 “We animators saw too little entertainment and too much harsh drama. We were stunned.”40

This stemmed from the death of Bambi’s mother. There was nothing building to the scene, “Her death seemed out of place because it was presented as an unfortunate occurrence in the young fawn’s life.” In order to fix this problem, Bambi’s mother had to become a more caring character and the danger presented by man had to be established as more convincing. Other problems were fixed by making the deer more humanized and the addition of more entertaining scenes with stronger characters.41

Aside from these problems, the animators were asking themselves why the film had to have such realistic qualities.42 Prior to *Bambi*, cartoons were centered on gags and funny antics, featuring mostly cutesy, humanized animal characters. Most of the cartoonists who had been

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38 Ibid.,138-139.
39 Ibid.,139.
40 Ibid.,139.
41 Ibid.,139-140.
42 Ibid.,140.
working on *Bambi* had been trained in doing animation this way, such as with Disney’s *Silly Symphonies*. *Bambi* would be the first animated feature to have, according to Johnson and Thomas, “real drama and the communication of an idea that would move the audience,” as well as realistic animal like characters and natural backgrounds.\(^{43}\) (see fig. 2)

As production progressed and problems with the story were resolved, *Pinocchio* was released. On February 7, 1940 all work stopped at Walt Disney Studios while the staff eagerly awaited the results of the release. Hopes for success were high due to the smash hit that *Snow White* had been in 1937. The results were disastrous, *Pinocchio* failed to turn a profit. For awhile, this threw a wrench into the plans of *Bambi*’s animators, but by late spring the fog *Pinocchio* had created began to lift and *Bambi* was taking shape with over two minutes of footage completed.\(^{44}\)

On February 28, 1942, *Bambi* was shown to a preview audience at a theater in Pomona, California.\(^{45}\) Comment cards and questionnaires were distributed to the viewers. The responses were mixed. Some thought the movie was, “beautiful,” and “…loved the characters.” Others thought it was, “too long,” and filled with “saccharine sweetness.” The controversial scene of the death of Bambi’s mother caused little reaction among the audience. When Bambi is searching for her, though, and calling out for his mother, one voice in the audience responded with, “Here I am Bambi,” causing a ripple of laughter. While the animators were disappointed with the preview, Disney added no new footage, though he edited a few scenes to make things flow more smoothly. Finally on August 13, 1942 *Bambi* was ready to be released.\(^{46}\)

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\(^{43}\)Ibid.,117.
\(^{44}\)Ibid.,158-163.
\(^{45}\)Ibid.,186.
\(^{46}\)Ibid.,188.
Bambi’s release was as disastrous as Pinocchio’s. The film earned $1.2 million in the United States. 47 Comparatively the top grossing film of 1942, Mrs. Miniver, made $5.4 million upon its U.S. release. Ollie Johnson and Frank Thomas attribute the initial failure of Bambi to the timing of the release, “Maybe it was too dramatic and violent in a world that was involved in a shattering war.” 48 Some parents also felt that the movie was not appropriate for their children. The characters, such as Bambi, Thumper, and Flower were lovable and appealing, but the themes were too harsh for a children’s movie. 49

Reviews after the first release in 1942 were mixed. Time Magazine called Bambi the best of Disney’s animated features while also stating that the forest fire at the end of the movie, “burns up Disney’s delicate fantasy.” 50 This review, while mainly praising, also criticizes Bambi. On the other hand, The New York Times review is full of criticism and questions Disney’s decision to combine the natural world and cartoon fantasy. The review expresses disappointment at the realistic animation and compares it to a magazine illustration. 51 These reviews from national media sources show the mixed feelings that Bambi provoked in 1942. Critics and audiences were unsure of how to respond to an extremely realistic portrayal of nature in such an imaginary and fantasy engulfed genre. Up to this point cartoons dealt with fantasy situations in a manner suited to fantasy. Bambi would deal with a realistic topic in a realistic way—man’s impact on nature from the point of view of the animals who were effected.

The review by Time Magazine also brings up a controversy with Bambi that has existed until today, the reaction by the hunting community. The Time review states, “Disney’s

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48 Ollie Johnson and Frank Thomas, Walt Disney’s Bambi: The Story and the Film (New York: Stewart, Tabori, and Chang, 1990), 189.
49 Ibid., 189.
50 The New Pictures.” Time Magazine, August 24, 1942.
indictment of men who kill animals for sport is so effective that U.S. sportsmen who have seen the picture are gunning for him.”  

Hunters had been angry with the film even before its release. Raymond J. Brown complained in the summer of 1942 that, “Bambi showed hunters engaging in low, unsportsmanlike practices—killing a doe, shooting deer in the spring, hunting deer with dogs, and setting the autumn woods ablaze to drive game,” and called for a disclaimer to precede the movie. Disney’s response was to point out that Salten’s book is about German hunters, not American hunters, and that hunting in America is not under attack.

The reaction by hunters has changed little over the years. Current criticism calls Bambi, “nature-fakery, a fantastically misleading distortion of scientific facts about the behaviors of wild beasts, and that children who see it are thereby gulled into foolish sentimentalism about wildlife and an unjustifiable hatred of hunters.” Whether or not this is true, Bambi can be attributed to turning at least one viewer into an animal rights activist. Sir Paul McCartney has been quoted with saying that the death of Bambi’s mother made him “grow up thinking hunting isn’t cool”

The backlash by hunters can also be seen in the development of the terms “Bambi Complex,” “Bambi Factor,” and “Bambi Syndrome.” Typically used by hunters, they are belittling terms used to describe those who have overly sentimental feelings for wildlife. These sentimental feelings can turn harmful when people begin to treat dangerous, wild animals as harmless, tame cartoon characters. Most of the people who criticize those with the “Bambi Complex,” “Factor,” or “Syndrome,” are hunters who feel that these people do not understand

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54 Ibid., 179.
55 Ibid., 180.
the reasons for hunting and who view it purely as the needless killing of wildlife. One of these hunters describes the “sufferers” as such, “They anthropomorphize these animals and exhibit the brightness akin to a 10-watt light bulb.” Hunters are not the only ones worried about the “Bambi Syndrome.” One New York venison farmer was concerned that it may cut into his profits. 58

_Bambi_ has been accredited, in part, to the current view of nature for those who have grown up with Disney films. A review of Bill McKibben’s *The End of Nature* appeared in *Forbes*. The reviewer, Ronald Bailey, states that McKibben, “yearns to return to a nature ‘independent’ of mankind…but nevermind: people like McKibben and his admirers weren’t raised on history but on a Walt Disney’s view of nature. For McKibben, nature is solely a ‘sweet and wild garden.’ Hi there, Bambi.” 59 I can attest to _Bambi_ having an impact on how nature is viewed. As a child I lived in a semi-urban area, I would rarely see deer, but when I did Bambi would immediately come to mind. I imaged all animals were tame and friendly as they were in Bambi’s world. I was horrified when my father brought home deer bologna for the first time—after all, he was eating Bambi!

_Bambi_ has also been accused of falsely portraying the dangers of forest fires. After its first release Bambi and his woodland friends became the spokesman for fire prevention for the Wartime Advertising Council. 60 (see fig.3) Soon after, Bambi and his forest friends were replaced by the nationally recognizable Smoky the Bear. In 2006, the National Ad Council developed a new Public Service Announcement that teamed Smoky the Bear and Bambi. The

58_Ibid., 163.
new campaign was due in part to the change in message that Smoky is providing, “Only you can prevent wildfires” versus the familiar, “only you can prevent forest fires.”\(^{61}\)

The National Park Service had a strict prevention at all costs forest fire policy in 1942. Forest fires were seen only as destructive and undesirable forces that destroyed nature and beauty. By the 1960’s, though, popular opinion among ecologists was changing, and forest fires were seen as necessary for nature to renew itself. Paul Schullery credits public outrage over the National Park Service allowing the 1988 Yellowstone National Park fire to burn itself out at least in part to \textit{Bambi}.\(^{62}\)

The main problem with \textit{Bambi}'s first release, though, was not the hunter response but the mood of the audience. The biggest successes of the World War II years were big war dramas or light-hearted comedies and musicals.\(^{63}\) It would not be until after World War II that \textit{Bambi} would turn a profit. After the war audiences were more receptive to the story that was told in \textit{Bambi} and to the realistic fantasy it held. In the early 1950’s Disney announced to his staff that \textit{Bambi} had paid for itself.\(^{64}\)

For generations after its release \textit{Bambi} has entertained children worldwide, but this entertainment has not come without controversy and parody. Many still consider \textit{Bambi} inappropriate for young children due to its harsh themes and realistic setting. One viewer from Slovenia wrote an internet review of the film in March 2002, calling \textit{Bambi} “A Horrible

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64 Ollie Johnson and Frank Thomas, \textit{Walt Disney's Bambi: The Story and the Film} (New York :Stewart, Tabori, and Chang, 1990), 192.
Experience,” and stating, “If you’re a kid reading this, a word of caution- DON’T WATCH Bambi until you’re old enough to handle really depressing scenes, and what’s the point of that unless you’ve got a suicidal tendency…” 65 This review, while certainly on the strong end of the spectrum, suggests that people do not want a realistic view of nature, but rather a fantasized view where death does not exist. Even without the presence of humans, nature is still full of death and a realistic portrayal would reflect this. Not everyone feels as strongly as the viewer from Slovenia, although many children are not allowed to view the film. My mother was not allowed to see Bambi when she was growing up and my younger sister is not allowed to see it either. Disney’s early films in general have been compared to horror films with unsuitable images. 66 Time Magazine has named Bambi number 20 on its list of the “Top 25 Horror Movies.” 67 This rather notorious reputation has not stopped Bambi from achieving worldwide fame in the least.

Bambi, the deer, has become more than a children’s classic, he has become a cultural icon. Bambi can be found in a wide variety of media outlets. His name is casually thrown into a Time Magazine article on whether kids should hunt. “To answer the question, begin with the paradox of Teddy Roosevelt: America’s greatest conservationist, creator of the national park system—and archetype Bambi killer.” 68 While this is in relation to Roosevelt’s conservationist efforts and big game hunting hobby, the casual reference indicates that Bambi is explicitly linked to hunting. A short cartoon from 1969 called “Bambi Meets Godzilla” stars a young fawn named

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This article also points out that, “When Snow White premiered at Radio City Music Hall, the management reportedly had to reupholster the seats because they were so often wet by frightened tots.”
Bambi standing in a meadow eating until he is suddenly stomped on by a reptilian foot.\textsuperscript{69} This short, roughly two minute cartoon demonstrates that not everyone feels sympathy for the young orphaned fawn, and that similar to those who accuse others of having “Bambi Syndrome,” some feel that \textit{Bambi} is just a cartoon. On the popular primetime medical drama, “Grey’s Anatomy,” the stereotypically innocent, underdog Dr. George O’Malley was nicknamed Bambi for a short time. The use of the name Bambi is evidence that is has become synonymous with innocence and the appearance of weakness. A trip to the local Wal-Mart features sweatshirts, books, socks, and other merchandise with Bambi’s likeness plastered all over it. (see fig.4) \textit{Bambi}’s merchandising popularity is more than an exhibit of the Disney media empire’s ability to market its products, it shows that over 60 years after its first release \textit{Bambi} is continuing to influence millions of children and adults. Aside from numerous children’s books in 2006 a sequel to \textit{Bambi} was released called \textit{Bambi II} and follows Bambi and the Great Prince immediately after the death of Bambi’s mother.\textsuperscript{70}

Since its acquisition by Walt Disney in the mid-1930s, \textit{Bambi} has been the subject of many controversies. Even during its production, Disney’s staff had trouble with the movie, whether in the form of story problems or animation. After its release, the film has been praised and criticized for, among other things, its beautiful art work and its potentially inappropriate themes in a children’s movie. Through all the praise and controversy, though, \textit{Bambi} has risen to become one of the most beloved jewels to emerge from Disney’s “Golden Age of Animation.”

What began in 1923 as Felix Salten’s tale of a young deer has been transformed by The Walt Disney Company into a cultural phenomenon. Children all over the United States, even those who have never seen the film, know the names of Bambi and Thumper. Generations of


\textsuperscript{70}“Bambi (1942), Bambi II (2006),” \textit{Time Magazine}, October 20, 2008.
adults and children have been enthralled and frightened by the Disney classic and many more will continue to be in years to come. Despite criticism and strife during and after production, *Bambi* has survived to entertain millions worldwide. Questions still remain, though, about the meaning of *Bambi*. Many opinions exist about what Felix Salten and Walt Disney were trying to do with their differing versions of the story. Was Salten’s book an allegory for the rebuilding of Europe after World War I? Was Disney responding to Nazi atrocities when he made man the only predator of his film? Felix Salten’s book was called a book for adults by Derek Bousè because of its many themes of death. When Walt Disney produced his film, death remained in the movie, though, anti-hunting themes took center stage. Was this Disney’s intent or was it a by-product of the elimination of animal predators? These questions and many more remain about *Bambi* and the only means available to answer them are speculation and analysis. All the same, one thing is for sure—that is the movie will continue to entertain and influence the thoughts and feelings of generations to come.
“All right, Mr. DeMille, I’m Ready for My Close Up:” A Reflection on Writing

I have written many papers throughout my time at Shippensburg ranging a variety of topics from the Civil War, to sub-Saharan Africa, to Brazil. It was not until I was a Junior and taking a class on the history of the USSR, however, that I was finally able to write a paper about what I enjoy studying the most—films. Since that time, in the spring of 2008, I have written two more paper dealing with the topic of film history.

It was not until my last year in high school that I began studying film history at first it was only a side interest. I had been studying the Civil War since I was around seven and this study consumed most of my time. Once I began reading about films and their history it quickly replaced the Civil War as my dominant area of interest. Unfortunately there were not a lot of opportunities to write about films in my classes. In high school I attempted to write a paper on the history of MGM Studios, however, my research skills were not advanced enough to complete the task and I changed my topic to something more manageable.

The first opportunity I had to write a paper that dealt with film would be in the spring of 2008. I wrote a paper analyzing the film Repentance and the way it reflected the open society in the USSR in the late 1980s. While I received a B+ on the paper, reading over it I can see where I could have expanded the ideas I presented. For example, I talk about way the Soviet past was presented in the film and how the public reacted to this presentation. While it would have been difficult to bring in reviews from the time of the movie’s release, I could have given examples of the way the Soviet past was presented in the film versus just mentioning that it was presented.

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One problem with this paper, that I would fix in the next paper, is the lack of background information. As I was reading this paper, I realized that I did not remember what the movie was about and who the characters involved were. I would add a paragraph that gave a short summary of the events of the film. I would also add a small amount of background on the events in Soviet history that I relate the film to. I believe this would add more substance to the paper as well as make my argument more believable.²

The next film paper that I wrote was for Theory and Practice in the fall of 2008. This paper talks about the gangster cycle of films from 1930-1932 and looks at the rise and fall of their popularity. Of the three papers I will talk about, this is my favorite. It opened me up to the world of pre-Code movies and the films of James Cagney. The topic was fascinating to study and I was able to watch movies that, otherwise, I would not have watched. On this paper I received an A and it was recently published in Write the Ship. This paper taught me a lot about research and the use of primary sources to back up an argument. In order to fully analyze the topics I discussed I used movie reviews from the time period, the films I looked at in the paper, the Hay’s Code, and box office numbers. This paper helped me to understand that box office numbers are the best way to show the popularity of a film and as an indicator of the impact the film has on the public. Movie reviews are also an indicator of this as well. This paper, while not the first time I have used primary sources, is the first that I used them to present my argument versus just as examples as I had in other papers.³

In order to make this paper better I would further some of the ideas and use more primary sources such as interviews of those who worked on the movie (if they exist), movie reviews, and newspaper articles that reference the movies. I would also elaborate more on the ideas I present.

³ Tiffany Weaver, “‘I Ain’t So Tough:’ The Rise and Fall of Gangster Films in Depression America,” *Write the Ship*, 2008-2009.
For example, when I discuss the similarities between the story of *Little Caesar* and Andrew Carnegie’s speech given at Curry Commercial College in Pittsburgh, PA, I would go beyond just listing the similarities. I would analyze what they mean and what they say about the society at the time.\(^4\)

Aside from being my favorite paper I have written, this paper is also the first time I used pictures. Prior to this, I always believed that using pictures in a research paper was a something you just did not do. For this paper, though, I learned that pictures are a way to demonstrate the ideas that are discussed. I used a picture of a young Tom Powers and his friend Matt Doyle to demonstrate the idea that Warner Brothers attempted to quiet censor concerns by talking about the background of a gangster. When used correctly, pictures can be an asset to a paper. Unfortunately pictures can also be used incorrectly and it is very easy to want to add too many pictures. I could have very easily added more pictures to this paper, as well as the next I will talk about, but I refrained from using more.\(^5\)

The last paper that I will discuss is the longest, most time consuming, and while, not my favorite, what I consider my best paper. What I refer to in my mind as the “infamous *Bambi* paper.” Written for the Senior History Capstone, in the spring of 2009, this paper is the most unusual I have ever written. In the *Bambi* paper, I talk about the environmental and cultural impact that the Disney film *Bambi* had on the American public. In order to fulfill the requirement of a global comparison element, I compared the movie to the original book written in Vienna, Austria and how it compares to *All Quiet on the Western Front* written at the same time. In both the gangster film paper and the *Bambi* paper I made sure to use background information for those

\(^4\) Ibid.
\(^5\) Ibid.
not familiar with the topic. In most cases I take for granted that people do not study the same things I do and therefore I wanted to make sure I did not do the same thing for these papers.\footnote{Tiffany Weaver, “What Kind of Movie is this?” Bambi’s Rise to Fame and Controversy. For History Capstone Seminar, spring 2009.}

In the \textit{Bambi} paper, I took what I learned from writing the gangster film paper and used it to make the \textit{Bambi} paper the best I could. I again utilized pictures to demonstrate the ideas I presented, though, this time I added them as an appendix to avoid formatting problems. Movie reviews and box office numbers were again used to demonstrate the impact the movie had on society at the time of release.\footnote{Ibid.}

This paper also required that I write a historiography, which I had never written before. I think that looking at the different views of the film and how they are presented over time is a good way to fully understand what it is you are writing about or reading about. In my historiography I would, again, analyze the topics I talk about more fully and provide examples from the original sources. The lack of analysis is a common theme in all of my papers. I present and idea but do not fully explain what I mean. Writing a historiography also gave me an idea for a paper I feel would be fun to write, a film historiography that would talk about how a certain event in history has been presented in films over time. For example, how the Civil War has been filmed or how World War II is filmed.\footnote{Ibid.}

Before I conclude, I would like to talk a little about the use of titles in my papers. I like to create a title that is catchy, while at the same time has meaning to me. The \textit{Repentance} paper is entitled, \textit{“Repentance: Details in the Fabric,”} this comes a song by Jason Mraz “Details in the Fabric” which had been released at the time I wrote the paper. \textit{“I Ain’t So Tough”: The Rise and Fall of Gangster Films in Depression America”} comes from a quote in \textit{Public Enemy}. After Tom
Powers is shot he lies in a gutter and says, “I ain’t so tough.” I felt that this related to gangster films and how they eventually lost their popularity with the public. For the *Bambi* paper “‘What Kind of Movie is This?’ *Bambi*’s Rise to Fame and Controversy,” came from a quote in a book I used by the animators who worked on the film. The quote describes the mood of the paper. I am looking at the different meanings of *Bambi* and the impact the movie had on the public.

Throughout my time at Shippensburg and I am sure, in the fall of 2009 as well, I have learned and will continue to learn writing skills that will benefit me in the future. None of the papers I have written concerning films have been for a class devoted to film history. It would be nice if a class for film history would be considered in the future. Films are all around us and impact the way we act, live, and view the world.