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LANDSCAPES OF THE ANTHROPOCENE IN *THE LORAX* BY DR. SEUSS

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Abstract

The *Lorax* (1971) is a children's book written by Dr. Seuss, which delivers a dire warning by pointing at the anthropogenic activities lethal to the environment at the micro level. The book is significant in that it teaches children and adults the importance of environmentally sustainable practices by uttering a parable in which the Once-ler, the antagonist of the story, as blinded by his capitalistic ambition overexploits and destroys the nonhuman environment around him. The story revolves around the anthropogenic devastation which brings about the end of a Seussian Truffula forest, contaminates the pond and drives the native species of the forest out. In this context, *The Lorax* can be considered as a projection of the real victimized nonhuman environment with its disturbed biosphere in the face of anthropocentric greed to make maximum profit out of exploiting nature. In this respect, this study aims to analyze *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss in the light of the Anthropocene theory and to compare *The Lorax*, a computer-animated movie released in 2012, with its namesake book on which it is based.

Keywords: Anthropocene, *The Lorax*, Dr. Seuss.

Introduction

Dr. Seuss (Theodor Seuss Geisel), who is the creator of many famous books for children such as his first book *And to Think That I saw It on Mulberry Street* (1937), *Horton Hears a Who!* (1954), *The Cat in the Hat* (1957), *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (1957), *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish* (1960) and *Fox in Socks* (1965), published *The Lorax*, his personal favorite, in 1971 (Dominy et al., 2018, 1196). He chose the title "Dr." with his mother's maiden name "Seuss" as a pen name when he was studying in Dartmouth College drawing illustrations for *Jack'O Lantern*, a humor magazine (Morris, 2011, 161). It is a striking fact that Dr. Seuss, the writer of over sixty children's books that have an important place in popular culture, did not have

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any children because his wife, Helen Palmer, could not bear children. Although Dr. Seuss' books are justifiably recounted as children's books, it can be gathered from his remark "I don't write for children, I write for people" (Gorman and Corwin, 1991, para. 66) that his messages about environmental issues, politics, capitalism, materialism, greed, vanity and war over ideologies prove that his books are for adults as well as children. His books are both full of nonsensical words and humor but all the same they are crammed with wisdom and seriousness. Dr. Seuss vocalizes his concerns about environment in *The Lorax* after observing the alarming rates of deforestation. He puts the imprint of his environmental philosophy in every word he wrote and every illustration he created. In this regard, as works of literature have the power of making a change in the world by appealing to the emotions of the reader, narratives such as *The Lorax* itself, play a crucial role for raising awareness about the Anthropocene (Baysal, 2019, 207).

Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* is an integral piece of work in children's environmental literature and eco-pedagogy. Considering Erdem Ayyıldız's point that "the authors of children's literature write with the consciousness that they can transmit the values of their time to the coming generations" (2018, 11), it may be claimed that *The Lorax* increases the eco-literacy of American children and children all around the world alike contributing highly to their imagination. Dr. Seuss witnessed the environmental degradation taking place in the U.S. around the time he wrote the book and he predicted the consequences that may take shape through substantial examples such as the desperate condition of Lake Erie in his region. His narrative stands as a representative of all nonhuman environs and their constituents adversely affected by anthropogenic impact. In this respect, *The Lorax* shall be explored through the filter of the Anthropocene.

***The Lorax* through the Lens of the Anthropocene**

The Lorax reflects the impact of the *Anthropos* with the story of the Lorax, a mystical creature that visits the Earth because of his duty to protect the environment from human-induced destruction. A story in verse form, *The Lorax* is an exemplary narrative of the Anthropocene, which refers to the recent geological era after the Holocene marked by the alteration of the Earth's surface and the atmosphere by anthropogenic activities going on for more than three centuries (Crutzen, 2002, 23). *The Lorax* introduces fable-like qualities to the narrative as even the most common elements of nature such as fish and other animals humming, singing and abandoning their habitats in search of better food sources. The atmosphere in the story reflects an effective narrative that points out the anthropogenic devastation that goes hand in hand with industrialization, capitalism, and urbanization, which can clearly be observed throughout the world.

The Birth of Anthropocene

Since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, anthropogenic effects on Earth have gained momentum. Anthropogenic activities on Earth are relatively recent but they are extremely profound. Therefore, the enormous influence of humans on land and atmosphere has brought about the idea of changing the name of the geological epoch, the Holocene, into the Anthropocene (Lewis and Maslin, 2015, 173), which is the human age. The name was coined by Paul Crutzen in 2001 and was popularized by Eugene F. Stoermer (Trischler, 2013, 5). Paul Crutzen's remarks on the start of the Anthropocene clarifies the point why this era should be called the age of the humankind: "The Anthropocene could be said to have started in the latter part of the eighteenth century, when analyses of air trapped in polar ice showed the beginning of growing global concentrations of carbon dioxide and methane. This date also happens to coincide with James Watt's design of the steam engine in 1784" (2002, 23). Before the Anthropocene, nature was the dominant force, but especially since the start of the utilization of steam engines, humans have become the wielders of global change. Anthropocene denotes to this fundamental change in the relationship between humans and nature. Humans are the new geological force outstripping the former ones (Andersen, n.d.). Every morsel on Earth bears the marks of humanity, so much so that nature itself is not natural anymore as it has undergone fundamental changes with the interference of humans (Rolston, 1991, 371). Humans have changed the biosphere by causing mass extinctions and mass migrations by habitat destruction. The greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere by human-induced activities have led to the change in the chemical content of the atmosphere which resulted in global warming and a decrease in air quality. The texture of the oceans and the soil deteriorated. All these circumstances play a big part in making the Earth uninhabitable day by day, thus contributing to the emergence of the idea of the Anthropocene.



Dr. Seuss's Environmental Sensitivity and Its Reflection in His Works

As a writer of the twentieth century, which displays the rise of the Anthropocene, Dr. Seuss was observant of and sensitive to the environmental changes in and around the vicinities he visited with his wife. To illustrate, on 1 January 1970, the National Environmental Policy Act was passed and the American environmental movement started in the same year; furthermore, in April, people celebrated the first Earth Day (Dominy et al., 2018, 1198). Sometime after these developments, Dr. Seuss decided to write a book with an environmental message behind it (2018, 1198). He finished his book by writing ninety percent of it on the same page with a laundry list during his journey to Kenya with his wife, probably inspired by the interactions of the nonhuman components such as trees and monkeys, in one afternoon. It is claimed by the biographers of Dr. Seuss in their book *Dr. Seuss and Mr. Geisel* (1990) that he was inspired by the Monterey Cypress tree, which he could see from his house on the top of Mount Soledad in La Jolla, California while creating his imaginary Truffula Trees, which were victimized by the Once-ler's greed in the book (Brown, 2019, para. 1). There is another theory that claims the Truffula Trees were inspired by the whistling thorn acacia, which grows in the Laikipia plateau of Kenya. Dr. Seuss observed these trees and nonhuman animals in interaction with them during his trip (Dominy et al. 2018, 1198). He and his wife moved to La Jolla in 1948. As long as they stayed in La Jolla, with the inspiration he gained from the vicinity, he wrote forty eight books, among which are *Horton Hears a Who!*, *The Cat in the Hat*, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, and *Green Eggs and Ham* (*The Shoal*, n.d., para. 2). It can be concluded from this information that Dr. Seuss observed and took inspiration from the nonhuman environment around him, which made him realize the vitality of human-nonhuman relationship and the interdependence between them.

In the same vein, it is highly possible that Dr. Seuss took the inspiration for his most popular character, the Lorax, from patas monkeys he may have encountered on his journey to the Laikipia plateau of Kenya (Dominy, et al., 2018, 1197). Patas monkeys bear a striking resemblance to the Lorax in that they have a mustache-like piece of fur above their mouth. In addition, their coat looks like moss, and they look like a small person when they stand on their legs. Furthermore, the color of patas monkeys' fur is similar to the color of the Lorax in the original illustration of the book. Likewise, the diet of Patas monkeys depends heavily on the acacia gum, and more importantly patas monkeys get the gum from the trees without harming them. They live in the same environment in symbiosis. It is possible to make the association that, just like patas monkeys are dependent on the seed, gum and thorns and flowers, the Lorax feeds on the fruits of the Truffula Trees as well as the other animals do in the book, which explains why the Lorax is so protective of the trees (2018, 1197). It can be claimed in the light of this that Dr. Seuss was attentive to the conditions of the nonhuman and the environmental degradation. In addition, he believed in environmental justice. He promoted responsibility or rather "response-ability" (the ability of reaction the nonhuman animals and plants embody) in Donna Haraway's words (2008, 88) and environmental ethics towards the nonhuman. He demonstrated how material greed leads to environmental crisis ultimately ending with the collapse of the whole ecosystem.

Anthropogenic Imprints in *The Lorax*

The opening lines of *The Lorax* present a very grim atmosphere created by human-induced destruction such as deforestation and mass migration or extinction of the native species in return (Braje and Erlandson, 2013, 19). The damaged and grim environs of an imaginary town are introduced to the reader. The environs have become suitable habitats only for the *Grickle-grass* and crows, but no other birds or plants. At this point, the current condition of Haiti's forests can be regarded as the projection of Seussian world of *The Lorax* in the real world, as much as how the unconscionable clearance of the tree cover on Haiti made it one of the most deforested countries in the world with less than 1% of its original forest cover leaving it with estimated 95% of its endemic species eradicated (Hedges et. al., 2018, 11850). Similarly, *The Lorax* displays a microcosm of habitat destruction leading to mass migration of species disturbed by human interference. Overexploitation of the flora by the Once-ler force the Brown Bar-ba-loots, the native species of the Truffula forest, leave their homeland and find another place suitable for inhabiting. The disturbance in the biosphere in the Seussian world by the annihilation of the Truffula Trees depriving the native species of food, shelter as well as clean air and water culminates in the defaunation of the premises. The entire ecosystem collapses in the absence of one of its members causing a domino effect. In a similar vein, nonhumans in the literal world, be it animal or plant, migrate to survive the deteriorating conditions in their former habitats. As parallel to the worsening environmental conditions in the book, in the real world, the polar bears in the arctic Canada migrate southwards due to the fact that rising climate temperature causes the ice sheets remain shorter than



they used to (Reid, 2020, 2). Additionally, Robin Wall Kimmerer, a professor of environmental and forest biology claims there is a possibility that maples will migrate towards northwards to escape from the adverse effects of climate change (2013, 173).

Likewise, deforestation is not a recent phenomenon as it dates back thousands of years. Humans have started clearing the land for many reasons including agriculture, for settlement, forest fires (deliberately or not), industrial logging, and mining (Potapov et al., 2017). Humans have been removing the tree cover which supply subtler advantages that are requisite to the life on Earth beyond their discernible benefits. They provide food and shelter for humans and the nonhuman alike and they protect biodiversity. For instance, the Amazon rainforest hosts 1300 bird species, 427 mammal species, 40.000 plant species and around 2.5 million different insect species (Heather, 2015, para. 30) whose existence is elementary to the maintenance of ecologies. The life on Earth depends on the trees which clean the air by utilizing gasses in the atmosphere: "Trees remove gaseous air pollution primarily by uptake via leaf stomata, though some gases are removed by the plant surface. For O₃, SO₂ and NO₂, most of the pollution is removed via leaf stomata" (Nowak et al., 2014, 115). In accordance with this fact, the removal of the Truffula Trees in the story made the wind in the imaginary town Seuss blows slow-and sour as the air is not cleaned through the trees. Moreover, it is evident from "the sour smell of the wind" that toxic contamination that cannot be filtered through trees taints the air making it hazardous to breathe, which can later be gathered from the condition of the Lorax, who starts to show the symptoms of a lung disease such as coughing and whiffing (1971, 40). The Swomeee-Swans, which are the singing birds in Dr. Seuss's imaginary world, have a hard time singing their songs because of the smoke that got into their throat. This havoc arising from the smog coming out of the factory and the vehicles of the Once-ler is reminiscent of the Great London Smog (1952) and Southeast Asian Haze (2013) which are examples of human-induced environmental degradation (Stoner, 2015, 1; Adamson, 2016). They both led to the deterioration of air quality, ultimately leading to respiratory illnesses and the deaths of people and animals (Cheong et al., 2018, 3286; Wilkins 1954, 1). *The Lorax* displays the adverse effects of deforestation and the decline in the air quality when there are no trees to cleanse the air and to present solutions for the coughing and whiffing of the Lorax. As a result of the dense air pollution indicating the destructive impact of the Anthropocene, The Swomeee-Swans lose their ability to sing. The air becomes foul and the environment inhabitable. In relation to this, it can be inferred that the Once-ler's anthropocentric mind-set and his actions as the owner of the factory leave permanent impact on the nonhuman environment and the animals.

The Once-ler is the greedy antagonist of the book who lives in his shed named Lerkim in the middle of the now-barren land he stripped off trees. He lives the life of a hermit. He does not fully show himself to anyone. He just peeks through the shutters on his window refusing any visitors. This antisocial behavior can be explained through his remorseful reclusion. Although he is regretful of his actions, he still goes after material gains because he tells his story to anyone who pays fifteen cents, a nail and the shell of an old snail. The Once-ler's passion for profit and its bitter fruit prove the fact that humans have become the new geological force shaping the surface of the Earth and changing the structure of the atmosphere, obviously not for the better. The root of the actions of the Once-ler can be traced back to the time "when the grass was still green and the pond was still wet, and the clouds were still clean" (1971, 18) and when the native species of trees, birds and other animals still existed in the vicinity. At this point, the writer presents the reader a very lively and brightly colored atmosphere. Apparently, the area was suitable for the animals and plants to thrive and multiply plentifully until the human interference.

However, according to the story about the Once-ler's past, this dreamlike pastoral scene starts to break down right after he unloads his cart, littering the environment with his tools, and chops the first Truffula Tree, whose *soft tuft* he uses to make his *Thneed*, a soft fabric made of knitted "Truffula tuft" (1971, 24). He even builds himself a small shop to sell his Thneeds. The Lorax comes from the stump of the first tree he chops. The physical appearance of the Lorax is described as "shortish", "oldish", "brownish", and "mossy", and he has a "sharpish" and "bossy" voice (1971, 27). Despite his non-threatening anthropomorphic configuration, he undertakes a very significant task; he assumes the role of a spokesperson for the trees because the trees cannot speak and defend themselves. The Lorax is a magical creature as can be gathered from his entrance to the scene, yet he does nothing magical to stop the Once-ler. He just warns him verbally, but he does not speak only on behalf of the trees. Actually, he speaks on behalf of every nonhuman being that cannot speak for or defend itself against the anthropogenic activities. In fact, the Lorax is a metaphorical character standing for the reason and the common sense that show the right path to take but oftentimes not heeded by humanity as humans are content with the current situation of world's climate and they are indifferent and ignorant towards it. Indeed, they are in denial of this fact, which can be explained as



a situation of “complacency” (Doan, 2014, 2). Similarly, in the case of the Once-ler, his remorseful sentences remain ineffective. The Once-ler does not share the Lorax’s concerns as he is after material gain. In addition, he is not aware despite the warnings of the Lorax that his reckless behavior is causing the collapse of the whole ecosystem of Truffula forest. He begins with chopping one Truffula Tree and thinks that chopping only one tree will cause no harm and there’s no need for alarm. However, as his business expands, he invents a device called *Super-Axe-Hacker* which chops four Truffula Trees at a time in order to maximize the efficiency and minimize the time spent on production. In concordance with the behavior of the Once-ler, individuals who seek to maximize their profit tend to ignore the gravity of the system functioning wholly with the “capitalist rationality” (Altvater, 2016, 146-147) are the representatives of the *Anthropos*. In other words, the nature is capitalized on for the profit of the few humans.

In the magical encounter of the Lorax with the Once-ler, he sees the Thneed and asks what he has done to his Truffula tuft. He refers to this soft part of the tree as “my Truffula tuft” (1971, 29) in order to express that the forest and the nonhuman members in it belong to the Lorax, which emphasizes his responsibility towards them. He expresses the oneness of all the nonhuman components in the forest with the Lorax (Dominy et al., 2018, 1197). In this sense, *The Lorax* has been the voice of nature since it was published and it still has lessons useful while shaping the environmental policy (Marris, 2011, 148). The protagonist, the Lorax criticizes the Once-ler’s material greed and articulates his disbelief about the Once-ler’s success in making profit out of the natural resources. To the dismay of the Lorax, who has not expected the Once-ler to sell his Thneed, he finds a customer and sells it to him immediately, which galvanizes his material hunger. He is at the source of the raw material, and now he has found himself a ready market to sell his Thneeds despite this piece of fabric looks useless to the non-anthropocentric Lorax, whose ecological advocacy goes for nothing. The Once-ler laughs at the Lorax and makes a point which resonates with the truth even today: “You never can tell what some people will buy” (1971, 26). He even builds himself a factory for the mass production of Thneeds in order to accelerate and expand his Thneed business. This incident clearly exemplifies the negative impact of capitalism on nature as one of the main gears of the Anthropocene (Moore, 2016, 2-3).

Proceeding with his capitalist venture, the Once-ler turns his business into a more professional one. As chopping one Truffula Tree at a time becomes insufficient, he utilizes his *Super-Axe-Hacker*, which chops down four Truffula Trees at once. Although he could just take the useful material on top of the trees, he just chops them down in order to acquire it more easily and to accelerate the production. The Once-ler’s business expands as he desires; however, he is not aware of the dire consequences of his reckless behavior. The Lorax that can be regarded as the representative of the Once-ler’s inner conscience comes at his door, time and again, to warn and to show him the poor conditions of the animals he defends. The natural habitat of the “Brown Bar-ba-loots”, bear-like creatures, is destroyed. As the source of their food, which is Truffula fruits has been chopped down, they face starvation and concordantly, various health problems. As a result, the Lorax sends them away to protect them from starvation and health problems. They are forced to migrate to escape this miserable condition. Although the Once-ler is moved by the mass-migration of these animals, his greed does not let him stop. It bolsters him to expand his business regardless the consequences. He claims he means no harm, but he is blinded with his anthropocentric greed and ignorance towards the nonhuman environment. The Once-ler enlarges his factory as well as the roads, wagons, and loads. He finds ready markets and starts to ship Thneeds into every direction. The more money he earns, the greedier he becomes. The smoke coming out of the chimneys of his factory reduces air quality and respiratory diseases begin to emerge in both the Lorax and the Swomee-Swans. Ultimately, they are forced to mass-migrate as are the Bar-ba-loots. At this point, the negative impact of capitalism and industrialization becomes more visible. Deforestation and the pollution of the water resources have sent animals away and caused their extinction in real life due to habitat change and uninhabitable environmental conditions: “[i]n addition to altering the selective forces shaping evolution within species, humans are also imposing selection at the species level. Most alarmingly, humans have increased the rate at which species are going extinct and strongly determine which species are at risk of extinction” (Otto, 2018, 5).

In addition, as narrated in the story, toxic waste is released from the factory to the pond “where the Humming Fish Hummed” before (1971, 47). Unfortunately, the fish in the pond can no longer hum since their gills have been stuck because of the waste dumped. The Lorax sends them away as well, to find a cleaner pond. About the biographical correspondence for this detail, it can be speculated that Dr. Seuss may be inspired by Lake Erie and created his pond in the book though he never explained the inspiration behind his creation (Witter, 2020, para. 9) as he mentions the name of the lake in the original text (Steffen et al., 2014, 216). *The Lorax* indicates that the pond is polluted just like Lake Erie, whose shores extend through Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, and Ontario: “They’ll walk on their fins and get woefully weary/ in search



of some water that isn't so smeary./ I hear things are just as bad in Lake Erie" (1971, 53). These are the lines that reflect the unfavorable condition of the lake, but they were taken out of the book fourteen years later. Lake Erie provides drinking water for five cities in two countries. In 1970, it was announced to be a dead lake and the ecosystem in and around Lake Erie was on the brink of collapse. Only the most primeval forms of life were able to live in the lake. Some of the primary causes of the pollution of the lake to such extent are:

(1) infectious agents [from inadequately treated wastes]; (2) chemical fertilizers (including those not designed for this purpose, such as detergent phosphates); (3) chemical and mineral wastes from industry; (4) organic chemicals – especially insecticides, pesticides, and herbicides; (5) silt from erosion; (6) heat from using water as a coolant such as in electric generation plants; (7) petroleum pollutants; (8) lead poisons – from car fumes; and (9) gross matter – the solid trash and debris deposited in our waters or dumped on the shores and later washed into the water. A tenth category – radioactive substances – can become important if proposed nuclear powered generating plants are built and if atmospheric testing of atomic weapons is resumed. (Reitze, 1968, 6)

With the guidance of the information presented above by Professor Arnold W. Reitze, Jr. who founded the GW Law's Environmental Law program in 1970, it can be claimed that in the core of the reasons for the suffocation of Lake Erie lies human interference. The miserable condition of Lake Erie owes its existence to being abounding in nutrients such as nitrates and phosphates, components of fertilizers that are washed off of the farmlands around it. These fertilizers fed the algae and the weed inside the lake, and they bloomed dramatically. The lake also got polluted with dead fish which died off due to lack of oxygen or other animals and bacteria using up the oxygen in return and decomposing the dead algae (Jaffee, 2015, 21). The bacteria decomposing the plentiful dead algae released more phosphate leading to the proliferation of more and more algae. Eventually, this cycle, the endless intra-action between the nonhuman, affected the primary cause which triggered it in the first place: that is, the humans. The cities through which Lake Erie extends suffer from water shortage and the people living in those cities could not fish in the lake. It was not even advisable to swim and do water sports in the lake unless they chose clean beaches (Edmonds, 1965, 28). It is possible to draw a parallel between the condition of Lake Erie and its nonhuman inhabitants and that of the pond in *The Lorax*. As it is a children's book intended to be didactic and entertaining at the same time, it is not expressed that the fish in the pond are dead, but it is accounted that they just migrate to another habitat clean and suitable for them to live (1971, 53). Dr. Seuss would not kill the fish off because he wished to write an enjoyable book telling a cautionary tale about the ecosystem collapse. Nevertheless, in contrast to the story, in real life when a pond becomes so polluted that the gills of the fish get stuck, the fish would not survive. Therefore, it can be inferred from the cases of both Lake Erie and the pond that there is a loss of biodiversity as an adverse effect of human impact.

A final example of environmental degradation that convinced Dr. Seuss to pen *The Lorax* is the brutal clearance of the eucalyptus trees around his home in La Jolla (Witter, 2020, para 4). Around the time, when *The Lorax* was published, the Pacific Northwest was being cleared off dramatically. Logging companies were making huge profits out of the forests. In this sense, the criticism of the narrative directed at cutting down of the trees for monetary gains clashed with the interests of the logging industries (Pleasants, 2006, 182). As a clear reflection of the outrage displayed by the logging industry, the book was banned from many schools and libraries in the area near these logging industries. The Hardwood Forest Foundation and the National Oak Flooring Manufacturers Association even sponsored a parody of *The Lorax* named *The Truax* (1990), written by Terri Birkett and illustrated by Orrin Lundgren to serve their purpose of corporate greed. Written by a member of a hardwood flooring industry, *The Truax* intended to justify the anthropocentric actions "spreading a pro-timber industry message to the public through education" (Jones, 2020, 151). In *The Truax*, there is Truax in place of the Once-ler. He is the logger whose name is reminiscent of the words *true* and *axe*, denoting the fact that he does the right thing. Similarly, Guardbark replaces the tree-protecting Lorax. The aim of the logging companies at this point is to convey that logging is indispensable to life. Truax stands for the logging companies that are professedly innocent because they chop down the trees to make things such as ball-bats and houses. Truax says he chops trees but plants their seeds in their empty space and convinces Guardbark that he is doing no evil. However, the efforts of the characters to protect their profit by banning *The Lorax* or putting the characters in *The Truax* up against *The Lorax* proved to be unsuccessful as since its publication, *The Lorax* has been read and its philosophy understood both by the children and adults worldwide (Marris, 2011, 148). Its message about the imminent environmental crisis still resonates within humanity.



In the end, as the voice of nature, the Lorax does his part, yet he cannot touch the Once-ler's heart. The Once-ler does not stop and think about the consequences of his deeds until he chops down the last Truffula Tree. He does not think things through or make a sustainable business plan. Concordantly, the over-harvesting of the Truffula Trees drives him out of business. Moreover, his exploitation of nature to the last Truffula Tree and forcing the native species out leaves him with a contaminated and barren piece of land. The moral of the parable is delivered through the word "unless" which the Lorax left behind before he has been lifted away (1971, 61). *Unless* is the message conveying the idea that "Restoration of the Truffula ecosystem seems possible if the younger generation heeds the mistakes of its forefathers" (Dominy et al., 2018, 1198). Unless someone like the boy in the book who listens to the story of how his town has become so barren cares, nothing is going to get better. After years of loneliness and contemplation, the Once-ler realizes what he has done is wrong and he hands the seed of the last Truffula Tree to the boy in order to compensate for the loss he caused. He comprehends the significance of the Truffula Trees and how every living creature, including the humankind, needs them. He asks the boy to grow a forest and protect it from the ones who want to cut them down. Though not completely stripped out of his greed, he has come to understand that nature with all its inhabitants is more important than material gain. He realizes that the absence of the Truffula Trees, a key component of the ecosystem in the Seussian universe, makes the reversal of what he has done impossible.

A Brief Reflection on the Dystopian World of the Animated Movie *The Lorax* (2012) Compared to the Original Text

The movie titled *The Lorax* directed by Chris Renaud is based on Dr. Seuss's titular book. It was co-produced by Universal Pictures and Illumination Entertainment and released on 2 March 2012, in the USA (IMDB 2018). The movie is important since it is set in the distant future of the premises smeared by the Once-ler, which Dr. Seuss most probably pictured in his mind while writing his book. It gives an insight into one of the alternative paths to be taken by the boy who gets the Truffula seed from the Once-ler. Furthermore, a dystopian society developed in a post-apocalyptic environment, which humans can project to their society and nonhuman environment and take drastic measures to prevent it from happening, is introduced.

The story takes place in a fictional city called Thneed-Ville after the destruction has been inflicted by the Once-ler where everything, including trees, is made of plastic, metal and synthetic materials (a nod to the parody of the book, *The Truax*, 1990). Even the animals in the city are metallic and mechanical, which the viewer gathers from the cat whose eyes serve to keep the citizens under surveillance by the totalitarian mayor of the city, Aloysius O'Hare. The only living and breathing components of the city are the residents who seem to be unaware of the unnatural condition in which they live. There is no such city in the original text of *The Lorax* and this city, with all its members, is the invention of the script writers. The viewers are introduced to a colorful city, but in fact it is deeply dystopian with the gloomy atmosphere and the barren soil outside with no living soul to be seen around.

As the story in the movie unfolds, a dystopian world is hidden under the façade of a utopia. The song the residents sing at the beginning of the movie proves the fact that "the people have been completely brainwashed into believing that they live in a healthy environment; they have no idea about the concept of nature, natural resources, or how bad their artificial environment and lifestyle is" (Stewart, 2019, para. 1). They somehow managed to survive the apocalyptic environmental degradation with the help of technology which killed the natural habitat and now capitalizes on them. In fact, though it seems colorful and lively, Thneed-Ville is a city surrounded by majestic walls erected in order to prevent the citizens from seeing the wasteland outside the city and keep them away from the Once-ler, who lives in the middle of this post-apocalyptic wasteland and holds the last Truffula seed as the final hope to restore the ecosystem to its former glory. The citizens are closely monitored in case they attempt to get out of the city. They eat synthetic jellies instead of real food. The residents seem blissful about their life in spite of the preventive walls, plastic trees, mechanical animals and artificial food in this unnaturally colored prison because they have no idea about the real nonhuman environment in and around their city which once used to be an idyllic forest radiating with bright colors of Truffula Trees, a variety of animal species and a bright blue sky before the Once-ler destroyed this pastoral paradise.

The protagonist of the movie is the boy, who as different from the book, has a name in this computer animated movie. He is named Ted after the writer of the book (Stommel, 2012, 4). Ted goes on a quest outside the city to be able to give a real tree to a girl, named Audrey after Seuss' beloved wife (Lybarger, 2012, para. 9), whom he likes a lot. Audrey has never seen any trees real and alive and she longs to see a real



one thanks to the stories she hears about them. With the hopes of fulfilling Audrey's wish, Ted's grandmother sends him over to the Once-ler's Lerkim, the shack where the Once-ler lives in the middle of the wasteland he created, in order to help him find a tree for the girl he likes. However, her real intention is to restore the former glory of Thneed-Ville's wildlife and to get rid of the shackles of the O'Hare Company owned by the insatiable mayor of the town, Aloysius O'Hare, who even sells oxygen in plastic bottles since there is no real tree to produce it for free. Ted finds the Once-ler as he is described at the end of the story in isolation behind the shutters in his Lerkim. The message on the stone left behind the Lorax, *unless*, is still in its place (1971, 62). Ted pays the price to the Once-ler and learns the story of formerly radiant vicinity of Thneed-Ville-most- which probably had another name before the destruction and is not present in the book- and what befalls it. The viewer learns about the misfortune of the region as the Once-ler starts narrating his story in the form of flashbacks. After he finishes his story, the Once-ler decides that he has what it takes to entrust Ted with the last seed of a Truffula Tree and to revive nature once again after he tells the whole story. He succeeds in this major task, which contradicts with the interests of the O'Hare Company. Ted struggles with many hardships inflicted on him by Aloysius O'Hare who, with all his power, tries to stop him. If Ted succeeds in growing a Truffula Tree, the townspeople will realize that real trees produce oxygen for free and O'Hare will lose his power over them. Finally, the seed sprouts and Ted calls out to the townspeople and explains that they can have free oxygen through trees. O'Hare does not want it to happen because it jeopardizes his business. He is the capital holder in the movie, who desires his profit to flow incessantly as the Once-ler in the past. He does not want to lose his consumers when there are real trees around. This story, which unravels before the reader, presents that a boy's struggle to prove his love turns out to be an action that awakens the members of a dystopian society from a deep slumber dissipating the illusion of a perfect society and nonhuman environment. In this regard, Ted proves that humans use technological control to put their own capitalistic ideals forefront instead of the common good. Thus, trees which are only one of the members of the nonhuman environment can save humans from their dependence on technology and its wielders.

The movie and the book share the same ethical concerns and both teach some important environmental lessons through imaginary characters and situations which are fictional but can be regarded as the microcosm of the real macrocosmic Anthropocene situation. Both the movie and the book are not preachy. In parallel with this, the story in the movie "is crafted as a comedy but the message highlights the serious ecological tragedy threatening Earth through deforestation, over consumption and pollution of the air, water and soil" (Gilroy, 2012, para. 6). Pointing the current environmental issues which have their roots in the Industrial Revolution, both works entertain and instruct young generations about the ethical concerns brought about capitalism, industrialization, and urbanization, which, as Erdem Ayyıldız argues, results in a materialist's life in which humans become alienated, deprived of freedom and "modern barbarians" in time (2019, 16).

Conclusion

To conclude, although *The Lorax* was first published in 1971, the message Dr. Seuss intended to convey still echoes today both thanks to the book itself and its animation, cartoon, and musical adaptations. The message lies beyond the writer's playful language and rhymes. The book bears a warning to the twentieth and twenty-first century readers by way of reminding the constant threat of a dystopian future awaiting the whole humanity and the nonhuman environment because of the reckless exhaustion of resources through the tale of needless consumerism and the greed of the characters such as the Once-ler and Aloysius O'Hare, the ambitious industrialists who represent the anthropocentric and capitalistic ideal. *The Lorax*, with its countless adaptations, instructed people from every age about environmental ethics, the importance of biodiversity and sustainable development. Dr. Seuss ends the book with a grim atmosphere and a bleak future, yet with a gleam of hope as the Once-ler, in the middle of the wasteland he created, hands the last Truffula seed to a child entrusting the future generations with the conservation of the environment. The book as a whole, especially with its ghastly but hopeful ending, answers its purpose of jolting the reader out of the anthropocentric and capitalist attitude before it is too late to redeem.

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