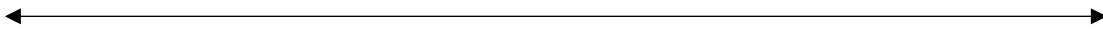


Hello, my name is Kari Slone and I am here today to read an excerpt from my essay, "Pocahontas: The Eco-feminist Warrior". I want to first clarify that I will be discussing eco-feminism within Walt Disney's classic cartoon Pocahontas...not the Native American daughter of Chief Powhatan. Yes oddly enough I have been asked, "I didn't know she wrote any books, what are they like?" Anyway, I want to discuss the close bond Pocahontas shares with the animals as shown within the musical scene of the popular song I am sure you are all familiar with, "Colors of the Wind"....feel free to begin singing at any moment. Through a close analysis of this scene, it is clear that Pocahontas utilizes her connectedness with nature through an anthropomorphic view in order to educate John Smith on the damage he and his fellow colonial men are causing. Before I dive any deeper, I must explain anthropomorphism and how the term applies to what I am about to read. Marianne Dekoven states, "Anthropomorphism is the charge generally leveled against people who see communication, emotion, culture, or intelligence and thought in other animals." It is through this idea that Pocahontas is motivated to bring John Smith into their world and further his understanding that they are all equal living beings, NOT property.



When John ventures away from camp in attempts to explore the land, he has caught the eye of a hidden Pocahontas as she crouches behind the bushes both curious and fearful of this stranger in her home territory. Within this scene in the forest, Pocahontas displays the mentioned characteristics of “anthropomorphism” upon when first laying eyes on the unfamiliar John Smith and experiences the identification of emotion and thought process as described previously by Dekoven. Pocahontas is crouched down behind the bushes animalistic like, as she stares at the cracker exchange between Meeko and John. Once compassion is exhibited for the hungry animal, John is now exhibiting anthropomorphism as described by Dekoven. Not only John, but Pocahontas is also capable of determining this strange figure as non-threatening and having emotions. This display of double anthropomorphism within this scene is supported by Dekoven by stating, “Strictures against sentimentality that forbid empathy for other animals and that often accompany charges of anthropomorphism are also more and more being replaced by an awareness of the intricate and massive interdependence between humans and other animals”. The interaction that Pocahontas witnesses between John and Meeko reassures her that the unfamiliar being is no longer dangerous and capable of forming a connection to animals, instead of immediately attacking her animal companion.

The scene between Smith and Meeko in the forest is not the only example of anthropomorphism depicted in Pocahontas. John Smith's character is soon confronted with Pocahontas herself during one of his hikes in the forest. During their actual meeting scene, even though he had previously viewed Native Americans as "savages" and people that he can "tame", John soon reaches a vulnerable moment of anthropomorphism in which he sees Pocahontas as a human. He is skeptical and defensive of Pocahontas at first glance due to his opinions of her culture. John also does not recognize her as human because of her animalistic behavior such as the language barrier and crawling, cat like motions across the rocks in the river, which insists him to draw his weapon. However, Pocahontas and John interact in an anthropomorphic "gaze" as described by Dekoven, which further signifies that they are on equal grounds, a moment that he sees her as more than property or collateral damage of their British invasion. Dekoven claims, "Suddenly or eventually, one can experience a shift in perspective, and these animals become visible apart from our myriad learned projections onto them. Moreover, they return the gaze of the knowing looker". Once the two characters have interacted in what Dekoven claims as a "gaze", they are now able to better understand each other. Through this newly formed common understanding, Pocahontas is now in the position to further educate John on the harm his people

are causing to the land through their greed allowing herself to become a bridge of communication between man and nature.

One of the songs from the film that is most commonly recognized is, “Colors of the Wind.” Despite her beautiful voice and artwork displayed in the background during this musical scene, the lyrics have a deeper meaning than surface level cartoon fantasy. After a close examination of the lines themselves and the details of the scene portrayed in the film, there are numerous examples to support an eco-critical theme is at play. Although the song itself along with the animals shown throughout the number are calm, the lyrics and visuals suggests the clear dominance that man seek to gain over nature without understanding the living beings that are affected. Pocahontas states in the intro to the song, “Still I cannot see, how the savage one is me”, as she returns John Smith’s gun back to him as a motion for surrender. From the beginning, this image and lyric suggests that the British settlers are creating more damage and acting more “savage” like than the Native Americans who are considered to be the problem. She continues on to state, “How can there be so much that you don’t know?” This statement speaks to his anthropocentric views about the world, believing that man is the central focus and holding the highest importance above everything. Following Pocahontas as she turns to walk away is the swirl of leaves in the wind, as declared to be her mother affirming that this is her destined path to be the voice of the land and

animals. “But I know every rock and tree and creature has a life, has a spirit, has a name,” Pocahontas claims early in the song. According to Megan Condis, “The princesses of color might be lovely and good at heart, but they are shown to be closer to expressing their animal natures than white women are”. Because Pocahontas has a closeness with the animals and environment that surrounds them, she is capable of bringing John into their world in order for him to understand they are also important.

Pocahontas is striving to connect John with the lives of the animals by explaining their lives through an established anthropomorphic lens. As Dekoven has claimed, anthropomorphism is depicted as seeing emotions or thoughts within an animal. This anthropomorphic interaction, much like the one John previously shared with Pocahontas, assists him in understanding the damage his people are inflicting on the lives of the animals that Pocahontas introduces him to. As the opening continues with the image of animal footprints leading into a cave with a family of bears, John seems fearful and immediately retreats back to defensive behavior by drawing his weapon on the bear. Pocahontas calmly lowers the gun and states, “You think the only people who are people, are the people who look and think like you. But if you walk the footsteps of a stranger, you’ll learn things you never knew you never knew.” As the scene displays footsteps leading into the cave of cubs, Pocahontas is making the claim that John’s unwillingness to

understand lives outside of his own is selfish and dangerous to other animal beings with families. Condis states, "Her theme song, "Colors of the Wind," in which she evokes her connection to the wolf, the grinning bobcat, the heron, and the otter (who she calls "my friends"), emphasizes this connection. She even brings John to see a family of bears, implying to him that, to her, animals and people are equally deserving of respect and even familial love". Because Pocahontas is bringing John into their world, she is using Dekoven's anthropomorphism to her advantage in order to teach him that he and the animals are more alike than he may realize in terms of emotions and individual personalities. This strategy speaks to her ability to communicate with both worlds in order to stop the land domination and destruction.

Pocahontas continues into the chorus as she states, "Have you ever heard the wolf cry to the blue corn moon, or asked the grinning bobcat why he grinned?" These lyrics personify the animals, further allowing the viewers and John to see humanistic qualities and emotions within them as preserved by anthropomorphism. Visually, it is also drawn within the stars and shaped through the trees a grinning bobcat when first mentioned. Pocahontas goes on to state, "Can you sing with all the voices of the mountain? Can you paint with all the colors of the wind?" As she sings these lyrics, her face is being painted into the sky. This type of fluidity with the Earth supports not only Pocahontas', but Grandmother Willow and her

mother's connection with the natural elements of the Earth. Asking these questions of the natural scenery with human characteristics also brings equality to themselves and their surroundings throughout the song through personification.

Pocahontas is not only trying to convince John to identify with the animals on the element of personality and equality, but is bringing his intentions of dominance and power into the song as well. Through the lyrics, "Come run the hidden pine trails of the forest, come taste the sun-sweet berries of the earth. Come roll in all the riches all around you, and for once, never wonder what they're worth." She is making the argument that you can appreciate and experience nature, without destroying its beauty or trying to distribute it for a price. Greta Gaard states, "Indigenous women called attention to the colonialism and environmental racism that legitimates hazardous waste, military bomb tests, coal mining, nuclear storage, hydropower construction, and PCB contamination on reservation lands". According to Gaard, the greed and destruction of Earth is being recognized by women in an attempt to preserve these natural resources.

Pocahontas' role throughout the film as an indigenous princess naturally is a protector of the animals and land. This destruction and disregard for repercussions as stated by Gaard is an expected reaction we notice from Pocahontas in an attempt to legitimize the harm these men are causing. She is essentially striving to reach this goal by educating John through pure exemplification of the victims. By

explicitly stating that John can experience nature without trying to own or profit from it, Pocahontas is speaking for the voiceless land that falls victim to John Ratcliffe's plan to mine for gold.

Pocahontas then goes on to support this argument by suggesting the endless possibilities and lives ended due to these acts by stating, "How high does the sycamore grow? If you cut it down, then you'll never know." The two are also symbolically pictured throughout the musical number running with deer legs and transforming from eagle to their natural human selves. Using this type of personification in the background of the lyrics only further signifies their connection to the animals, solidifying John's understanding of anthropomorphism. Toward the closing lines of the song she states, "Whether we are white or copper skinned". Pocahontas is bringing their racial differences into question with this line, while also suggesting that all living creatures belong to the earth and can cohesively live together without dominating one another. Visually, it is shown as the song comes to a close that all of her efforts will go unnoticed from a reality stand point. As the screen pans out to display John's gun in the corner which ultimately resembles his position of power over Pocahontas and nature. Condis' article states, "An account of the princesses requires an intersectional approach with a perspective on how constructions of gender, race, and class intersect and dissolve in the play between the categories of the human and the animal". Condis

supports the statement white or copper skinned as necessary because of the inferiority and inequality she faces as an indigenous princess. The Disney film includes a 'Happily Ever After Trope' for which he does not use his gun for battle, yet stands with Pocahontas for peace. However, this is a powerful scene in terms of eco-criticism due to the known facts of how dominant man has been over women and land throughout history.

Over the course of Walt Disney's earlier films, the princesses were idolized by little girls while treating their animal companions as background, supporting characters on the journey to assist in the 'Happily Ever After' ending we are all too familiar with. As this role of Disney princess began to shift with the introduction of princesses of color, animals were no longer thought of as lesser value or abstract characters. Pocahontas brought forth a complex character of independence that defied the stereotypical role of princess. Pocahontas' actions to strive to create peace among her people and the colonial men for the sake of the land, while also seeking to discover her life path serves as a significantly important role model in connection to eco-feminist ideology. Unlike previous Disney films, her animal sidekicks are more than mere slaves that do her chores and assisting her with the fairytale wedding. In her quests, her strong relationships to the animals and nature that surrounds her serves a greater purpose in establishing John's understanding to the natural world. As Pocahontas instills John with a better understanding of the

Earth outside of greed and his own anthropocentric views, she is then capable of becoming a self-actualized woman finding her own Happily Ever After.