



## **Monsters or Victims? An Ecocritical Reading of *Samson and Sally* and *Dot and the Whale*, Retellings of *Moby Dick***

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**Abstract**

The paper aims to explore two animations, *Samson and Sally* (1984) and *Dot and the Whale* (1986), through the lens of zoocriticism (Huggan and Tiffin) and ecocinematic analysis to show how the directors have presented the alternative version of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* in order to showcase the crises of cetaceans like whale in the present scenario of the global warming, pollution and various anthropogenic damages. Unlike many popular Hollywood movies, these two animated films do not portray whales as monsters. In many popular Hollywood ventures, we can see the representations of vengeful bloodthirsty sea creatures like sharks and whales causing shipwrecks and killing humans, just like *Moby Dick* did in Melville. However, *Samson and Sally* and *Dot and the Whale* propose a different version of *Moby Dick*, where *Moby Dick* is portrayed as a saviour of the whale race under the threats of whaling, oil spills, and rising temperature. *Samson and Sally* is a bildungsroman as it depicts the journey of a young whale in search of the mythical *Moby Dick* who can only save his clan from whalers who have killed his mother and other relatives. *Dot and the Whale*, on the other hand, points such issues like the beaching of whales and their exploitation for oil and other resources. These two animations have presented an accurate picture where animals are not presented as monsters but rather victims of human greed. Although these animations are in the anthropomorphised version, they are created to raise human awareness to protect cetaceans and marine life.

**Keywords:** Zoocriticism, Eco-animation, cetaceans, marine world, Ecocinema

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## Introduction

The complexity of socioeconomic and cultural dimensions of the global environmental crises has led to the retelling of many canonical texts with a new focus on the nonhuman elements and their points of view by setting aside the anthropocentric thrust in the narrations. A retelling of known stories from an ecocritical point of view draws attention to the “large-scale biodiversity loss” and “anthropogenic species extinction” (Von Mossner A.W., 2020, p. 19). The new ecological discourse reconstructs the agency of silent animal characters in many dominant art forms. Zoocentric perspectives, where nonhumans’ point of view is of utmost importance, serve as one of the burgeoning theoretical paradigms suitable for such new discourse. One of the aims of zoocriticism is “to take the nonhuman world as seriously as previous modes of criticism have taken the human realm of society and culture” (Love, 2003, p. 47) to promote their rights. Zoocentric texts present animals in actual forms and characteristics. Here, nonhumans are not represented as comic caricatures, symbols, or metaphors for various human purposes. “The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history” (Buell, 1995, p. 7).

Contextualising within the non-human centric veins of criticism, the paper analyses two eco-animations *Samson and Sally: The Song of the Whales* (1984) by Jannik Hastrup and *Dot and the Whale* (1986) by Yoram Jerzy Gross which are the retellings of Herman Melville’s canonical text *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale* (1851) through the paradigm of zoocriticism to showcase how these visual texts envision justice for cetaceans through animal advocacy within the boundary of eco-cinema. Both zoocriticism and ecocinema fall under the umbrella term of the ecocritical scholarship. They focus on issues like the representation of and justice for animals and humans’ relationship with the environment, among many more. “Cinema and ecocinema studies enable us to recognize ways of seeing the world other than through the narrow perspective of the anthropocentric gaze that situates individual human desires at the center of the moral universe” (Rust & Monani, 2013, p. 11). The selected eco-animations extend the purpose of ecocinema and zoocriticism to echo the concerns of justice for cetaceans, critiquing whale hunts. These graphic texts, through the media of zoocriticism and ecocinema or rather eco-animatic studies, show the importance of animal-centric texts by subverting the anthropocentric domination in some of the canonical texts. Animations often deliver thoughtful messages to the audience in a lighter tone. “Rather than light entertainment for children, animation now presents itself to the public as a mature visual genre that can address issues ranging from war and discrimination to technological innovation and environmental crisis” (Heise, U, 2014, p. 301). Eco-animations with nonhuman animated performers in the main centre, like *Samson and Sally* and *Dot and the Whale*, engage in significant discussions on ecology and the marine world.

*Samson and Sally* is a Danish animated film, whereas *Dot and the Whale* is an Australian animation. In these ecocritical adaptations, two whales, Samson and Tonga, along with their families, have been victims of human atrocities. They seek help from Moby Dick to seek justice. The selected animations highlight the threatened marine ecosystem resulting from anthropogenic interventions like the unchecked killing of cetaceans like whales. They advocate the peaceful co-existence of all beings in an ideal ecological balance. They seek help from Moby Dick to seek justice. The selected animations highlight the threatened marine ecosystem

resulting from anthropogenic interventions like the unchecked killing of cetaceans like whales. They advocate the peaceful co-existence of all beings in an ideal ecological balance. These animations are created in 80s, and both criticise whaling culture in two different regions with the same message in a transnational way.

Nature and wildlife constitute a significant part of human imagination. The unfathomable underwater world thrills mankind. Surprisingly enough, while “the ocean became a space for theorizing the materiality of histories, yet it rarely figured as a material in itself” (DeLoughrey, 2019, p. 33). In many cultural texts, oceans play a background to evoke human emotions. However, a few works of art have shown concern for the health and well-being of marine life. So, the issues such as overfishing, radioactivity, and plastic pollution mostly remain neglected. The ocean is more like a trope in literary-cultural productions than an entity or agency by its own rights: “The films, texts, and photography about the ocean . . . pose ocean life as either the vessel for heroic exploration and scientific control or a perfect specimen for aesthetic contemplation” (Alaimo, 2014, p. 193). Oceans are plundered for resources like minerals and their creatures to such an extent that it leads the total marine ecosystem to the verge of destabilisation. Moreover, human imagination has alienated sea creatures by mystifying them. They are mostly conceptualised as monsters or some mythological beings to satisfy mercantile needs, as in the case of the commodification of whales.

Whales have occupied a significant space in our culture because of their enormous size, similarity to humankind as mammals, and industrial values. Therefore, from mythologies to contemporary literary-visual culture, whales have representations like the Biblical Leviathan, the whale in Sindbad’s travel narratives, John Milton’s *The Paradise Lost*, and many more. The prevalent notion about whales is that they are vengeful, blood-thirsty creatures who pose significant dangers to humans. This belies the fact that whales are not predators of human beings at all. “Sperm whales are naturally timid and disposed to fly from the remotest appearances of danger” (Bennett, 1970, pp. 176–7). Another natural historian Thomas Beale has also confirmed the benign nature of sperm whales. He observes that a sperm whale is “remarkably timid, and is readily alarmed by the approach of a whaleboat” (Beale, 1839, p. 46). Their natural diet includes squids, fish, and other sea animals. However, the portrayals of monstrous whales in most maritime literature are driven by consumerism to accelerate the whaling industry.

Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* (1851) is perhaps one of the most famous works of fiction that portray human-animal conflict from the perspective of a whaler. It depicts a sperm whale Moby Dick that drowns the whaling ship Pequod which attempts to kill it. All the crew members except the narrator Ishmael die as a result. While the narrative provides a reasonably accurate representation of the whaling culture of the 19th century, questions may arise on the imposed anthropomorphisation of Moby Dick being a vengeful creature out there on a killing spree. The fiction gained immense popularity in the early 20th century through numerous adaptations and retellings in print and visual media across the globe, contributing a significant apathy against these magnificent animals. However, recent research on Environmental Humanities attempts to reassess this portrayal through an environmentalist reading of *Moby Dick*, where the main attention has been shifted to Moby himself and on the cruelty associated

with the whaling industry. The ecocritical thrust in the selected works, *Samson and Sally* and *Dot and the Whale* speaks against “unreasonable anthropocentric exploitation or endangerment” (Steinwand, 2011, p. 187) of whales.

### **The Whale and the Whaling Industry in *Moby Dick***

Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* is one of the foremost fictional texts that talks about the American whaling industry before the American Civil War. Melville was perhaps influenced by the story of the whaling ship *Essex* which was drowned by a sperm whale in 1820, causing the starvation and subsequent death of all the crew members (King, 2013). The image of *Moby Dick* is probably inspired by a huge albino sperm whale named *Mocha Dick*, first seen on the coast of Chilli in the Pacific Ocean near Mocha Island (King, 2013). *Mocha Dick* survived many encounters with whalers. At last, he was killed while trying to save a bereaved mother whale, who had just lost her cub to whalers’ attacks. Unlike *Moby Dick*, *Mocha Dick* was thus killed, and his body was used for the whale-oil industry.

The historical account of *Mocha Dick*, along with *Moby Dick*’s story, brings the attention of the environmentalist with stark criticism of the whaling industry and the mass murder of innumerable whales. Philip Hoare and Graham Huggan have remarked:

“Whales have literally been torn apart to create oil for lighting, soap, and margarine; baleen and bone for various decorative and sartorial purposes. For a time, the trade in whales for oil would match the trade in humans for sugar as the commercial basis for the British Empire” (Hoare, 2008, p. 277, Huggan, 2018, p. vii).

Whales provided the sources of oil which laid the foundation of the European civilisation and colonies. Especially desired was the “pure, limpid, odiferous” sperm whale oil which was the “most precious of all his oily vintages” (Melville, 1851, p. 286). Ishmael comments, “You must go to New Bedford to see a brilliant wedding; for, they say, they have reservoirs of oil in every house, and every night recklessly burn their lengths in spermaceti candles” (Melville, 1851, p. 38). These depictions from *Moby Dick* show the importance of the whaling industry in 19th-century America. So, the novel is not only about the anthropocentric reading of Captain Ahab’s ego in pursuing a “dumb brute” (Melville, 1851, p. 167), but it is more about the capitalist exploitation of whales.

Apart from the industrial value, the whale *Moby Dick* is also taken as an evil force of nature. Captain Ahab describes *Moby*, “I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate” (Melville, 1851, p. 133). In *Moby Dick*, the sailors conceptualise: “The universal cannibalism of the sea; all whose creatures prey upon each other, carrying on eternal war since the world began” (Melville, 1851, p. 215). Ishmael explains the reason behind his sea venture “chief among these motives was the overwhelming idea of the great whale himself. Such a portentous and mysterious monster roused all my curiosity” (Melville, 1851, p. 6). However, the main aim of racing against the whale race was of commercial significance.

*Moby Dick* provides two types of reading, one where the whale is associated with the Biblical allegories and another that is based on utilitarian worth, as P. Armstrong aptly explains:

“In the mid-nineteenth century, two traditions, one long standing and one more recent, offered competing views of the whale. The first was the Judeo-Christian allegorical tradition that saw “leviathan” as a symbol of either God’s power (as in the biblical parable of Jonah) or of Satan’s (a comparison famously used by Milton in *Paradise Lost*).<sup>5</sup> A second way of processing cetaceans emerged with the whaling industry which, like its present-day descendent, treated the whale as a “marine resource,” a kind of ocean-going cash cow whose harvest was complicated only by the animal’s inconvenient size, occasional aggression, and increasing inaccessibility” (Armstrong, 2004, p. 23).

Melville’s occasional romanticisation of the whale race also betrays the general attitudes of humankind to nature as a perpetual resource: “We account the whale immortal in his species, however perishable in his individuality. He swam the seas before the continents broke. water; he once swam over the site of the Tuileries, and Windsor Castle, and the Kremlin” (Melville, 1851, p. 462). At another instance, he conceptualises whale species as evil incarnate: “the mightiest animated mass that has survived the flood; most monstrous and most mountainous!” (Melville, 1851, p. 62). “The novel thus mythologizes the whale in order to deny the possibility of its extinction, in a manner diametrically opposed to the aims of late-twentieth century environmentalism, which mythologized the whale to make it the symbol of vulnerable biodiversity” (Armstrong, 2004, p. 25).

Melville also glorifies the whaling industry: “I know a man that, in his lifetime, has taken three hundred and fifty whales. I account that man more honourable than that great captain of antiquity who boasted of taking as many walled towns” (Melville, 1851, p. 218). Due to excessive whaling, many whale species almost faced extinction, and many are still considered endangered (<https://blogs.cornell.edu/info2040/2015/12/02/over-exploitation-of-the-whale-population/>). According to the International Whaling Commission (IWC), many species, including the North Pacific right whale, still have not recovered from excessive whaling and are on the brink of extinction (<https://blogs.cornell.edu/info2040/2015/12/02/over-exploitation-of-the-whale-population/>). Continued whaling can be a great threat to the whale population (<https://blogs.cornell.edu/info2040/2015/12/02/over-exploitation-of-the-whale-population/>). Therefore, Melville’s endowed magnificence to the whaling industry of his time as brave men going on hazardous expeditions to encounter the great leviathan has been criticised sternly. “At a time when the health of the world’s oceans and their inhabitants is indeed of increasing global concern and when first-time readers of *Moby-Dick* can see very little “honor and glory” in the enterprise of whaling” (Schultz, 2000, p. 97) makes the retelling of the narrative through an ecocritical lens relevant.

Unlike many whaling texts, Melville occasionally expresses his sympathy for the whales as well: “cetaceans were mostly exploited for their flesh, a source of food for humans, and for their bones, used in the manufacture of “canes,” “umbrella-stocks,” “handles for riding whips” (Melville, 1851, p. 281). Lawrence Buell remarks:

“Consider the case of Herman Melville. His sensitivity to physical environment was acute, even when one might least expect it . . . *Moby-Dick* comes closer than any other novel of its day to making a nonhuman creature a plausible major character and to



developing the theme of human ferocity against animal nature. Yet Melville's interest in whales was subordinate to his interest in whaling, and his interest in the material reality of both was constrained by his preoccupation with their social and cosmic symbolism" (Buell, 1995, p. 4,5).

Contemporary animations extend sympathy toward animals, as shown by the selected ones in the paper. Critics like Alison Baird who retells the story of Moby Dick in *White as the Waves: A Novel of Moby Dick*, observes:

"In Melville's day it was still possible to write of a conflict in which Man stood helpless against the vast, terrifying, enigmatic power of Nature. In this era of holes in the ozone layer; devastated rainforests and ravaged fish stocks—an era in which some whale species still have not fully recovered from the wholesale slaughter of previous centuries—humanity can no longer comfortably cast itself as the victim. We have ourselves become the vast and implacable force before which nothing can stand. And were Herman Melville living in our day, perhaps -- who can tell? -- he might have chosen to write his great epic from a rather different point of view" (Baird, 1999, pp. 275-276).

### **Animals in Animations**

Eco-animations can convey ecological messages in a simplistic narrative to a larger audience including children. There was a proliferation of such animations in 1990's with the aim of educating children and young adults to protect the planet.

Animals also have allegorical representations in animations where we find talking animals or animals behaving like humans.

"Animation has always used animal characters to avoid, comment on, or subvert the human social, political and religious taboo which would otherwise be self-evident in the depiction of humankind. For the most part, ironically, this has served to make 'the animal' invisible, essentially promoting meaning and affect through the 'phenomena' of animated characters and forms" (Wells, 2009, p. 1430).

Nonetheless, animal characters in animations have undergone an evolution in terms of representation, theme, and technique. They are created with special effects. Full-length movies are also made on animal characters. Sometimes, they are not completely animals in appearance but a combination of both humans and animals that can be called zoomorphic characters. Celebrated "animated animals" (Stephens B, 2014, p. 199) such as Mickey Mouse, Bambi, Nemo, Uncle Scrooge, Kovu, Simba, Winnie-the Pooh, Ninja Turtle, and so on have been the focal point of scholarly discussions. Whereas in some animations, animals betray the prevalent notion in human civilisation, like ideas about civilised and uncivilised (Wells, 2008), some animal characters draw sufficient attention to the anthropogenic exploitation of the animal world, like Disney's Dumbo and Bambi.

Samson and Sally and Dot and the Whale may be included as the earliest examples of eco-animation where “nonhumans appear not as the agents of social satire or of allegory but as characters in their own life stories” (Copeland, 1998, p. 277). Moreover, they use simulated animal characters in the course of the action. Thus, real animals are not forced to perform any strenuous tasks. These animated movies attempt to go beyond Peter Singer’s path-breaking term “speciesism,” which is “a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one’s own species and against those of members of other species” (Singer, 1975, p. 7). Singer equates speciesism with racism and sexism and contends that this attitude is responsible for exploiting or abusing other species because of their difference from the human species. In dominant literary texts, animated characters are marginalised, “interpreted as metaphor or symbol meant to illuminate something human” (Copeland, 1998, p. 87). However, the selected zoocentric cultural texts “involves the method of analysing narratives from the perspective of a construed protagonist or animal agents and their behavioural and emotional repertoire” (Barcz, 2017, p. 92). In the case of such zoocentric animations, animals often enjoy a free-spirited representation with autonomy which cannot be possible in realist media (Stewart & Clark, 2011). However, while representing animals as talking or behaving like humans, these animations are subjected to anthropomorphic representations. John Simons has described the basic tenet of anthropomorphism:

“To portray non-humans as if they were humans is to bring them into a discursive realm in which it is possible to give the illusion that their experience is being reproduced. This is achieved by the device of providing them with human characteristics and even human form, and by this means it becomes possible to speak of them as if they were human” (Simons, 2002, p. 116).

Nevertheless, animations use human-like animals to draw audiences’ attention toward the condition of animals. “Children’s media [like animation] often makes use of anthropomorphism in order to create narratives, landscapes, and characters that are easy to relate to. This allows audiences to more readily identify with the text’s overarching themes” (Caraway & Caraway, 2020, p. 3). However, anthropomorphism raises concern as well because it endows all human characteristics onto the animals and thus denies the differences of all species. It is homogenizing where the very existence and differences of non-humans are erased (Barc 2015). Jacques Derrida’s “The Animal That Therefore I Am” objects to the generalisation of all non-human species as animal: “Appellation that men have instituted, a name they have given themselves the right and authority to give to the living other” (23). The paper’s selected animations are exceptions as they portray the actual animals that are whales in all their characteristics. Here we “dissociate ourselves and enter an animal world”, and “we can imagine and we can speculate” (Simons, 2002, p. 7).

### **Victimisation of Whales in *Samson and Sally***

*Samson and Sally: Song of a Whale* is an eco-cinematographic retelling of *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville. This is an adaptation of Bent Haller’s novel *The Song of the Whales*. The adaptation has been made in the context of a threatened ocean world of the Anthropocene, where numerous marine creatures, including cetaceans, are facing extinction because of human intervention. The International Whaling Commission has observed:

“Sperm whales face a number of threats today, including entanglement in fishing gear, ingestion of fishing gear, and marine debris and ship strikes. The latter is thought to be one of the main drivers of the sperm whale population decline in the Mediterranean and a major threat to the survival of sperm whales in the Canary islands” (<https://iwc.int/about-whales/whale-species/sperm-whale>).

*Samson and Sally* visually portray all these factors that endanger the existence of Sperm whales in particular. This bildungsroman, which depicts the journey of a young whale, can be called a zoocentric text as here “nonhumans appear not as the agents of social satire or of allegory but as characters in their own life stories” (Copeland, 1994, p. 277). What is more interesting here is to note the absence of human characters. Human deeds like changing the geology of oceans are pointed out without any specific human character. Unlike some other animated films, this film depicts the grim realities in the natural world, like constant threats by humankind and “human accountability to the environment is part of the text’s ethical orientation” (Buell, 1995, p. 7).

This animation explicitly engages with *Moby Dick* with the environmentalist intentions of criticising the whaling industry of contemporary Denmark. This movie is a story of a young male sperm whale Samson in the Arctic Ocean and his search for Moby Dick, a messiah who can save the whales from humans. The animation presents a poignant depiction of Captain Ahab and his team’s cruel attack on Moby Dick in flashback mode. Interestingly, here the entire attack has been viewed from the whale-centric perspective. The villainy in Ahab’s face is clear, and the helplessness of the whale has been brought out. The bruised whale has no option but to drown the whaling ship with his fin. The movie can be analysed through the paradigm of zoocriticism, which focuses on animal perspectives in any discourse (Barcz). It foregrounds animals’ experiences and their feelings towards humankind. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin (2010), while discussing zoocriticism, include those texts that “grant autonomy to the nonhuman animal” (2) and talks about the “reflection on the methods of how such autonomy is achieved” (3).

“While the Enlightenment trajectory of humanist essentialism demanded the repression of the animal and animalistic in all its latent and recrudescing forms, it is not until our own century, in the urgent contexts of eco-catastrophe and the extinction of many non-human species, that a radical re-drawing of this foundational relationship has occurred” (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010, p.134).

The shift of agency from humans to animals often increases the possibility of ethical treatment of animals as it is visible in case of the selected animation, where the audience empathise with Samson and Sally although they are anthropomorphised.

The animation portrays another sperm whale, Sally, an orphan, as whalers have killed her entire clan. Samson’s mother adopts her. The movie has portrayed whales not as vicious, revengeful beasts as it has been portrayed in *Moby Dick* but as benign creatures capable of love and compassion not only towards the members of their species but also on an inter-species level. Samson’s friendship with a seagull and his rescue of a polar bear can be cited as examples. However, these majestic animals are routinely hunted down by humans with harpoons and “steel beasts” (whaling ships), destroying the entire ecosystem. This is reflected in the behaviours of Samson’s mother, who warns her young child as she keeps saying: “Man does everything in his power to kill us” (Hastrup, 1984). The ecological balance and inter-



species dependence are lost when whalers invade with their ships and kill a large pod along with Samson's mother. However, the cubs Samson and Sally escaped the massacre with a long-lasting memory of human brutality. The death of his mother leads Samson to search for Moby Dick, who enjoys a mythical stature among the whale community. In his journey to search for the legendary Moby Dick, he encounters different anthropogenic environmental hazards such as oil spills from refineries, toxicity from nuclear and chemical wastes, and deaths of birds and marine species that show the destruction of the ocean world. Samson finds Moby after much struggle. However, the Moby he encounters is a feeble old whale, not a monster as Melville has depicted him. Moby advises Samson to return to his clan as there is no solution to escape human depravity. Moby Dick foretells, "they (humans) are not evil. They are stupid. One day they will see that if they kill everything in the sea, they will kill themselves, too" (Hastrup, 1984). The movie ends with a reunion of Samson and Sally, the birth of their cub, and Samson protecting their child from killer whales. The movie does not give any specific conclusion, as there is no end to human-animal conflicts and the use of non-humans for commercial purposes. However, this animated movie teaches children the importance of ecological conservation in the present environmental crisis.

### **Ecofeminism in *Dot and the Whale***

The character of the little girl Dot in the movie *Dot and the Whale* appears in other animated series with her name, as in *Dot and the Kangaroo* (1977). This animation, as in *Samson and Sally*, directly references *Moby Dick*. Dot, a young girl, reads the novel and feels sad for the whale Moby Dick, who disappears after the combat with Captain Ahab. After learning about the great Moby, Dot sets out to find him to save a beached whale Tonga. While playing with her dolphin Nelson, Dot hears the cry of Tonga, who has been stranded on a beach. This movie is different from *Samson and Sally* by virtue of its young adult environmental narration. Here there is active participation from Dot and her young friends to send Tonga to her ocean home. This movie goes against anthropocentrism or human exceptionalism as it depicts animals are intelligent and skillful in their survival struggles. This movie shows human and animal co-existence as the whale is saved by the teenagers and some environmentally conscious adults. Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies observes:

"We are in need for a new cosmology and a new anthropology which recognizes that life in nature including human beings is maintained by means of co-operation, and mutual care and love . . . [and] to create a holistic all-life embracing cosmology and anthropology" (Shiva & Mies, 2014; *Ecofeminism* 6).

On the one hand, Tonga has to undergo human cruelty that kills her pod and displaces her; on the other, it is by human initiative that she is saved.

The animation shows the interaction between Dot and other animals as she can understand their language. The dolphin Nelson teaches her different tricks to stay underwater. Dot becomes angry to see two local boys throwing sand particles at the beached whale Tonga. These boys later become friendly with Tonga and take the initiative to send her back to the ocean. Tonga, however, has lost her spirit to live. Whalers have murdered her family. There is

no one left to whom she can return. The background song sets the pathos in her pitiable narration about the human cruelty she and her family have faced.

Meanwhile, a fishing agency, “Fish and Chips” attempts to kidnap Tonga from the beach where she is stranded. This shows the greed of some humans who consider the endangered cetaceans only as resources to consume. However, young adults like Dot and her friends prevent this poaching. Dot meets Moby Dick after her hazardous journey to the Antarctic sea world. She is shocked to see the heap of plastic and other garbage in the ocean, and she is also trapped in a fishing net and gets choked. These depict how humans damage the marine world. Dot is cured by an old tortoise doctor. Her encounter with ghosts in a wrecked ship serves as a reference point to the story of the ship wreck and the subsequent death of sailors because of their encounter with Mocha Dick, the story that inspired *Moby Dick*. However, after lot of struggle, Dot finally meets Moby Dick, who She believes can convince Tonga to revive her energy to live.

Moby Dick is an old wise whale who hugely influences marine animals. To her utter surprise, Moby tells Dot not to interfere in Tonga’s decision to die, as humans have not left any place for animals to survive. If Tonga agrees to return to the sea, she will probably be another victim of the whalers, just like her family. Moby Dick utters, “why can’t humans leave us alone?” (Gross, 1986). This poses an existential question for all species with equal rights, like humans to live freely. Human intervention has caused misery to the animals and the human world because human existence is dependent on the maintenance of the ecological balance. The animated movie uses Moby Dick as a prophetic figure who can retrospect on human actions and the tragedy that awaits humans if they rupture the natural balance.

Tonga is ultimately touched by the children’s attempts to save her that revitalises her spirit to sustain her life. Dot and her friends manages a transport to move her to the ocean by fundraising. Big corporate organisations come forward to help them but only in exchange of a good sum as “we (they) are not animal welfare corporation” (Gross, 1986). The profit-driven organisations do not consider to take any initiative for environment and non-human others. The narrative, however, ends with a positive note as Tonga is shifted to her ocean home, and her health improves. Now she is a new spirited whale who has gained faith in humanity.

The animation may be analysed by the paradigm of ecofeminism as it points out the active role that women can play in the preservation of ecological sanctity and conservation of wildlife, which is one of the major postulates of the theory of ecofeminism. Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein define ecofeminism as a term “to describe both the diverse range of women’s efforts to save the Earth and the transformations of feminism in the West that have resulted from the new view of women and nature” (1990, p. ix). Their observations seem appropriate because women from the Eastern and Western parts of the world have participated in different environmental movements across time and space. At the very outset of the animation, Dot is seen trying to save Tonga from the attacks of a few boys. She, thus, takes an ecofeminist stance and “promotes affirmative and nonviolent solutions to the problems intrinsic to the hierarchical worldview sanctioned by patriarchy and capitalism” (Paparcone, 2020, p.215). However, ecofeminism also includes the role of men in saving the environment within its purview, as ecological conservation cannot be done without active participation from men as well. In the select animation also, Dot is helped by the boys of her age group who

initially showed antagonism towards Tonga. In the end, Dot and her group stop the capitalist aggression of the enterprises that wanted to kill the whale.

The movie questions human exceptionalism with the message that animals, too, have their families and individuality as it shows different characteristics of different species. Humans, if they want, can be the companion of animals as Dot becomes for Tonga and Nelson. The animation is appealing because of its soundtrack. It ends with a message about the indiscriminate whaling practice that leads to the extinction of many whale species.

### **The Importance of Animations in Ecological Preservation**

*Samson and Sally* and *Dot and the Whale*, the retellings of *Moby Dick* go beyond the prevalent notion of Speciesism that points out the unjust treatment of living beings based on their species: “Speciesism is the unjustified disadvantageous consideration or treatment of those who are not classified as belonging to one or more of a particular species” (Horta, 2010, p. 247). The select animations prove that animals may not serve the purpose of metaphors or stimulus for human attempts to rebuild their subjectivity, but “the ways in which animals appear in texts, are represented and figured, in and for themselves and not as displaced metaphors for the human” (Simons, 2002, pp. 5-6). Both animated films show “a sense of sacred nature which can help mobilize a general ecological mindset beyond the reasonable and self-interested grounds of long-term global survival” (Spivak, 1996, p. 199). *Moby Dick*, as a reverend figure, plays the role of sacralising nature beyond human greed and consumerist mentality. These animated movies hope for a planet without any hierarchy as environmental philosopher and an ecofeminist Val Plumwood dreams of:

“where there is no hierarchy, among humans or between humans and animals, where people care for one another, and for nature [. . .] where the power of technology and of military and economic force does not rule the earth” (1993, p. 7).

Animations like these probably influenced people to take conservation seriously. In many countries, Commercial whaling was banned in 1980:

“In the last eight years, the situation has changed drastically. In 1982, the IWC adopted a moratorium on commercial whaling, which came into effect in 1987. In 1983, the last year with "normal" activity, the quota was 1690 whales. Today, only a few whales are taken for scientific programs” (Ris M, 1993, p. 158).

Animations about whales also encourage interspecies bonding by providing knowledge about the cetaceans. Countries now invest in projects such as whale safari, building networks of whale friends, who act as protectors of whales:

“Joining whale friends and whalers for a vivid dialogue is an important part of the project. For example, in the case of Norway, it is seen local people start to participate in whale watching tourism to know exciting details about whales. Thus, the ecological importance of whales is acknowledged there gradually” (Ris M, 1993, p. 162).

In this way, human perspective toward cetaceans is changing with a new hope of ecological conservation through a collective responsibility.

Animations are very popular among children. Therefore, important environmental messages can be delivered to them through animated movies. Although animations are often criticised for their anthropomorphism, which can be held as a limitation of such a kind of approach as they present anthropomorphised speaking animals, they deploy these techniques to increase empathy towards animals. “In children’s media, anthropomorphism is commonly used to engender a sense of sympathy with animal characters” (Caraway & Caraway, 2020, p. 6). They do it to foster a “combination of serious engagement with a playful style” (Heise, 2014, p. 301). They also enhance a ‘feel good effect’ that “is a common theme in current eco-animation studies” (Monani, 2016, p. 3). The anthropomorphism in those animated films may be called “Anthropomorphism without an anthropocentric bias” (Bliss, 2017, p. 3). These representations may be termed “quasi-anthropomorphic or natural ‘performances’ in animal representation” (Wells, 2009, p. 1435), where animals are treated with empathy (Wells, 2009, p. 1435). Anthropomorphism, in a way, also broadens the scope of active animal participation in the narration. The human concepts of Enlightenment rationality, sensibility, and speech that are believed to be human possessions are also problematic. Therefore, we should not deny the agency of animals because they do not possess these features. So, we may conclude that “allegation of anthropomorphism itself derives from an anthropocentric and ethnocentric understanding about what agency can be” (Amerstrong, 2005, p.95). Interestingly, in the selected animations, animals behave like animals, with one exception they can talk. Therefore, we may conclude that *Samson and Sally* and *Dot and the Whale* have preserved all other animalistic behaviours and looks except the speech required to convey the animals’ point of view in the ecocritical retellings of *Moby Dick*.

## Conclusion

Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* is a well-researched fiction which have had significant influence on readers over generations. “Melville’s book should not only be treated as a cultural artefact heavily steeped in Western oral and literary traditions, but also as one that continues to be appropriated in creative global arenas today” (Pfeiler, 2013, p. 81). The book has been interpreted from various discursive angles that mostly place human concerns to the forefront. Hence, the analysis of the selected animated movies, with their zoocentric readings can be held as new additions to the global ecocritical scholarships. It is also interesting to note that out of the two selected movies, one is from Denmark and another is from Australia. Both of them deal with the retelling of *Moby Dick* from the point of view of whales, their victimisation, and pollution in the marine world. Their significance lies in the fact that they throw light in the trajectory of whaling industry in the 90’s in a transnational scale, and generate ecological sensibility to protect our planet. These eco-animations engage in environmental activism to promote the importance of conservation as well, going beyond the nature/culture binary that further strengthens concepts like civilised/uncivilised, male/female, East/West, and the like.

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