

HUMAN/NON-HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS IN HILDA: AN ECOCRITICAL READING

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Abstract:

The current research offers a textual analysis on the animation series, Hilda, through an eco-critical lens. Hilda is a children's animated series by Luke Pearson which aired on Netflix in 2018. The first two seasons are chosen for the purpose of this research. Hilda tells the story of a young girl, who moves from the wilderness to the city of Trolberg with her mother Johanna. The series focuses on the way Hilda adapts to moving from the wilderness to the city. The series raises concerns about natural spaces, humans/non-humans and anthropocentrism. The current research dissects narrative events, characters and settings of Hilda to explore its perspective on environmental concerns. The focus is on human/non-human relationships and how space is navigated. As the series is heavily inspired by Scandinavian folklore, which is rooted in Paganism, this research concludes that the series' perspective on human/non-human relationships is rooted in the Pagan value that everything has a spirit and all is connected in a non-hierarchical way. In addition, the series emphasizes that regardless of how many barriers human tries to create between humans and non-human species, all species and spirits live and are able to traverse all spaces, again reinstating the connectedness of all living and non-living things.

Keywords: Eco-criticism, Eco-toon, Hilda, Animation, Paganism, Textual Analysis.

1. Introduction

Environmental cartoons, also known as eco-toons or enviro-toons have a history that dates as far back as Bambi (1942). Though films such as Bambi and Wall-E have been written about extensively in relation to their contribution to environmental studies, eco-

critical readings of cultural products are vital to understand the world we live in and how the media shapes our understanding of it.

The current research is concerned with the medium of animation and its depiction of nature, for this reason it focuses solely on the animated series of Hilda. Hilda is a cartoon series aimed at children aged 7+. The series is based on a graphic novel series, also called Hilda. It is an animated series created by Luke Pearson and directed by Andy Coyle, the first season aired in October 2018 and the second season aired in December 2020. Each episode runs between 24-32 minutes.

Hilda is a series that lends itself to an eco-critical reading because it exemplifies ecological concerns such as humans understanding and treatment of nature and anthropocentrism. The series raises questions about the relationship between humans and landscapes, flora and fauna, which David Abram has called the “more than human” world. This research provides a textual analysis of the first two seasons and the way in which they reflect eco critical ideas via various narrative and mise-en-scene elements such as setting, color and props. Whenever necessary, a comparison is drawn between Hilda and other cartoons such as Bambi and Princess Kaguya.

The current textual analysis of Hilda explores the following questions: How the relationship between human and non-human characters are constructed in regard to potential conflicts and their power struggle? And what environmental perspectives does this relationship represent? And How do humans and non-humans navigate space? The analysis focuses on the mise-en-scene elements, starting with setting. Using examples from both seasons, the gradual breakdown of the dichotomy between the city and the wilderness is explored. This is followed by highlighting how the neutral color palettes used in all of the settings emphasis the cohesion and unity between all places, beings and things.

2. Eco-Criticism and the Envirottoon

Eco-criticism is defined as “a range of critical approaches that explore the representation in literature (and other cultural forms) of the relationship between the human and non-human, from the perspective of anxieties around humanity’s destructive impact on the biosphere” (Marland, 2013, p. 846). Ecocriticism emerged in the eighties, as a way to analyze “the depiction of nature in literature. An eco-critical viewpoint is a subfield of environmental communication that deals with representations of “symbolic and material rhetoric” (Endres, 2020, p. 314), which reconstructs the relationship between humans and the environment.” (Vécsey, 2022; Pike, 2010).

Cheryl Glotfelty further explains that “ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artefacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman.” (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xvi)

Glotfelty explains the importance of eco-criticism by highlighting that the environment has been overlooked as an area of research in culture:

“If your knowledge of the outside world were limited to what you could infer from major publications of the literary profession, you would quickly discern that race, class, and gender were the hot topics of the late twentieth century, but you would never suspect that the earth’s life support systems were under stress.” (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xvi).

Peter Barry has also expressed that Ecocriticism is less explored in comparison to other academic disciplines, one that “is still on the academic margins...the movement still does not have a widely known set of assumptions, doctrines or procedures.” (Marland, 2013, p. 846). Ecocriticism underlines perspectives on our global crisis within cultural forms.

Ecocriticism is increasingly being applied to animations. Through history, films such as Bambi, Wall-E, The Lion King and Finding Nemo have become “enviro-toons”. Enviro-toons are "animated short or feature films that address environmental concerns" (Murray & Heumann, 2007, p. 2). The term 'enviro-toon' was coined by cultural critic Jaime Weinman who sorts animation into two simple categories. Some cartoons are useful for depicting the complexity of ecological issues. Others represent "a terrifying type of kiddie show" (Weinman, 2004, cited in Murray & Heumann, 2007, p. 2). Weinman claims that enviro-toons "never preach" and "not only humanize nature but comment on abuse of nature and the natural, especially by humans" (ibid.)

The studies show that there are numerous ways to define the term “connection to nature”. The study of “How green is Children’s TV” (Oates, 2013) provided quantitative data about how much “waste behavior “is in Children’s TV, with the argument that the more children see “recycle, reuse” behavior, the more they will imitate it. The study of WALL-E involved how environmental concepts could be formed after watching the film (Konstantinos Korfiatis, 2020). Arran Stibbe (2008) on the other hand, analyzed Hayao Miyazaki’s film, My Neighbour Totoro and how it impacts environmental awareness. Stibbe concluded that the way in which animation involves lines and colors and cinematography can create the experience of the human observer. Stibbe explains that observing is the initial step towards awareness and action (p. 13).

Hilda’s perspective on the environment exemplifies a line of thought within Ecocriticism that Pippa Marland defines as “Deep Ecology. Marland explains that deep ecology “challenges anthropocentrism...it asserts that if we address our hierarchical attitudes towards the natural world and identify ourselves within a broader circle of living things, then our societal problems may also find resolution.” (Marland, 2013, p. 850)

3. Analysis

Hilda is an animated series that focuses on a young girl who lives with her mother. Hilda grows up in the wilderness, where she develops her skills in connecting to different mythical life forms, from Woffs, to elves and trolls. The series opens with Hilda moving

from wilderness to the city. As Hilda adapts, the strong contrast between the wilderness, the city and all the life forms that inhabit these spaces gradually disintegrates. Every episode presents a challenge that usually involves humans and non-humans having to adapt to each other. This textual analysis focuses on Season 1 and 2, which were accessed on Netflix from November 2022 to May 2023.

This analysis explores the setting, in terms of the contrast between the city and the wilderness and how the characters learn how to respect both kinds of space. In addition, elements of mise-en-scene such as Color palette, decor and props are looked at to highlight the way in which the series creates cohesion between characters and their environment.

3-1 The wilderness will always be my home

The way in which Hilda expresses environmental concerns is through its depiction of setting and the way in which characters navigate space. The initial boundary is that between the city and the wilderness and how Hilda (and the more minor characters) interacts between the two. The series opens with this theme with the image of a crow flying above the city into the sparse wilderness. We then see Hilda and her Twig wondering through the land perfectly in sync with the weather and the different life forms and time. From the beginning we are introduced to a central theme: how Hilda navigates and negotiates her way through the wilderness and the city.

The conflicts between the wilderness and the city either involve conflicts within systems, such as elections and evictions or Hilda following her intuition and discovering new life forms that can sometimes be threatening. The curiosity and spontaneous encounters is counterbalanced with rules, forms and permissions between life forms, by episode 2, Hilda's elf friend Alpha gets a passport just to move to Trolberg. Her first challenge is keeping the peace with an ancient troll and with the elf community who are trying to evict her and her mother from the land, due to their new prime minister's promise. Hilda has to learn how to live in peace with the elves.

By the time she achieves this, however, her mother already decides to move to the nearby city, Trolberg; a city that is walled for the purpose of keeping the trolls out. From the second episode onwards, we realize that Hilda herself isn't used to rules, as she is shocked even by the school bell. Episode 2, "The Midnight Giant" elaborates on history and evolution of life forms. The land was once populated by giants until people appeared and build towns. The conflict and destruction eventually forced the giants into space.

In episode 4, the Sparrow Scouts, rules about how to respect and connect to nature are mapped out for students, with assignments and prizes. Hilda and her friends, Frida and David are given the task to create a garden just outside the walls of Trolberg (Figure 1). They are eager to cultivate their garden, aiming to get new Sparrow Scout badges. They discover that their garden patch is inhabited by "vittra", which are humanoid root vegetables. Figure 1: Hilda, Season 1, Episode 4 "The Sparrow Scouts" Some of the vittra destroy their garden to defend themselves, while others were taken to the Trolberg Mulching center. In order to really respect the land, they return all the vittra back to their land, ending up with nothing to show for their gardening project.



Figure 1: Hilda, Season 1, Episode 4 "The Sparrow Scouts".

Some of the vittra destroy their garden to defend themselves, while others were taken to the Trolberg Mulching center. In order to really respect the land, they return all the vittra back to their land, ending up with nothing to show for their gardening project.

They restore the vittra's lives, but ultimately fail their Sparrow Scout assignment. They teach themselves a bittersweet lesson about doing what's best for the greater good over achieving a personal goal. This episode highlights anthropocentrism because it puts the needs of the environment before the needs of humans and what they want to achieve in society. The main ideological ideas are introduced through, historical figures like Vikings, magical creatures and weather spirits. From season 2, Hilda faces more complex challenges, such as trying to prevent a ghost ship full of radioactive pirates from haunting Trolberg in episode 2. These challenges are more concerned with how all characters mature both as people but also in their connection to nature and non-humans.

The wilderness and the city are not displayed hierarchically; they are entwined with each other. The series does not reflect that humans are the sole nurturers of the environment, rather that they are in co-creation with nature and all its life forms. Hilda takes us through history, conflicts between life forms, e.g. humans and giants haunt the present with challenges that new generations have to deal with. Nature is not pure and untouched, as the episodes progress they reveal the towns and bureaucracies of mini civilizations. Though Trolberg and the wilderness seem cut off from each other, all life forms are connected and riddled with useless paperwork, rules and unpredictable behavior which constantly test the characters. Underground live vittras, in hidden tunnels exist radioactive rats.

Hilda's character develops as she encounters her surroundings, which is full of real and magical things, beings and places. These encounters reflect power struggles between life forms. To interpret the setting, we interpret elements of mise-en-scene. Mise-en-scene refers to the arrangement of everything in a frame. This includes colors, silhouettes, props, costumes, colors, lighting and scale. John Gibbs defined mise-en-scene in cinema as "an interaction of elements". According to Gibbs these elements include color, lighting, decor, action and performance and frame (Gibbs, 2002). Themes

are also analyzed in relation to ecological messages and how they contrast from previous styles of animation.

Nearing the end of Season 1, Woodman says to Hilda "You've gone city" to which she responds "The wilderness will always be my home". The dichotomy between the city and the wilderness disintegrates in season one, whereas season 2 concentrates more on how life forms from all time periods exist in all spaces beyond anyone's control.

In Hilda, warm and cool color palettes are used. The city and all interiors use reds while the wilderness uses a cooler palette of pale orange, yellow, beige and brown (Figures 1 and 2). Night time uses blues and purples (Figure 3). And only neutral greens are used, keeping with the neutral color palettes.



Figure 2: Hilda. Season 1. Episode 12 "The Nisse"



Figure 3: Hilda, Season 1, Episode 2 "The Midnight Giant"

The colors not only create cohesion for the world of the series, they also reflect that everything is connected. The series uses earth tones that do contain some greens, browns and greys. The earth tones are contrasted by a cooler palette of blues and purples that occur at night. Hilda's iconic blue hair is what keeps her at the center of the story. Hilda's blue hair is complimentary to all the others. At times, especially at night we see Hilda's hair blend in with background colors (Figure 3), other times, we see parts of her surroundings (especially the rooftops of Trolberg) match her hair color. but her hair maintains her status as protagonist and also can be used to guide our eyes within the frame.

Hilda's other defining feature are her big red boots, she is the only character to have them, keeping her as the protagonist and the explorer. We notice that the colors of the setting all match Hilda and the other characters. As Daniel Ang notes (Figure 4), if you were to erase the lines of a character, you'll find that they merge with the background (Ang, 2023).

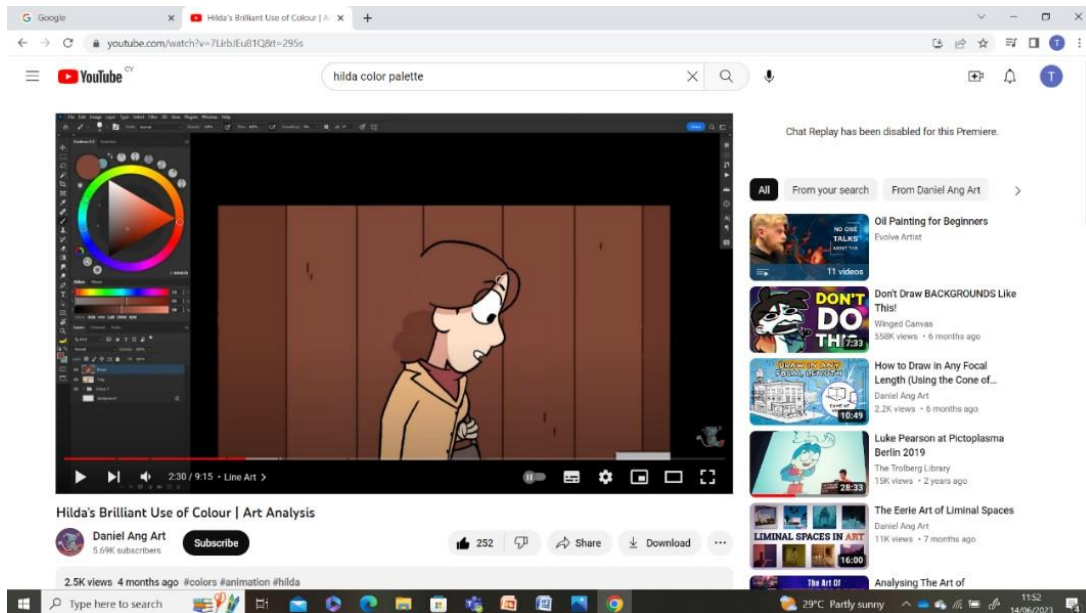


Figure 4: Daniel Ang, Hilda's Brilliant Use of Colour.

The consistent color palette means that when new colors are introduced, there is a sense of newness in the narrative also. For example, the librarian's purple hair is our introduction to the theme of witchcraft (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Hilda, Season 1, Episode 3 "The Witch"

In addition, neon red and green introduce us to the rat king and the nightmare spirits that dwell in the city, connoting pollution and toxicity. Envirotoons also express their messages about the environment through their art style. Envirotoons such as Bambi (Figure 6) and Princess Kaguya (Figure 7) employ a watercolor and painterly technique.



Figure 6: Bambi (1942)

Tyrus Wong's background art for Bambi is reminiscent of Chinese scroll paintings whereas Princess Kaguya is based on the Sumi-e technique. Sumi-e, (Crowley, 2002) is based on Taoism "which blends precise concepts of cosmology, human destiny and the relationship between man and the universe" (Signoritti, 2021).



Figure 7: Princess Kaguya (2013)

The simple, digitally drawn and block colors used in Hilda greatly contrasts from these styles. So how can the drawing and coloring style of Hilda reflect eco-critical concerns? As previously mentioned, the similar color palettes and line work employed throughout reflects the interconnectedness of all beings, places and times. Any differentiation from this only introduces us to something new. For example, the translucent geometric shapes used in “The Deerfox” (Figure 8) are the only time we see such imagery; this is because it belongs to a different dimension.



Figure 8: Hilda, Season 2, Episode 9, "The Deerfox"

Depictions of nature in animation often link to older philosophies. For example, Hayao Miyazaki's *Princess Kaguya* draws from the story “The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter” in which a baby girl is found by a farmer in a bamboo stalk. The girl grows into a beautiful woman who is unwilling to marry. *Princess Kaguya* (meaning “The Shining Princess”) is guarded by the emperor once she announces that she will soon move back to the moon where she is from (MET, n.d.). *Princess Kaguya* is literally born from nature. Isao Takahata, director of *Princess Kaguya* explains that “I don't think it's any particular interest in nature, but the fact that she grew up surrounded by nature is very significant, and really that's what we have – the world around us is full of nature. Even in the West, poetry is full of nature – British poems are full of nature – or love and human feelings;

those are the two main subjects of poems. We're dealing with the fundamentals of human beings." (Hatfull, 2020). Takahata acknowledges that within *Princess Kaguya* is the message that our connection to nature is part of what makes us human. In an interview about *My Neighbor Totoro*, Hayao Miyazaki explains that "In my grandparents' time, it was believed that spirits [kami] existed everywhere – in trees, rivers, insects, wells, anything. My generation does not believe this, but I like the idea that we ... should treasure everything because there is a kind of life to everything" (Boyd and Nishimura 2004: 16, cited in Stibbe, 2008, p.3)

The focus on the spiritual in nature is a call to observe nature as if to communicate and learn from it. Critics have written about ecological awareness in other Miyazaki films such as *My Neighbour Totoro*, which has been linked to Zen and Shinto philosophies and symbols such as shrines, camphor trees, rock sand waterfalls, which have been seen as a "spiritual geography" with which the characters interact with. Shinto has been explained as a philosophy that acknowledges humans and nature as a whole creative life force whereas Zen philosophy invites us to appreciate nature as it is, instead of conceptualizing it, as western philosophy does (Stibbe, 2008, p. 3).

In contrast to these examples, the digital drawing style and coloring of Hilda emphasis interconnectedness of life forms and places, however there does not seem to be any deeper connection to ancient philosophies. The characterization in Hilda has a stronger connection to Pagan philosophies, which express the strongest connection to history and nature.

Though nature contains many of the mythical creatures of Hilda, natural landscapes are depicted as grand and free. Garkovich explains that "Landscapes" are the symbolic environments created by human acts of conferring meaning to nature and the environment, of giving the environment definition and form from a particular angle of vision and through a special filter of values and beliefs. Every landscape is a symbolic environment. These landscapes reflect our self-definitions that are grounded in culture." (Garkovich, 1994)

The scale and proportions of space and characters highlight characters' personalities and dynamics within spaces. In Trolberg people and buildings are proportionate to each other using tight camera shots. However, the wilderness is often pictured with wide shots. Hilda is often depicted as a much smaller silhouette amidst a vast landscape of trees and mountains. This contrast in scale connotes the grandeur of nature and also Hilda's bravery to venture into it. Her bravery is emphasized from the beginning, in "The Midnight Giant" where Hilda climbs into the giant's ear having observed it and sketched it to go on a journey (Figure 9).

The contrast in scale is also in the witch's library (Figure 10). In this scene, the wilderness and the witch's library are juxtaposed. Both places are as vast as each other and characters wonder as tiny figures. They hold a sense of infinite power and wisdom. Pagan symbols of circles, stars, triangles and runes connect the world of the characters to the natural world. In "The Witch", these symbols present increasingly present themselves as Hilda and Frida traverse from the library to the witches' library. All pagan symbols represent elements such as earth, air and water. They are symbols used by the witches and Vikings who give characters some tools to protect the natural world. Books are another important prop as they initiate characters into different challenges. Frida must read ancient texts to become a witch and the woodman give Hilda ancient texts to learn about trolls and giants.



Figure 9: Hilda,
Season 1, Episode
2, "The Midnight
Giant".

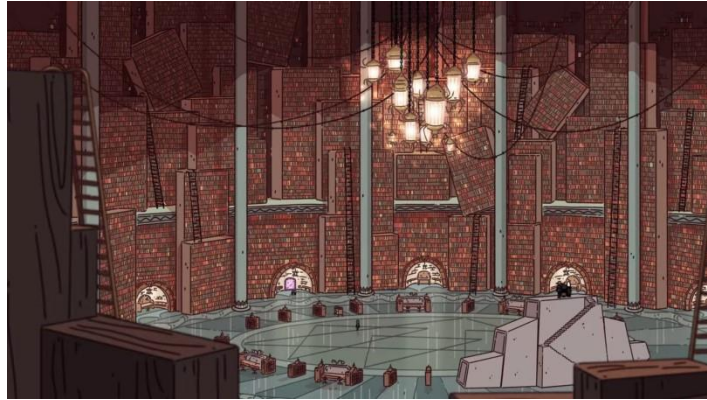


Figure 10: Figure 10 Hilda, Season 2, episode3, "The Witch"

The props used in *Hilda* contribute to the world of the story. Hilda's bedroom echoes her character (Figure 11); there are sketches of the wilderness and posters of leaf specimens and landscapes, there is also a poster of a huge eye. Her bedroom encapsulates her personality as explorer and observer.



Figure 11: Hilda, Season 2, episode 6, "The Old Bells of Trolberg"

Hints of nature continue throughout their house in Trolberg, which can be seen more as Johanna's world. In their house there are also pictures of leaves, keeping their connection to nature alive in their city home.

3-2 Human/Non-Human Relationships

Hilda depicts the awareness between humans and non-humans, the natural and manmade world. We see how these dynamics work in harmony and against each other. The series carries lessons for younger generations and reminders of lessons to older generations. This is done primarily through having the protagonist be a child, and seeing the world through her eyes, as she navigates and adapts to her new city life with new, human friends. Moreover, we see the relationship between Hilda, her mother and her teachers to get a sense of how her perspective of the world is challenged by different peers and age groups. Hilda can be seen to exemplify a child on the way to becoming an eco-citizen. Heggen et al. propose the idea that children, just like adults, are able to embrace the notion of the self as part of a greater ecological system, and should therefore be offered opportunities to enact eco-citizenship. Heggen further states that:

“Children with an active identity as eco-citizens may feel an initial sense of belonging to our common planet, including the more-than-human world. Knowing the value of participation, they may exercise and further develop a desire of care, solidarity, curiosity, and knowledge. This can promote children as active and informed members of a sustainable society. We argue that an identity as eco-citizen may provide an emerging understanding that humans, including each individual child, are active parts of the environment. In this perspective, our actions have consequences for the future.” (Heggen cited in Ghent, 2020, (Ghent, 2020, p. 48)

Though Hilda can be considered as the primary eco-citizen from the beginning, the progression between season 1 and 2 highlights the strength of the surrounding characters and that eco-citizenship is ultimately a team effort.

Characters in Hilda can be interpreted through Carl Jung's theory of archetypes and through Pagan belief, as the series draws heavily on Scandinavian folklore. These two veins of thought apply to the series because they concern universality, timelessness and life in all beings. The characters in Hilda conform to character types to an extent. Applying Carl Jung's archetypes reflect the extent to which the characters adhere and reject archetypes. In doing so, we understand how the series creates nuanced characters. According to Jung, archetypes are universal models of behavior that come from the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious contains behaviors deriving from our ancestors. It is the universal part of our unconscious. Archetypes are also ancient behavior traits that are passed down from ancestors (Cherry, 2023). There are 12 archetypes: The Ruler, The Creator/Artist, Sage, Innocent, Explorer, Rebel, Hero, Wizard, Jester, Everyman, Lover, and caregiver. The characters in the series each embody certain archetypes that reveal themselves as they face challenges. The link to the ancestral is also relevant because Hilda, Frida and David's ability to communicate with different life forms through history, is what enables them to strive for environmental justice.

Ancestors are significant in Hilda because the different life forms such as elves and spirits, are linked to Scandinavian folklore, which is predominantly Pagan. Scandinavian folklore is one of the core influences of the series. While at university, Pearson did a map illustration project of Iceland, it was then that he became inspired by Scandinavian mythology and legends. Elves, Vikings, witches, spirits and symbols as connected to nature. Elves and weather spirits reflect the land spirits of Norse Paganism, as they are magical creatures with the duty of protecting the land.

Hilda could represent the explorer, her character expresses the tension between following rules and intuition. Throughout the series Hilda is a student and teacher, learning through exploration and sharing knowledge from experience. From the beginning we watch her wonder fearlessly, sketchbook in hand, document her surroundings. As earlier expressed by Stibbe, the initiation into environmental action is observation and this is at the beginning of all of Hilda's adventures. Her life in the wilderness gives her the

ability to communicate and care for other life forms (in a way that other children cannot). In episode 1 we see her traversing through waterfalls and hills while being assisted by creatures. Hilda's interactions begin as naive discoveries of different species, such as the elves in episode one "Hidden People". Hilda learns how to negotiate between different groups and as the series progresses, so do her exploring and problem solving skills.

In episode 3 "The Bird Parade", as her mother encourages her to make friends with humans, Hilda struggles to participate in their games though she does refuse the game of harming animals and cares for the wounded raven that was hurt by another child. Hilda cares for the hurt raven, only to discover that it is the great raven that traditionally visits the city for the parade twice a year. The tradition states that it is bad luck if the raven doesn't visit, due to a centuries old legend that linked the raven with a good harvest. Though the raven recovers, he loses his memory and escapes Hilda's house. Eventually Hilda finds him and restores his memory. The Great Raven returns and flies Hilda over the city in time for the parade. Hilda is an explorer that enables her to be a bridge between the wilderness and the city.

Everything has a spirit in Hilda, another episode that reflects this Pagan belief in episode 2 "The Midnight Giant". In this episode, a giant from centuries ago named Jorgen roams the land during the night in search of his long lost girlfriend. Hilda watches him in the night and follows him. Woodman gives Hilda a book about the giants who used to guard the land until conflicts arose with human settlers. As Hilda climbs hills to find Jorgen's girlfriend, Jorgen's girlfriend emerges. She recounts how she waited for Jorgen for years and eventually became a mountain. She drifts away with Jorgen when they reunite. In Episode 5 "Troll Rock", A Troll emerges from a rock, breaks into Trolberg through the wall and bursts through the school walls to retrieve her baby rock, which David accidentally used for his school project. When the Troll bursts through the school walls while Hilda's teacher is shocked, Hilda explains "She just came for her baby". Hilda's teacher is concerned about Hilda's unusual skills, yet her mother defends her "That's the sort of thing she excels at." What these episodes have in common is that all forms are alive, they protect the land and they have thoughts and feelings that are to be respected.

This reflects the Pagan idea, that nature is God. Hilda has the ability to communicate and empathize between all these life forms.

The most noticeable change between the first and second season is that the characters are growing up. As they do so, they develop their personalities, their personal magic. In season one, the characters' experiences reflect environmental responsibility on a physical level, however season two demonstrates how rooted humans are in the earth and how they have always striven to communicate with and respect nature through means of the occult. In season 2, it's not just Hilda with the ability to communicate with creatures and solve problems between the city, wilderness and spirit world, Frida and David have also developed these abilities.

In regards to Jung's archetypes, Frida carries traits of the sage. Frida is the sensible, intelligent and organized and in season 2 her skills mature. The Nightmare Spirit in Season 1 and in season 2, episode 2 "The Witch" have paralleled in that they both involve a transition from childhood to adolescence. In The Nightmare Spirit, on the surface, the teenagers are moody but they are actually nightmare Spirits planting nightmares while David is sleeping. The only way Hilda finds information about them is through "The Tales of Marra", an ancient book explaining these powers. Hilda adds magical powers to regular human behaviors and attaches it to the past. All human feelings and behaviors are linked to spiritual or ancestral beings.

Hilda and Frida discover the wonderful world of the witches that live within the library. Frida is then chosen by the committee of 3 (the main witches) to become a witch. Though Hilda has intuitive skills and the skills to document (we see her frequently sketching in nature), Frida is chosen because she has the ability to focus and study. Later, in episode 6 "The Old Bells of Trolberg." Frida is able to do spells to disconnect a new bell system in the city that disturbs all creatures such as Woffs and giants. Similar to Frida is Hilda's mother Johanna. As Hilda's mother, Johanna is a caring voice of reason, though she contrasts Hilda's thirst for adventure, she is deeply connected to nature, as we find out that she was the top Sparrow Scout when she was younger. While Hilda carries the bravery of the explorer, Frida and Johanna carry the wisdom of the sage. Towards the

end of season 1, in the episode “The Black Hound”, we see Johanna at her bravest when her solution to saving the black hound is to go on a great car chase through the city so the guards don’t shoot it.

In episode 13, The Nisse, Johanna is the one who teaches Hilda about the Nisse when they find a homeless one in Trolberg. The Nisse are house spirits, both in Hilda and in Nordic folklore. In episode 12, Johanna explains that the homeless Nisse has probably been banished, she also tells Hilda not to speak to or trust them, telling Hilda to just “do as [she] is told”. In the episode, the black hound is also foreshadowed. While fear starts to spread in Trolberg, it seems that Johanna is also afraid of it. However, in the coming episode we find that Johanna is more concerned with protecting the black hound rather than helping the city destroy it. Beneath her sensible nature, it is clear that Hilda’s bravery and abilities come from her mother, who balances protecting Hilda from danger but also letting her use her abilities in the world. Just as Hilda is a bridge between the human and non-human world, Johanna is a bridge between her daughter and the world that sometimes struggles to understand her.

In contrast to these characters, is David, who identifies more with the innocent. David wearily follows Hilda and Frida on their adventures and often ends up as a victim of antagonists because of his fears. However, in season 2 David learns a lesson about bravery. In “The Eternal Warriors” David falls down a hill and meets Vikings in the forest. David agrees to help them to find the medallion of Sigurd (which uses the symbol of the ouroboros, meaning cyclical time and eternity) which gives people fearlessness. David wants to prove his bravery especially after being made fun of by Hilda and Frida. However, the medallion changes his character to the extreme and Hilda and Frida end up having to revive him after he is decapitated. In the end, David returns to his old self and Hilda and Frida apologize him. Mixing with magic from the past also teaches characters about themselves. Marland explains that deep ecologists “believe in raising ecological awareness through an adjustment of values, suggesting that a change in our relationship with the environment can only come through first “grounding ourselves in the dark of our deepest selves” (Snyder,iv) in order to rediscover our profound connection

with the more than human world.” (Marland, 2013, p. 850) Throughout the series, Hilda learns via navigating adventures; Frida becomes a witch and uses her powers to solve conflict between humans and non-humans; and David learns bravery from Vikings. Hilda also reflects the idea that we become eco-citizens and raise our consciousness by undergoing personal transformations.

The closest character that can be considered as a villain is Victoria Van Gale, the weather woman (Figure 12). Her character is reflective of the magician and the outlaw, though she strives towards knowledge of the environment, her obsession ultimately outcasts her from society. In Season one, episode 10, Hilda and her friends are eager to meet Van Gale who comes across as a friendly expert on the weather and nature. As the episode progresses her passion unravels into an obsessive control over the weather.



Figure 12: Hilda, Season 1, episode 10, “The Storm”

Having kidnapped one of the weather spirits, Van Gale's need for control initiates a dangerous storm over Trolberg that Hilda, Frida and John solve. Ultimately Van Gale's weather station gets destroyed and Van Gale does not reappear until season 2 where she is found to be living in an old windmill outside Trolberg. Hilda, Frida and David eventually forgive her for the past and spend time with her again, only to discover that her efforts to control and manipulate worlds continue. This time, Van Gale develops a system where people can access nowhere space from their homes. Every building has its own nowhere space, which is extra storage space within the building. Nisse creatures are able to travel between these spaces but humans cannot, as they may never be able to return. Van Gale builds her own nisse and uses it to traverse the nowhere space system. In addition, she also wants to get as much information from Hilda (who has visited Nowhere space) as she can, so she sends a Nisse to spy on her. Van Gale's true intention reveals itself, she planned for humans to take over Nowhere Space to prevent any further construction in Trolberg and the forest, a plan which would eventually swallow the entire city.

Once again, her plan to save the environment will ultimately destroy it because she is trying to control life forms and spaces. She straps the nisse into a machine while explaining that "Nowhere space is an untapped resource". Hilda, David and Frida, eventually destroy her machine, as they leave the windmill, the wildlife returns to the area. Hilda tells them "it's all yours now" while she tells Van Gale "This is not your world". The dynamic between Victoria Van Gale, Hilda, Frida and David reflects that trying to control the environment leads to catastrophic consequences. However, the series still creates empathy for all characters, even Van Gale, who ends up alone and defeated by the end, with a chattering skull next to her.

The characters of Hilda all connect to the past or to different life forms. Whether their interactions build their own characters or save the environment, the characters are deeply rooted into characters of the past and the earth.

Season 2, episode 9 "The Deerfox" depicts the most relatable human/non-human dynamic, that between a human and their pet, in this case, Hilda deals with the dilemma

of letting Twig return to the dimension where Deerfox come from. In this episode, Hilda and Johanna go in search of Twig, their pet Deerfox who has gone missing. This is the episode where we see from the perspective of a non-human the most. The episode has a double narrative, that of Twig and the way he was separated from his parents and found Hilda and how Johanna eventually let Hilda go into the wilderness alone (with Twig as her guardian) as she grew up. The episode uses flashbacks of Hilda's younger childhood where she constantly wants independence from her mother and the present moment when she acts as a team with her mother to find Twig. During the episode we flit from their story to Twig. Twig's emotional journey is equally depicted, Twig wonders the wilderness seeing images of Hilda, in the river or an echo of her voice, while entering the Deerfox dimension, he sees apparitions of Hilda before deciding to return to her. The episode emphasizes a mutual relationship between human and non-human, instead of focusing on the humans' perspective of releasing an animal into the wild.

Moreover, this episode is another example of the unity between all species. We see Johanna and Hilda working as a team to find twig, their connection is emphasized by the coloring of the episode. At dusk they take on the colors of their surroundings, cool shades of blue and indigo (Figure 14). They are part of each other and part of nature. During their search, they come across their old house, that seems to have been destroyed by elves. Johanna teaches a heartbroken Hilda about the necessity of change, at which point Twig finds them and guides them to a place. They discover that it is time for Twig to return to his parents.

It has been previously explained that eco-toons often emphasize the beauty of nature, the human admiration of nature, especially that which is unknown, is present in all art forms and it is present in this episode also. Hilda and Johanna come across the Deerfox dimension, a luminous translucent pathway of blue and white shapes where the Deerfox travel to. They are in awe, as we all are when we see a rare sighting in nature (Figure 8). Certain frames of the episode create the feeling of awe admiration and sentimentality seen in previous eco-toons such as *Bambi*. Figure 13 and 14 demonstrate the similarity between a shot in *Bambi* and *Hilda*. In each shot, a lone deer stands proudly

between trees or in a vast landscape, holding the audience and the other characters in awe of the rare animal.



Figure 13: Hilda, Season 2, episode 9, "The Deerfox"



Figure 14: Bambi, (1942)

In addition to the feeling of being in awe of nature, is the change of emotional connections. There are mirrored narratives of letting go, Twig is to let go of Hilda and vice versa, While Johanna is letting go of Hilda whilst teaching her about change as well. On the way to the Deerfox dimension, Twig decides to return to Hilda, whether this is for the sake of a happy ending or not, the episode expresses the strength of the bond between humans and non-humans, how they protect each other's wellbeing and freedom.

The relationship between humans and non-humans is often challenging and dangerous in Hilda. Though humans constantly try to control the spaces that don't belong

to them, they are also under constant threat of stronger forces such as trolls and Woffs who can be threatening when tested. The series reflects that the challenges humans face is learning curves that can eventually lead to an understanding. The older Hilda gets, the stronger she tries to rebel against her mother. Towards the end of season two, through their clashes, Johanna and Hilda manage to work through challenges together. In “The Stone Forest” Hilda and Johanna constantly test each other’s authority until they reach the troll’s cave to save twig. Eventually they enter together and help each other. Not only do they save twig but they manage to befriend a troll and its baby, they sit round a campfire in peace, demonstrating a new understanding between humans and non-humans. This seems to be the case for all characters, not just because Hilda and Johanna have the ability to communicate with different beings. We also see the Safety Patrol, David and Frida spending time with a troll around a campfire. Season 2 ends with a sense of peace and understanding between various life forms.

Conclusion

The series *Hilda* is neither didactic nor does it catastrophize the global environmental crisis. As much as the characters and organizations like the Sparrow Scouts express explicit intention to learn about other species and protect the land, the series highlights the perspectives of life forms and ideas about eco justice through the lives and experiences of its characters. The first research question deals with the construction of the relationship between human and non-human characters in regard to potential conflicts and their power struggle, and the second question delves into the construction of the environmental settings and the way humans and non-humans navigate spaces.

The answer to all these questions is in the Pagan value of connectedness that is at the heart of the series. *Hilda* depicts the constant connection and friction between humans, non-humans and spaces. As humans and non-humans coexist in their present day, they must learn how to respect and care for each other amidst present day life and echoes of history. No matter how many barriers humans try to create, all beings live and are able to traverse everywhere. Echoes of history appear as problems, whether it’s the

city's new bell system disturbing ancient trolls or a giant black hound returning to Trolberg. Humans create their present while learning to respect their past. Even if this occurs with great consequences, consequences are presented as lessons not judgments of the characters.

From season 1 to season 2 we see a breakdown of the human effort to control the natural world. Trolls break the city walls, spirits exist in all spaces, bell systems are destroyed to protect trolls and the efforts of the safety patrol to protect the city never work. Though it isn't didactic, these incidences all signify that the human effort to control the environment does not work. Instead humans are to learn to communicate with land and life forms. Care, sensitivity, love, connection, power and destruction all sit on wavering scales of our actions and timing. In relation to the second research question what environmental perspectives do human and non-human relationships reflect? The environmental messages in *Hilda* echo core Pagan belief. Hilda demonstrates an effort to reach a harmonious connection between the land and ourselves through endless trial and error.

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