


***Bambi*: Understanding a Youth Literature Classic through its book covers**

Bambi: Compreendendo um clássico da literatura juvenil através das capas dos livros

Bambi: Entendiendo un clásico de la literatura juvenil a través de las portadas de sus libros

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Abstract

This study analyzes the covers of *Bambi: A Life in the Woods* by Felix Salten, focusing specifically on the original German edition and its English translations. It examines how the visual elements of these covers influence readers' expectations before engaging with the text. Utilizing a qualitative, observational, and interpretive approach, this study analyzes the evolution of cover designs over a period of nearly 100 years, from the 1923 German edition to contemporary English translations. This study investigates how these visual representations engage with themes such as ecological awareness, personal growth, and societal concerns, and how they reflect broader cultural and aesthetic shifts. Cover art styles, ranging from intricate realism to minimalist abstraction, were explored to understand their role in shaping the narrative's interpretation. This analysis underscores *Bambi's* significance in children's and youth literature, its engagement with environmental and social discourse, and its universal relevance across various historical and cultural contexts.

Keywords: *Bambi*; Felix Salten; book covers; literary analysis; visual analysis.

Resumo

Este estudo ofrece unha análise das cubertas de *Bambi: Unha vida na fraga* de Félix Salten, poñendo o foco na edición orixinal en alemán e nas súas traducións ao inglés. Examínase como os elementos visuais desas capas inflúen nas expectativas dos lectores antes de entrar en contacto co texto. Utilizando unha abordaxe cualitativa, observacional e interpretativa, o artigo analiza a evolución dos deseños das capas ao longo de case 100 anos, dende a edición alemá de 1923 até traducións contemporáneas en inglés. O estudo investiga como esas representacións visuais abordan temas como a conciencia ecolóxica, o crecemento persoal e cuestións sociais, e como reflicten mudanzas culturais e estéticas máis amplas. Estilos de arte de capa, que varían dende o realismo detallado até a abstracción minimalista, son explorados para entender o seu papel na formación da interpretación da narrativa. Esta análise resalta a importancia de *Bambi* na literatura infantil e xuvenil, a súa conexión con cuestións ambientais e sociais e a súa relevancia universal ao longo de diferentes contextos históricos e culturais.

Palavras chave: *Bambi*; Félix Salten; cubertas de libros; análise literaria; análise visual.

Resumen

Este estudio ofrece un análisis de las portadas de *Bambi: Una vida en el bosque* de Félix Salten, centrado específicamente en la edición original en alemán y en sus traducciones al inglés. Examina cómo los elementos visuales de estas portadas influyen en las expectativas de los lectores antes de que interactúen con el texto. Utilizando un enfoque cualitativo, observacional e interpretativo, la investigación analiza la evolución de los diseños de las portadas a lo largo de casi 100 años, desde la edición alemana de 1923 hasta traducciones contemporáneas al inglés. El estudio investiga cómo estas representaciones visuales abordan temas como la conciencia ecológica, el desarrollo personal y las cuestiones sociales, y cómo reflejan cambios culturales y estéticos más amplios. Se exploran los estilos artísticos de las portadas, que varían desde un realismo detallado hasta la abstracción minimalista, para comprender su papel en la formación de la interpretación de la narrativa. Este análisis subraya la importancia duradera de *Bambi* en la literatura infantil y juvenil, su compromiso con cuestiones medioambientales y sociales, y su relevancia universal a lo largo de diferentes contextos históricos y culturales.

Palabras clave: *Bambi*; Félix Salten; portadas de libros; análisis literario; análisis visual.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Bambi: A Life in the Woods, by Felix Salten, first published in 1923, transcends the conventional boundaries of children's and young adult literature, positioning itself as a profound literary work with a complex, multi-layered narrative. At the heart of the story is Bambi's maturation as he learns to navigate the dynamics of his environment. However, Salten's narrative extends far beyond a simple coming-of-age tale, exploring deeper themes and existential challenges.

This narrative stands as a poignant exploration of universal themes that continue to resonate with readers across of all ages. Salten emphasizes the critical importance of ecological conservation, offering an early glimpse into environmentalism during its formative stages.

From *Bambi*'s perspective, the story introduces nature as an interconnected community, underscoring the vital role played by each living within this ecosystem. Salten's portrayal of the relationships among forest inhabitants goes beyond mere human socialization, presenting these interactions with depth and empathy.

Moreover, *Bambi*'s journey from youth to adulthood mirrors a universal human experience marked by challenges, discoveries, and teachable moments. The narrative stresses our responsibilities toward the natural world, with Salten's nuanced depiction of human-nature interactions serving as a compelling appeal for environmental stewardship and empathy towards animals and their habitats.

Beyond its narrative content, *Bambi: A Life in the Woods* educates and inspires, championing the interconnectedness of all life and the impact of human actions on the environment. It endures both an enchanting and enlightening tale, advocating a reverent, respectful, and protective stance toward nature. The pioneering status of this work in ecological literature continues to hold relevance, serving as a timeless reminder of life's beauty and vulnerability.

Since its initial publication, the visual presentation of *Bambi*, especially through its book covers, has been integral in shaping the reception of the work, particularly among young readers. The covers serve as more than mere decorative elements; they establish a horizon of expectations by visually encoding the central themes of the story – nature, growth, and environmental interconnectedness – before the text is even engaged with. For children and young readers, whose first encounter with the book often begins with its cover, these visual elements play a significant role in preparing them for the emotional and thematic journey that follows.

The imagery used in the covers not only sets expectations but also subtly communicates the ecological and emotional themes embedded within the narrative. Focusing on representations of the natural world, animals, and pastoral scenes, the covers mirror the core messages of environmental stewardship, personal development, and societal reflection found in Salten's story. These visual cues allow readers to form an early emotional connection with the themes of the book, guiding their understanding of the narrative's ecological concerns. Thus, *Bambi*'s covers do more than capture attention; they serve as a gateway to the values and ideas that define the story, shaping the reader's perspective before the first page is turned.

2. WHO IS BAMBI?

Felix Salten, the pseudonym of the writer and journalist Siegmund Salzmann ([Barsanti Vigo, 2009](#); [Eddy, 2010](#)), is best known by *Bambi*, a narrative imbued with a powerful environmental message. This theme is artistically encapsulated in the cover designs of numerous editions that frequently depict serene woodland scenes and wildlife. These visuals evoke the story's deep connection to nature conservation, subtly commenting on the impact of human encroachment.

Originally published in 1923, shortly after World War I, *Bambi* presents a contemplative narrative that explores themes of survival and the harsh realities of life. These darker elements are frequently reflected in the book's cover designs, which symbolize the loss of innocence and echo the social and historical context of the time.

However, *Bambi* owes its global recognition largely to Walt Disney's animated adaptation in 1942, which recontextualized the original narrative. Disney's version significantly broadened the scope of Felix Salten's 1923 novel, transforming it from a somber allegory about survival in nature ([Salten, 2022](#)) into a more romanticized portrayal of the wilderness designed to evoke

awe and wonder (Alkhatat, 2020). This process of “Disneyfication” had a profound impact on American cultural attitudes towards wildlife, particularly regarding practices such as hunting (Lutts, 1992). The influence of the animated film has been so pervasive that recent English translations of Salten's novel have sought to reframe *Bambi* and its author, attempting to extricate them from the legacy of Disney's interpretation to restore the deeper, more nuanced layers of the original work (Strümper-Krobb, 2024a). Despite these efforts, Disney's *Bambi* remains a cultural touchstone that shapes collective childhood memories and influences global perceptions of nature and wildlife (Lutts 1992).

While Disney's adaptation retains the overarching themes of nature and personal growth, it introduces significant modifications that simplify and soften the story, making it more accessible to younger audiences. The film adopts a brighter and more sentimental tone, placing greater emphasis on Bambi's friendships and interactions with other woodland creatures. As a result, Disney's *Bambi* shifts its focus towards innocence and emotional development, in contrast to the somber exploration of the natural world's harsh realities that are central to Salten's original text (Strauss, 2023; Whitley, 2008). Moreover, as highlighted by Grieze (2018), the film's portrayal of the “circle of life” subtly reinforces traditional gender roles, reflecting and validating the idealized dynamics of the American nuclear family.

This retextualization extended *Bambi's* influence beyond the literary realm, transforming it into a cultural icon through visual merchandising, animation, and media formats. While the Disney adaptation shifts the focus towards a more optimistic and less existential tone, it maintains the underlying ecological message (Malamud, 2023), continuing to convey the cyclical nature of life and the importance of environmental stewardship. Disney's *Bambi* thus serves as both a homage and a divergence from the original, reinterpreting the narrative for a broader, more global audience and ensuring its lasting relevance in popular culture (Wells, 2002)

Bambi's structure follows a relatively linear timeline, tracing the protagonist's journey from childhood to maturity. The chapters are organized to reflect the different stages in Bambi's life, as well as the seasonal changes that shape the rhythms of the forest. The narrative is guided by a third-person narrator with a limited omniscient perspective that primarily focuses on Bambi's experiences. This perspective allows readers to observe Bambi's growth while maintaining a certain distance, a crucial element in capturing the harshness of nature and the dangers surrounding it.

From a narratological perspective, characters are crafted to reflect the dynamics of the natural world. Bambi himself undergoes significant physical and emotional evolution throughout the story, exemplifying the Bildungsroman genre (Morgenstern, 2009). Characters such as Faline and the Old Prince play pivotal roles in Bambi's development by offering guidance and alternative worldviews. The Old Prince represents wisdom acquired through experience and the detachment necessary for survival in a dangerous world. The anthropomorphic portrayal of animals, with each character having a distinct voice, allows readers to connect emotionally with their innocence and vulnerability (Strauss, 2023).

The setting – the forest – is not merely a backdrop, but functions as a character in its own right, actively influencing the narrative. Detailed descriptions of forests and their ever-changing atmospheres convey both protection and danger. Time, particularly the cyclical nature of seasons, is central to the narrative's structure, reflecting Bambi's growth and the inevitable cycle of life and death.

Rhetorically and stylistically, narrative relies heavily on description, using language that highlights both the beauty and brutality of nature. The depictions of the forest range from serene and gentle, to dark and threatening, mirroring the unpredictability of the natural world.

This alternating tone enhances the contrast between Bambi's initial innocence and the harsh realities he must face (Strauss, 2023; Strümper-Krobb, 2024b).

Symbolism played a critical role in this story. The forest represents the natural world with its unyielding laws of survival, while humans – presented as antagonistic and destructive – embody external forces threatening the delicate balance of nature. The figure of “Man,” never directly shown, heightens the sense of suspense and fear, symbolizing the oppressive power of civilization. This symbolic presence of “Man” is crucial in defining the tension between nature and humanity, and it is a recurring motif that is visually translated into many of the book's covers. Often, darker tones and imagery that allude to danger, such as shadowed forests or distant, ominous figures, emphasize this theme of threat and loss.

One of the most prominent themes in *Bambi* is the cycle of life, portrayed as stark realism. From birth to death, Salten explored the constant struggle faced by forest animals for survival. The death of Bambi's mother, a pivotal moment in the narrative, symbolizes the itability of loss and the personal growth that follows.

Thus, the relationship between humans and nature is essential. Although largely unseen, the presence of humans is a looming threat, representing the destruction and imbalance that civilization brings to the natural world. The novel's ecological critique presents a pessimistic view of the relationship between humanity and nature. As Bambi matures, he learns to fear and avoid humans, reflecting the inherent mistrust of the two worlds. This human-nature conflict is visually encoded on many covers through representations of vulnerability, – often depicted through solitary animals surrounded by vast, looming forests, or scenes where natural serenity is interrupted by distant signs of human interference.

The themes of maturity and emotional growth were central to Bambi's development. As he grows, Bambi gains a deeper and more disillusioned understanding of the world, ultimately accepting the unrelenting laws of life. He assumes his role as a leader, navigating the ongoing cycles of life, death, and renewal.

Bambi is not merely a tale of woodland creatures, but a sophisticated narrative crafted by Salten that reflects on the vulnerability and resilience required for survival in the natural world. These themes, often underscored by the book's covers, contribute to its recognition as an allegorical reflection of the human impact on nature and existence itself. The covers, in particular, visually encapsulate these layers, offering hints of the deeper themes within the story, such as Salten's personal experiences as an Austrian Jew, which subtly inform the allegorical undertones of the narrative.

The recurring visual elements on the covers, such as the use of dark colors, depictions of animals standing alone in natural landscapes, and the interplay between light and shadow, serve to reinforce the emotional and thematic weight of the narrative. By emphasizing isolation, vulnerability, and the looming presence of human encroachment, these cover guides readers' interpretations from the outset. In doing so, they not only prepare readers for the ecological and existential themes of the story, but also subtly influence their emotional engagement with the text. The visual portrayal of nature as both a place of beauty and danger, along with the ever-present symbolic threat of “Man,” allows the covers to act as gateways into the story's deeper reflections on life, survival, and the relationship between humans and the natural world.

3. MAIN STUDIES ON FELIX SALTEN'S *BAMBI* BOOK COVERS

Research on the covers of *Bambi* is notably limited, with only a few studies directly addressing this topic. Nevertheless, several scholars have explored related themes that provide

valuable insights into the visual representation of Salten's iconic work. The most relevant studies are discussed below.

[Balakirsky Katz \(2020\)](#) explores the visual sources that influenced Felix Salten's *Bambi* and its post-publication legacy across various countries, including the United States, Poland, India, Israel, and Russia. Katz highlighted the Jewish roots of the visual motifs associated with *Bambi*, examining how these motifs were adapted in the mid-twentieth century. This study offers a unique perspective on how cultural and religious symbols are interwoven into the visual identity of the book's covers, reflecting broader social and historical contexts.

In his new translation of *Bambi* ([Salten, 2022](#)), Jack Zipes captures the complexity of Salten's narrative, viewing it as a Bildungsroman, an existential autobiography, and a plea for animal rights. Zipes also drew parallels between the challenges faced by Salten and those encountered by *Bambi*. Just as *Bambi* must navigate the forest to survive and mature, Salten struggled with anti-semitism, exclusion, and poverty. While Zipes's work primarily focuses on the text, it indirectly informs an understanding of how *Bambi's* themes – particularly those concerning survival and resilience – may be visually encoded in the book's covers across different editions.

Another study by Autor ([2022](#)) focuses on Felix Salten's *Bambi: A Life in the Woods* and its ideological values, particularly its ecological message and the tension between humans and nature. Autor's work examines the cultural and social messages conveyed by Disney's adaptation of *Bambi*, calling attention to the differences between the original story and the film as well as the impact of these messages on audiences, particularly young viewers. While not focusing specifically on the book's covers, this analysis highlights the importance of visual media in shaping interpretations of Salten's work, suggesting that the covers themselves warrant careful scrutiny of their roles in conveying ecological and ideological messages.

[Francesca Arnavas \(2023\)](#) conducted a review of *Bambi: The Story of a Life in the Forest*, emphasizing the discrepancies between the original novel and Disney's adaptation. Arnavas critiques the inaccurate translation upon which Disney based its film, underscoring how this affected the portrayal of key themes. Although Arnavas study is centered on textual differences, it also draws attention to how these discrepancies might influence the visual representation of *Bambi* in various media, including book covers, which often reflect broader adaptations of the story.

To further analyze the covers of *Bambi*, this study follows [Gérard Genette's \(1997\)](#) concept of *peritexts*, which highlights the importance of the cover as an element that mediates the relationship between the text and its reader. Genette argues that the cover is not a mere accessory, but a critical threshold that shapes how the text is received and interpreted. [Powers \(2006\)](#) expanded on this by examining memorable book covers and how their graphic elements influence both the critical and commercial reception of literary works. This theoretical framework allows us to approach the covers of *Bambi* as visual texts in their own right, essential components that influence the reader's perception of the narrative before they even engage with the written text.

Book covers act as essential portals to the stories they envelop, capturing a narrative's essence and themes in a singular visual representation ([Barnard, 2013](#); [Meggs, 1992](#)). They are more than just protective layers; they are integral to the storytelling process and offer visual narratives that connect readers to the essence of the story before the first page is turned. [Kress and van Leeuwen \(2006\)](#) offered valuable insights into how visual design communicates meaning, emphasizing that every visual element contributes to a narrative and ideological message. Applying their theory of multimodal communication, we can interpret the covers of *Bambi* as more than just decorative features; they are complex, multimodal texts that encode the themes of the story through color, composition, and symbolic imagery. The animals, forests,

and landscapes depicted in the covers function as signifiers of vulnerability, resilience, and the relationship between humans and nature. For example, darker tones often evoke the looming threat of human encroachment, while lighter, more pastoral scenes may reflect the peaceful, interconnected world *Bambi* initially experienced.

The evolution of *Bambi's* cover over the past century mirrors the shifting cultural and literary perceptions of the work. In early editions, covers often emphasized the solitude of animals against vast, uninhabited landscapes, evoking themes of isolation and survival. These early covers reflect the period's artistic and literary tastes, where nature was depicted in more subdued tones, symbolizing the fragility of life in a world that was increasingly impacted by human expansion. As environmental concerns gained prominence in public discourse, later covers began to incorporate more vivid depictions of wildlife and nature, thus aligning the narrative with contemporary ecological movements. These newer covers emphasize a stronger connection between humans and nature, with animals depicted in harmony with their surroundings, suggesting a shift toward a more optimistic or symbiotic relationship between the two.

This evolution in visual representation not only reflects changes in how *Bambi* is marketed but also how its themes resonate with new generations of readers. The shifts in design – from realistic depictions of nature to more abstract or symbolic representations – suggest broader cultural engagement with the book's ecological and existential themes, reinforcing its ongoing relevance across time. Each reimagining of the cover reflects contemporary societal concerns and trends in both graphic design and environmental awareness, illustrating how *Bambi* continues to reinterpret visually to suit the sensibilities of its era. The design choices of each era reflect the evolving relationship between humans and nature, from early depictions of isolation and vulnerability to recent portrayals of interconnectedness and environmental stewardship.

While these studies focus primarily on the textual and ideological aspects of *Bambi*, they offer critical insights into how visual elements, especially on the book's covers, have been shaped by cultural, historical, and social contexts. The recurring themes in *Bambi*, such as survival, environmentalism, and the relationship between humanity and nature, are not only central to the narrative but also echoed in the visual presentation of the book. Many cover mirrors these themes through their choice of imagery, color schemes, and composition, often evoking a sense of vulnerability and resilience. As such, covers play a pivotal role in guiding readers' interpretations and expectations, making them an essential element in understanding the broader reception and legacy of *Bambi*. The analysis of these visual shifts over time will allow us to concretely assess how changing cover designs reflect broader literary, cultural, and ecological discourses.

4. RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to address the following research question: *How do the covers of Felix Salten's Bambi over the course of 100 years influence readers' expectations and interpretations before engaging with the text?*

This study was developed with two main objectives: (i) to analyze how the covers of various editions and translations of *Bambi* have shaped the horizon of expectations, especially in terms of their visual and symbolic elements, throughout the century since its original publication; and (ii) to explore the ways in which the visual components of the covers, including color schemes, imagery, typography, and layout, contribute to the portrayal of key themes such as innocence, survival, and environmental awareness.

5. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Drisko, 2019; Hammersley, 2013; Majumdar, 2022; Ruiz Olabuénaga, 2012), centering on the interpretation of Bambi's cover through a thematic lens. The research is both observational and interpretive, analyzing the visual and thematic elements presented on the covers of different editions (Rose, 2016).

The selection of covers was based on the following criteria:

(i) *Language*: This study focuses primarily on notable editions of *Bambi* published in German and English, reflecting the original publication language and the international reach of the work.

(ii) *Temporal scope*: Over the span of almost 100 years, from the original 1923 German edition to editions published in 2022, notable covers were selected to address the research question. These editions were chosen for their relevance in reflecting the key thematic and visual elements that shape readers' expectations. This approach ensures broad temporal coverage that allows for an analysis of how the visual representation of Bambi has evolved over a century.

Visual analysis categories

To explore how Bambi's covers contribute to shaping readers' expectations, the analysis focuses on several key visual elements:

- *Color palette*: The study examines the use of color to convey mood and tone, particularly the contrast between dark and light elements. Early covers often use darker tones to emphasize themes of isolation, vulnerability, and threats posed by human encroachment, while later covers may introduce brighter, more pastoral scenes, reflecting a shift toward environmental harmony.
- *Composition and layout*: The placement of visual elements on the cover is analyzed to understand how they guide the viewer's eye and establish focal points. This includes the prominence of the title, positioning of Bambi or other characters, and the overall balance of the image. The study examines how covers from different periods prioritize certain elements, such as nature or characters, and how this reflects broader shifts in the interpretation of the narrative.
- *Iconography and symbolism*: Special attention is paid to the recurring symbols on the covers, such as the forest, animals, or human figures, and how these icons are used to evoke the central themes of the story. For example, the presence (or absence) of human figures can signal the degree of threat or harmony between humanity and nature. The depiction of Bambi as either a vulnerable fawn or a mature stag is also significant in shaping reader expectations about the themes of growth and survival.
- *Typography and title design*: This study considers how the choice of font, size, and style of title contributes to the overall impact of the cover. Bold, modern fonts may suggest a contemporary or more adventurous take on the story, while classic serif fonts might emphasize its status as a literary classic. The interplay between text and images on the cover is crucial in creating a coherent visual narrative.

Justification for the temporal scope

The decision to select *the Bambi* editions spanning from 1923 to 2022 provides a comprehensive view of the visual evolution of the story over the course of a century. This timeline enables an analysis of how the visual elements of these covers reflect broader societal shifts in the perceptions of nature, survival, and environmentalism. By focusing on key editions, this study captures a range of artistic interpretations, showing how the covers have either reinforced or reimagined the core themes of the narrative. Additionally, this broad temporal scope emphasizes *Bambi's* enduring relevance across different eras, as the covers have continuously adapted to new aesthetic trends and cultural sensibilities.

Limitations of the research

A key limitation of this study is the focus on editions published in German and English. While these languages offer a representative sample, they may exclude important nuances present in adaptations to other linguistic and cultural contexts. Additionally, the selection of some notable editions, while ensuring broad temporal coverage, may exclude alternative visual interpretations found in lesser-known editions. Despite these limitations, this research aims to offer a nuanced understanding of how *Bambi's* visual identity has evolved and how these changes have shaped readers' expectations across different periods.

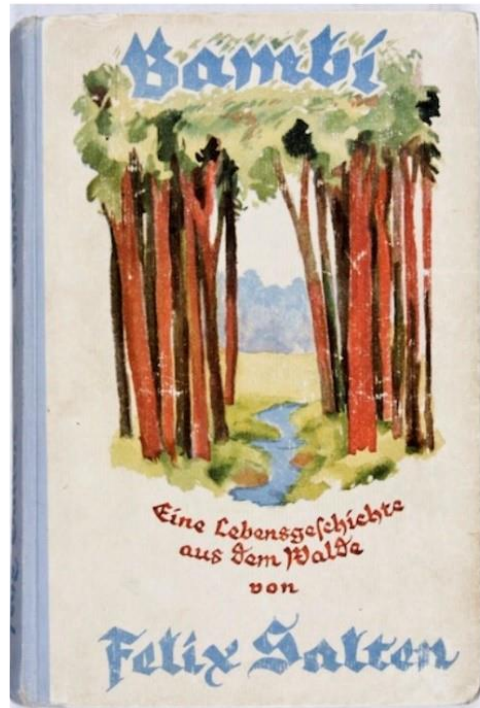
6. CORPUS UNDER ANALYSIS

Selection process for covers of *Bambi. A Life in the Woods* by Felix Salten resulted in the following corpus: 14 notable editions published over the course of almost 100 years, from 1923 to 2022. These editions were chosen based on their significance in illustrating the evolution of the book's visual identity as well as their contribution to shaping readers' expectations over time. Each edition reflects the different cultural, editorial, and artistic trends that have influenced the reception and interpretation of *Bambi* throughout its history.

Selected corpus

- **Salten, F. (1923). *Bambi: Eine Lebensgeschichte aus dem Walde*. Wilhelm Heinrich Verlag.** The first edition is critical for understanding how *Bambi* was initially presented to its German audience. The cover design from this period reflects post-World War I artistic sensibilities and the themes of survival, loss, and the natural world.

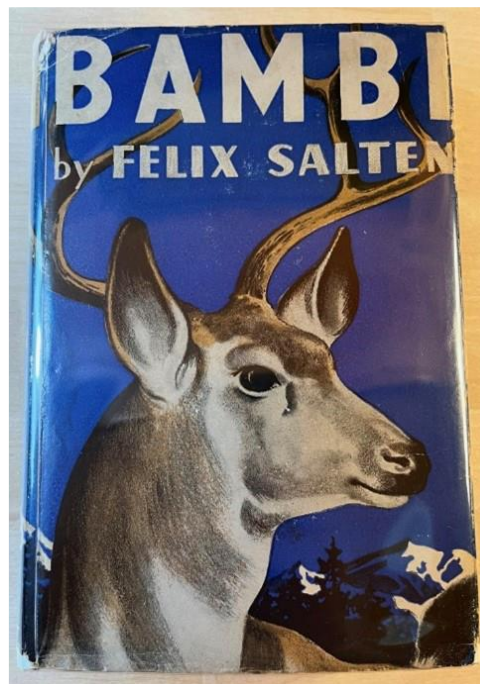
Figure 1. Cover of *Bambi: Eine Lebensgeschichte aus dem Walde*



Salten, 1923

- **Salten, F. (1929).** *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*. Illustrated by Kurt Weise. Grosset & Dunlap. As one of the earliest English editions, this version has played a crucial role in bringing *Bambi* to an international audience. Illustrations by Kurt Weise contributed significantly to the visual representation of the story for English-speaking readers.

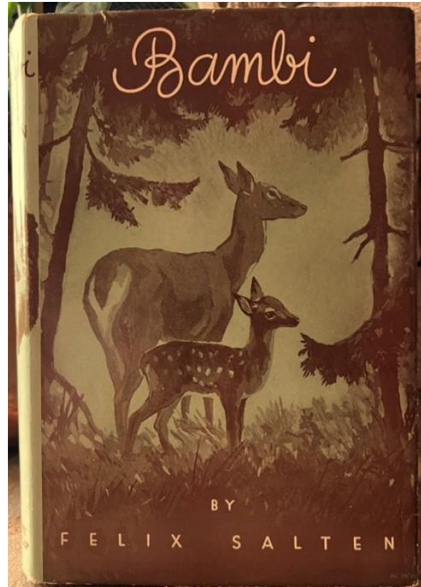
Figure 2. Cover of *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*



Salten, 1929

- **Salten, F. (1931)**. *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*. Illustrated by Kurt Weise. Grosset & Dunlap. This later printing by the same publisher and illustrator reflects minor updates in layout and cover design aimed at maintaining the book's popularity in the English market.

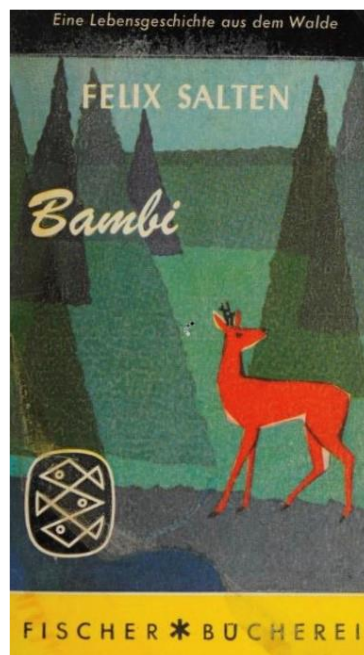
Figure 3. Cover of *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*



Salten, 1931

- **Salten, F. (1940)**. *Bambi: Eine Lebensgeschichte aus dem Walde*. Fischer Bücherei. This German edition reflects the artistic trends of the 1940s and how *Bambi* was marketed at the onset of World War II. The cover likely conveys a more serious and somber tone, which resonates with the historical context of its time.

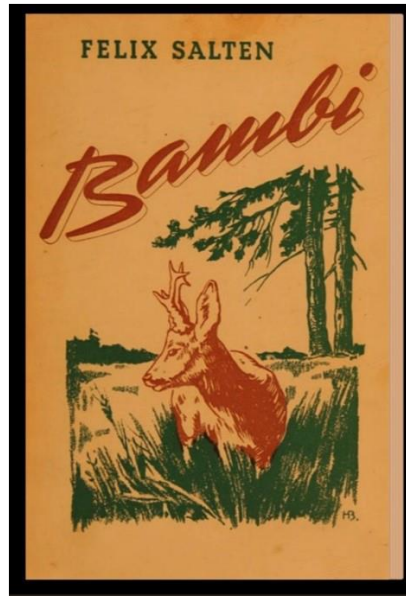
Figure 4. Cover of *Bambi: Eine Lebensgeschichte aus dem Walde*



Salten, 1940

- **Salten, F. (1946).** *Bambi: Eine Lebensgeschichte aus dem Walde.* **Albert Müller Verlag.** Published in the immediate aftermath of World War II, this edition presents a visual interpretation that aligns with post-war reflections on survival, nature, and human condition.

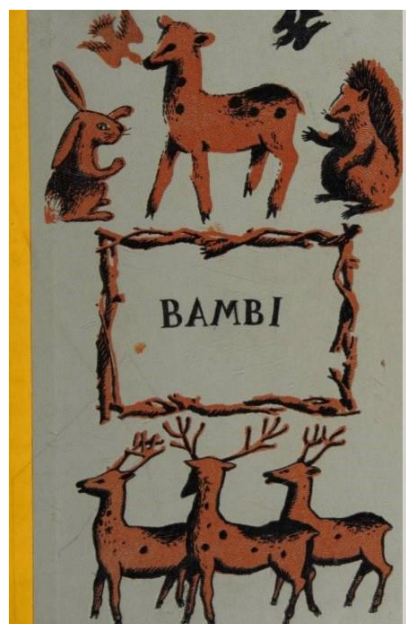
Figure 5. Cover of *Bambi: Eine Lebensgeschichte aus dem Walde*



Salten, 1946

- **Salten, F. (1956).** *Bambi.* **Illustrated by Girard Goodenow. Junior Deluxe Editions.** This mid-century edition reflects changes in the illustration style, moving towards more accessible and colorful depictions aimed at younger audiences. The inclusion of illustrations by Girard Goodenow marks a shift toward a more family oriented representation of *Bambi*.

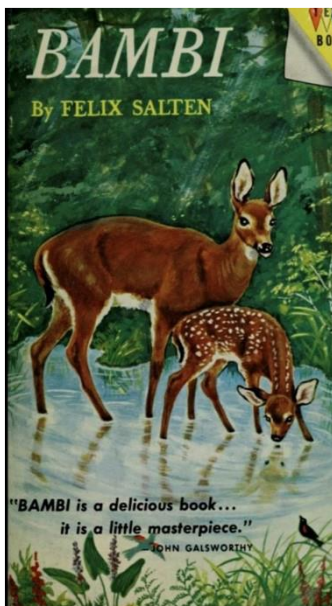
Figure 6. Cover of *Bambi*



Salten, 1956

- **Salten, F. (1964). *Bambi*. Foreword by John Galsworthy. Grosset & Dunlap.** A reprint featuring the introduction of a prominent literary figure, this edition capitalizes on *Bambi's* growing status as a literary classic. The cover likely reflects a more polished and formal aesthetic aimed at older readers and collectors.

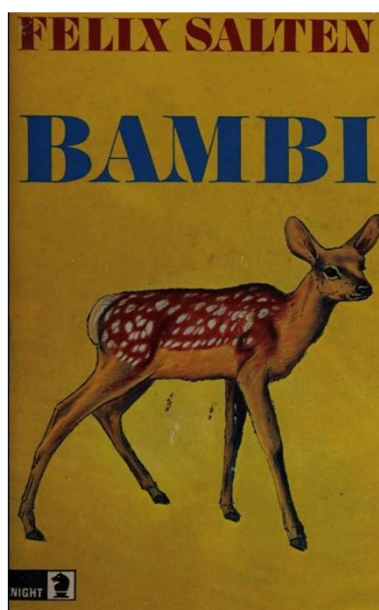
Figure 7. Cover of *Bambi*



Salten, 1964

- **Salten, F. (1967). *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*. Translated by Whittaker Chambers. Illustrated by Maurice Wilson. Knight Books.** With illustrations by Maurice Wilson, this edition provides a unique visual interpretation of *Bambi* within the context of the late 1960s, possibly incorporating more modern and abstract elements into its design.

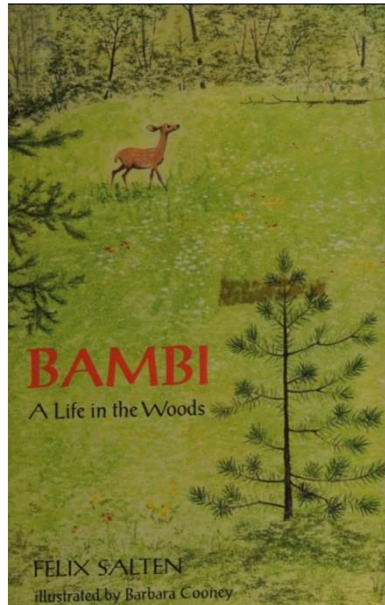
Figure 8. Cover of *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*



Salten, 1967

- **Salten, F. (1970).** *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*. Illustrated by **Barbara Cooney**. **Simon & Schuster**. Illustrated by Barbara Cooney, this edition reflects environmental awareness that began to rise in the 1970s. The cover and illustrations likely emphasize the nature and beauty of the wilderness, in line with the growing ecological consciousness of the time.

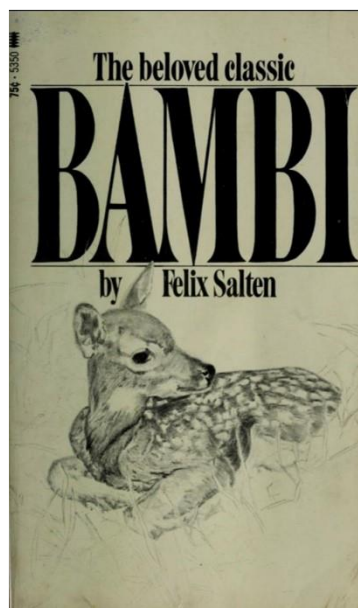
Figure 9. Cover of *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*



Salten, 1970

- **Salten, F. (1972).** *Bambi: The Beloved Classic*. Foreword by **John Galsworthy**. **Grosset & Dunlap**. Another edition with John Galsworthy's foreword capitalizes on Bambi's enduring appeal. It retains much of the formal and classic presentation of earlier editions, with slight updates appealing to contemporary readers.

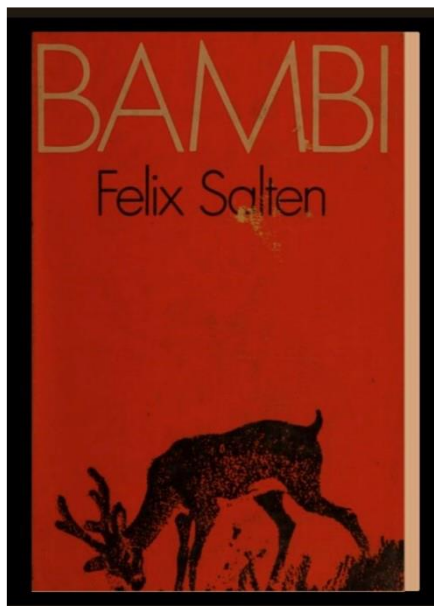
Figure 10. Cover of *Bambi: The Beloved Classic*



Salten, 1972

- **Salten, F. (1982).** *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*. Translated by **Whittaker Chambers**. Foreword by **John Galsworthy**. **Jonathan Cape**. This edition bridges the gap between the earlier and more modern interpretations of *Bambi* using a well-established translation and introduction. The cover design likely incorporated more minimalist or modernist trends from the 1980s onwards.

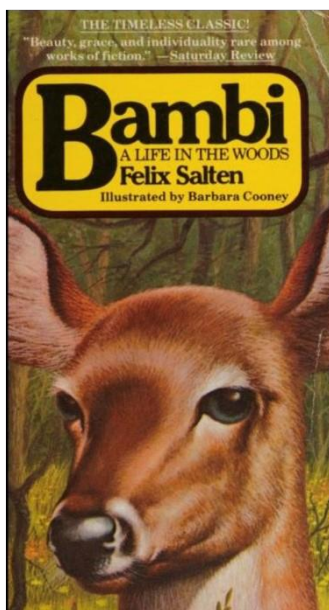
Figure 11. Cover of *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*



Salten, 1982

- **Salten, F. (1988).** *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*. Illustrated by **Barbara Cooney**. **Pocket Books**. A reprint of the earlier illustrated edition by Barbara Cooney continues to reflect the environmental and natural themes that dominated earlier decades. The artwork is likely to be more vivid, aiming to appeal to a broader audience of younger readers.

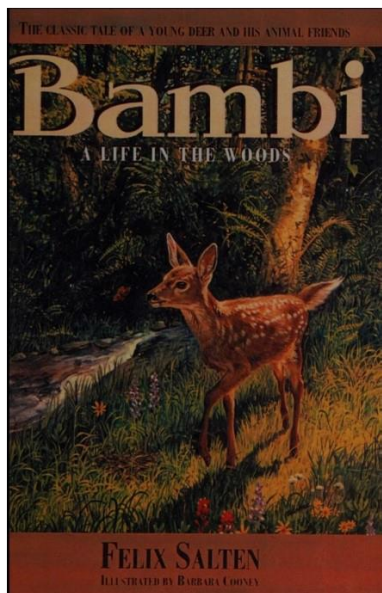
Figure 12. Cover of *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*



Salten, 1988

- **Salten, F. (1998).** *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*. Illustrated by Barbara Cooney Porter. **Pocket Books**. Another reprint featuring Cooney's illustrations, this edition, reflects a shift towards digital print methods and may include updated visual elements to match the design preferences of late 20th-century audiences.

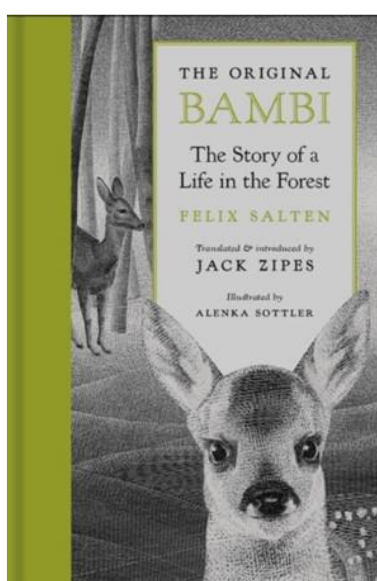
Figure 13. Cover of *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*



Salten, 1998

- **Salten, F. (2022).** *The Original Bambi: The Story of a Life in the Forest*. Translated and introduced by Jack Zipes. Illustrated by Alenka Sottler. **Princeton University Press**. This recent edition, translated and introduced by Jack Zipes, offers a modern reinterpretation of *Bambi*, with new illustrations by Alenka Sottler. The design reflects a contemporary focus on sustainability and a return to the roots of the story, as well as a critical reexamination of its themes.

Figure 14. Cover of *The Original Bambi: The Story of a Life in the Forest*



Salten, 2022

Notes on Duplications

Several editions of the corpus include multiple publications by the same publisher or with the same illustrator. These duplications were retained because of notable updates in the cover design or layout, which reflect shifts in cultural and editorial strategies over time. For example:

- **Kurt Weise's illustrations** appear in both the 1929 and 1931 editions, but these editions show slight changes in layout and emphasis in response to *Bambi's* growing popularity in the English-speaking world.
- **Barbara Cooney's illustrations** are featured in the 1970, 1988, and 1998 editions. Each reprint represents an attempt to refresh the visual presentation of *Bambi* while maintaining the ecological themes conveyed by Cooney's illustrations. These updates reflect the changes in print technology and design preferences from the 1970s to the late 1990s.
- **Grosset & Dunlap editions** (1929, 1931, 1964, and 1972) reveal how one publisher adapted the book's design across decades to appeal to different audiences. While the core themes of nature and survival remained constant, visual presentation was updated to reflect shifts in marketing strategies and reader expectations.

7. ANALYSIS OF THE COVERS

The evolution of *Bambi's* covers over the years offers an intriguing glimpse of cultural shifts and diverse interpretations of the work. From the first German edition in 1923 to the latest in 2022, the covers not only reflect artistic and design trends, but also reveal nuances in the narrative's reception across different periods. Visual elements, such as the depiction of the forest, characters, use of color, and typography, play critical roles in shaping readers' interpretations of the story.

A closer examination of these covers highlights how the layout – including typography, color palettes, and the placement of elements – has been carefully designed to reflect both the themes of the book and the cultural context in which each edition was published. These interconnected elements define the visual identity of each edition and guide readers in forming their initial impressions, creating specific horizons of expectations that frame the thematic depth of *Bambi* even before the reader opens the book.

Typography and font styles

Across the decades, *Bambi* covers have employed a range of typographic styles, oscillating between modern and traditional fonts that reflect both contemporary design trends and the literary stature of the book.

- *1923 Edition (Germany)*: The first edition features ornate cursive for the title and gothic type for the author's name, connecting the work to Germanic literary traditions and evoking a sense of artistry and authority.
- *1929 Edition (US)*: The cover transitions to bold, sans-serif fonts in uppercase, suggesting modernity and aiming to appeal to a broader, American audience.
- *1931 Edition*: A softer cursive font appears, emphasizing emotional accessibility and intimacy, reflecting a narrative more focused on personal relationships.

- *1940 and 1946 Editions*: These editions feature fluid, modernist fonts and italicized cursive, respectively, signaling post-war simplicity, dynamism, and a youthful vigor that connects with Bambi's own growth.
- *1956 and 1967 Editions*: Serif fonts return, clean and formal, with the 1967 edition's bold text in blue contrasting a yellow background, creating a modern and eye-catching appeal.
- *1972 Edition*: The oversized serif font dominates the cover, emphasizing the book's status as a "beloved classic", reinforcing its literary prestige.
- *1982 Edition*: Minimalist sans-serif fonts convey a modernist, introspective approach to the narrative, contrasting the heavy serif styles of earlier editions.
- *1988 and 1998 Editions*: Serif fonts in black or beige maintain a traditional feel, with the 1988 edition balancing this formality against a youthful image of Bambi, while the 1998 cover emphasizes a connection to nature.
- *2022 Edition*: Serif fonts in muted greens and greys create an understated elegance, appealing to a sophisticated, modern audience while remaining faithful to the story's timeless themes.

Color palette

The color palettes of *Bambi's* covers have shifted across the decades, with each edition using tones to influence reader expectations and emphasize particular aspects of the story's emotional and thematic depth.

- *1923 Edition*: Earthy greens, browns, and blues create a serene, introspective atmosphere, tightly linked to the forest setting.
- *1929 Edition*: Deep blues and neutrals evoke mystery and maturity, reflecting Bambi's journey into adulthood. The contrast between the natural tones of the deer and the blue background also highlights the theme of resilience.
- *1946 and 1956 Editions*: Warm browns, greens, and reds reinforce the rustic simplicity of post-war nature and community life, with muted tones fostering harmony.
- *1967 and 1970 Editions*: Vibrant color combinations, like yellow and blue, or soft earth tones, create a sense of energy, discovery, and immersive connection with the natural world.
- *1972 Edition*: Monochromatic black, white, and grey signal the story's emotional depth, drawing attention away from external elements toward Bambi's personal journey.
- *1982 and 1988 Editions*: Bold orange (1982) contrasts with the vibrant realism of natural tones in 1988, where browns and greens evoke the forest's calm, blending introspection with the challenges of survival.
- *1998 Edition*: Rich greens and browns dominate, emphasizing the natural environment and the emotional intensity of Bambi's connection to the forest.
- *2022 Edition*: A minimalist palette of greys and greens underscores the contemplative nature of the story, suggesting a refined literary focus.

Size and placement of elements

The size and placement of the titles and illustrations across *Bambi* covers reflect evolving design priorities—whether focusing on *Bambi* as a character or the broader environment.

- *1923 Edition*: The title is large but balanced with intricate depictions of the forest, blending Bambi's character with his environment.
- *1929 Edition*: The title is bold and occupies much of the upper cover, emphasizing modernity and accessibility for a wider audience. The detailed and realistic deer illustration adds a sense of maturity and elegance.
- *1940 and 1956 Editions*: The title takes a more subtle role, allowing visual elements to integrate the narrative of Bambi within the natural setting.
- *1967 and 1972 Editions*: The title dominates the design (especially in 1972), placing emphasis on the book's literary reputation rather than its narrative or visual content.
- *1982 and 1988 Editions*: Balanced layouts emerge, with text and detailed illustrations working together to establish a strong emotional connection between the imagery and narrative.
- *1998 and 2022 Editions*: Titles are prominent but do not overshadow the intricate, naturalistic backgrounds. Both editions balance text and imagery, emphasizing both narrative themes and literary sophistication.

Visual elements: focus on Bambi as the central character

With the exception of the 1923 edition, most covers prominently feature Bambi, emphasizing the narrative's focus on his experiences in nature.

- *Bambi as Fawn vs. Adult*: Most covers, such as the 1967, 1970, and 1988 editions, depict Bambi as a young fawn, emphasizing vulnerability, growth, and innocence. These visual representations align with themes of childhood, exploration, and the challenges of youth. In contrast, the 1929 edition portrays Bambi as an adult deer, focusing on more serious themes of survival, autonomy, and maturity. This contrast between Bambi as a fawn and as an adult prepares readers for either a lighter coming-of-age story or a more profound reflection on the harsh realities of life in the wild. The transition from depicting Bambi as a young fawn to an adult deer suggests to the reader that the narrative will address themes of growth and maturation, both classical motifs of personal development. Covers that depict Bambi as a fawn highlight the struggles of youth, emphasizing innocence and the difficulties of learning to navigate the world. On the other hand, covers that present him as a mature deer indicate a continued fight for survival and independence. These visual cues not only guide readers in understanding the narrative's thematic direction but also frame Bambi's development as a reflection on the broader life cycle within the natural world.

- *Isolation vs. Community*: Several covers visually explore the themes of isolation and community in *Bambi*, using symbolic imagery to suggest either solitude or interdependence. For instance, the 1931 and 1964 editions depict Bambi with other animals, highlighting themes of social interaction and community. The 1964 edition, in particular, portrays a young Bambi drinking from a water source under the watchful gaze of an adult deer, evoking protection, guidance, and the inherent dangers of the natural world. This depiction reinforces the idea of a connected forest ecosystem, where relationships with other creatures play a critical role in survival. In contrast, covers like those from 1929 and 1998 emphasize Bambi's solitude, presenting him in isolation, which underscores themes of independence and self-sufficiency. The 1929 edition shows Bambi as an adult, alone, focusing on the themes of survival and autonomy. Similarly, the 1998 cover, despite being richly detailed in its depiction of nature, positions Bambi as a lone

figure navigating the vast, untamed wilderness. These visual choices frame Bambi's journey as either a solitary struggle for survival or an exploration of communal life in the forest. By presenting Bambi either in isolation or within a vibrant natural community, these covers set the reader's expectations regarding the narrative focus. Covers emphasizing isolation suggest a story centered on individual resilience and the hardships of survival, while those featuring other animals highlight themes of community, interdependence, and the broader ecological context within the wild.

- *Close-Up vs. Distant Representations*: Bambi's depiction varies between close-up images (1988, 2022 editions) and more distant portrayals (1970 edition), which naturally lead to different interpretations. The 1988 cover, illustrated by Barbara Cooney, captures a close-up of Bambi, highlighting his youthful innocence and vulnerability, suggesting a focus on childhood. Conversely, the 2022 edition, introduced by Jack Zipes, presents a more nuanced view, with an adult deer in the background and Bambi's face in the foreground, creating a sense of both vulnerability and uncertainty about the unfolding narrative. The absence of human figures in these compositions further emphasizes the centrality of the wild and the animal perspective.

- *Central vs. Marginal Positioning*: Bambi is often positioned centrally, as in the 1998 edition, signaling that his experiences are the story's focal point. However, editions like 1970 position him off-center, suggesting a broader narrative scope that includes his interactions with the environment. The deer typically appears on the covers either feeding (1964 and 1982 editions), wandering, always in contact with nature (1931, 1940, 1967, 1970, and 1998 editions), or standing still (1941, 1972, 1988, and 2022 editions).

Bambi's environment and ecological themes

The natural landscape consistently plays a key role in *Bambi's* covers, reinforcing the connection to the forest, which serves as both shelter and threat. Across different editions, the depiction of nature not only sets the scene but also symbolizes the broader narrative, portraying the forest as a dynamic space where Bambi must grow and face numerous challenges.

- *1923 Edition*: A stylized forest as the centerpiece suggests a mysterious, challenging environment that Bambi must navigate. This visual choice introduces the forest as a crucial element in shaping Bambi's journey, emphasizing both its beauty and the dangers it harbors.

- *1972 Edition*: Sparse charcoal drawings emphasize Bambi's vulnerability within the vast wilderness. The simplicity of these illustrations highlights the overwhelming scale of nature in contrast to the fragility of Bambi.

- *1998 Edition*: A richly detailed forest setting immerses readers in Bambi's habitat, underscoring the beauty and dangers of the wild. The intricate depiction of the forest reinforces its significance as both a nurturing space and one filled with peril, symbolizing Bambi's complex relationship with his environment as he matures.

Across all these covers, the consistent presence of nature conveys an expectation that the setting will be fundamental to the narrative, not merely as a backdrop but as a living, dynamic space where Bambi grows and confronts challenges. The forest is portrayed as both a refuge and a space of danger and uncertainty, reflecting Bambi's journey of growth and survival.

The absence of human figures across these covers reinforces the notion that *Bambi* is a story centered on the animal perspective, with ecological and survival themes at the forefront.

The symbolic representation of nature as a space where life unfolds aligns with the notion of the forest as a living entity, shaping the narrative as much as the characters themselves.

Bambi can thus be viewed as an early example of environmental literature (Branch, 1998; Parham & Westling, 2016; Stables, 1996), exploring themes of nature, wilderness, and their relationship with humanity. These themes, central to the narrative, resonate with broader cultural concerns about the environment and humanity's place within it, reflecting a growing awareness of the natural world's intrinsic value beyond human dominance. By positioning nature as a pivotal force in *Bambi*'s story, these covers invite readers to engage with the ecological dimensions of the narrative, highlighting the delicate balance between life, survival, and the natural environment.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the 14 covers from various editions of *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*, spanning nearly 100 years, underscores the significant role of visual choices in shaping readers' expectations even before they open the book. These covers are not merely decorative elements; they serve as visual gateways that communicate, both symbolically and aesthetically, the central themes of the work, preparing readers for the underlying narrative.

The consistent focus on *Bambi*, the young deer, in nearly all the covers reinforces the importance of the protagonist and establishes an immediate connection between him and the reader. This design strategy directs the audience towards a narrative that is both personal and expansive, addressing growth and the challenges of life in nature. The covers highlight *Bambi*'s maturation within his natural environment, mirroring the thematic exploration of personal development and the complex dynamics of life in the forest.

The visual evolution of *Bambi* covers from 1923 to 2022 offers rich material for analyzing how artistic interpretations, market trends, and narrative focus have shaped reader expectations. Through the careful integration of typography, color palettes, layout, and iconography, each edition presents *Bambi* not merely as a tale of wildlife but as a timeless story of growth, survival, and emotional depth. The artistic variations between intricate realism and stylized abstraction reflect the design trends of their respective periods while also underscoring the enduring appeal of the book.

From a symbolic perspective, the visual representations of *Bambi* encapsulate moments of innocence and vulnerability, key themes that reflect youth, development, and the challenges of surviving in the wild. The consistent emphasis on growth, survival, and emotional depth demonstrates the thoughtful integration of narrative and artistic elements in shaping the reader's interpretive horizons. By positioning *Bambi* at the center of the cover designs, readers are invited into a narrative that balances emotional warmth with deeper reflections on survival, ecological consciousness, and the impact of human actions on nature.

Moreover, this analysis highlights how the covers reflect cultural shifts and different interpretive lenses over time. The artistic evolution of *Bambi*'s covers across decades reveals the story's adaptability and its ability to resonate with readers across different cultures and periods through universally relevant themes. The study confirms that *Bambi* is not only a classic of children's literature (Calvino, 1994) but also a work that provokes profound reflections on ecology, personal development, and human impact on the natural environment.

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