

Bambi Turns 100! But What Is The Story Really About?

Follow-up to
A Conversation with Fairy Tale and
Children's Book Scholar and Translator
Dr. Jack Zipes

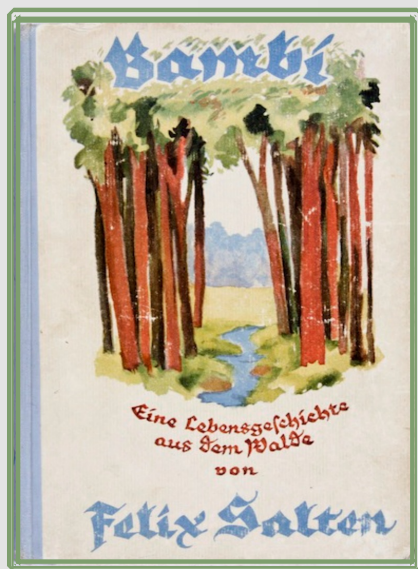


The Film Society of Sinai Free Synagogue
Mount Vernon, NY

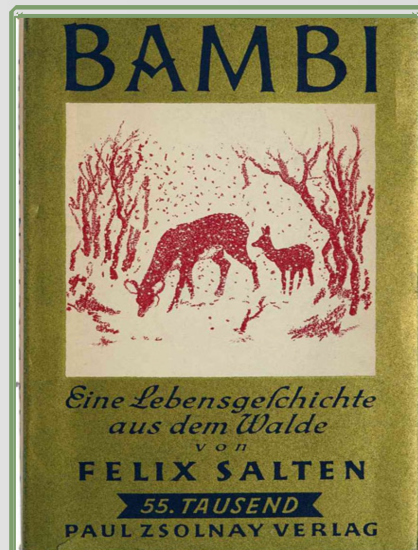
SALTEN & ZIPES. *THE ORIGINAL BAMBI: THE STORY OF A LIFE IN THE FOREST*. TRANSLATED BY JACK ZIPES FROM FELIX SALTEN'S *BAMBI: A STORY OF A LIFE IN THE WOODS* (1923). COPYRIGHT © 2022 BY PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS. ILLUSTRATIONS COPYRIGHT © 2022 BY ALENKA SOTTLER. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Bambi: A Story of a Life in the Woods, by Felix Salten

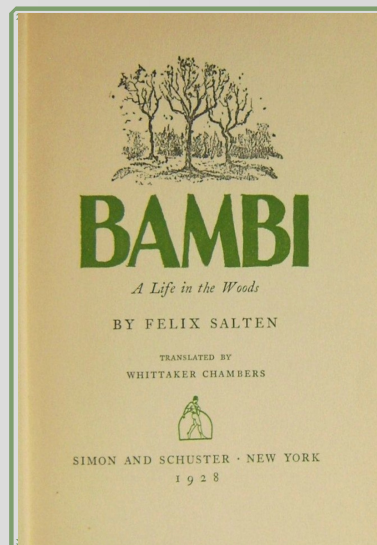
1923 edition



1926 edition

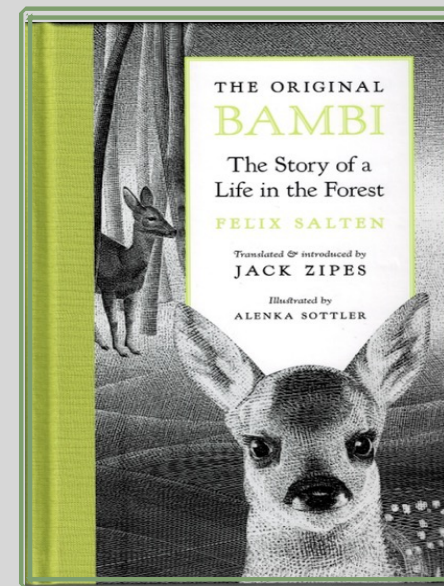


1928 edition translated by
Whittaker Chambers
(first English translation)



Subsequent
English
translations
until...

2022 edition translated by
Jack Zipes



Illustrated by
Alenka Sottler

All three 1920s editions illustrated by
Kurt Wiese

"Bambi is a delicious book. For delicacy of perception and essential truth, I hardly know any story of animals that can stand beside this life study of a forest deer." John Galsworthy, foreword to the Whittaker Chambers translation.

Poetry and Philosophy in A Tale of Forest Life

*In "Bambi," Felix Salten Writes an Animal Story That Is
Literature of a High Order*

Book review by John R. Chamberlain of the first English language edition (translated by Whittaker Chambers)
The New York Times, July 8, 1928

For Felix Salten, in "Bambi," takes you out of yourself. He has the gift of a tender, lucid style. His observation is next door to marvelous, and he invests the fruits of this observation with pure poetry. His comprehension makes his deer, his screech-owls, his butterflies, grasshoppers and hares, far more exciting to read about than hundreds of human beings who crowd the pages of our novels.



Bambi: Two Leaves (Zwei Blätter) By Felix Salten. Translated by Jack Zipes



(an existential dialogue)

The leaves fell from the great oak tree at the edge of the meadow. They fell from all the trees. One branch of the oak tree stood high above the others and stretched far out toward the meadow. Two leaves sat together on its very tip . . .

“It’s no longer like the old days,” one leaf said to the other . . .

“No one knows who’s going to fall next,” the first leaf said.”

“What happens to us when we fall from the tree?” the second asked.

The first leaf responded: “Who knows? None of those who have fallen down there have ever returned to tell us about it . . .”

Then the first leaf spoke tenderly to the other: “Don’t grieve about this too much. You’re trembling . . .”

“Don’t worry,” the second leaf answered. “These days I tremble easily. I don’t feel all that secure anymore in my place” . . .

“Which of us will be the first to fall down there?”

“There’s still plenty of time to worry about that,” the first leaf calmed him down. “Instead, let’s remember now just how beautiful it was, how wonderfully beautiful, when the sun came and glistened so hot . . . And then the morning dew, and the mild glorious nights!” . . .

Now both of them became silent. The hours passed.

A moist wind, cold and harsh, swept through the treetop. “Oh, oh . . . now,” the second leaf said. “I . . .” Then his voice broke off. The leaf was softly cast from its place and floated downward.

Winter had arrived.



Who Was Felix Salten?



September 6, 1869 - October 8, 1945

Salten was an Austrian Jewish novelist and journalist . . .

SKETCH FROM A PHOTO OF ST. STEPHEN'S CATHEDRAL



By Alenka Sottler, illustrator of *Bambi: The Story of a Life in the Forest*, translated by Jack Zipes (2022) from *Bambi: A Story of a Life in the Woods*, by Felix Salten. One of a series of preliminary sketches in which she seeks to depict the allegorical nature of *Bambi* (“the forest becomes Vienna”). This illustration is not in the book.

“Felix Salten is a remarkable example of Vienna’s powers of assimilation. Born in Budapest of Jewish parents and learning Hungarian as his mother tongue, he has been absorbed, transformed and reborn of Vienna, as truly a typical Viennese as anyone who came into the world within sight of the shadow of the spire of St. Stephen’s Cathedral. Even when his pen travels beyond the narrow frontiers of Austria and depicts his personal land of desire, New Palestine, Salten always peers through Viennese spectacles and forms his judgments on Viennese principles.”

G.E.R. Gedye (British journalist and foreign correspondent)
The New York Times
September 8, 1929



a Zionist . . .

Felix Salten and Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) were close friends, and Salten wrote a weekly column for *Die Welt*, Herzl's Zionist newspaper.

In 1929, the Zionist Organization of America published *Theodor Herzl: A Memorial* (edited by Meyer Wolfe Weisgal) to mark the 25th anniversary of Herzl's death. It included a tribute by Salten.

His tribute concludes: "Only when he was borne to his grave on the lofty *Türkenschanze*, when...I saw the enormous train of his funeral procession – only then did I understand how appalling was the loss which Jewry had suffered."



HOWARD ZIK. *THEODOR HERZL WITH HIS ASTONISHING TALENTS AND FRIENDSHIPS*.
JEWISHPRESS.COM. AUGUST 8, 2019.

CHARLIE TYSON. *THE DARKER SIDE OF 'BAMBI.'* WHAT FELIX SALTEN'S TALE TEACHES US ABOUT THE LIVES OF MEN.
THE YALE REVIEW. UNDATED.

As a Friend Knew Him

A Reminiscence of Herzl and His Influence in Literary Vienna

By FELIX SALTEN

vested with a prose of extreme simplicity, Felix Salten has gradually and eminence in the European literary world. America became acquainted with him last year through his best-selling novel of animal life, "Bambi." In this sketch Salten remembers Theodor Herzl the man and his literary work, for whose Zionist paper, "Die Welt," he often wrote. Due to the arrival of this manuscript, it has been placed in this section and not Section I where it properly belongs.

EVERN his very first impression upon me was extraordinarily powerful. It was unforgettable, that meeting: I was a mere youth, employed in the editorial office of a Viennese evening paper; one day the door opened—majestically, so to speak—and Theodor Herzl was in the room.

Vigorously, gaily he voiced his greeting: "I call my colleagues!" As he had just completed the arrangements for his permanent transfer from Paris he did not quite understand what he might want in our office. I had, of course, long been an admirer of his graceful, witty, spirited feuilletons. But it developed that he had not come for a discussion of literary matters. He had brought in his *Judenstaat*, and was seeking to win our paper over to his cause.

I read his pamphlet the day he gave it to me; and today I may confess that the reading of it released my spirit. At that time political and social anti-Semitism—encouraged by the Mayor, Dr. Lueger—was making triumphal progress in Vienna; Paris was living its Dreyfus affair. It is difficult to describe my position as a young author and a Jew: All about me was diffidence, servile acceptance of the demagogic leader's success or, at most, waggery or venomous lemons. Only the voice of Theodor Herzl was purely Jewish. My talks with him—at a time when rapid growth was still a natural process for a youthful mind—soon brought me to a recognition of the degeneracy of the Jews in the large cities of eastern Europe.

Theodor Herzl—who naturally felt this much more profoundly and much more painfully than I—gradually became filled with ineffable bitterness. Yet his light at every recruit to his ranks was great; thus he welcomed me affectionately when I came to him and told him that I would publicly espouse his cause. Soon after he began to publish a Zionist weekly, *Die Welt*, for which I wrote many articles. I often met him at the printer's; and he fascinated me again and again with his unique mixture of embitterment and gaiety, confidence and momentary despair, irony and immutability of purpose.

Particularly, however, I remember a meeting with him at Alt-Aussee, a summer resort in the Styrian mountains frequented by fashionable Viennese society. He was wearing the Styrian peasant costume:

leather breeches that left his knees bare, a broad belt, a short jacket of rough green cloth and a hunter's hat of green ornamented with an enormous chamois beard. Naturally I was struck by the curious contrast between this attire and his position as the Zionist leader, and could not refrain from remarking upon it. He smiled; but a little later, grown thoughtful, he suggested that his costume might be a symbol of the tragic situation he shared with so many others. That day in Alt-Aussee has made a lasting impress upon my memory.

I recall one of the last times I saw him—a melancholy experience. It was a fine Sunday afternoon; my wife and I were promenading on the Ringstrasse. We felt very happy—we had been married only a few weeks—and were laughing exuberantly. I no longer know at what we were laughing, for suddenly our mirth was extinguished: Theodor Herzl stood before us. "Children," he said with an attempt at a smile, "how I envy you! You cannot imagine how I yearn, how I thirst to feel such joyousness again!" We were profoundly moved—not only by his words, but by his appearance. He looked pale and exhausted; his eyes bespoke deep pain. We walked with him for a while; and everything he said expressed discouragement, disappointment and sorrow.

Not long after this I heard that Theodor Herzl had fallen ill. But I was not alarmed until a friend told me that he had visited Herzl in Edlach and had found him near death. "I am like a tree that has been felled," Herzl had told this friend. I found it hard to believe. I resolved, however, to obey the summons of Herzl, who had asked my friend to tell me to visit him in Edlach soon. But before I had an opportunity to see him it was too late.

One beautiful morning, early that summer, I was sitting on the lawn before our suburban house, enjoying the prospect of distant Vienna, when a messenger from my paper came up the grassy slope. He handed me a slip on which was written: "Theodor Herzl is dead." But even then I was unable to believe the crushing truth. Indeed, I wrote his obituary notice without fully realizing that he was actually dead.

Only when he was borne to his grave on the lofty *Türkenschanze*, when, together with Arthur Schnitzler and Hermann Bahr, I saw the enormous train of his funeral procession—only then did I understand how appalling was the loss which Jewry had suffered. But of all the mournful scenes there the most heart-breaking was the sight of Herzl's mother—dove-eyed, her face unmoving as if carved out of stone, following the coffin with the tragic dignity of a Biblical figure.

[239]



. . . and a man of contrasts and contradictions

A lover of animals, with great compassion for their plight at the mercy of Man.

An insider

- ❖ **Highly assimilated** (with ties to the ruling Habsburg family)
- ❖ **Important** in Austrian and Viennese cultural life
 - member of Young Vienna (Jung-Wien), a literary movement that challenged moralistic 19th century literature and advocated “sociological truth and psychological – especially sexual – openness”;
 - art and theater critic;
 - prolific and published author.

A hunter

An outsider

- ❖ **Critical** of “the attempt to hide or disown one’s Jewish heritage”
- ❖ **Zionist**
 - columnist for Theodor Herzl’s newspaper *The World (Die Welt)*;
 - speaker at the Bar Kochba Association, a Zionist student organization in Prague, in 1909 (“a brilliant performance”) and 1911;
 - traveler to Palestine in 1924 (described his trip in *New People on Ancient Soil*, 1925).

CARL E. SCHORSKE. *FIN-DE-SIÈCLE VIENNA: POLITICS AND CULTURE*, p 212. COPYRIGHT 1961, 1967, 1973, 1979 BY CARL E. SCHORSKE. VINTAGE BOOKS EDITION, JANUARY 1981.

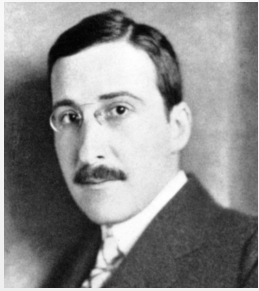
PAUL REITTER. *BAMBI’S JEWISH ROOTS*. JEWISH REVIEW OF BOOKS; WINTER 2014.

BAR KOCHBA ASSOCIATION. ENCYCLOPEDIA.COM.

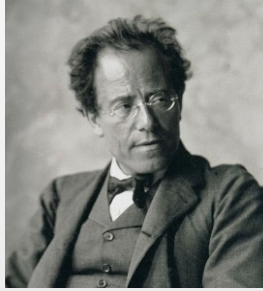
NEUE MENSCHEN AUF ALTER ERDE: EINE PALÄSTINAFAHRT (NEW PEOPLE ON ANCIENT SOIL: A TRIP TO PALESTINE). WIKIPEDIA.

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Felix Salten's Vienna (1895-1938): Home of Psychoanalysis, Zionism . . .



STEFAN ZWEIG,
WRITER (FICTION,
HISTORY, MEMOIR)



GUSTAV MAHLER,
COMPOSER & CONDUCTOR



ARNOLD SCHÖNBERG,
COMPOSER & TEACHER

Several of Salten's Jewish contemporaries



THE RINGSTRASSE

BUILT IN THE MID-19TH CENTURY, IT REPLACED THE MEDIEVAL DEFENSES THAT HAD ENCIRCLED VIENNA. THE RINGSTRASSE REPRESENTED THE RISE OF MERCHANTS AND THE MIDDLE CLASS.



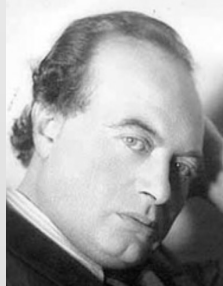
BERTIE ZUCKERKANDL,
WRITER, ART CRITIC, & SALONNIÈRE
(ONE OF SEVERAL DESCRIBED AS
"ENGINES OF MODERNISM")



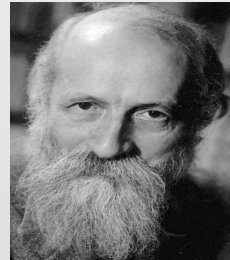
FRIEDL DICKER-BRANDEIS
PAINTER, ARCHITECT, TEACHER
(KILLED AT AUSCHWITZ, AGE 46)



ARTHUR SCHNITZLER,
WRITER & DRAMATIST



FRANZ WERFEL,
POET,
PLAYWRIGHT, &
NOVELIST



MARTIN BUBER,
PHILOSOPHER



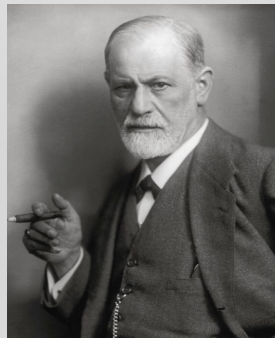
ELSE JERUSALEM,
WRITER & FEMINIST



FRANZ KAFKA,
WRITER (NOVELS, SHORT STORIES)



THEODOR HERZL,
JOURNALIST, ACTIVIST,
& FATHER OF MODERN
POLITICAL ZIONISM



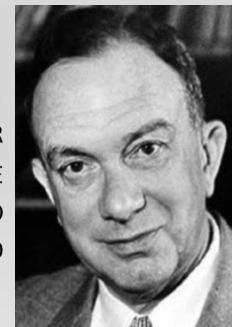
SIGMUND FREUD,
NEUROLOGIST & FOUNDER
OF PSYCHOANALYSIS



CAFÉ GRIENSTEIDL (BEFORE 1897), WHERE THE WRITERS KNOWN AS YOUNG VIENNA MET. THEY INCLUDED FELIX SALTEN, ARTHUR SCHNITZLER, AND STEFAN ZWEIG.



JOSEF ROTH,
JOURNALIST & NOVELIST



OTTO KALLIR,
ART HISTORIAN & COLLECTOR
(FOUNDED THE ORIGINAL NEUE
GALERIE IN 1923 AND INTRODUCED
KLIMT, KOKOSCHKA, & SCHIELE TO
AMERICA)

... and Nazism

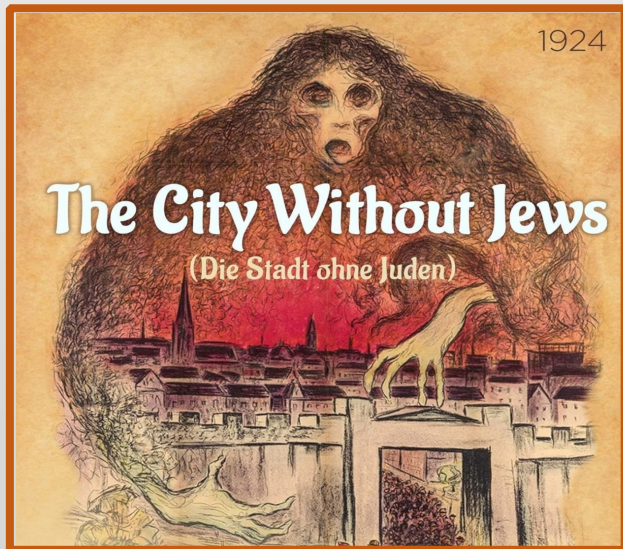
Anti-Semitism in Vienna.

VIENNA, June 7.—Posters of a violent anti-Semitic character appeared all over the city Sunday. One series requested Gentiles to join leagues for the elimination of Jews from the business and official life of the country and for the expulsion of non-Austrian Jews. Other posters, signed by the German Officers' Association, demand that the army be freed of Jews.

The New York Times

Published: June 8, 1920
Copyright © The New York Times

Silent film (1924) based on a 1922 novel by Hugo Bettauer



The City Without Jews (1924). Flicker Alley

Bettauer (b. 1872), an Austrian writer and journalist, was Jewish by birth. A convert to Christianity, he spoke out against antisemitism. His satirical novel depicts the decline of Vienna after a new law expels all Jews. The film, which has horrifically prophetic scenes, enraged antisemites. **Bettauer was murdered in Vienna by a Nazi party member in March 1925**, exactly 13 years before the Anschluss. Last shown in 1933, the film was lost until a full copy surfaced in 2015 and was restored by FilmArchiv Austria.

NICOLE BAXTER. A NEARLY 100-YEAR-OLD SILENT FILM THAT OUTRAGED ANTI-SEMITES IS MAKING ITS IOWA PREMIERE. HERE'S WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL. IOWA PUBLIC RADIO. SEPTEMBER 21, 2023.

RICK NOACK. LONG LOST-FILM THAT PREDICTED THE RISE OF ANTI-SEMITISM HAS OMINOUS MESSAGE FOR TODAY'S WORLD. THE WASHINGTON POST. MARCH 30, 2018.

ON MARCH 15, 1938, ABOUT 200,000 GERMAN AUSTRIANS CHEERED IN VIENNA'S HELDENPLATZ (SQUARE OF HEROES) AS HITLER ANNOUNCED THE ANSCHLUSS ('ANNEXATION') OF AUSTRIA, WHICH TOOK PLACE ON MARCH 11-13



Hitler spent seven years of "study and suffering" in Vienna, during which "my eyes were opened to two perils, the names of which I scarcely knew hitherto and had no notion whatsoever of their terrible significance for the existence of the German people. These two perils were Marxism and Judaism...Vienna taught me the most profound lessons of my life" (*Mein Kampf*, 1925-1926). He left for Germany in 1914 but returned to Vienna in triumph following the Anschluss.



The Cultural Critic

After the Anschluss, Jews were forced to clean the streets of Vienna (1938).

Into Exile: 1938

Raised in quiet...and peace, we are suddenly thrown upon the world . . . Goethe, "To Lottie"

Felix Salten and the Austrian Jewish writer Stefan Zweig corresponded prolifically for over thirty years. Zweig (1881-1942) was born and raised in Vienna. When Salten and Zweig fled Austria after the Anschluss, their correspondence intensified as they tried to encourage one another while in exile, continents apart. Zweig lived briefly in Ossining, NY, before moving to Brazil.



The World of Yesterday Is Zweig's memoir of Vienna from the late Habsburg Empire to the Hitler years. He sent the manuscript to his publisher on February 21, 1942, one day before he and his wife committed suicide in Petropolis, Brazil.

"When I attempt to find a simple formula for the period in which I grew up, prior to the First World War, I hope that I convey its fullness by calling it The Golden Age of Security . . ." [CHAPTER ONE: THE AGE OF SECURITY, P 1]

"My father, my grandfather, what did they see? . . . In even rhythm, leisurely and quietly, the wave of time bore them from the cradle to the grave...I belong nowhere, and everywhere am a stranger, a guest at best. Europe, the homeland of my heart's choice, is lost to me . . . Against my will I have witnessed the most terrible defeat of reason and the wildest triumph of brutality in the chronicle of the ages." [PREFACE, PP XVIII, XIX]

Stefan Zweig

The World of Yesterday: Memoirs of a European

"IHRE BRIEFE BEWAHRE ICH ALLE." DIE KORRESPONDENZ ZWISCHEN FELIX SALTEN & STEFAN ZWEIF.
["I KEEP ALL OF YOUR LETTERS." THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN FELIX SALTEN & STEFAN
ZWEIG]. BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DU LUXEMBOURG. NOVEMBER 8, 2023.



STEFAN ZWEIF, *THE WORLD OF YESTERDAY*. COPYRIGHT 1943 BY THE VIKING PRESS, INC.

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Is *Bambi* Felix Salten's "Fictional Autobiography"??*

“. . . Salten's novel is a brilliant and profound story of how minority groups throughout the world have been brutally treated, even when they try to live peacefully in their own environment.”

Jack Zipes, Introduction

The Original Bambi: The Story of a Life in the Forest



Gobo was Bambi's cousin and the twin brother of **Faline** (the future mother of Bambi's children). Weak and sickly, he was shot by Man. But He took Gobo home and, after nursing him back to health, returned Gobo to the forest. Gobo made the fatal assumption that Man could be trusted and would do him no harm. **Marena** was in love with Gobo.

“Like Gobo, Felix Salten Did Not Know Who His Real Enemy Was”*

They were about to go away, when suddenly the jay screamed loudly from the far side of the meadow . . .
“Did you hear that?” Bambi cried . . . “That means danger!” . . .
Gobo stood there smiling in his superior way. “Danger! Danger! Who cares about that? Not me.” . . .
“Let’s get out of here!” cried Bambi. “Come quickly!”
But Gobo remained unmoved.



While they stood and watched, he went out onto the meadow. They remained there astonished by his great confidence, and at the same time, they were gripped by an enormous fear for his life . . .

Gobo stood freely on the meadow looking around for the alder trees . . . However immediately a thunderbolt blazed from the bushes. Gobo was sent flying into the air by the shot. Quickly he turned around and fled back to the thicket, staggering as he came . . .

Gobo laid there with his bloody entrails streaming from his torn flank.

“Marena,” he said with an effort. “Marena . . . He didn’t recognize me.”

His voice broke down . . . “He’s approaching,” she whispered frantically . . . “He’s coming! Can’t you get up and come with me?” . . .

Marena saw that He was very near. She retreated slowly and disappeared through the nearest bushes . . . He was bent over and grabbed the wounded Gobo. Then they heard Gobo’s wailing death shriek.



“A Word of Warning before You Enter the Forest”



Bambi is a sad but truthful novel. It was never intended for children. Unfortunately, the little ones—not to mention their parents—have been fed a diluted version in films and numerous books. Salten, a brilliant Austrian journalist and lover of animals, was also a dedicated hunter, a killer of deer and other harmless beasts. His novel *Bambi*, written after World War I, is an allegory about the weak and powerless in the world. This story has great implications for the development of humanity in our conflicted world. I was overwhelmed by Salten’s dilemmas as I translated his work and hope that I have done it justice.

Jack Zipes

The Original Bambi: The Story of a Life in the Forest

Translator’s Note. June 7, 2021

The challenge was how to express the dual nature of the text: at first glance, the children’s story of the animal world; and the hidden real existential drama of the Jewish population and, with it, writer Felix Salten in Vienna, just before the onset of fascism.

Alenka Sottler, Illustrator (2022)

The Original Bambi: The Story of a Life in the Forest



Walt Disney “radically transformed” *Bambi*

“Taken critically and seriously, Salten’s novel exposes the Disney *Bambi* as a shallow, sentimental film.”

Jack Zipes, Introduction
The Original Bambi: The Story of a Life in the Forest

“The film is faithful to visual, artistic accuracy in the general appearance and movements of many of its animals, not to a scientific or ecological accuracy. Even the visual accuracy is compromised for the sake of cuteness...This image of cuteness has become so popular that even adult deer are sometimes mistakenly shown with spots.”

Ralph Lutts, “The Trouble with *Bambi*: Walt Disney’s *Bambi* and the American Vision of Nature”



Disney



Allstar/Disney

The Hunter Dogs



disneyscreencaps.com

Final Scene



Disney

JACK ZIPES. “A SYRUPY LOVE-FEST.” *ON THE BLASPHEMOUS DISNEYFICATION OF FELIX SALTEN’S ‘BAMBI.’*
VIA PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS. JANUARY 31, 2022.

SALTEN & ZIPES. *THE ORIGINAL BAMBI: THE STORY OF A LIFE IN THE FOREST*. INTRODUCTION, P XXII. TRANSLATED BY JACK ZIPES FROM
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RALPH LUTTS. *THE TROUBLE WITH ‘BAMBI’: WALT DISNEY’S ‘BAMBI’ AND THE AMERICAN VISION OF NATURE*.
FOREST AND CONSERVATION HISTORY; 36: 160-171. OCTOBER 1992.

Like Bambi, Felix Salten Ultimately Had No Secure Place in the World



Felix Salten

September 6, 1869 - October 8, 1945

In 1933, Felix Salten sold the film rights to *Bambi* for just \$1,000 to an American director, who then sold them to Disney. He earned nothing from the famous animation (although he was financially comfortable).

The Nazis banned *Bambi* in 1936 (copies were burned). Two years later, following the Anschluss, Salten fled to Switzerland. Before fleeing, he took the precaution of destroying many personal belongings and much of his correspondence archive. But he wrote to Stefan Zweig: “I am keeping all of your letters.”

In 1940, the Nazis stripped Salten of his Austrian citizenship. This left him stateless, which meant that Switzerland could deport him at will.

Salten’s final years were spent in Zurich. After the loss of his friends and the Vienna that he loved – preceded by the death of his son in 1937 – he was a “broken man.” Yet his fate, while tragic, is “minor” compared with that of others during the Holocaust.

JACK ZIPES. “A SYRUPY LOVE-FEST.” *ON THE BLASPHEMOUS DISNEYFICATION OF FELIX SALTEN’S ‘BAMBI.’*
VIA PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS. JANUARY 31, 2022.

DONNA FERGUSON. ‘BAMBI’: CUTE, LOVABLE, VULNERABLE . . . OR A DARK PARABLE OF ANTISEMITIC TERROR?
THE GUARDIAN. DECEMBER 25, 2021.

FELIX SALTEN, *BAMBI’S* VIENNESE FATHER WHO REMAINED IN THE SHADOWS. FRANCE 24. JUNE 12, 2021.

RENATE WAGNER. *FELIX SALTEN – STEFAN ZWEIG: CORRESPONDENCE.* ONLINE MERKER. MAY 25, 2023.

ANNE BEADE. *FELIX SALTEN, THE NEGLECTED CREATOR OF ‘BAMBI,’ CELEBRATED IN VIENNA SHOW.* THE TIMES OF ISRAEL.
JUNE 12, 2021.



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