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“But Business is Business, and Business Must Grow”: A Take on The Lorax

Keywords

Marxist Theory, The Lorax, Theodor Seuss Geisel, Dr. Seuss

**“But Business is Business, and Business Must
Grow”: A Marxist Take on *The Lorax***

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On the surface, children’s books can be entertaining and light-hearted. They are meant to amuse, to teach, to make reading fun, and, occasionally, to promote a moral lesson. Few children’s books are appealing to the adult audience except as an item of curiosity or as a temporary distraction from more “mature” pursuits. However, when a children’s book delivers a particularly powerful message that reaches beyond its simple language, it becomes accessible to young and old alike.

The Lorax is such a book; the tale of the Lorax and his truffula trees spans generations and is widely

considered a classic children's favorite. Pages of detailed, colorful illustrations and playful language make the book appealing to youth, while the timeless message of ecological preservation touches older generations who gradually understand what the Lorax has been trying to tell us all along. With age, we come to realize that the sadness that accompanies the devastation of the Lorax's habitat and the extinction of the Truffula trees is all the more palpable because it is an allegory of our own declining ecological situation. A brilliant critique of industrial capitalism, *The Lorax* is also a telling example of America's sometimes misguided attempts at environmentalism (Darling 52). Written in 1971, the book is largely hailed as the beginning of the environmentalist movement (Dobrin 11).

While the ecological warning expounded by Theodore Geisel's wheezy old Lorax is a potent message indeed, it begs the question as to why it is so effective. Few children's books make such a resounding statement, a statement that has spanned almost four decades without showing signs of losing effectiveness. In fact, the environmental crisis has never felt as real as it does right now, making the message of *The Lorax* hit that much closer to home. Anyone who lives in a heavily polluted city or fears for the fate of the rainforests can attest to that. Just how, exactly, did our situation get so bad? There is no easy answer because it is a complicated question. One way to delve into the deeper meaning behind *The Lorax* is to use Marx's theories to help us understand how a seemingly innocent children's story, through rhyme and nonsense, can both

expose and refute the evils of modern society.

Historical and Socio-economic Influence

There is no doubt that decades of human history have influenced the societal criticisms found in *The Lorax*, beginning with the Industrial Revolution and extending to modern times and current values. After all, would we even be facing global warming, pollution, and polar bear extinction if humans had never opened factories, mass-produced commercial goods, or consumed products at such an alarming rate? Would the Truffula trees and the wildlife have disappeared if people weren't so crazy for Thneeds? Probably not; but it has happened nonetheless, both literally and figuratively. Dr. Seuss's book traces the development of our increasingly capitalistic global society.

Marxist criticism is concerned with examining the history that produced a text (Hart 322). Furthermore, it is important to look at everything about a text that serves to make it unique. The fact that a renowned children's author incorporated a serious social message into a children's book, full of colorful illustrations and nonsense words, serves to make the text unique and enhance its message. Indeed, Dr. Seuss is no stranger; he is someone with whom many of us grew up, and the fact that we were encouraged to read his books as children adds to his credibility. If an unknown author had written *The Lorax*, would we have paid its message the same heed?

Marxist critique makes the form of *The Lorax* impossible to ignore. Using child-like language and fanciful illustrations makes the book appealing to children and

to adults who wish to revisit an old favorite or examine its message a little more thoroughly. In other words, incorporating his message into a children's book is a brilliant way of making *The Lorax* as versatile as possible. Even if children do not understand that the book is a criticism of our rampant disregard for the environment or the potential evils of capitalism, they still empathize with the Lorax and his friends and understand that the Once-ler's greed brought about the demise of an ecosystem.

Paradise Lost: Utopian Ideals

No detail is too small for a Marxist critique, and *The Lorax* is no exception. The illustrations in the book are particularly important for making the meaning of the story explicit to young readers. Rather than beginning with a depiction of the Lorax and his Truffula forest in all its glory, for instance, the first few pages of the book open upon a desolate wasteland under darkened skies:

At the far end of town
 where the Grickle-grass grows
 and the wind smells slow-and-sour when it
 blows
 and no birds ever sing excepting old crows...
 is the Street of the Lifted Lorax. (Seuss 1)

The young boy who visits the Once-ler in his old Lerkim comes from the town visible in the corner of the landscape, and although Dr. Seuss does not explicitly talk about urbanization in the text, the town makes an appearance at the beginning of the story, and it did not exist in the paradise recounted by the Once-ler (Darling 55). It seems

that the boy is familiar with this world and the fact that “the far end of town” with its dead grass-lined roads and tree stumps is nothing out of the ordinary. The language is simple, and the meaning of the illustrations is unmistakable; things are ugly, but they were once beautiful. It is only when the Once-ler recounts the land’s former glory that we are greeted by pages awash with bright colors under blue skies, and “the feeling evoked by the colors, postures, and expressions is rapturous, harmonious, and innocent” (Darling 54). Multicolored Truffula trees are plentiful and the animals are happy. He acknowledges the pristine land:

Way back in the days when the grass was
still green
and the pond was still wet
and the clouds were still clean,
and the song of the Swomee-Swans rang out
in space...
one morning, I came to this glorious place.
(Seuss 12)

Compared to the introductory scene of the book, what the Once-ler describes to the young boy is an Eden-like utopia. While the visual images make this clear to children, older readers can understand a more implicit message. The Truffula forest reflects a world where “orderliness reigns supreme and one knows one’s place” (Hart 326). In the forest he describes, there are no social classes, no people, no worries: an ideal community for its occupants. For several reasons, Marxist criticism often focuses on the use of utopian strategies in a text. The first is that utopias often serve the

interests of the exploiter, rather than the exploited (Hart 362). We might wonder how this can be so, since the Truffula forest in its unspoiled state is a prosperous habitat. However, the very untouched, idyllic quality of the land is what attracts the Once-ler, particularly the Truffula trees, which first catch his eye. The Once-ler describes the vegetation in admiring tones, “But those trees! Those trees! Those Truffula trees! All my life I’d been searching for trees such as these” (Seuss 16).

The Once-ler’s initial awe of the forest could be mistaken for true appreciation of its natural beauty. Yet, after gushing over the Truffula trees, he pulls out an axe and chops one to the ground. The Once-ler’s intentions are quickly realized, even by the youngest readers, who are not familiar with Marxist criticism but can understand the motives of the Once-ler. He does not appreciate the forest or the trees for their unspoiled beauty; instead, he sees an opportunity to profit from the land and seizes it. Therefore, the utopia of the Truffula forest turns out to serve the interests of the Once-ler, who becomes rich, rather than the original occupants, who are gradually forced from their homes.

Another reason Marxist criticism concerns itself with utopias is that they are so malleable that they “can be used to sanctify the unsanctifiable” (Hart 327). Therefore, when the Lorax expresses his disapproval of the Once-ler’s actions, the latter claims, “I chopped just one tree. I am doing no harm” (Seuss 24). The Once-ler uses the abundance of trees in the forest to justify harvesting Truffula trees because he implies that because there are so many trees, the

loss of one is not devastating. By using Marx to examine the implications of utopian strategies, we find that in the end, the utopian nature of the Truffula forest does the land more harm than good.

Exploitation and Oppression

As he begins to plunder the forest, the Once-ler is admonished by a strange and unexpected adversary:

Mister! he said with a sawdusty sneeze,
I am the Lorax. I speak for the trees.
I speak for the trees, for the trees have no
tongues.

And I'm asking you, sir, at the top of my
lungs—

he was very upset as he shouted and
puffed—

What's that THING you've made out of my
Truffula tuft? (Seuss 15)

The heart of a Marxist critique is the story of exploitation (Hart 320), and one of the most obvious themes in Dr. Seuss's thinly veiled allegory is the notion of the exploiter versus the exploited, represented by the contention between the Once-ler and the Lorax. For Marx, the term "exploitation" becomes almost synonymous with injustice (Van de Veer 370). The young Once-ler, as soon as he realizes that he is able to reap the benefits of the Lorax's paradisiacal habitat to his own advantage, becomes the epitome of the reviled exploiter. As each Truffula tree is chopped down and the "Gluppity-Glup" and the "Schloppity-Schlopp" pollute the once pristine forest, the Brown Bar-ba-

loots, the Swomee-Swans, and the Humming-Fish are forced to retreat to greener pastures. The injustice of this scenario is apparent, even to the youngest readers. The fact that it is so easy to empathize with Seuss's fictional creatures as they are driven out of their Technicolor habitat is a testament to the book's effectiveness, even with regard to children. It is one of the reasons the tale of the Lorax has withstood the test of time and is still an effective commentary on exploitation; we do not have to dig deep to see the injustice of the situation, it is right there on the surface, to be felt by young and old alike.

The Lorax, who "speaks for the trees" and, subsequently, for all the occupants of the woodland community, cries out for the exploited and amplifies the voice of the oppressed. The trees have no tongues, and, apparently, neither do the Brown Bar-ba-loots, the Swomee-Swans, or the Humming-Fish. They have only the Lorax to appeal to the Once-ler, who pays no heed to the repeated warnings. Indeed, the Lorax appears like a modern-day Jeremiah, predicting disaster and growing frustrated as his warnings fall on the Once-ler's deaf ears: "What's that THING you've made out of my Truffula tuft?" The fact that the Lorax considers it *his* truffula tuft is significant; it shows both the extent to which the Lorax identifies with the environment and, in contrast, the extreme lack of concern displayed by the Once-ler. The Lorax uses "my" to denote his sense of oneness with the forest. However, the Once-ler is now even less considerate of the environment because it is not his to worry about; it is the responsibility of the Lorax

(Dobrin 132).

Through literary personification, Dr. Seuss gives life to two elements: the environment and industrialism. While the Lorax advocates for the environment, the small, dwarfish creature cannot stop the Once-ler with force; he can only plead with the Once-ler on behalf of the land. At the same time, the mysterious Once-ler represents industry at large. Throughout the book's detailed illustrations, the Once-ler is never shown—he remains faceless, leaving readers to foster their own impressions about him.

The depictions of the Lorax and the Once-ler are important to a Marxist critique. The Lorax, who represents the exploited, is, on the surface, a poor excuse for an environmental advocate. He is small, funny-looking, and has an annoying manner (yet, Marxists would have us keep in mind that this view is colored by the Once-ler, who is the story's narrator). An apparently ineffective environmental spokesperson, the Lorax is the epitome of the oppressed; he represents the “little guy,” who is ignored, overlooked, and ridiculed by those in power.

In contrast, the faceless Once-ler is confident and convincing; he embodies the role of the exploiter. Yet, it is sometimes difficult to understand *who* is exploiting or oppressing a particular group or why. Most people are familiar with the phrase “the *man* is keeping us down,” but who is exactly is “the *man*”? This could be a reference to authority figures like parents or police or something as vague and general as the economy or the government. It is hard to put a face on some metaphorical oppressors, and, therefore,

the Once-ler is the epitome of faceless bureaucracy and capitalism (Lebduska 173).

Marxist critique calls for us to look at strategies of omission because the unsaid often speaks the unspeakable (Hart 327). Sometimes a point may not be argued explicitly because it simply *cannot* be argued. Omitting details makes rhetoric work harder because we now have to examine what isn't there and why. For example, we must ask why the Once-ler remains hidden; we are left to presume that the oppression and exploitation associated with Marxist views on capitalism are too complex to be depicted accurately in this children's story. Perhaps omitting any visual representation of the story's disillusioned narrator is a commentary on the impersonal, abstract entity of industry itself, personified in the Once-ler.

What's in a Name?

Marxist criticism would not let us ignore something as significant as Dr. Seuss's seemingly nonsensical names for characters and objects. His unusual, fictional terms for characters and objects have a childlike appeal and, below the surface, have significant implications for his stories.

The Once-ler, harvesting *Truffula* tufts, succeeds in creating the universal, generic need: the ever-enticing Thneed, or "TH[E]need" (Lebduska 174). While he contends that "there is no one on earth who would buy that fool Thneed" (Seuss 16), the Lorax is quickly proven wrong; the urge to obtain goods is strong enough to override common sense.

As a variation on the word "lore," the Lorax's name

suggests a didactic element. It might also imply that, in our current consumer society, teaching about trees necessitates teaching about their decimation as well. In this story, axes bring about the destruction of the trees and, eventually, the whole landscape (Lebduska 174).

The Once-ler's name may be the most peculiar. His very name implies a sense of terminableness; the Once-ler was once rich, once successful, once glorified, once upon a time—but not anymore. The idea of his brief but intense brush with success leads us to wonder just where he went wrong. Also, the sense of perpetuity absent in the Once-ler's name helps understand his thought process; he is concerned only with making gains in the short term, not about what implications his actions will have in the future.

Challenging Capitalism and the “Standard” Culture

Capitalism is introduced fairly early on in *The Lorax*; in fact, it is one of the first ideas the reader confronts. The Once-ler is described as being willing to tell his story for the price of “fifteen cents and a nail and the shell of a great-great-great-father snail” (Seuss 6). He also makes a “most careful count” of the payment given him, implying that others better not try to cheat him.

Marx was a pioneer in the analysis of capitalism in society. His criticisms of the bourgeois and the inequality of the social classes are still popular and relevant to modern society, where capitalism still thrives. Interestingly, the longevity of Marx's theories parallels the messages of *The Lorax*; both are timeless, and some may argue that they become even more relevant as we move toward the future.

One of Marx's guiding theories behind the *Communist Manifesto* is that all history is essentially the history of class struggles (Gilbert 522)—something absent in the pre-capitalist, utopian Truffula forest. Indeed, it is the rise of industry that forms new class conflicts and paves the way for capitalism:

A Thneed's a Fine-Something-That-All-
People-Need!

It's a shirt. It's a sock. It's a glove. It's a hat.
But it has other uses. Yes, far beyond that.
You can use it for carpets. For pillows! For
sheets!

Or curtains! Or covers for bicycle seats!

(Seuss 16)

Here is a classic example of exploiters "using rhetoric to justify their exalted position" (Hart 321). In a very salesman-like fashion, the Once-ler downplays the Lorax's concerns and rationalizes his own beliefs and opinions. The Once-ler makes Thneeds attractive; therefore, the purchase of Thneeds becomes popular, the Thneed industry grows, and the environmental impact of this expanding industry becomes an afterthought. This is the story everywhere although we rarely like to think about it because it implicates us as well.

Does anyone really *need* a Thneed? The Once-ler would have us believe that we do. New and better possessions seem practically necessities today, and constantly acquiring them is deemed a worthwhile pursuit. Americans, especially children, are socialized into their roles

as consumers (Lebduska 172). After an apparently superior product is developed, everything that has come before seems obsolete. Why record a show on an ancient VCR when one can get TiVo? As the Once-ler says, “[Y]ou never can tell what some people will buy.” When a fellow comes along and purchases a Thneed for \$3.98, the reader is forced to admit that he is right.

Hart and Daughton best summarize Marx’s opinion of this marketing phenomenon: “People’s most unique thoughts are little more than the thoughts ‘granted’ them by the larger social system” (322). When people make the decision to buy a Thneed, they think they are acting independently when, in fact, they are succumbing to the rhetoric of the Once-ler’s sales techniques. It was not the people’s choice, but the Once-ler’s choice that they buy a Thneed. People are buying Thneeds because they are cheap, costing only \$3.98; however, Thneeds may be sold so cheaply because there is no competition in the Thneed market. We can also assume, but cannot verify, that the Once-ler is paying his factory workers relatively low wages for their labor. Lastly, people think they are acting prudently by buying a Thneed because of its myriad uses as touted by the Once-ler. It is necessary that the consumer remain under this delusion because if the truth were exposed, the entire economic and social system would collapse (Hart 322).

When the Once-ler’s Thneed business begins to thrive, he sees an opportunity for “the whole Once-ler family to get mighty rich” (Seuss 21), and why not? He sees a chance to create a veritable monopoly from his Thneed-

making business, with no competition in sight. However, the relocation of the Once-ler family to the Thneed factory echoes one of Marx's most longstanding criticisms of the capitalist system: the dehumanization of the workers (Van de Veer 378). The Once-ler entices his family with the prospect of wealth as long as they work full-time in his Thneed-making factory. As long as Truffula trees are plentiful and Thneeds are in demand, the family is guaranteed a living. While the story does not go into detail about working conditions in his factory, one can imagine the exhaustion and monotony that accompanies most, if not all, factory jobs. The fact that the Once-ler's workers are members of his family makes no difference; if anything, it makes the injustice of their employment seem even greater. Rather than the Once-ler generously sharing the wealth, the family is forced to work to enjoy any of the Thneed profits, knitting Thneeds "just as busy as bees" (Seuss 22). In this manner, the Once-ler becomes the capitalist boss to whom the family must answer. From Marx's perspective, those whose lives are dependent upon another person are, in effect, slaves (Van de Veer 379). This theory serves to strengthen the idea of the development of class struggle with the rise of capitalism. Hence, when the last Truffula tree is chopped and the factory shuts down, the whole Once-ler family must disband and scatter, presumably to find work elsewhere.

Subverting the Superstructure

Marxist criticism is interested in the concept of *hegemony*—the dominance of one group over another. Hegemony is so broadly based in society that it usually goes

unseen by both rhetor and audience (Hart 322). We know that there are social groups who are dominant over other social groups, but we do not realize the pervasiveness of this situation.

Consider the average Joe buying whatever the latest particular Thneed happens to be because he has subversively, or even overtly, been told to do so. The ruling classes, the capitalists, are asserting dominance over the consumer classes. However, consumers do not think of this as dominance because they refuse to believe they are being *made* to do anything. The ruling classes do not forcibly assert their dominance. They do not have to because submissive social groups are actually *allowing* themselves to be dominated. Consumers rarely put up resistance when a product is hyped; rather, they are more inclined to line up around the block before it flies off the shelves and they are left high and dry, without their Furby or copy of “Halo 3.”

Lebduska best summarizes the concept of “cultural hegemony,” stating that the superstructure is not static but constantly in flux—sometimes there is no Once-ler, “who conspires to make Thneed-dependent customers”—but capitalism is an unavoidable fact of American life (172). From an early age, children respond to the lure of capitalism by taking up consumer attitudes that are not only socially acceptable but also encouraged from all sides. Furthermore, capitalism is something that dominates every social class, and the poorest to the most affluent feel its pull (Lebduska 172).

How does *The Lorax* delineate the superstructure?

The Once-ler is practicing the theory of hegemony by keeping submissive groups (consumers) in place by economic means—creating the need for Thneeds and providing jobs with his factory. He is also asserting dominance over the Lorax and his friends, who don't have the power to initiate a rebellion. This situation appears to be a loss for everyone but the Once-ler and, possibly, the ignorant consumers who are not concerned about who is ruling who as long as they get their Thneeds.

All the Lorax can do is admonish the Once-ler: "Sir! You are crazy with greed" (Seuss 16). Thus, he verbalizes the ultimate motive behind the Once-ler's self-centered rise to power—plain old greed. And who wants to be characterized as greedy? Furthermore, any consumer reading this book is bound to feel at least a tinge of guilt after realizing the large part consumer greed plays in the downfall of the Lorax and the demolition of his home. The Once-ler's greed and his uncontrollable urge for business "biggering" bring about his sharp plummet from capitalist glory. The fact that he is characterized as being at least partially repentant says only so much; his credibility is still destroyed in the eyes of the reader. Thus, the Lorax, the book's eco-antihero, is exalted, and consumers hang their heads in shame at their complicity in wreaking environmental havoc.

Environmentalism: Friend or Foe?

An offhand interpretation of *The Lorax* would be to say it is a book about environmentalism. This is both true and false. It is true in that it certainly advocates concern for the environment, but how the concept of "environmentalism"

is often applied in our current culture may actually undermine the preservation of the Earth and our natural resources.

This paper has already pointed out the pervasiveness of consumerism in modern society; indeed, the consumer ethic is so strongly and subversively encouraged that it has even pervaded attempts to counteract its effects. Marx's theory of inherent dialectical strategies tells us to look for any opposition to the creator of a text and the culture in general (Hart 327). In Dr. Seuss's case, readers may interpret *The Lorax* as advocating for environmentalism, without questioning how environmentalism has become misconstrued. In a Marxist analysis, we find that environmentalism may actually favor capitalism in ways we do not even realize.

Although *The Lorax* attacks the mindless greed and spending associated with our consumerist culture, the very heart of environmentalism today is, ironically, consumption. According to Lebduska, "[c]hildren's environmental culture, for instance, frequently promotes checkbook activism such as bake sales, car washes, and other fund-raising events to save whales or rain forests" (172). In other words, children are being taught that to save the Earth, people must buy more products that promote recycling and donate more money to worthy eco-friendly causes. For example, at the grocery store, individuals can buy a small, two-dollar fruit drink that claims to "save one rainforest tree with every purchase."

It is no wonder that we are sending the message that, in order to save the Earth, we must acquiesce to

the consumer ethic that *The Lorax* warns us about. “Environmentalism [today] consists of choosing the right brand or finding sufficient pocket change, while buying itself remains un-scrutinized” (Lebduska 172). Children, in particular, are being slowly divorced from nature as it becomes less a part of life than a circus sideshow we can watch and learn about on the Nature Channel. Indeed, environmentalism is now thought about almost solely in monetary terms. However, Dr. Seuss’s grouchy, mustachioed Lorax works to refute this unfortunate misconception by presenting us with far simpler, hands-on solutions, like planting trees and flowers. Yet, even the devastation that lays waste to the Lorax’s home has little effect on changing the consumer ethic that has permeated society and remains the biggest threat to our environment.

“Unless”—Can We Change the Status Quo?

As a revolutionary activist, Marx studied historical situations in order to advocate for proletariat revolution (Gilbert 521). Social revolution, however, is not feasible in the context of *The Lorax*; none of the characters in the book suffering from oppression and exploitation could lead an effective crusade against the Once-ler in his prime. However, the Lorax presents us with a dilemma as well as hope for the possibility of a better future through what he leaves behind—“a small pile of rocks, with one word... ‘Unless’” (Seuss 48).

When the last Truffula tree is chopped and the Once-ler’s factory is closed, the once-Edenic woodland community is no more. The Lorax resigns himself to the destruction

and disappears “through a hole in the smog, without leaving a trace” (Seuss 47). However, there is hope in the form of the young boy who listens to the Once-ler’s sad tale of his own greed-induced downfall; he is undoubtedly meant to represent the reader, turning the pages of Seuss’s text:

UNLESS someone like you
cares a whole awful lot,
nothing is going to get better.
It’s not. (Seuss 50)

Therefore, while environmental alienation is being practiced by most of society, Dr. Seuss’s *The Lorax* attempts to instill the seed of responsibility in the book’s readers, who will take the cue, it is hoped, to do their part in salvaging the earth.

A central tenet of Marxist criticism is that ideology operates most powerfully when an audience is relaxed (Hart 328). In this manner, *The Lorax* is tricky; it doesn’t leave us in despair, but it does not give us a steadfast solution either. It leaves us with an “unless,” not a guarantee. Even after the Once-ler grants the young boy the last Truffula tree seed, the boy must still “plant it, treat it with care, give it clean water, and feed it fresh air” (Seuss 61). Only when the environment is restored and new trees are planted—assuming that they are protected from “axes that hack”—the Lorax and his friends *might* return.

While it may have been deemed far more appropriate, especially for a children’s book, to employ a more cheerful ending, this would have undermined Dr. Seuss’s intentions. Indeed, *The Lorax* would no longer be the satire it was intended to be. The book does not

describe the young boy going off and planting *Truffula* trees enthusiastically; it calls for the reader to take these actions. Rather than creating an entire hypothetical situation that resolves in a happy return to normalcy, the book becomes more interactive as the responsibility is shifted to us. We do not get the same notion of environmental alienation when someone suggests that we can physically change something about the world by going out and *doing* it, rather than mailing someone a check. It is no wonder the Lorax has become the mascot for Earth Day and environmental advocacy. He is telling us to recycle, to plant trees, to care about pollution, not to be greedy, to be aware of the detrimental effects of capitalism. However, the story does not tell us that things *will* be okay; it's saying that they might be—that it is a possibility, but by no means a certainty.

While *The Lorax* leaves us with tentative hope for the future, what can be done about the cause of the environmental devastation detailed in the book? The Once-ler's greed brought about his downfall, but what about modern society, where capitalism is still thriving? *The Lorax* doesn't give us a solution to the problem of capitalism because there more than likely *isn't* one. Other than the elimination of industry and a return to living off the land in the manner of the American Indian, the Street of the Lifted Lorax will never truly be what it once was, just as rainforests will never again cover the Earth and extinct species will never re-exist. "The Lorax's criticism of materialism and pollution need not be interpreted as insisting on a choice between economic and environmental health,

though extending its logic would lead to a reexamination of American lifestyles” (Lebduska 170). Hence, the book most effectively operates as a wake-up call to society, telling us to think about what effects our actions have in the long run, unlike the Once-ler, whose very name suggests his short-lived, momentary rise to power. Rather than thinking in terms of “right-now,” Seuss is telling us to think of our actions in a linear way, the effect our actions will have indefinitely, the way the Once-ler did not.

One of the deep controversies of *The Lorax* is that it can be interpreted to suggest that our current economic and cultural system depends on pitting people against nature (Lebduska 170). Although this is a harsh reading, it cannot be refuted that our nation is treating the earth like an inexhaustible source of consumable resources. The Once-ler certainly thought this way, ignoring the outcry of the Lorax, who, in speaking for the trees, ultimately knew better. The question is, do we? The Truffula seed is in our hands.

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