



Mermaids

ECL 305: Literature and the Environment

Spring 2025. Professor Pressman

Day 15: William Cronon "The Trouble with Wilderness"



October 29

Arts & Letters

Department of English and Comparative Literature

Q&A + OPEN HOUSE

Join ECL faculty & learn strategies for grad student success. Get your questions answered! Room AL-266.

12:00-1:00 PM

Meet + mix with ECL faculty, students, and organizations. Learn about 2026 courses. Get free candy! A&L Floor 2.

1:00-2:00 PM

Interested in tabling? Contact rporath@sdsu.edu.

ADMIN

- Halloween extra credit??
- Midterm essay grades — this week by email.
- Grading Rubric (for this assignment and all):
- C: attempt at a thesis and attempt at some close reading
- B: thesis and close reading
- A: strong thesis and close reading

Discussion

- Main points to discuss today.
- Passages and/or questions?

From your blogs- the fantasy

- KELLY: Humans often depict the wilderness as this grand fantasy where “[t]he torrents of mist shoot out from the base of a great waterfall in the depths of a Sierra canyon, the tiny droplets cooling your face as you listen to the roar of the water and gaze up toward the sky through a rainbow that hovers just out of reach” (Cronon 8).
- ...By intertwining humans and nature, it shifts the way we think about the environment since it becomes something that is part of our daily lives and all around us. Rather than thinking of wilderness as a foreign place, we can appreciate the wilderness outside our windows.

What is “wilderness”

"wilderness is “profoundly a human creation” (2).

“The more one knows of its peculiar history, the more one realizes that wilderness is not quite what it seems. Far from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, it is quite profoundly a human creation-indeed, the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history” (7)

“Instead, it is a product of that civilization, and could hardly be contaminated by the very stuff of which it is made.” (7)

“there is nothing natural about the concept of wilderness. It is entirely a creation of the culture that holds it dear, a product of the very history it seeks to deny.” (16)

William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature”
Environmental History, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Jan., 1996), pp. 7-28

Wilderness as historical construction

- “we mistake ourselves when we suppose that wilderness can be the solution to our culture’s problematic relationships with the nonhuman world, for wilderness is itself no small part of the problem” (7-8)
- “To gain such remarkable influence, the concept of wilderness had to become loaded with some of the deepest core values of the culture that created and idealized it: it had to become sacred” (10)



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The Trouble with Wilderness

- “The removal of Indians to create an “uninhabited wilderness”-uninhabited as never before in the human history of the place- reminds us just how invented how constructed, the American wilderness really is” (15-16)
- “Only people whose relation to the land was already alienated could hold up wilderness as a model for human life in nature, for the romantic ideology of wilderness leaves precisely nowhere for human beings actually to make their living from the land” (17)
- “Wilderness gets us into trouble only if we imagine that this experience of wonder and otherness is limited to the remote corners of the planet, or that it some how depends on pristine landscapes we ourselves do not inhabit” (24)

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Thesis/conclusion

"If wildness can stop being (just) out there and start being (also) in here, if it can start being as humane as it is natural, then perhaps we can get on with the unending task of struggling to live rightly in the world- not just in the garden, not just in the wilderness, but in the home that encompasses them both" (25)

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Literature helps make Nature

- The Sublime and The Frontier
- “This nostalgia for a passing frontier way of life inevitably implied ambivalence, if not downright hostility, toward modernity and all that it represented” (14)
- “More often than not, men who felt this way came, like Wister and Roosevelt, from elite class backgrounds. The curious result was that frontier nostalgia became an important vehicle for expressing a peculiarly bourgeois form of antimodernism” (14)

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Nostalgia





Simulacra & Simulation

HUMOR, THEORY AND THEORISTS

UNDERSTANDING JEAN BAUDRILLARD WITH PUMPKIN SPICE LATTES

🕒 SEPTEMBER 24, 2014 👤 EUGENE WOLTERS 💬 31 COMMENTS

It's fall, and America is once again infatuated with pumpkin spice everything. What started as a simple fascination with pumpkin spice lattes has now spread – pumpkin spice is now a culinary cancer on otherwise fine food.

- <http://www.critical-theory.com/understanding-jean-baudrillard-with-pumpkin-spice-lattes/>

Jean Baudrillard,
The Precession of Simulacra (1981)



- “Disneyland is a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulation”



absence of real



- Simulation is no longer a question of imitation, nor of parody. **“It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself”** (*Simulations 4* [1983])

Questions/Take-aways?