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Section 303

P2 Formal Draft

While addressing his audience at the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 1940, Franklin D. Roosevelt takes care to use patriotic and proud language when describing the national park he is residing in. When he states, “In this Park, we shall conserve these trees, the pine, the red-bud, the dogwood, the azalea, the rhododendron, the trout and the thrush for the happiness of the American people” (Roosevelt), he is proving how important nature and wilderness is to the American people, our history, and our future. From this exhibit, one can see that the language that Roosevelt is using has a large impact on the meaning of nature and wilderness that he is passing on to the audience. While his speech is meant to inspire his audience into supporting World War II, its large wilderness themes provide evidence into how we as Americans view nature. In treating it as something vital to the fabric of the American people, he is able to use his prideful language and positive descriptions while calling to the past pioneers of America, such as when he states “[They] Stood on their own feet,

they shot their own game and they fought off their own enemies. In time of accident or misfortune they helped each other, and in time of Indian attack they stood by each other” (Roosevelt). This exhibit can be lifted from its own meaning, and applied to a topic that is quite significant today: Conservation efforts in America. How important is the way nature is described and talked about to our modern conservation efforts, and is there a problem with how nature is talked about today?

In his essay, “The Trouble with Wilderness”, William Cronon puts forth the idea that thinking of wilderness and nature as a remote entity negatively affects a society’s relationship with it, and this distance can be detected in the way our language today reflects nature. He gives multiple examples throughout his essay, including the religious and sublime language popularized by Thoreau, before going on to address the same type of language used by Roosevelt in his speech when he states “seen in this way, wild country became a place not just of religious redemption but of national renewal, the quintessential location for experiencing what it meant to be an American” (Cronon). In his essay Cronon is opening a dialogue about the distance between the audience and the language that does not reflect positively for us becoming a part of nature. However, Cronon does not see this in a positive way, as he later goes on to address that the masculine language used by those who described the frontier life and American wilderness also “became emasculated by the feminizing tendencies of civilization” (Cronon). In treating the wilderness with this masculine and sentimental language, they inherently separated themselves from civilization and eliminated any responsibility they had for sustainable development in modern civilization. The American elite and wealthy used wilderness as their escape, as shown by Cronon when he talks about how the idea of an escape to the pure wilderness was created by the wealthy, and only enjoyed by those who could afford it. Thus the language took on an elite tone, full of careful description that separated the audience from the actual subject. Cronon’s interpretation of the problems of our language bring up another question: How is this distance in our language realized, and what does this say about humans in general?

David Hinton’s analysis of early Eastern language paints a different picture of the wilderness, and its relationship to the language it is described in. Through China’s sparse and empty language when describing nature, he shows how much the Chinese language incorporates the audience into its descriptions, and how it relies heavily on the present tense and the current reality of the audience in order to get its point across. In Hinton’s example, he states “No less remarkable is how the classical Chinese poetic language melds the human into the wilderness cosmology, peopling its grammatical space as sparsely as a grand Sung Dynasty rivers-and-mountains painting” (Hinton). By reading about nature in this way, becoming a part of the descriptions and paintings, the audience can feel that they are a part of nature and wilderness, what the chinese called the “being”.

Interestingly enough, this is very different from the twentieth century American’s description, as shown in Roosevelt’s speech, and highlights the vast difference between cultures of the west and east. Obviously Hinton and Cronon paint very different pictures of their respective cultures, and so the question remains: What causes these differences, and what do these language differences symbolize about our place in nature? Hinton’s analysis of the Chinese language shows that humans are involved in nature by the very way they speak. By leaving emptiness in their sentence structure they allow the audience to become involved in the language itself, and feel one with the wilderness and the “being” of nature. This could help interpret the distance felt by Cronon in his analysis of the english language. Perhaps the intense structure of the language in America has left it to be sterile and alienating, and for that reason it is not as pure and including as the traditional Chinese language. In relation to conservation efforts in America, this lack of personal inclusion in the english language has a largely negative impact. Where as the early Chinese language makes its audience feel included and connected to nature the english language is too isolated, and as a result we grow up with a feeling that nature is a remote idea. From this, we do not feel a responsibility to take care of the land as much because we do not see it as part of our everyday lives.

To whom it may concern,

This draft is still very much in process of revision, I am still finding my claim and ways to develop my interpretive problem over the course of the essay. I know I need to bring more evidence in as well.

(Notes for further improvement)

Language used to describe nature

Berger pictographs

Aldo implicit separation from nature

Hinton Eastern language

Cronon’s language in describing nature

Thoreau’s sublime and religious language

Absence of connecting words (prepositions, etc) in Hinton’s poem

Roosevelt’s patriotic and enormous language in his address at the smokies

Logical conclusion: language is a part of nature itself, because we are a part of nature.

Masculine and feminine view on language, nature

Imposing human views on nature itself