

Analysis of jack turners the a



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Jack Turner's *The Abstract Wild* is a complex argument that discusses many issues and ultimately defends the wild in all of its forms. He opens the novel with a narrative story about a time when he explored the Maze in Utah and stumbled across ancient pictographs. Turner tells this story to describe what a truly wild and unmediated experience is. The ideas of the aura, magic, and wildness that places contain is introduced in this story. Turner had a spiritual connection with the pictographs because of the power, beauty, and awe that they created within him upon their first mysterious contact. Turner ruined this unmediated experience by taking photographs of the pictographs and talking about them to several people. His second visit to the pictographs was extremely different- he had removed the wild connection with the ancient mural and himself by publicizing and talking about them. This is Turner's main point within the first chapter. He believes that when we take a wild place and photograph it, talk about it, advertise it, make maps of it, and place it in a national park that we ruin the magic, the aura, and the wildness of that place. Nature magazines, photographs, and films all contribute to the removal of our wild

experience with nature. It is the difference between visiting the Grand Canyon after you have seen it on TV and read about it in magazines, or never having heard of the place and stumbling across it on your own during a hike. Unfortunately, almost every wild experience between nature and the public has been ruined by the media. Through Turner's story he begins to explain the idea of the wild and its importance and necessity of human interaction with the wild.

The second chapter contains two major ideas. The first is Turner's defense and explanation of the appropriateness of anger. Turner thinks that society wrongly taught the people to repress and fear their emotions. Turner finds primal emotions to be necessary to our survival, as well as the survival of the wild. He explains that anger occurs when we defend something we love or something we feel is sacred. He reminds us to cherish our anger and use it to fuel rebellion. Turner criticizes the cowardice of modern environmentalists in the following passage: 'The courage and resistance shown by the Navajos at Big Mountain, by Polish workers, by blacks in South Africa, and, most extraordinarily, by Chinese students in

Tiananmen Square

makes much of the environmental protest in America seem shallow and ineffective in

comparison(21).'; Maybe if we knew and loved wild nature we could properly defend and

preserve it. Maybe if we felt an intimate connection with wild nature we would react to the

damming of a river or the rape of an ancient forest as we would to someone raping our children.

The second major idea is Turner's argument of how modern man is far removed from wild

nature. He describes how different nature is today compared with the mid-nineteenth century

nature of Thoreau and Muir. Government laws and organizations have severely degraded the

wild nature. They seek to preserve and remove problems within the wilderness; however, they

only remove the wild from nature. Zoos and national parks are poor substitutes for authentic

wild nature. Government laws and organizations, such as national parks and the Forest Service,

use anthropocentric ideas to manage the wilderness. They use surveillance and control every

aspect of ecosystems, and thus removing the process of wild nature from these ecosystems by

making them dependent on human maintenance. National Forests were

<https://assignbuster.com/analysis-of-jack-turners-the-a/>

created for humans for

recreation and resource utilization. They are literally a business, and only

seek to preserve

nature based on anthropocentric needs rather than geocentric needs. Turner

claims that true wild

nature does not exist within national forests because they are constantly

being tampered with and

altered by humans. Wild nature, however, still exists in more remote

wilderness areas.

The third chapter Turner returns to more narrative writing and explains his

respect and

love for mountain lions. He expresses a relationship with mountain lions

similar to that of Doug

Peacock and his experience with Grizzly Bears.

In chapter four, Economic Nature, Turner explains how John Locke and Adam

Smith

shaped the ideas of our economy and how that has affected society's

perception of nature.

Hamilton, Madison, Jefferson, and Adams decided the early fate of the

American wilderness

through Christian and Enlightenment ethics. They divided the land into a grid

and sold it to

men. The land became the private property of men, who farmed and

extracted resources as they

pleased. Turner comments on how language has added to ecological

ignorance. The American language is based on ideas of economy, and as ecological problems arise people use economic terms to describe nature. Thus, ecological problems are not properly dealt with or even understood because they are viewed and discussed in terms of economy. The economy views nature anthropocentrically. The resources of the land are to be used for the purpose of improving technology and economy. This problem of language is the reason why biological scientists and shallow ecologists fail to see the answer to ecological problems. Turner raises the question that if ecological problems are technology-based, then how could technology solve ecological problems? According to Turner, this is a problem of language and perception, and eventually transforms into a problem of morals and values. Another problem with viewing things economically is that everything must be commensurate. Economically, everything has a value in money. There is a major problem with viewing a forest as millions of dollars. When you look at a forest as money you are completely blind to its true importance as an ecosystem.

The wild and the sacred of the forest is lost. The degradation of wild nature is

a direct result of

our language and economic perceptions of the world. Of course, the first step toward finding

solutions to ecological problems would be changing our language. Turner offers the solution

that if 'we refuse these three moves- the abstraction of things into resources, their

commensurability in translatable units, and the choice of money as the value of the units- and

economic theory is useless(64).'; The preservation of the wild nature requires a deeper

geocentric view of the world.

Chapter five delves into the Turner's knowledge and experience of the white pelican.

Little is known about these ancient birds because they avoid human contact.

Turner is intrigued

by their behavior. He observes the white pelicans as enjoying their risky high dive flights. He

makes the connection between the peculiar behavior of the white pelican and the nature of wild

animals. He questions their love for soaring as a logical choice for enjoyment. Within this

chapter Turner also raises another big issue. He discusses the influence humans have on wild

animals when they try to study them, and he explains some of the

detrimental effects that occur

upon human interference and control of wild animals and their habitats.

Turner seeks a higher,

more idealistic, approach to learning about wild animals. He believes that if

we sit quietly in

their habitat 'they will come to us(71).'; Turner displays an wild connection,

understanding, and

respect for the white pelican. He thinks that the behavior of the white pelican

is another insight

into the idea of the wild.

The main idea of chapter six is that one of the main roots of the modern

environmental

crisis is the mistake of wilderness for wildness. It was Henry David Thoreau

who was first

mistaken. Thoreau was an American pioneer of the wild. His most famous

quote is 'In

Wildness is the preservation of the World.>'; Unfortunately, that quote is now

severely

misconceived; for we have replaced Wildness with wilderness. The word

Wildness has negative

connotations in today's society. Thoreau was describing Wildness as a good

virtue connected

with freedom. Thoreau looked past the problems of wilderness and

ecosystems. He wasn't

concerned with deforestation or biodiversity. Thoreau went deeper and found

the root of the

problem was in Wilderness. That was where the fight was. Thoreau's main struggle was the

preservation of wild and to reincarnate that virtue into humanity. Turner claims that our

wilderness is not very wild, and he gives four reasons for this. His first reason is that wilderness

areas are too small. He believes that for a person to really experience the wild they need to

spend a couple of weeks living out in nature. Unfortunately, most of our wilderness areas are

too small. His second reason is that wilderness areas lack wild predators.

Visitors to these

wilderness areas are never threatened or even in the presence of predators, and Turner thinks that

the removal of predators from these areas is a bad idea. The predators add a special and

necessary dimension to the experience of the wild. When man is in the presence of predators he

realizes that he has become part of the web of life. Man experiences the wild when he realizes

that he is a meal to a mountain lion or bear. Being a part of the food chain, or at least the

possibility is an important part of experiencing the wild. Turner's third reason is that the

government has tamed the wild for recreational purposes. This is done by

<https://assignbuster.com/analysis-of-jack-turners-the-a/>

placing signs, building

trails, and making maps. All of these create a mediated experience for the adventurer and steal

the wildness from their experience with nature. Returning to Turner's experience with the

pictographs in chapter one, all of these signs and maps combine to remove the factor of surprise

from a wilderness area. An adventurer will never experience the wild of discovering a waterfall

or any surprise that nature has to offer because signs and maps ruin the experience. His fourth

reason that our wilderness is not wild is that we made laws that allow our wilderness to be

artificially controlled and managed. This is very unfortunate. Ecosystems are constantly being

altered, predators moved, and wildfires suppressed. Wild nature is autonomous and fixes its own

problems. Man's interference is slowly making wilderness dependent of artificial influence.

Turner argues that tourism is destructive. Society wrongly views wilderness as a fun place for

human recreation. We have become wilderness fun hogs. Humans take an anthropocentric view

toward wilderness and only see it in terms of how much fun can I get out of this park; all the

while, completely ignoring the human need for wild experience and intimate

<https://assignbuster.com/analysis-of-jack-turners-the-a/>

connection with

nature. The result of our present perception is our emotional loss with wild nature. We have

lost the understanding of how to connect with the wild within wilderness.

Turner claims that

most ecologists and conservationists turn to technology to help preserve the wilderness.

Realistically, the solution lies in our past, our roots, not in the future of technology. The solution

lies within the knowledge of wild people, such as the native Americans whose cultures have

been wiped out by American imperialism and western expansion. Turner does not find hope in

the solutions that deep ecologists have to offer either. He claims that there ideas are based on

abstract philosophies of Spinoza and Whitehead that are too difficult for the public to understand

and grasp. The solution must be more simple and natural than understanding complex

philosophies. Turner also doesn't believe that the effort of deep ecologists to change the idea of

the world from a mechanical model to an organic model will convince the public. Turner writes

that reason will not make 'us respect and care for wild nature... Philosophical arguments,

moralizing, aesthetics, political legislation, and abstract philosophies are

<https://assignbuster.com/analysis-of-jack-turners-the-a/>

notoriously incapable

of compelling human behavior(88).'; Turner returns to his idea in the chapter two that we only

express anger to violently defend something we love or feel is sacred.

Ecological preservation is

only possible through a loving and intimate relationship between humans and wild nature. Our

love of nature is supported by the art, literature, poetry, myth and lore of wild nature. It is these

things that develop the language that our society so greatly lacks. Turner finds his solutions

more from the ideas of Thoreau and Muir. He finds the preservation of the wild we must

establish residency in the wilderness and gain knowledge of the wild. Only then might we

develop the love of the wild that is necessary for its defense and preservation.

In chapter seven, Turner discusses the importance of Doug Peacock. Turner comments

on how unique Peacock's message about wildness is and how different it is from most nature

literature. Through Peacock's Grizzly Years and Faulkner's Big Two Hearted-River, Turner

describes the wild as a place of healing. He also explain some of the rituals,

traditions, and

experiences that help restore the wild within humanity.

Chapter eight offers more ideas on wildness and further discusses the defense of nature.

Turner agrees with Thoreau and Gary Snyder that wildness is a quality, and it is closely linked

with sacredness and autonomy. He continues to point out that modern civilization has recreated

nature to meet the needs of the economy and society. We have created a wilderness hyper

reality. Our wilderness areas are becoming more like theme parks. Turner explains that 'a

created environment is a neutered wild, and a wild to which we no longer live in vital

relationship. Artificial influence on the wilderness is creating laboratories out of habitats. He

believes that conservationist and biodiversity theories are wrong in their principle. Again he

feels that the land should be left to fix and manage itself without human interference and control.

Turner argues that the reason we impose human order on nonhuman orders is to gain prediction,

control, and efficiency. Although Turner agrees that we cannot preserve wild habitats if their

inhabitants are not free, he does not believe that human existence within an

ecosystem will

destroy its wildness. It is in essence human control that will destroy the wildness within an

ecosystem. Turner does not believe that the ideas of biodiversity or conservation biology will

provide solutions to the viability of wild nature and ecological problems because their

prescription calls for more control with ideas of resource management. In fact, he calls the

autonomy of the natural systems the 'skeleton in the closet of our conservation ethic(119).';

Turner finds that even radical environmentalists have faltered and are now beginning to agree

with biologists on solutions to ecological problems. He wisely notes that 'true change comes

from alteration of structure, not the treatment of symptoms(115).';

According to Turner,

scientific solutions only offer the latter type of treatment. Turner offers the 'leave it alone and

let nature sort it out method'; to achieve ecological preservation. He closes by offering hope that

Wildness is still out there, and he encourages us to explore the Wild within ourselves.

Although I agree with many of Turner's ideas in *The Abstract Wild*, I do believe that

some of his ideas are in need of a logical critique. In chapter two and later in

<https://assignbuster.com/analysis-of-jack-turners-the-a/>

chapter six, Turner

builds up to the argument that maybe if we loved wild nature and lived intimately with it we

might be able to properly defend or preserve it. This is a full-proof argument.

The key word in

that idea is love. Most people might think, 'Oh yeah, I love nature. In fact, I went mountain

biking in the Sierra last week.'; Unfortunately, this is not a statement that defends a powerful

emotion, such as love. Turner is correct in his argument that most people haven't experienced

and don't know wild nature. Nature is a place for humans to escape the confinements of the

city-life and indulge in recreational activities. It is not home. Humans don't feel a personal or

loving connection with nature because they view it selfishly from an anthropocentric perception.

Besides the selfish view of the recreational nature, most people carry with them Christian values

and the ideas of Hamilton, Jefferson, Locke, and Smith that nature is property of man and a

resource measured in economical terms. Thus, we may like nature, but we don't love nature.

We don't treat nature like we treat our family and home, which brings us back to Turner's idea

that if we loved nature we could defend it with true passionate anger.

<https://assignbuster.com/analysis-of-jack-turners-the-a/>

Without this

understanding and personal connection with wild nature, humans will not be able to properly preserve nature.

I agree with his argument, but I don't think his solutions are realistic.

Turner's solution

is for man to establish residency in wild nature, and gain knowledge and understanding of the

land, the flora, and the fauna. Modern man should return to a primitive society and adopt the

Native American way of life. Furthermore, it is the art, beauty, and myth of wild nature that will

lead us back to wildness and our place in nature. His solution seems logical, but it is too

idealistic. Modern Western Civilization just simply will not succumb to these solutions under

the present control of the many facets of megatechnology. The vast majority of human minds

are controlled by corporations on a global scale that for economic purposes (or the love of

money) would prevent Turner's solution from becoming reality.

Unfortunately, it seems that

only a few enlightened individuals have the courage to commit to this way of life and understand

the wild. Logically, humans will only commit to major change once they are

scared into

submission, but only after the collapse of the environment.

Turner is accurate in his claim that the solution of preserving the wild begins with

language. Language is the basis of how we express our ideas, morals, and values.

Unfortunately, this is another area in which megatechnology has great control over. In years

past, it was the courageous activity of counter-cultures, such as the Beats and the Hippies, that

strayed from corporate and government control. These groups began to create their own

language, form of communication, and perceptions of the world. Bound by similar goals and

ideas, these counter-cultures refused to conform to what was considered normality. They ignited

the Civil Rights Movement and changed society. Although some were concerned with

environmental issues, most of their battles were fought within the anthropocentric realm. Maybe

our best fight to preserve wild nature lies in the hands of our youth. The environmental crisis is

in need of a modern counter-culture. It needs a generation that could regain power through

autonomy, non-conformity, and a new language. Starting from where their

predecessors ended,

this new counter-culture would adopt a geocentric view and become the future of the

environmental movement.

Another major issue that Turner discusses is the effectiveness of different methods of

solving ecological problems. I agree with Turner that conservation biology, biodiversity, and

preservation seem like short term answers to long term problems. These are science's quick

remedies. At the root of this issue is the philosophical idea that if human technology and control

is ruining the environment then more human technology and control will not fix it. Trying to

solve ecological problems by artificial means will only add to the problem. No matter how you

justify it or disguise it, human technology and control of ecosystems disrupts the natural order in

which the system operates. The environment was fine before we altered it with our pollutants

and behavior, so it will only begin to repair itself in the absence of human influence. This is a

logical idea that MIT scientists can't seem to comprehend because they would rather indulge in

their 'playing God'; with nature. Turner believes that we should let nature

sort it out. If we just

stop conservation biology and the experiments in wilderness labs maybe

nature can find its own

natural way of returning to homeostasis.

Whether or not I accept either solution boils down to the idea of the wild. The

'let

nature sort it out'; solution is decaying fast. Philosopher and deep ecologist

George Sessions,

gave the environment twenty years before its collapse. The 'let nature sort it

out'; solution is

running out of time. At the same time, Turner can't predict the future of

science and ecological

research through the writings of Thoreau and Muir. There is always the

undeniable, and yet,

unpredictable possibility that science might produce an ecological cure

based on chemical

compounds. However, implementing chemical compounds into ecosystems

and organisms

won't preserve the wildness of an ecosystem. The possibility of a viable

techno-wilderness is

imaginable, but the wildness of the land, the flora, and the fauna will be lost

forever and, I don't

think science can cure that.