

Different essays on literature



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Part One, Essay Option One: Short Term Profits for Long Term Problems

Imagine coming to a new land that was filled with peaceful streams and brooks, tranquil woodland creatures, and jaw-dropping trees that reach as high as the sky and you can see what the European colonists saw when they arrived in the New England region. Now, imagine being able to wake up to that land each and every day as the Native Americans did. The landscape there was filled with natural resources that were respectfully harvested by the Native Americans until the European colonists settled there. Once the European colonists arrived in the region, they too began to utilize, and trade, the resources. As with many things, land changes over time, but the settlements of the Native Americans and the European colonists helped contribute to the changes in the land. As they were altering the land and its resources for their personal benefit at the time being, the changes they made were lasting ones that impacted the environment. In William Cronon's book, *Changes in the Land*, he discusses many agricultural, animal, and tree resources that these two groups harvested and reflected on how the harvesting of them changed and impacted the land through trading and deforestation, which in my opinion, negatively impacted the land.

The New England landscape offered a variety of resources that the Native Americans and the Europeans were able to use and trade. Cronon notes that there were several strawberry and raspberry fields there and that they were favorable among the European settlers (91). Besides berry fields, the landscape also offered, up to a certain time, fertile soil that allowed for the growth of many agricultural products, such as corn, that could be used for many purposes like food and trade. The two most dominant resources that

the Americans harvested from the landscape were animals and trees. Animals, such as beavers, moose, otters, muskrats, foxes, raccoons, and minks were traded for their furs while other animals, such as fish, deer, turkeys, ducks, and geese were traded mainly for their meat (Cronon 99). In addition, trees were harvested resources that were mainly used and traded by the Europeans for the many purposes they fulfilled. For example, they could be traded for profit, cut down to make room for agricultural fields, or burned for fuel. All in all, the resources that were harvested in the New England landscape mainly consisted of plants and crops, animals, and trees, and served many purposes to both the Native Americans and the Europeans which caused the resources to have lasting effects on the northeastern American environment.

One of the lasting effects on the environment from the resources that Americans harvested was deforestation because of the popularity of trees and what purposes they fulfilled. The trees that they harvested served a variety of purposes based on what type of tree it was, for example, white pine trees were used to make a ship's mast (Cronon 109). As Cronon said, "Trees held a high value in market" (Cronon 112). Another lasting effect the harvesting of resources had on the environment was a decline in animal population, which was a result of both trading and deforestation. One of the most popular things that were traded was the furs of animals, especially beavers, which led to the Native Americans overhunting animals. In addition to hunting animals for their fur, meat animals like deer and turkey also began to disappear. As a result of overhunting, the number of animals,

especially meat species, began to decline by the end of the seventeenth century (Cronon 100).

In my opinion, these changes, deforestation and trade, were ultimately negative because they hurt the environment more than they helped it. “ It was not, as some thought, that the weather itself was changed by clearing, but rather, the way the landscapes responded to the weather” (Cronon 123). A few specific examples of deforestation correlating with the weather that Cronon mentions are hotter summers, colder winters, and the drying up of streams, creeks, and springs (123-125). In addition, deforestation took away the habitats that affected many animals that had not fallen victim to being hunted for trade. Although burning and girdling trees helped to replenish the soil, this change was not permanent and ultimately caused the soil to go bad. While trade helped benefit Europeans and Native Americans for a little bit, the trade ultimately hurt the environment by declining the number of species in the area. When animals such as deer and beavers begin to disappear, then what they fed on could overpopulate, which affects other things in the ecosystem, which throws the habitat out of balance. Overall, I believe the changes caused by deforestation and trade negatively affected the environment because the results of both only provided good, short term effects, such as food and fuel, but the long-term effects, like infertile soil and the loss of trees and animals, hurt the environment.

To conclude, the resources that Americans harvested the most from the New England landscape consisted mainly of crops, animals, and trees. Once the Americans got these resources, they were able to use them in a variety of ways, such as trading and exchanging them for profit and food. However, the

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effect of harvesting the resources was negative in the long term. The Native Americans began to overhunt the area for game to trade, which led to the decline and almost disappearance of animals, like the beaver and white-tailed deer. In addition, the harvesting of trees caused deforestation as the European settlers cut them down for the many purposes they served. The region that was once filled with an abundant amount of resources became a region that was filled with Americans looking for more. All in all, the resources in the New England landscape helped to sustain the life of many Native Americans and European settlers; however, their impacts on the land led to lifelong, negative changes on the environment.

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Part Two, Essay Option Four: Romantics' Feel of Nature

When you think about and see nature, what do you see? Do you think about nature from a positive view, or do you see nature and think about how the environment could be better put to use? Two movements from decades ago, the Romantic and Enlightenment Eras, both had ideas regarding nature, but in two different ways. The Romantic/Transcendental Movement occurred

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after the Enlightenment and shifted the theme of exploration into a theme of feelings and emotions. The theme and ideas of the Romantic Era changed the way that people viewed nature as they began to see nature beyond what the eyes could see. The Romantic/Transcendental Movement emphasized feelings and emotions, which impacted how people saw the natural world, something simple, beautiful, and worth preserving, which is unlike the Enlightenment view of nature; as a result of the Romantics' view towards nature, the environment was impacted in a positive way by being preserved and being a symbol of pride for the Americans.

The Era of the Romantic Movement was a time when people shifted their mindset from reason to feeling, a time in which exploration of discovery became an exploration of one's feelings. One of the major events in this era was the Industrial Revolution, which encouraged people to leave the industrialized world and get back to nature. The major ideas and movements of the time were: transcendentalism, the sublime, and primitivism. According to "Transcendentalism, An American Philosophy", transcendentalism was the idea that each individual has knowledge about themselves and the world that goes beyond their senses. The "Intellectual Thought and the Environment Romantic Era" power point created by Dr. Gernhardt described the sublime as having perfection and greatness in all things and primitivism as finding value and inner strength in simple and unsophisticated things. In the "Early Intellectual Thought and the Environment: The Enlightenment and Romantic Movements" presentation that was also created by Dr. Gernhardt, it was noted that Henry David Thoreau and Walden Pond were leaders of transcendentalism and traveled to various natural environments to draw

inspiration from them. People like George Catlin, William Bartram, and William Byrd were a major part of the era thanks to their contributions to literature and art; a common theme of their literary work and artworks was that of the environment, such as Byrd's "History of the Dividing Line", Bartram's drawings of plants and Catlin's portraits of Native Americans in their native territory of the Old West. Overall, the Era of the Romantic Movement was a time in which people focused on their feelings and emotions and as a result, had an emphasis on nature and the environment.

Romanticism had an emphasis on feelings and emotions because one of the biggest ideas of that time dealt with feelings and understanding yourself and the world beyond. Henderson described in his article "American Wilderness Philosophy" that as a result of the emphasis on feelings and emotions, it impacted the way that Europeans and early Americans viewed the natural world by allowing them to see nature as something that is beautiful and where they could draw inspiration from. Since some of the movements, such as the sublime and transcendentalism, focus on understanding something beyond one's senses, the people of the movement began to look at nature beyond just something to study or look at. The Romantic Era impacted how people saw nature as something that was transcending and beautiful, which Henderson hinted in his article "American Wilderness Philosophy", created feelings of awe and fascination with nature. So, in a sense, the movement emphasized that nature be looked at beyond the surface and as a result, many people found it as a way to grow closer to God and understand one's self.

The Romantic Era's point of view of nature differed from that of the Enlightenment view of nature because the Romantics saw nature as something mysterious, beautiful, and something that allowed you to connect with and find God in. On the other hand, the Enlightenment viewed nature as something to study and use for human progression and advancement, which makes sense because the era is also commonly known as the "Age of Reason". Two of the main events of the Enlightenment were the Lewis and Clark Exploration and Manifest Destiny. *Discovering Lewis and Clark* describes how the Lewis and Clark expedition was about discovering the nature and land in America's interior, and on this trip, they were able to discover many plants, animals, geography, geology, fossils, insects and Indians. The "Manifest Destiny" page on the *History* website shows how the Manifest Destiny was a concept to expand U. S. territory, and that it was destined by God for them to spread democracy and capitalism. Also, Gernhardt noted in the "Early Intellectual Thought and the Environment: The Enlightenment and Romantic Movements" presentation how the Enlightenment period had the idea of "rationalizing the wilderness". Rationalizing the wilderness, Manifest Destiny, and the Lewis and Clark expedition all dealt with knowing, exploring, and understanding nature on the surface, whereas transcendentalism, the sublime, and primitivism were more about finding appreciation, themselves, and God in nature. Overall, the Enlightenment and its events and ideas were about the exploration and discovery of the environment and nature; this means that the Europeans and early Americans wanted, in a sense, to control nature and the wilderness and to have it tamed, whereas the Romantics would have viewed nature as being free.

The impact that the Romantic/Transcendentalist view had toward nature was very positive and respectful. Since they viewed nature as something simple, sophisticated, mysterious, and beautiful, they respected nature by appreciating, preserving, and conserving it. The Romantics impacted the natural environment by not disrupting it for the gain of themselves. Instead, they left the wilderness alone and observed it, rather than try to tame and rationalize it as the Enlightenment era idealists did. According to “American Wilderness Philosophy”, the Romantic view “became a point of pride and national identity” in America (Henderson). That being said, the Americans also viewed nature as a symbol of their country and they took pride in that, and as a result, preserved and protected the natural environment that not everybody in the world had. This idea and thought still impact the United States today because there are many National Parks that preserve the beauty of the country in its natural environment. Overall, the Romantic view of nature impacted the natural environment of Early American by preserving, protecting, and respecting it.

To conclude, the Romantic Era was a movement that was characterized by the focus of one’s self and feelings, which was reflected in transcendentalism, primitivism, and the sublime. The leaders of this movement, such as Henry David Thoreau, shed new light and ideas about nature beyond the idea that it was a subject to study. The Romantic Era’s emphasis on feelings and emotions impacted how the Europeans and Early Americans saw the world by showing the true beauty of nature and that one can discover, understand and experience themselves and God through nature. Compared to the Enlightenment Era, the Romantic time period

emphasized nature as something to be simple and respected, whereas the Enlightenment time period emphasized that nature was something to be explored, discovered, rationalized, and controlled. The Romantic's view of nature impacted the environment by preserving and reserving its true beauty that Americans take pride in as a country. Evidence of the Romantic Era is still seen in our country today through the many literary works and artworks that represent nature as a way of finding yourself and God, as well as through the preservation of natural habitats and the environments in national parks throughout the country. Overall, the Romantic Era's focus on self and feelings impacted nature in a positive way, not like how we see nature being treated in today's world.

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Part Three: The Importance of Tree Metaphors and Why They Should Change

Trees; you pass by them as you travel, they provide shade in the summer, shed leaves in the fall, are just “ there” in the winter, and bloom again in the spring. Occasionally, you may even plant one, but what exactly is the purpose of a tree, or do trees even have a purpose? If they have a purpose, is it a concrete purpose or a purpose that is fluid? In Michael Pollan’s *Second Nature: A Gardener’s Education*, chapter nine, he recalls when he decided to plant a tree and reflected on what it’s future purpose might be. Pollan then goes on to think in a grander way by pondering what trees were referred to over the years, what their purposes were, and how people in that time saw them. Based on his findings, he shares several tree metaphors present throughout the decades to give readers insight on how the vision and purpose

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of trees have changed over the years. In chapter nine of his book, *Second Nature: A Gardener's Education*, Michael Pollan describes various tree metaphors that show how tree metaphors do and should change over time, and while I agree with that main point, I believe that the current tree metaphor is a "Helping Tree" and that the future tree metaphor will be a "Hope Tree".

Pollan's tree metaphors that he mentioned were the: romantic tree, colonial tree, puritan tree, utilitarian tree, and political tree. The Romantic tree is a tree that symbolizes inspiration and shows trees in an inspirational way. Instead of keeping trees to help maintain their status, people began keeping them to explore their mind, Pollan also notes how Thoreau mentions that trees helped with the well-being of people's emotional state and spirituality (165). On the other hand, the colonial tree refers to the cutting down and taking out trees for the progression of society or advancement of one's self. Rather than looking at trees for beauty, people saw the tree in colonial times as a tool for them. Pollan makes a concluding note about the colonial tree and how if it didn't advance an individual or his colony, that it was a waste (162).

The Puritan tree metaphor refers to trees in a negative way, to the point of seeing them as evil and dark, or as Pollan puts it, an "accomplice to evil" (161). Since people could get killed by them and lost, and more importantly, lost away from God, the Puritans believed it was their duty to cut down the trees. The utilitarian tree is briefly mentioned and refers to cutting down trees, but at the same time, enjoying their beauty on the outside, and inside, which gave them a deeper purpose. Pollan notes that this tree metaphor was

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created in Theodore Roosevelt's time as an attempt to try and settle the dispute about trees and if people should be in favor of cutting them down or not (166). Finally, the political tree metaphor refers to planting trees to show where you ranked socially. So, if you had more money, then you had more land in which you could plant more trees.

The main point that Pollan tries to make is that tree metaphors are temporary and as time goes on, new ones will need to replace the old metaphors. In his chapter "Planting a Tree", he talks about a variety of tree metaphors from different times and what the trees meant to those people at that time in history. By going back through time and explaining the different tree metaphors, Pollan throughout the chapter was able to show that the trees meant different things to people based on what was going on in society. Overall, the argument Pollan makes is that one metaphor doesn't include everybody's opinions from all over the world at the same time because the world is constantly progressing, and so is the opinion and view of trees, so the meaning of the trees changes as well. In my mind, Pollan does convince and prove to me that tree metaphors aren't permanent and that as time progresses, the metaphors will need to change. With each of the tree metaphors, Pollan showed me how different and quickly peoples' views and the world change. The tree metaphor that really convinced me to believe his argument was the utilitarian tree metaphor because it showed me how people of the same time and place can have different views over what something, a tree, means. So, Pollan's main point is that tree metaphors will need to be changed as time goes on to fit the views of the people of that time, and through the tree metaphors he talked about, he was

able to convince me to agree with him that there will never be a permanent tree metaphor.

I would argue that today's tree metaphor is a "Helping Tree" because many people today are saying that they want to help protect and preserve the Earth. There are many things that are harming the planet, such as harmful toxins and deforestation, that are causing major problems with the Earth such as global warming and the extinction of plants and animals. As a result of all the bad going on in the planet, I see a lot of people that are wanting, and advocating to help the planet right now, which is why I would argue today's tree metaphor is a helping tree. In addition, I see a lot of similarities between the Romantic Tradition Era and today's world, so I think many people still view trees in the same sense of the romantic tree metaphor, so they don't want to cut them down, which also helps the planet. I would also argue that a future tree metaphor would be a "Hope Tree". Unfortunately, there is a lot of suffering in this world, especially because of medical reasons such as chronic illnesses, diseases, and cancers. However, technology and science have been improving and are getting closer towards curing these vicious medical diagnoses. So, the hope tree metaphor will refer to the hope people will have in technological and scientific discoveries, especially those dealing with medicine, and hope that the Earth will be protected through the use of green alternative sources.

In conclusion, chapter nine of "Planting a Tree" in *Second Nature: A Gardener's Education*, Michael Pollan describes various tree metaphors throughout the centuries, such as the romantic tree, the puritan tree, the utilitarian tree, and the political tree. Each of the trees metaphors that he

describes refer to how the people in that time period saw the tree and what they thought about it. Throughout his many tree metaphors, it is obvious that as time goes on, what trees mean to people to change, and thus, tree metaphors change, which is the main point of the chapter. Pollan's point in chapter nine is that as time changes, so do the ideas, views, and opinions of trees, which means that tree metaphors are only temporary and change as the vision of a tree changes. Based on the metaphors he described, Pollan convinces me of his main point because he provided clear evidence of how depending on what occurs in society and where, the view of what a tree is and its purpose changes. Although Pollan gives his own examples, I think the current tree metaphor is a " Helping Tree" as many people are beginning to recognize the problems of the planet and are contributing to helping it, and that the future tree metaphor will be the " Hope Tree" as science advances to better medicine and care of the Earth. As one could see from the reading, tree metaphors refer to the way in which people of that time saw trees and their purpose and that the metaphors are meant to be changed. If the tree metaphors aren't changed, does that mean we no longer have a sense of what a tree is?

Works Cited

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