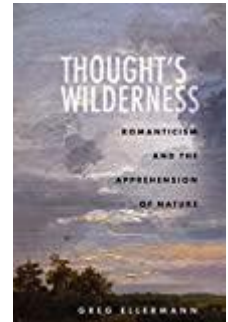


Greg Ellermann. *Thought's Wilderness: Romanticism and the Apprehension of Nature*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022. xiii + 180 pp. \$70.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-5036-2848-9.



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Greg Ellermann's book *Thought's Wilderness: Romanticism and the Apprehension of Nature*, provides a thorough examination of the significance of nature as a concept. The author argues that without the romanticism movement, society would view and understand nature through a capitalist lens. To support this argument, Ellermann explores the works of eighteenth-century romantic poets and philosophers such as Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, Mary Wollstonecraft, William Wordsworth, and Percy Shelley. By revisiting their debates on nature from a critical perspective, Ellermann challenges recent ecocriticism that rejects the difference between social and natural processes surrounding the idea of nature.

Within *Thought's Wilderness*, Ellermann suggests a dialectic relationship between nature and imagination as a political matter. Ellermann refers to this political framing between nature and imagination to substantiate an underlying critique of capitalism. This critique is apparent in the title of the book, which is derived from Percy Shelley's works *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) and "Ode to

the West Wind" (1820). Through a study of romantic literature, the author showcases how the concept of nature can be understood beyond the confines of modern capitalism. Overall, *Thought's Wilderness* provides a thought-provoking analysis of the value and political implications surrounding nature.

Thought's Wilderness central argument develops in three stages. The first stage connects romanticism and Marxist critical theory by contending both rely on the notion of apprehensive consciousness, or a fabricated idea of the mind required for the "cognition of nature" (p. 12). The development of apprehensive consciousness builds within a philosophical approach by understanding how romantics establish relationships between consciousness, nature, and social life. The second stage of the argument moves away from the philosophical approach toward the aesthetic by studying the poets of wilderness. The argument's final stage connects the philosophical and aesthetic approaches. This connection demonstrates Ellermann's argument that studying romanticism of

fers a unique way to comprehend the concept of nature and its importance.

Ellermann's extensive study on the concept of nature provides a window into the cultural influence of capitalism on the societal public spheres. Capitalistic influences result in limiting peoples' imaginations regarding nature. Ellermann's work, through the study of romantic poets and philosophers, demonstrates the complicity between conceptual and economic domination as a technology of control. Romanticism allows people to acknowledge their participation in the "capitalist mastery of nature" (p. 13). Ellermann contends that romanticism pushes past capitalism's technology of control over nature, allowing peoples' thoughts to stem from a less demanding relation to the world and giving rise to the notion of apprehensive consciousness. Ellermann claims people cannot return to a more simple relationship with nature because of previous development and the expansion of capitalist societies. However, through the lens of romanticism, individuals can form an understanding or apprehension of nature that allows for a more sustainable relationship with the environment. This is reflected in the poetics of wilderness that romantic writers utilize, which emphasizes letting things be while also acknowledging the fleeting presence of nature.

Ellermann's work emphasizes the importance of examining how peoples' conceptual frameworks are shaped by economic systems and how this can limit understandings of nature. He argues that, through a deeper understanding of romanticism and its emphasis on apprehension consciousness, it is possible to move beyond these limitations and develop a more nuanced and sustainable relationship with nature. *Thought's Wilderness* explores the importance of romanticism in reforming the concept of nature through the works of these poets and philosophers. By examining the perspectives of these individuals, Ellermann highlights the ways in which romanticism

challenged the dominant conceptual frameworks of its time.

Thought's Wilderness is a literary study organized into five chapters. Each chapter focuses on an individual poet or philosopher. Chapter 1 studies the poetry of William Wordsworth to establish the methodological approach of the book. Through Wordsworth's poetry, Ellermann argues that Wordsworth's poems offer a unique perspective on the connection between nature and consciousness, one that exists outside the realm of capitalism. Chapters 2 and 3 explore how romantics conceptualized the relations between nature, consciousness, and social life through the works of Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel. As chapter 2 shows Kant understood nature as being beyond human cognition. He contends that nature cannot be fully grasped in its catastrophic and evolutionary forms.

Chapter 3 continues with a philosophical lens, examining Hegel's argument that apprehension of nature should be considered a social problem. Ellermann explains that Hegel's idea of apprehensive consciousness can lead to a form of freedom for consciousness, but this freedom is limited by exploiting nature as a commodity. Both Kant and Hegel work within the framework of Marxist critical theory, which views modernity as a process of universal and violent development of ideas. These ideas set the boundaries of apprehension of nature. From the foundation of the boundaries of apprehension of nature, in the following three chapters, Ellermann studies the aesthetic of poetics of wilderness. Ellermann employs the aesthetic of poetics to explore humans' conceptualizations of and relationships with nature beyond commodification toward reconciliation.

Ellermann's final chapter examines Shelley's 1813 work, *Queen Mab*, to develop the concept of apprehensive consciousness. *Queen Mab* provides a platform for exploring the conceptualization of figures in ethereal atmospheres of natural philosophy and expresses hope for people's reconcili-

ation with nature. Shelley's other work, *Prometheus Unbound*, invokes "common love," which demonstrates how people can be in and with nature, but cannot not fully conceptualize the world.

Overall, *Thought's Wilderness* offers a critical study of the concept of nature and its political implications, drawing on the works of romantic poets and philosophers from the end of the eighteenth century. By providing a unique perspective on the relationship between nature, society, and consciousness, *Thought's Wilderness* offers insight into the limitations of capitalism and the potential for alternative ways of relating to nature. In all, Ellermann's work is a thorough and thought-provoking literary study that explores how capitalist societies grapple with the idea of nature. This work demonstrates the importance of romanticism and its ability to show how the concept of nature is fundamental to understanding the natural world. While Ellermann argues that this book is not an environmental history, it could greatly benefit not only literary scholars but also historians in their study of the environment.

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