



The dark net wilderness

Description

“There are darker things beyond the Wall,” said Catelyst in George Martin’s *A Game of Thrones* (22). That’s the bleak wilderness where the *wildings* live, an uncharted landscape, dangerous, of uncertain extent, and a symbol of the darker reaches of the untamed unconscious. You venture into the wilderness from the safe confines of civility. Hopefully you return, and are in some way emboldened, challenged, informed, and transformed.

The anthropologist Victor Turner provides several accounts of initiation rites and excursions into wild, liminal conditions. Notably he identifies the initiation rite amongst First Nation Americans, where “boys go alone into the wilderness to fast and pray.” This solitude is liminal between boyhood and manhood (100), and as such presents an extreme condition marking the transformation from boy to man.

Wilderness downtime varies. The Children of Israel wandered for forty years in the wilderness; Jesus spent forty days and forty nights there tempted by the devil.

Wild nowhere

Where is the wilderness? Now it seems as though everywhere is identified, managed, probed and mediated by human intervention. So it’s difficult to identify a true and representative wilderness.

But it’s simpler to think of a wilderness as a step in a process, relative to whatever precedes and follows. The idea of wilderness is comparable to the way we define a threshold: in terms of whatever is on its either side, or a period of silence as relative to the noise at the beginning and end of the moment.

According to the OED a wilderness could be: uncultivated land, a desert, a confusion of plant life, a labyrinth, and a place where you get lost. It contrasts with a place of order. Many large scale formal gardens have an area set aside called a *wilderness*, that is often just a hedge maze (notably at Hampton Court) you can get lost in.

Dark and deep

Some commentators have also identified a cyber wilderness that is dark and deep: “Welcome to the Dark Net, a wilderness where wars are fought and hackers roam,” says security specialist William Langewiesche. Notably, this cyber wilderness is of uncertain extent: “The deep web is deep because it cannot be accessed through ordinary search engines. Its size is uncertain, but it is believed to be larger than the surface net above it.”

For my part I’m prepared to see wilderness as a mythic space. It’s a giant expanse of extreme and indeterminate otherness, encountered through literary foray, argument, or imagination. By various means we go there, and come out again, and in the process are transformed. See posts: [Oblivion](#) and [Betwixt and between](#).



References

- Langewiesche, William. 2016. Welcome to the dark net, a wilderness where invisible wars are fought and hackers roam free. *Vanity Fair*, (October) <http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2016/09/welcome-to-the-dark-net>.
- Martin, George R.R. 1996. *A Game of Thrones*. London: Voyager
- Turner, Victor. 1967. *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press

Note

- The image above is Tamerza (or near), Tunisia.

Category

1. Nature

Tags

1. excursion
2. liminality
3. return

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Author

rcoyne99