Recalling the Wild (En 101)

Professor: Jocelyn Holland jholland@caltech.edu
Dabney 301a
Winter 21 / T + Th, 10:30 – 12:00
Office hour Tuesday 2 – 3 p.m.
(or any time during the week by appointment)

This is a new course, designed to investigate ideas about wilderness and “the wild” as they connect to our own sense of humanity. I have structured it as a survey in three parts, where the concept of the wild is considered first of all in terms of nature and the environment, then in terms of animals, and finally with reference to the human. With just one or two exceptions, we will be focusing or discussions on a time period (the nineteenth century through the present) when increasing population rise, exploration, and industrialization seem to push questions of the wild to the margins of human society and culture. Part of the project of the course is for us to determine, to what degree that might be true, and to what degree notions of wildness are transformed and reintegrated into the human condition in different ways. At the end of the quarter we will consider the “final frontier” with a short reflection on the wild alien.

Note: This is a preliminary syllabus and slight changes may occur before the first week of the quarter, but there will not be an increase in the workload. All readings will be available as pdfs on Canvas.

January 4   Intro: what it means to be wild

Part 1: Wild Nature

January 6   Grimms’ Fairy Tales (selections – the uncensored versions!)

January 11  Henry David Thoreau, Canoeing in the Wilderness (selections)

January 13  Annie Dillard, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek (selections)

January 18  Rachel Carson, The Sea Around Us (selections)

January 20  J. R. R. Tolkien, chapters on Mirkwood from The Hobbit

Part 2: Wild Animals

January 25  The Island of Dr. Moreau

January 27  The Island of Dr. Moreau

Feb 1  The Island of Dr. Moreau

Feb 3  Helen McDonald, “H is for Hawk” (selections)

Feb 8  The Call of the Wild

Feb 10  The Call of the Wild

Feb 15  The Call of the Wild

Part 3: The Wild Human

Feb 17  An early example: Tacitus on Germanic tribes

Feb 22  Jean-Jacques Rousseau on man in the State of Nature

March 1  The wild human in fiction (1): The Jungle Book (excerpt)

March 3  The wild human in fiction (2): Tarzan of the Apes (excerpt)

Epilogue: Space, The Final Frontier (Or: The Wild Alien)

March 8  From Star Trek to Avatar

March 10  Avatar

March 15  Review

Course requirements:

- In-class (or Zoom) attendance: 15%
- Perusall comments: 15%
- Homework assignment x 2 = 40%
- Final paper = 30%