**Grizzly Man**

Timothy Treadwell fits neatly into the cookie cutter form of a classic Romantic. His experience with nature was an immersion in the sublime. The original term has a deeper meaning than the modern version. Today we see the word as a synonym to marvelous or splendid, but in the sense of the Romantic Movement, this definition is notably incomplete. According to the Tate Gallery Website, “Edmund Burke’s Philosophical Enquiry (1757) connected the sublime with experiences of awe, terror and danger. Burke saw nature as the most sublime object, capable of generating the strongest sensations in its beholders.” Without the sense of danger, the Romantic experience is incomplete. It fails to inspire the requisite emotions. During the course of his thirteen seasons among the bears, Treadwell appears to have relished those moments off danger. In the videos he frequently points out the precariousness of his situation. He boldly states that others who would seek the same experiences would lose their life. He is sincere in his love and appreciation for wild animals, but his enjoyment of the adrenaline rush brought on by the self-induced treachery is equally apparent. He is wallowing in the perilous sublime.

The issues facing the bear population are similar to those that challenge thousands of species on a daily basis. The threat of extinction is a reality for far too many creatures. Treadwell chose this population of bears to elucidate his position. He responded to a situation he found untenable with a unique approach and a strong conviction that his actions fostered change. He shared his experience with students and became an improbable environmental educator without consideration for monetary gain. However, not all wealth can be measured in currency and Treadwell gained tremendous personal benefits from his time in the wilderness. In the documentary the statement is made, "The bears saved Timothy Treadwell more than he saved the bears." The truth in the assertion is undeniable. His friends describe patterns of self-destructive behavior, including drug use, which preceded his transformation into a crusader. He had found a cause that inspired a purpose and gave a center to his spiraling circumstances. He discovered a new life and spent 13 seasons confident his mission was important and he was up to the challenge. The bears were his salvation. It is regrettable that he could not rescue them in return.

In habituating the bears to the presence of humans, Treadwell may have unintentionally done them harm. Would they approach a campsite without concern? Would they fail to flee from hunters, believing them to be innocuous? Did Treadwell alter the very wilderness he vowed to protect? In 1964 the U.S. Legislature declared, “a wilderness… is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” In remaining for extended periods of time and seeking interaction with the bears, he altered their perception. He affected their environment. He trammeled. These actions have unpredictable results. Though the spirit of his mission may be admirable, the practical reality of his actions are difficult to ascertain. It is a bit egotistical to cast ourselves as heroic and excuse our intrusion with ideals. Sometimes the greatest benefit to the wilderness is given by our absence. Defend the environment relentlessly with your voice and your vote. Make this the issue by which you judge those who would represent you, but respect the untouched places and allow them to remain intact.