


2013

# Nature's Use: Language and its Use in the Writings of John Muir and Gifford Pinchot

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## Recommended Citation

Whitbeck, Matthew E. "Nature's Use: Language and its Use in the Writings of John Muir and Gifford Pinchot." Department of History senior seminar thesis paper, Western Oregon University, 2013.

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WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY

# Nature's Use:

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## Language and its Use in the Writings of John Muir and Gifford Pinchot

**By Matthew Whitbeck**

**6/3/2013**

HST 499 Senior Seminar -

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## Introduction

Environmentalism today owes much to two men who were both influenced by and influential upon the landscape of America in the 1900s. John Muir was a Scottish born immigrant who fell in love with the Yosemite Valley and helped to create the national park that many still visit today. Gifford Pinchot was born to a wealthy wallpaper merchant in Connecticut and brought professional forestry to the United States from Europe. What influenced these men and helped to create what would become a wide chasm in environmentalism today? By studying the ways that John Muir and Gifford Pinchot saw Nature and how their ideas of conservationism versus preservationism have created a chasm that is widening and causing more problems for modern environmentalism than helping the problem by placing man at the center of the natural world; it could be possible to move away from this socially constructed view and to heal the relationship between mankind and nature. Preservation is the idea of keeping things as they are in this case the “natural” world; conservation on the other hand is concerned with having enough resources for future generations to use. Both Muir and Pinchot believed that nature was to be made use of and needed managing so that future generations would be able to use nature for both spiritual renewal and worship in the case of Muir, or for resources to indicate national wealth and health in Pinchot’s case. This paper will look at how they both wrote from a point of view that put man at the center of the world and everything natural underneath his control for use as Man saw fit.

One important concept that needs to be examined is that of social construction; social construction is the idea that reality is created by individuals through observation.<sup>1</sup> Through a social constructed view from both science and religion, nature can be seen as separate from

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<sup>1</sup> Clark S. Binkley, “Forestry in a Postmodern World or Just What Was John Muir Doing Running a Sawmill in Yosemite Valley,” *Policy Sciences*, 31, 1998. P.135

mankind. Also from these same teachings mankind has come upon an anthropocentric view of the world; that is that humans are at the center of the world around them. Nature then, is something to be used and managed for humanities benefit, and at the same time what humanity does to the natural world does not really impact it because humans are not part of said natural world.

John Muir was influenced by his time in Dunbar in the lowlands of Scotland and his escapades into the fields and beaches that were his “wild” places; Muir wanted to escape the strict upbringing of his father and his insistence on memorizing the Bible. Later in life Muir would be influenced by the Transcendental movement and go on to meet Ralph Waldo Emerson and have his own experiences within the natural world. Muir was also an educated man who went to the University of Wisconsin-Madison and enrolled in the scientific curriculum; Muir studied Latin, Greek, algebra and trigonometry, mensuration (measurement) and navigation, and United States and general history during his first year, it was not until his final year that he would take any science classes.<sup>2</sup> It was also during this time in university that Muir would meet Doctor Ezra Carr and Carr’s wife Jeanne with whom he would correspond throughout his life. Later in his life, when he was thirty-one, Muir would first set foot in Yosemite Valley, where he would meet Emerson in 1871.<sup>3</sup> Yosemite became his home; even when he was travelling, it was where his spirit came alive.

Gifford Pinchot’s influences were his father and his views on the reckless logging in America at the time and also his own time in Europe learning about forestry management. Pinchot’s life strongly contrasts with Muir’s more rural life in Scotland. Pinchot traveled to Europe at the age of six and due to his father’s influence dined with General William Tecumseh

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<sup>2</sup> Donald Worster, *A Passion for Nature The Life of John Muir* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2008), 73-74.

<sup>3</sup> John Muir, “Forests of Yosemite Park,” in *Nature Writings* ed. William Cronon (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1997) p.786.

Sherman and the son of the President of the United States, Lieutenant Frederick Dent Grant.<sup>4</sup>

Pinchot would attend Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire in 1884 at the age of nineteen where he showed an interest in religious matters and insects.<sup>5</sup> Unlike Muir, Pinchot was educated in private schools and went to Yale before heading off to Europe to learn about forest management. Pinchot himself recounts that “from childhood he intended to be a naturalist” and that “camping was his delight.”<sup>6</sup> Pinchot’s views of nature came from his childhood and his time in Europe and he brought a very different view of use and management to the American landscape than Muir did.

It can be hard to understand the differences between these two men because of the language they use and the ways that they use it. Muir spoke of Yosemite Valley in a way that leads one to imagine a pristine wilderness that man left untouched and Muir also spoke in religious terms due to his Transcendental leanings. When Muir first encountered Yosemite he said this: “nearly all the upper basin on the Merced was displayed, with its sublime domes and canyons, dark upsweeping forests, and glorious array of white peaks deep in the sky, every feature glowing, radiating beauty that pours into our flesh and bones.”<sup>7</sup> Muir said this about the Great Tuolumne Canyon in the Sierra Nevada Mountain: “I used to envy the father of our race, dwelling as he did in contact with the new-made fields and plants of Eden; but I do so no more, because I have discovered that I also live in ‘creation's dawn.’ The morning stars still sing together, and the world, not yet half made, becomes more beautiful every day.”<sup>8</sup>

Pinchot, on the other hand, was more scientific and concerned more with how abundance of natural resources would show the rest of the world that America was a prosperous nation.

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<sup>4</sup> M. Nelson McGeary, *Gifford Pinchot Forester Politician* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1960), 9. -

<sup>5</sup> McGeary, *Gifford Pinchot Forester*, p. 10 -

<sup>6</sup> Gifford Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1947) p. 2. -

<sup>7</sup> Muir, *Nature Writings*, p. 219 -

<sup>8</sup> John Muir, "Explorations in the Great Tuolumne Cañon", *Overland Monthly*, Vol 11, No. 2 (August 1873) p. 143. -

America during the Progressive Era was a nation of “civilized” wilderness; farms and city parks that brought order to the chaos of the natural world that mankind inhabits. The time in which both Muir and Pinchot lived was one of chaos as more and more people were leaving the rural life of the farmlands for one of industry in the growing cities. The one thing that did not change was man’s view of himself as the center of the world around him. Pinchot felt that the most important job of a Forester was to develop effective plans for the use of a forest.<sup>9</sup> Thus man’s purpose is to regulate and shape for his own use. Muir on the other hand had beliefs that put man less at the center of the world and in fact found such ideas foolish and unsupported by his own observations.<sup>10</sup> Yet despite this Muir also felt that the universe would be incomplete without man and also it would be incomplete without the “smallest transmicroscopic creature that dwells beyond our conceitful eyes and knowledge.”<sup>11</sup>

This anthropocentric view; or Man as the center of the world and that same world having been created for him lies at the heart of both Muir’s and Pinchot’s ideas about conservation and preservation. Muir though by spending so much time in the natural world exploring and writing down his observations planted the seeds of a more anthropogenic view; or in other words the influence of mankind upon the natural world. If as Muir thought mankind is just a part of the natural world around us then it is logical to assume mankind has an impact upon that world that needs to be addressed. Mankind has divorced himself from his surroundings and hidden from the truth that what man does has an impact upon the natural world.

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<sup>9</sup> Gifford Pinchot, *The Training of a Forester* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1914) p. 51. *The most important tasks of the trained Forester on a National Forest are the preparation of working plans for the use of the forest by methods which will protect and perpetuate it as well, and the carrying out of the plans when made.*

<sup>10</sup> William Frederic Bade, *The Life and Letters of John Muir* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1924) p.166. *The world, we are told was made especially for man, a presumption not supported by all the facts. A numerous class of men are painfully astonished whenever they find anything, living or dead in all God’s universe, which they cannot eat or render in some way what they call useful to themselves.*

<sup>11</sup> John Muir, “Cedar Keys” in *Nature Writing* p. 826.

## Nature versus Forests-How Muir and Pinchot used words

Nature like civilization is a socially-constructed reality. What this means is that reality is subjective not objective; put another way we create our reality through perceptions from our five senses and also from our culture and society.<sup>12</sup> Both Pinchot and Muir created a reality in which nature was a valued 'entity'. Muir was influenced by Transcendentalist ideas and also his own dislike of Christianity's and especially Calvinism's anthropocentric attitude<sup>13</sup>, his greatest objection was the idea that the world was made for man.<sup>14</sup> Pinchot was influenced not only by the more practical and utilitarian methods he learned in France at the French Forest School and Switzerland from Forstmeister Ulrich Meister in the Sihlwald, but also from Christianity in his biography Pinchot wrote of being undecided between medicine and the ministry before his father asked him the question "how would you like to be a forester?"<sup>15</sup> From his own writings Pinchot's view could be seen as more business-like and unattached whereas Muir is very much attached to nature and the beauty it offers.

In his journal, during his thousand mile walk to the gulf, Muir writes about his views on regarding the Christian view of the world being created for man. He writes of asking "the profound expositors of God's intentions, How about those man-eating animals, and the noxious insects that destroy labor and drink his blood...These are unresolved difficulties connected with Eden's apple and the Devil.<sup>16</sup> After this Muir goes on to write that it, "never seemed to occur to these far-seeing teachers that Nature's object in making animals and plants might

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<sup>12</sup> Binkley, "Forestry in a Post-modern World." p 135. "Suppose that we think about what is 'out there' as an - unmediated flux. The term emphasizes that the flux does not exist in any of the usual conceptual terms we might - construct (reality, nature, the universe, the world) until it is processed by an observer. It interacts with and comes - into consciousness through self-organizing, transformative processes that include sensory, contextual, and - cognitive components. These processes I will call the cusp." -

<sup>13</sup> Thomas J. Lyon, *John Muir* (Boise: Boise State University, 1972), p. 14. -

<sup>14</sup> Lyon, *Muir*, p. 15. -

<sup>15</sup> Pinchot, *Breaking*, p.3. -

<sup>16</sup> John Muir, *Nature Writings* (New York: The Library of America, 1997) pp. 825-826. -

possibly be first of all the happiness of each one of them, not the creation of all for the happiness of one.”<sup>17</sup> Here it is easy to see Muir’s dislike of Christianity’s view of the world, man’s place in the world and his anthropomorphizing of Nature; or Muir’s giving of human characteristics to a non-human entity such as the motive for the creation of animals and plants. In an article for *The Overland Monthly* written in 1873, Muir speaks again of Nature as an entity with human characteristics here as a mother that cares for her ‘bairns’ or children.<sup>18</sup> Muir also writes of the geysers and hot springs in Yellowstone National Park in *Our National Parks* in 1901 and tells of the tourists that would gather round such geysers as the Castle or the Giant and engage in idle chatter until they exploded and then the onlookers would retreat to safety and “look on, awestricken and silent, in devout, worshipping wonder.”<sup>19</sup> Nature when anthropomorphized is worthy of worship and devotion according to Muir. Nature for Muir uses the capital ‘N’ rather than the more common lower case ‘n’ and this again is indicative of his view of the natural world as at least semi-divine if not fully divine in its own right aside from being the creation of God. Nature in her goodness can help to heal our spirits in an ever-industrialized society.

This is Muir’s whole point with wanting to preserve Nature; he wants to show that man is not above the natural world but part of it and he also believes that it is good for the soul of mankind to find replenishment and rest in that world that is outside of the civilized cities and factories of America. This is where Muir placed the value of Nature for mankind in the spiritual rather than the more utilitarian use of Pinchot.

For Gifford Pinchot nature was an enemy of the managed forests that were being created to ensure that timber would be available for future generations. According to part one of *A Primer of Forestry* the forest is “threatened by many enemies, of which fire and reckless

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<sup>17</sup> Muir, *Nature*, p. 826.

<sup>18</sup> Muir, *Natural*, p. 599.

<sup>19</sup> Muir, *Nature*, p. 754.



lumbering are the worst.”<sup>20</sup> Fire tends to occur naturally, but fire has been used by Native Americans to influence the landscape and encourage growth or non-growth of certain plants for their use.<sup>21</sup> After these enemies came sheep grazing and wind; among other enemies from nature were landslides, floods, insects, and fungi and also humans which Pinchot places as the most serious.<sup>22</sup> What was forestry though? According to Pinchot forestry was “knowledge of the forest. In particular, it is the art of handling the forest so that it will render whatever service is required of it without being impoverished or destroyed.”<sup>23</sup> A forest was not unlike a city; it was an intricate community with a life of its own.<sup>24</sup> So it is not hard to question whether the word forest as by Pinchot meant something natural or man-made. Nature was not something to be worshipped or revered but something that had to be defended against in order for the forest to survive. It makes nature something to be wary of and also keeps man at the center of the world by putting the protection of forests from natural and also man-made effects. According to Pinchot the main idea of the Forester is to promote and bring about its greatest use for men.<sup>25</sup> This is a fine example of the utilitarian belief of Pinchot and the department of forestry. This is not a bad way of thinking; forests are important both economically, but also environmentally. Climate is affected by the amount of trees and plants as is air quality. Forests also provide food stuffs such as nuts, berries, and fruits. Forests also affect the wind force and air temperature.<sup>26</sup> This is part of what Pinchot was trying to accomplish when he came back from Europe; Pinchot wanted to protect America’s forest assets from nature and man as much as possible. The other

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<sup>20</sup> Gifford Pinchot, *A Primer of Forestry* (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1903) p. 67. -

<sup>21</sup> Native American Use of Fire [http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fire\\_poster/nativeamer.htm](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fire_poster/nativeamer.htm) -

<sup>22</sup> Pinchot, *A Primer*, p. 67 -

<sup>23</sup> Gifford Pinchot, *The Training of a Forester* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1914) p. 13. -

<sup>24</sup> Pinchot, *Training*, p. 14 -

<sup>25</sup> Pinchot, *Training*, p. 23. -

<sup>26</sup> 10 Profound Ways in which Forest is Useful to Man, Preserved Articles. - [http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fire\\_poster/nativeamer.htm](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fire_poster/nativeamer.htm) -

factor that led to Pinchot's view of reality was the belief that natural resources especially forests proved the wealth of a nation and showed the world that the nation was prosperous. Pinchot wrote in his book *The Fight for Conservation* in 1910: "When the natural resources of any nation become exhausted, disaster and decay in every department of national life follow as a matter of course. Therefore the conservation of natural resources is the basis, and the only permanent basis, of national success. There are other conditions, but this one lies at the foundation."<sup>27</sup> In *Training of a Forester*, Pinchot wrote more on how important forestry was to the nation, Pinchot wrote: "National degradation and decay have uniformly followed the excessive destruction of forests by other nations and will inevitably become our portion if we continue to destroy our forests three times faster than they are produced, as we are doing now."<sup>28</sup> It is the business of the forester to protect the wealth of the forests from both nature and mankind.

Another way that Pinchot saw America and especially government was as a business, not a political organization. He wrote of this again in his book *The Fight for Conservation*: "The business of the people of the United States, performed by the Government of the United States, is a vast and a most important one; it is the house-keeping of the American Nation. As a business proposition it does not attract anything like the attention that it ought. Unfortunately we have come into the habit of considering the Government of the United States as a political organization rather than as a business organization."<sup>29</sup> Business runs on efficiency and so does conservation; conservation must be efficient and practical and guided by three principles. Those principles which Pinchot wrote about are: development, prevention of waste, and resources must

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<sup>27</sup> Gifford Pinchot, *The Fight for Conservation* (1910) Chapter 1. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/11238/11238-h/11238-h.htm#2HCH3> -

<sup>28</sup> Pinchot, *Training*, p. 26. -

<sup>29</sup> Pinchot, *The Fight*, Chapter VI. -

benefit the many and not only profit the few.<sup>30</sup> Pinchot thought of forests as a business and that influenced not only how he wrote about forests but also nature which is the number one enemy of the forest. These were the way that Muir and Pinchot saw “nature” and the forests; it is important to explore their lives and experiences that shaped these views.

## **Biographical Information on John Muir and Gifford Pinchot**

Both John Muir and Gifford Pinchot were influenced by their childhoods and also their fathers. Muir spent much of his childhood in Scotland escaping his overbearing father and his Bible lessons by exploring the surrounding fields and the beaches of Dunbar his hometown and also his time in Wisconsin farming. Pinchot was introduced to the managed “wilds” of the Adirondacks and also spent much of his formative education in France studying forestry since America had no official training for foresters at the time. These times helped form the outlooks and ideas that both men would carry with them throughout life. During the time spent by Muir and Pinchot in nature and also their latter journeys whether to France in Pinchot’s case or during Muir’s travels through Yosemite ideas of nature and how man relates to it formed for them both.

John Muir was born in Dunbar, Scotland on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April 1837; Dunbar is located on the eastern side of Scotland and is known both for its herring fishing and also for its farming due to well-drained, loamy soil.<sup>31</sup> Muir ran and played in the “wild” places around Dunbar. In fields Muir listened to the birds, and down by the shore seashells, crabs and eels captured his attention. Another favorite place for Muir and his childhood friends to play was the old Dunbar Castle where they tried to see who could climb the highest.<sup>32</sup> When Muir was not out playing with his friends or exploring nature outside the urban Dunbar, he was forced to memorize the Bible by his father. Muir himself recounts that: “father made me learn so many Bible verses every day that

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<sup>30</sup> Pinchot, *The Fight*, Chapter IV.

<sup>31</sup> Donald Worster, *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2008), 23.

<sup>32</sup> Muir, “The Story of Boyhood and Youth” in *Nature Writing*, pp. 7, 14.

by the time I was eleven years of age I had about three fourths of the Old Testament and all of the New by heart and sore flesh. I could recite the New Testament from the beginning of Matthew to the end of Revelation without a single stop.”<sup>33</sup> This sore flesh that Muir speaks of seems to indicate that Daniel Muir, John’s father, would beat him to encourage memorization

Not only was Daniel Muir strict in his biblical lessons, but also in his family’s diet. According to the accounts of Linnie Marsh Wolfe and Donald Worster the family either ate mutton broth and barley scones for dinner or boiled potatoes and scones.<sup>34</sup> The differences can be explained by the fact that Wolfe was relying more on her interviews with John Muir’s daughter, Wanda who wanted to present a more human version of Muir to the world as Muir was already an icon who at this time had only been dead for thirty-one years. This contrasts with Worster’s decision to portray Muir in the light of liberal democracy that was on the rise during Muir’s lifetime. Liberal democracy was a movement that was concerned with the quest for human rights, personal liberty, and social equality.<sup>35</sup> This upbringing shaped the beliefs of John Muir in his later life due to rebellion against the strict biblical training and Christianity’s anthropocentric view of nature along with his frequent romps in the fields and beaches near to him. In 1848, while still just an eleven year old boy Muir along with the rest of his family immigrated to America and settled in Buffalo, Wisconsin near Fox River.<sup>36</sup>

Here in Wisconsin, Muir came to experience the American landscape for the first time. Muir wrote of the discovery of snakes that at first he and his brothers were afraid of the snakes, but soon became fascinated by them after learning that most species were harmless.<sup>37</sup> Muir and

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<sup>33</sup> Muir, “The Story of Boyhood,” in *Nature Writing*, p.20. -

<sup>34</sup> Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, p.25; Linnie Marsh Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1945), p.18. -

<sup>35</sup> Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, p.6. -

<sup>36</sup> Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, p. 47. -

<sup>37</sup> Muir, “The Story of My Boyhood and Youth,” in *Nature Writings*, p. 56-57. -

his brothers would build a boat and sail it on a lake that “was so clear that it was almost invisible”<sup>38</sup> they could see the plants and fishes underneath them. On Sundays they boys would often float on the lake and in Muir’s words would get the “finest lessons and sermons from the water and flowers, ducks, fishes, and muskrats.”<sup>39</sup> This was an important time in young Muir’s life as he learned lessons from nature as much as from church. In 1860, Muir would leave the farm and attend the University of Wisconsin for two and a half years and eventually as he told Mrs. Carr he would wander in the wilderness<sup>40</sup> and this was the beginning of what would become his thousand mile walk from Indiana to Florida in 1867.<sup>41</sup>

When Muir was thirty years of age he found what would become his home for the rest of his life, whether he was traveling or not: Yosemite Valley. This was a place that he had found all on his own with no connection to family or his past life, a place to start fresh. To get to his own paradise, his own Eden, Muir took the steamer *Nebraska* from Florida to San Francisco.<sup>42</sup> After this Muir took a job as a farm laborer to support himself, on this job Muir developed a disdain for sheep. Sheep, he observed, destroyed the natural vegetation and left only the trees alone, Muir wrote of an observation concerning sheep this, Several flocks had already gone ahead of us, scarce a leaf, green or dry, was left.”<sup>43</sup> Again Muir wrote about sheep this, “These mill ravages, however, are small compared with the comprehensive destruction caused by ‘sheepmen.’ Incredible numbers of sheep are driven to the mountain pastures every summer, and

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<sup>38</sup> Muir, “The Story,” in *Nature Writings*, p. 59 -

<sup>39</sup> Muir, “The Story,” in *Nature Writings*, p. 60. -

<sup>40</sup> Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, p.117. -

<sup>41</sup>Sierra Club, “Biographical Timeline of John Muir’s Life,” *John Muir Exhibit*, - [http://www.sierraclub.org/john\\_muir\\_exhibit/john\\_muir\\_day\\_study\\_guide/biographical\\_timeline.asp](http://www.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/john_muir_day_study_guide/biographical_timeline.asp) (accessed - June 2, 2013). -

<sup>42</sup> Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, pp. 148- 149 -

<sup>43</sup> Muir, *Nature Writings*, p. 157. -

their course is ever marked by destruction”<sup>44</sup> During his time tending sheep Muir had an experience that he could not explain, but felt was part of the natural world.

While Muir tended sheep in Yosemite he had an experience that he could not explain. On August 2, 1869 Muir had an experience with telepathy; at this time Muir was tending sheep and sketching as much of Yosemite as he could. Muir as he wrote in his journal was “busily employed thinking only of the glorious Yosemite landscape...I was suddenly, and without warning, possessed with the notion that my friend, Professor J. D. Butler, of the State University of Wisconsin, was below me in the valley.”<sup>45</sup> Later he wrote that he had found Professor Butler “like a compass-needle finds the pole”<sup>46</sup> and that this seemed the “one well-defined marvel of my life of the kind called supernatural; for, absorbed in glad Nature, spirit-rappings, second sight, ghost stories, etc., have never interested me since boyhood, seeming comparatively useless and infinitely less wonderful than Nature’s open, harmonious, songful, sunny, everyday beauty.”<sup>47</sup> This event seems to only have deepened his belief in the power of Nature to refresh a man’s soul and connect man with the divine in Nature, or God.

During his time in Yosemite Muir would write letters to his friend Mrs. Jeanne Carr whom he met during his time at the University of Wisconsin in the early 1860s.<sup>48</sup> In September of 1871, Muir wrote to Mrs. Carr about Clarence King, who was one of the geologists backing Josiah D. Whitney California’s State Geologist at the time and the way he found Muir to be melancholy and in need of polishing. He writes how Carr would if she saw how happy he was she would “gladly let me go with only God and his written rocks to guide me.”<sup>49</sup> Later in the

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<sup>44</sup> Muir, *Nature Writings*, p. 437. -

<sup>45</sup> Muir, “A strange Experience,” in *Nature Writings*, p.257. -

<sup>46</sup> Muir, “A strange Experience,” in *Nature Writings*, p. 258. -

<sup>47</sup> Muir, “Strange Experience,” in *Nature Writings*, p. 258.

<sup>48</sup> Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, p.78 -

<sup>49</sup> Bade, *Life and Letters of John Muir*, p. 293. -

same letter Muir wrote how “the great Valley has always kept a place in my mind. How did the Lord make it? What tools did He use? How did he apply them and when?”<sup>50</sup> Muir was also very aware of the need for money in order to support his true work of investigating Yosemite and writes extensively in this letter about the money he had, what he had sent to his sisters and brothers, and who owed him money still.<sup>51</sup> Although Muir wanted nothing more than to pursue Nature and her beauty he knew that money is necessary for him to continue his work. In this letter we can see how important Yosemite was to him and that to him by investigating the natural world he could almost figure out the mind of the Creator; which ties into his transcendental leanings and could also explain why meeting Ralph Waldo Emerson who was one of the most influential Transcendentalists, was important to Muir.

During 1871 in Yosemite Muir would meet Emerson and having already read his essays felt sure that he of all men “would best interpret the sayings of these noble mountains and trees.”<sup>52</sup> Muir proposed a camping trip into the heart of the mountains, but Emerson was “too near the sundown of his life. The shadows were growing long, and he leaned on his friends.”<sup>53</sup> Muir was able to spend only two days with his hero, once to accompany the group to some Mariposa big trees where he hoped to camp with Emerson, but was sadly unable to due to Emerson’s companions fearing a cold.<sup>54</sup> Muir wrote here of pointing out the sugar pines to Emerson and pointed them out “calling the noblest of them kings and high priests, the most eloquent and commanding preachers of all the mountain forests; stretching out their arms in

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<sup>50</sup> Bade, *Life and Letters of John Muir*, p. 293. -

<sup>51</sup> Bade, *Life and Letters*, p. 296-297. -

<sup>52</sup> Muir, *Nature Writings*, p. 786. -

<sup>53</sup> Muir, *Nature Writings*, p.787. -

<sup>54</sup> Muir, *Nature Writings*, p. 787 -

benediction over the worshipping congregation gathered about them.”<sup>55</sup> Here again Muir shows how he deified Nature and spoke in religious terms when referencing nature.

Another love that Muir had was for forests, he wrote of the forests of America reverently: “the forests of America, however slighted by man, must have been a great delight to God; for they were the best he ever planted. The whole continent was a garden, and from the beginning it seemed to be favored above all the other wild parks and gardens of the globe.”<sup>56</sup> Muir also felt that it was the white man with his steel axes that were the doom of the forests. He felt that the Native Americans who were in America already could do no more harm than “the gnawing beavers and browsing moose.”<sup>57</sup> Muir like Pinchot was in favor of conservation of forests since they had been mismanaged for far too long and were as he wrote “desperately near being like smashed eggs and spilt milk.”<sup>58</sup> The essential difference between Muir and Pinchot was in their views of nature; Muir revered Nature as a physical manifestation of the divine and Pinchot while enjoying nature found it to be more of an enemy to the forest industry.

Like Muir Gifford Pinchot was influenced by the natural world during his childhood. Gifford Pinchot was born in Simsbury, Connecticut on the 11<sup>th</sup> of August, 1865 to James and Mary Pinchot. James was a wealthy manufacturer in New York and Pennsylvania; Gifford was his eldest son.<sup>59</sup> Pinchot, like Muir, encountered nature at an early age. When he was thirteen, the Pinchots went on a family trip to Keene Valley in New York’s Adirondack Mountains. Like Muir this encounter was with a more civilized wilderness than a truly untouched landscape on one occasion, Pinchot and his father hiked down to the Lower Ausable Pond where the younger

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<sup>55</sup> Muir, *Nature Writings*, p. 787. -

<sup>56</sup> Muir, *Nature Writings*, p. 701. -

<sup>57</sup> Muir, *Nature Writings*, p. 703. -

<sup>58</sup> Muir, *Nature Writings*, p. 719. -

<sup>59</sup> Harold T. Pinkett, *Gifford Pinchot: Private and Public Forester* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1970) p. 15. -



Pinchot could try out his new fly rod-a gift from his father.<sup>60</sup> According to Pinchot himself: “any youngster with such a background would want to be a forester; whatever Forestry might be, I was for it.”<sup>61</sup>

Pinchot spent most of his formal educational years in either Paris or New York City where the family lived during much of his childhood. Pinchot entered Yale University in 1885 and just before going there his father asked him how would he like to be a forester.<sup>62</sup> At the time in America there were no actual forestry programs in universities so Pinchot had to make do with related courses such as: botany, meteorology, geology, and astronomy. During his time at Yale, Pinchot read every book he could find on forestry such as: *The Earth as Modified by Human Action* by Marsh, Sargent’s comprehensive study of American forests, and *Studies in Forest Economy* by French forester Jules Clave.<sup>63</sup> Pinchot graduated from Yale in June of 1889 and had planned to give a speech that was whole unrelated to forestry but “on the spur of the moment I dropped it, my future profession welled up inside me and took its place, and I made to the exalted graduates of Yale my first public statement on the importance of Forestry to the United States.”<sup>64</sup> Other than this reference to his given speech, I was unable to find anything more regarding said speech.

In October of 1889, Pinchot left America for Paris in the hopes of continuing his education and studying forestry which was well established there. In Paris Pinchot meets two of the world’s foremost foresters: Sir William Schlich and Sir Dietrich Brandis.<sup>65</sup> Schlich gave Pinchot an autographed copy of his *Manual of Forestry* and recommended that he meet with

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<sup>60</sup> Char Miller, *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism* (Covelo: Island Press, 2004) pp. 17-18. -

<sup>61</sup> Pinchot, *Breaking*, p. 3. -

<sup>62</sup> Pinkett, *Gifford Pinchot: Forester*, p. 16. -

<sup>63</sup> Pinkett, *Gifford Pinchot: Forester*, p.16. -

<sup>64</sup> Pinchot, *Breaking*, 6. -

<sup>65</sup> Pinkett, *Gifford Pinchot: Forester*, p.18. -

Brandis in Germany; Brandis was known for pioneering forestry in British India.<sup>66</sup> According to Schlich in his manual forest protection was to be protected by two agencies the State and the owner of the forest.<sup>67</sup> Schlich wrote that “forest protection has for its objective the security of forests against unfavourable external influences, as far as lies within the power of their owner.”<sup>68</sup> The manual has chapters dealing with everything from boundaries to the various problems a forest reserve can face such as animals, fungi, wind, rain, and fires. Within the larger science of forestry which included forest protection as written in Schlich’s manual there was also silviculture which was the forming, tending, and regeneration of forests, forest protection or how to guard against injurious external influences and forest utilization or how to make use of a forest in the most suitable manner.<sup>69</sup> This is seen in Pinchot’s own written manuals for American foresters. After meeting with Brandis and on his advice Pinchot enrolled in the French Forest School in Nancy. This is where Pinchot began to learn forestry and theories about the wealth of a nation and in relation to its natural resources. On the assumption that the health of natural resources was vital to national welfare, students at the French Forest School learned silviculture and also economic matters such as: forest capital, rent, interest, and sustained yield. They also studied forest law based upon the Code Napoleon;<sup>70</sup> the Code Napoleon was the French Civil Code. Looking ahead to what Pinchot did when appointed Chief of Forestry it is not hard to see that his training in Europe affected him deeply.

Pinchot’s time in the French Forest School was not necessarily a happy one for Pinchot. Pinchot admired his professors, but felt the students “looked with contempt on the profession they had chosen, and most of them were far more interested in their light-o’-loves than in

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<sup>66</sup> Miller, *Gifford Pinchot: Making*, p. 82. -

<sup>67</sup> William Schlich, *Manual of Forestry* (London: Bradbury Agnew and Company, 1895) p. 1. -

<sup>68</sup> Schlich, *Manual*, p. 1. -

<sup>69</sup> Schlich, *Manual*, p. 2. -

<sup>70</sup> Miller, *Gifford Pinchot: Making*, p. 83; Pinkett, *Gifford Pinchot: Forester*, p18. -

work.”<sup>71</sup> The very things these French students railed against were the things Pinchot was counting on; the scientific and exacting work of forestry.<sup>72</sup> One influential professor was Lucien Boppe who taught silviculture; Boppe made Pinchot promise that he would upon returning to America “manage a forest and make it pay.”<sup>73</sup> Forestry was like a business that needed managing in order for it to pay out. Pinchot would get a break from all of this when Brandis invited him to Switzerland for a month.

In the spring of 1890 Brandis made it possible for Pinchot to spend a month with Swiss forester Forstmeister, a title that means forest superintendent, Ulrich Meister. Forstmeister Meister was in charge of the ancient Sihlwald, a municipal forest of Zurich, which stretched for roughly five miles in the Sihl valley.<sup>74</sup> The Sihlwald had been under systematic and profitable management since before the discovery of America, which is why Brandis, one of the pioneers of British forestry in India, felt Pinchot should visit. Pinchot’s “publicist” education began in the Zurich woods. Forstmeister Meister was not only a forester but also “the head of the Liberal Party, head of the Swiss Fish Cultural Society and *Angler’s Journal*, Representative at Berne for the city of Zurich, Brigadier General in the Swiss Army, and President of the biggest Swiss newspaper.”<sup>75</sup> According to Pinchot Forstmeister combined all the qualities a pioneer public forester needed to have “practical skill in the woods, business common sense, close touch with public opinion, and an understanding of how and why things get done in government and politics in a democracy.”<sup>76</sup> Here was the beginning of Pinchot’s own ideas about how forestry in America should be run. Pinchot’s education in European forestry was not just about protection

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<sup>71</sup> Pinchot, *Breaking*, p. 11. -

<sup>72</sup> Miller, *Gifford Pinchot: Making*, p. 84 -

<sup>73</sup> Pinchot, *Breaking*, p. 11 -

<sup>74</sup> Miller, *Gifford Pinchot: Making*, p. 86 -

<sup>75</sup> Pinchot, *Breaking* p. 15. -

<sup>76</sup> Pinchot, *Breaking*, p.21. -

but also financial value and use of forest resources. In Pinchot's book *the Fight for Conservation* he wrote, "Business prudence and business common-sense indicate as strongly as anything can the absolute necessity of a change in point of view on the part of the people of the United States regarding their natural resources. The way we have been handling them is not good business. Purely on the side of dollars and cents, it is not good business to kill the goose that lays the golden egg, to burn up half our forests, to waste our coal, and to remove from under the feet of those who are coming after us the opportunity for equal happiness with ourselves."<sup>77</sup> Forestry was partly a business; businesses are run by humans, so within Pinchot's schooling and his own writing we can see how anthropocentrically people were thinking during Pinchot's lifetime. Not only are Muir's and Pinchot's childhood along with Muir's time in Yosemite and Pinchot's time in France, but also what the current thinking during their lives was.

## **Nature before and during the Progressive Era**

1894-1915 in America was a time of change and progress; the landscape became more urban as factory jobs as industrialization came to the forefront of the economic world. This new industrialism was growing largely unchecked in the United States after the Civil War, creating new jobs and new problems simultaneously.<sup>78</sup> It was into this tumultuous time that both John Muir and Gifford Pinchot were born. It was during this time period that many people were moving from the rural farmlands to the growing cities to take jobs as laborers or for those that had the education as white-collar managers in the factories. Thought was also going through a change as a new movement in the New England area of the United States was taking shape.

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<sup>77</sup> Pinchot, *Conservation*, Chapter VI, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/11238/11238-h/11238-h.htm#2HCH8> (accessed May 31, 2013).

<sup>78</sup> America at Work, *Library of Congress*. <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/awlhtml/awlwork.html>

Transcendentalism was a philosophy, a religious faith and a movement for reform that was at odds with this new industrial America.<sup>79</sup> The essence of Transcendentalism was direct communion with God through the intuition. Theodore Parker, was an American Transcendentalist and said this concerning the problem of Transcendentalism: “The problem of transcendental philosophy is no less than this, to revise the experience of mankind and try its teachings by the nature of mankind; to test ethics by conscience, science by reason, to try the creeds of churches, the constitution of states, by the constitution of the universe.”<sup>80</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was influential on John Muir, spoke of Nature in his works and wrote this in his book *Nature*: “The aspect of Nature is devout. Like the figure of Jesus, she stands with bended head, and hands folded upon the breast. The happiest man is he who learns from nature the lesson of worship.”<sup>81</sup> Emerson was influential on John Muir through Emerson’s essays, visiting Muir in Yosemite, and continuing to correspond with Muir after meeting him in 1871. Emerson thought highly of Muir and wrote him on February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1872, Emerson wrote, “I have been far from unthankful---I have everywhere testified to my friends, who should also be yours, my happiness in finding you---the right man in the right place---in your mountain tabernacle.”<sup>82</sup> That Emerson thought kindly towards Muir was made even clearer in this letter when Emerson wrote that he expected his guardian angel, “would pronounce that your probation and sequestration in the solitudes and snows had reached their term, and you were to bring your ripe fruits so rare and precious into waiting society.”<sup>83</sup> Transcendentalism and the way in which it spoke of Nature influenced Muir’s own views and writing. This contrasts with the more prevalent thought about

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<sup>79</sup> Henry David Gray, *Emerson: A Statement of New England Transcendentalism as Expressed in the Philosophy of its Chief Exponent* (New York: Leland Stanford Junior University: 1917) p. 9. -

<sup>80</sup> Gray, *Emerson*, pp. 9-10. -

<sup>81</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Nature” in *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2006) p. 61 -

<sup>82</sup> Bade, *Life and Letters*, p. 259. -

<sup>83</sup> Bade, *Life and Letters*, p. 259. -

man and nature during much of the Progressive Era that followed this period of industrialization and the rise of Transcendentalism.

The Progressive Era was one of change; change to a more urban society and the progressives wanted to regulate big business and chase corruption out of the government.<sup>84</sup> These same progressives were also concerned with the environment and the conservation of natural resources.<sup>85</sup> It was in this to this environment that both Muir and Pinchot came to prominence; though more so Pinchot as Muir died in 1914. One important thinker during this period was Nathaniel Shaler; who was a Harvard geologist who wrote books and essays in support of conservation in the 1900s. His work *Man and Earth* contends that natural resources are finite and that humankind was well on his way to depleting them.

One prevalent thought that was shared at this time was that primitive man and the lower animals were less harmful to the earth than modern man. Shaler wrote, "To see our position with reference to the resources of the earth it is well to begin by noting the fact that the lower animals, and primitive men as well, make no drain on its stores. They do not lessen the amount of soil or take from the minerals of the under-earth: in a small way they enrich it by their simple lives, for their forms are contributed to that store of chemically organized matter which serves the needs of those that come after them. With the first step upward, however, and ever in increasing measure as he mounts toward civilization, man becomes a spoiler."<sup>86</sup> There was a belief that hunter gatherer societies had less impact upon the earth than later agrarian societies. While it could be true, animals whether of the human variety or "lower" animal variety all have an impact upon the

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<sup>84</sup> Progressive Era to New Era, 1900-1929, "Overview," *Library of Congress*, - <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/progress/> -

<sup>85</sup> Progressive Era, "Overview" -

<sup>86</sup> Nathaniel Shaler, "Man and Earth," *Library of Congress*, - <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/progress/co-nservice/manearth.html> (accessed May 30 2013) -

world. Muir felt the same way when he wrote of the Native Americans, “Indians walk softly and hurt the landscape hardly more than the birds and squirrels, and their brush and bark huts last hardly longer than those of wood rats.”<sup>87</sup> Industry which progressed from the change from hunter/gatherers to more sedentary agrarians had created problems with the environment; problems that both Muir and Pinchot attempted to heal, so that mankind could benefit from nature.

## Conclusion

During the Progressive Era there was an attempt at not only reconnecting with the land that had given birth to America but also a strong desire especially in the political arena to prove to the world after the Civil War that the nation was still strong and prosperous. Pinchot’s theories of Forest management originated in his studies in Europe, and most notably his time in the Sihlwald with Forstmeister Meister who was not only a forester but also a politician. It was in France and the Sihlwald that he learned of not only forest management but also how to use politics and public opinion to achieve one’s goals which in Pinchot’s case was the conservation of the forests in America. In juxtaposition John Muir viewed Nature as a sacred way to refresh and replenish the soul from the more urban lifestyle that had become more prevalent during his life. Muir was not only influenced in this anthropocentric view by his own religious traditions but also by Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the major figures in the Transcendental movement.

Both of these men had experiences with the natural world at a young age that profoundly affected them, but those were encounters with a “civilized” wilderness that had been managed by man, either in the shape of Anglo Europeans or Native Americans. In the case of Muir, his experience was with the agricultural fields that surrounded Dunbar, Scotland. Later in his life he

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<sup>87</sup> Muir, *Nature Writings*, p. 184.

encountered Yosemite Valley, which had been occupied for many years by the Miwok population and had been managed by them before Muir set foot there for the first time. Pinchot as a young boy had visited the Adirondack Mountains, but he also visited the forests in Europe which had been managed before Europeans discovered America. These experiences led to very different views of the natural world and how best to interact and keep it for future generations, Muir felt that nature was not only an escape but also a place to learn lessons and sermons from Nature; Pinchot forests were to be protected as signs of national wealth and prosperity and it was his trip to the Adirondacks and time with his father there that helped him decide to study forestry.

Both men felt that sheep were a destructive force upon the land<sup>88</sup>, both men felt that something had to be done to protect nature for the use of future generations, both men also tried to influence political leaders and the general populous. They also had different ideas of what nature meant. For Muir “Nature” was the “pristine” wilderness that could renew mankind’s soul and mind. Pinchot was more concerned with forests as a sign of prosperity and national health; “nature” for him was a threat to forests there indication of prosperity and needed to be managed so that the wild did not interfere with the forests.

There had been a lack of biographical interest in either of these men for quite some time; most of the biographies are from around the 1960s and 1970s or earlier, but in the 2000s there was more of a revival of interest. Climate change and the current state of the environment renewed the debate over man’s duty to the natural world and the effects of humanity’s impact upon the environment. Both Muir and Pinchot have led to where America is today in regards to the environment; both have interpreted nature from an anthropocentric viewpoint which has divorced mankind from the world around us. While today the focus is on a more anthropogenic viewpoint of man’s impact upon the natural world it was common for many years after Muir and

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<sup>88</sup>See Muir, *Nature Writings*, p. 185 and Pinchot, *A Primer of Forestry*, p.67



Pinchot to think of man as above nature and that resources would not only outlast but also survive and be replenished despite how much was used. There is also an almost unconscious desire to place Muir in a good light and ignore the fact that he was focused on preserving nature for use. Like Pinchot, Muir viewed Nature from an anthropocentric view; even though he was more holistic in his view of the connectedness of Nature and man.

Pinchot and Muir wrote about and used language differently; for Muir, nature was anything “untouched” by man. For Pinchot nature was an enemy of the forest that had to be controlled so that in turn the forests could be controlled better, Schlich, who gave Pinchot a copy of his *Manual of Forestry* wrote that Forest Protection had both “preventative and remedial measures that could be taken, according as their object is to ward off certain dangers, or to remedy evils which the forest has already incurred.”<sup>89</sup> Muir used religious and mystical terms for Nature. He wrote about worshipping both Nature and God (though not the Christian God) through Nature. Even writing of it with a capital N versus a lower case n shows how Muir personified nature, due in part to his Transcendentalist leanings. This contrasts with Pinchot’s writings of nature and the many dangers it posed to the forests; he also wrote about how prosperous the nation was due to its resources that are to be used, conserved, or destroyed as Americans desire. The question for Pinchot, was what to do with this wondrous land and its bountiful resources. Nature as these two men saw it, was either virtuous for the spiritual renewal of man or for the prosperity it would bring to mankind. Their writings give further evidence of the anthropocentric attitude that abounded in America during the Progressive Era and still afflicts American environmentalism today. In order for future environmentalist activities to be successful, mankind needs to move on from the archaic anthropocentric viewpoint and take up the anthropogenic view, that of viewing humans as part of the natural

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<sup>89</sup> Schlich, *A Manual*, p. 1.

world and therefore having an actual lasting impact upon the world, in order to see how much of an impact we humans have on the world around us. Muir was the closest to an anthropogenic view as he felt that humans were just part of the world and not in any way set apart from it as special. Muir wrote: “From the dust of the earth, from the common elementary fund, the Creator has made *Homo sapiens*. From the same material he made every other creature, however noxious and insignificant to us. They are earth-born companions and our fellow mortals.”<sup>90</sup> Muir believed that every living thing was created by the same Creator and thus all the same, Pinchot from his writings did not seem to feel the same way; both men created and helped to perpetuate a view of reality that the use of nature for mankind’s benefit at the heart of their points of view.

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<sup>90</sup> Muir, *Nature Writings*, p. 827.

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