

Lecture #15: Nurturing Nature: The Child in the Garden

Suggested Readings:

Peter J. Schmitt, *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America* (1969)
Allen Lacy, *The American Gardener*, 1988; Bonnie Marranca, *American Garden Writing* (1988)
Norma Mandel, *Beyond the Garden Gate: The Life of Celia Leighton Thaxter* (2004)
David Park Curry, *Childe Hassam: An Island Garden Revisited* (2005)
H. Allen Anderson, *The Chief: Ernest Thompson Seton and the Changing West* (1986)
Kevin C. Armitage, *The Nature Study Movement: Forgotten Popularizer of America's Conservation Ethic* (2009)

Outline

I. The Dream of a Rural Cityscape: Parks and Suburbs

1831, Jacob Bigelow organized Mt. Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, Massachusetts: rural retreat in city, contemplation of death & nature, pointing toward park, arboretum, suburb (cf Forest Hill Cemetery in Madison)

Andrew Jackson Downing, 1815-1852, *Theory & Practice of Landscape Architecture*, 1841, transferred

J. C. Loudon's landscape ideas from England: constructing the picturesque and the beautiful directly upon the garden landscape: estates & rural retreats

Frederick Law Olmsted, Central Park, 1857: bringing rural picturesque to city, curvilinear organic patterns in opposition to civil grid, with Mt. Auburn & Downing as models

led to ideal suburb: Riverside, IL's (1869) curving streets, middle-class houses on large lots, with gardens tended by women: male commute between home and workplace meant suburb shaped by feminine notions of beauty

II. A Woman's Garden, A Woman's Home

Mabel Osgood Wright, founder of CT Audubon, editor of *Bird-Lore*, author *Garden of a Commuter's Wife*, 1901: bird-watcher and conservationist as gardener

(dramatic shift in late 19th c from High Victorian gardening fashion--massed beds of single-color annual plants in parterres--toward rustic, perennial plantings promoted by William Robinson & Gertrude Jekyll, ideas spread to US and still dominate)

Celia Thaxter's *Island Garden*, 1894, on Isles of Shoals, New Hampshire: garden as expression of woman's role as nurturer of young life, flower as symbol of fertility and feminine beauty, garden as direct sign of God's love for birth, growth, and death

women's love of gardens & flowers ranged across class boundaries: cf. Elizabeth Lawrence's *Gardening for Love* (1986), on market bulletins that served as seed/plant exchanges for southern gardeners from 1901 on: community of women sharing fruits of their labor

III. Moral Visions for Children: Nature Study

Gifford Pinchot saw women as key to movement's success in role as educators of next generation conservation publicly supported by women's clubs, Audubon societies, etc.

but one of most important vehicles for women's work in conservation: nature study movement

nature study romantic, sentimental, embraced natural world and its creatures as anthropomorphic vehicle for exploration of human values: fables, moral lessons

many forms: Florence Holbrook's nature myths, fictional Indian stories, nature spirits

Clifton Hodge's fairy world of divine enchantment, God in nature explicit religious goal

Anna Botsford Comstock's more scientific approach still retained search for values: Botsford born 1854; 1874 enrolled at Cornell, met entomologist husband J. H. Comstock and became scientific illustrator for him; 1895 became involved in nature study, joined Cornell faculty, became leading figure of movement for next three decades: *Handbook of Nature Study* first published 1911, remains in print as a classic

nature study as another domesticated strand of romantic sublime: secularization of religious values, nature as best context for educating children to cultural values

IV. Boys, Girls, and Woodcraft Indians

among most popular of natural history authors in early 20th century: Ernest Thompson Seton

born 1860 in England, to Canada at age 6, began work as artist/illustrator, doing animal illustrations for scientific publications by mid-1880s; wolf killer in NM in 1893

most popular short story: "King of Currumpaw," 1894; *Wild Animals I Have Known* published 1896; stories of noble wolves & other animals struggling against odds, dying

1902 created Woodcraft Indians; became model for Lord Baden-Powell's Boy Scouts in England, 1908

(cf. militarist/imperial strands); Seton in turn founded U.S. branch of Boy Scouts in 1910; followed in 1912-15 by Juliette Low's Girl Scouts

Girl Scouts emphasized domestic, "feminine" values: home-making, group vs. individual achievement; nature as field for nurture and communal support more than competition

Seton's child Indians used fantasy to occupy a lost American landscape, but also encounter a natural world whose meanings are a higher source of moral value in modern society

conservation: preserving the world being lost, whether for wildness or to save a child's moral universe: birdhouse as a practical symbol of gentle nature humanely protected

Progressive conservation: nature as resource, sublime cathedral, Sunday School, home