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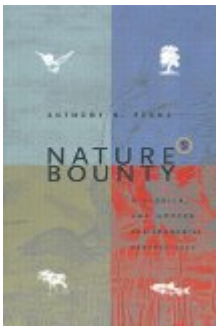

Anthony N. Penna. *Nature's Bounty: Historical and Modern Environmental Perspectives.* Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1999. xvi + 300 pp. $97.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7656-0187-2.

Reviewed by William Rowley

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For those who teach American environmental history on a regular basis it is an annual struggle to choose texts and readings. Anthony Penna's *Nature's Bounty* offers a good choice for instructors inclined toward a natural resource approach to the subject. The natural resources singled out here address the topics of forests, wildlife and wildlife habitat, water and drinking water quality, and finally air quality and air pollution. After a chronological and analytical discussion of the topic, a series of primary source historical documents follows each section. The combination allows the student narrative history coupled with analysis backed by primary sources. This creative organization is the outstanding contribution of Penna's work. It does not strike any new interpretative directions or insights. The organizational innovation is no small accomplishment for students and instructors seeking to draw the connection between documents and the narrative story.

Some will say that other topics of environmental concern should be considered for a future volume: the quality and safety of food: the role of fire in the natural environment; nuclear environmental questions; weather patterns related to global warming. This, of course, would be asking the author to write an ambitious and probably unwieldy book. Beyond these speculations there remains the work at hand. Penna shows good judgment when he launches his discussion with the topic of forests. It is widely acknowledged that they served a crucial, symbolic role in the early conservation movement. Today Penna rightly sees forests as "the planet's major reservoir of biological diversity"(p. 17). Emphasis on biological diversity is correctly identified as a contemporary concern, but his use of the term "environmentalist" and his strained efforts to read the label into the past disturbs those sensitive to past historical contexts. He describes Theodore Roosevelt as a "leading environmentalists"(p. 49); refers to alarm and concern by "environmentalists" over the controversy between the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture over the administration of public lands in the period from 1897 to 1905. This occurred when the Forest Reserves were transferred from Interior to Agriculture for administration under an emerging national Forest Service. Clearly the use of the term in this period has an

invalid, unhistorical ring about it. His error on this point is all the more surprising because only several pages later he notes: "It was during the 1960s that public interest in the environment, as we know it today, began to take shape. The 'environmental movement' of the sixties differed from the earlier 'conservation movement'."(p. 55)

But we must applaud the work for introducing the student to George Perkins Marsh via Lewis Mumford's observation that, ***Man and Nature*** was the "fountainhead of the conservation movement." (p. 29) On the other hand transcendentalists and Henry David Thoreau are given short shrift. Thoreau is merely described as "a New England philosopher of nature." (p. 22) Good supplements to this work in courses might be ***Man and Nature*** edited by David Lowenthal; Robert L. Dorman's recent, ***A Word for Nature: Four Pioneering Environmental Advocates, 1845-1913*** (Marsh, Thoreau, Muir, and Powell). I realize that the title of this latter work suffers from the same problem criticized in the use of the term "environmentalist" in the Penna work. Other works on Rachel Carson and Aldo Leopold could also be supplemental.

The use of this book as a basic text in a course would also call for caution in several areas. Some will complain that the author's discussion of early American forests does not stress the impact of native fire practices on the forest regimes first encountered by Europeans. Also, did early Euro-Americans believe they were living in an "Eden" as Penna quotes one of Don Worster's more glib statements in the 1993 ***The Wealth of Nature*** (p. 9)? Much of this hinges upon David Potter's explanation of Americans as ***A People of Plenty*** (1954), which may suffer from the ills of reading history backwards. Early Puritans were not so convinced when they found themselves in the midst of what seventeenth-century poet Michael Wigglesworth called a "howling wilderness." Also, is natural history writing simply a forerunner of environmental history as Penna contends? "Writing about natural history of a country or a region," he asserts, "later became known as environmental history" (p. 9). Reference to pretty, fanciful, and detailed natural history writing refers to a literature that does not rise to the culture-nature interaction subject matter of modern environmental history. Finally Borderland historians will wince at placing of Coronado's expedition north from Mexico in the 1520s instead of in the 1540s (p. 6). Aside from these issues, will this reviewer use the book in a course? Decidedly, yes!

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