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FATAL REVOLUTIONS:
U.S. NATURAL HISTORIES OF THE GREATER CARIBBEAN
1707-1856

by

CHRISTOPHER PAUL IANNINI

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

2004

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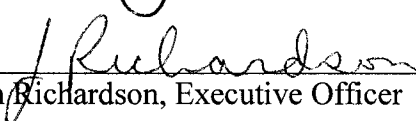
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Abstract

FATAL REVOLUTIONS
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Adviser: Professor William Kelly

“Fatal Revolutions” pursues the complex West Indian routes of American nature discourse. From the signing of the Treaties of Utrecht in 1714, through the Americanization phase in Louisiana, to antebellum debates over the annexation of Cuba, the sugar islands formed a volatile locus of Euro-American ambition and anxiety. During those same decades a series of prominent North American naturalists found themselves almost fatally impelled toward study of the multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and transnational region—extending from Venezuela and Colombia in the south through Florida and Louisiana in the north—that recent scholars have named the greater Caribbean. Figures including St. John de Crèvecoeur, William Bartram and John Audubon—along with European collaborators such as Sir Hans Sloane and Alexander von Humboldt—produced a substantial corpus of narratives, images and exhibits of circum-Caribbean environments, societies and commodities. Surveying a broad range of natural historical depictions of the region, the four central chapters of my study attempt to situate key documents of early American and U.S. culture within a specific Black Atlantic geography, one that was itself crucial to the development of Caribbean Studies by figures including Eric Williams and C.L.R. James. Several generations ago, their anti-colonial

scholarship helped to locate North America firmly at the periphery of an eighteenth-century global economic vision centered on Caribbean sugar and slavery. “Fatal Revolutions” argues that this powerful counter-geography haunts the ostensibly nationalist designs of texts including *Letters from an American Farmer*, Bartram’s revolutionary-era travel narrative of the Florida borderland, and Audubon’s autobiographical account of the mass slaveholder exodus from Haiti to New Orleans. Through varied aesthetic means, their authors depicted the greater Caribbean as source of an ardently desired yet disruptive superabundance, extolling West Indian trade and commodities as source of prosperity and prestige, while warning of the threat to borders and beliefs posed by the *mestizaje* of the Caribbean plantation, and subaltern movements that included the spread of West Indian-style slave revolution.

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Introduction

“Fatal Revolutions” pursues the complex West Indian routes of American nature discourse. From the signing of the Treaties of Utrecht in 1714, when the British Empire consolidated its dominance over the Atlantic world, to U.S. debates over the annexation of Cuba in the 1850s, the islands of the West Indies formed a volatile locus of Euro-American ambitions and anxieties.¹ In the decades between, a series of prominent North American and U.S.-based natural historians found themselves fatally impelled toward study of the greater Caribbean. Their travels to and interest in the region were driven by sweeping and deeply rooted forces. During the long eighteenth century the Caribbean marked the epicenter of at least two broad and interrelated revolutions. As preeminent source for sugar, the most valuable of the new colonial staples, the islands were integral to the emergence of what was arguably the first global economy. They were also the

¹ It is worth pausing here to address some matters of terminology. While the title of this dissertation refers to U.S. natural histories of the greater Caribbean, its genealogy of that discourse begins in 1706, a date at which any reference to the United States would of course be wholly anachronistic. I have generally refrained from employing the term “early American,” however, in order to differentiate the natural histories written and/or funded by the colonists of British North America from the extensive natural historical efforts in the rest of the colonial Americas. When I do on occasion use the term early American in the pages that follow, my intention is to suggest the extent to which British North Americans, or citizens of the early U.S., were also members of a trans-colonial and hemispheric society. It is also my hope that the cognitive dissonance between the time-frame and national location of my title might be productive. If the tendency to overstate the discontinuities between European colonialism and imperialism on the one hand, and U.S. national development on another, has marked one essential component of American exceptionalism, then one way to combat exceptionalism is through the writing of cultural histories that employ crucial moments in the development of British global ascendancy (such as the War of the Spanish Succession in the case of this study) as starting points for accounts of cultural production in the early U.S.

center of a particularly radical and violent challenge to a mercantile order that was coextensive with the triangle trade and dependent on a brutal system of plantation production. Between 1789 and 1815 alone, the greater Caribbean was shaken by over sixty slave-led conspiracies, rebellions and full-blown revolutions, many in areas that the U.S. would soon acquire.

Acutely aware of these developments, naturalists including J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, John and William Bartram, and John James Audubon—with European collaborators such as Mark Catesby, Abbé Raynal, Sir Hans Sloane and Alexander von Humboldt—produced a substantial corpus of narratives, images and exhibits of West Indian environments, societies, and commodities. They contributed to a circum-Caribbean natural history covering locations as diverse as Jamaica, Haiti, Cuba, the Bahamas, the Floridas, Louisiana, the Yucatan, Colombia, and Venezuela, through media as various as travel sketches, treatises, letters, speeches, autobiographies, paintings, illustrations, maps, museum displays and botanical gardens. While the particular concerns that animated their depictions of the greater Caribbean would continue to shift, ever sensitive to the demands of the historical moment, natural historians would consistently portray the region as source of an ardently desired yet disruptive superabundance, extolling Caribbean trade and commodities as source of prosperity and prestige, while lamenting the threat to borders and beliefs posed by the *mestizaje* of the Caribbean plantation, and subaltern movements that included the spread of West Indian-style slave revolution.

Two crucial terms in the title of this dissertation require some definition at the outset. While the volatile and expansive framework of the greater Caribbean defines the

geography of this study, the fluid and mobile discourse of natural history provides its generic focus. The concept of an extended greater Caribbean has been most forcefully employed in recent years by the historians Barry Gaspar and David Geggus.² In their highly inventive collection *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution in the Greater Caribbean*, Gaspar and Geggus survey a multi-lingual and transnational region extending from the Caribbean coasts of Venezuela and Colombia, through the islands of the Lesser and Greater Antilles themselves, to what would become the U.S. coast of the Gulf of Mexico (from Florida to Louisiana) in the north. By tracing the impact of the French Revolution in selected locales throughout the region they admirably capture the continuities and distinctions between its various territories. On one hand, Gaspar and Geggus see the greater Caribbean as a coherent plantation society. They argue that by the late eighteenth century its French, British, Spanish, and Dutch territories constituted, “basically similar colonial worlds.” Those worlds were, “shaped by developments centered in the Caribbean, principally the establishment and expansion of plantation slavery and crop production, which spawned contests for power between competing European states, between masters and slaves, and between whites, blacks, and people of mixed ancestry” (vi). The individual territories of this zone shared significant traits and patterns of development. All were transformed by the sugar revolution of the eighteenth

² For other studies by the editors see Gaspar’s *Bondmen & Rebels: A Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua, with Implications for Colonial British America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), and *More than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas*, ed. With Darlene Clark Hine (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); see also Geggus’ *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), *Slavery, War and Revolution: The British Occupation of Saint Domingue, 1793-98* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), and *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001).

century into wildly profitable monocultures. As a result of their economic value, many were shaken by inter-colonial rivalry. Many were also shaken by full-blown rebellions, as slaves resisted the exploitative labor on which the value of the islands depended. Most were black majority societies, with substantial populations of free coloreds. All gave birth to a range of creole cultures, from the great house to the slave village to the maroon garrison, located along the continuum between Afro-Creole and Euro-Creole described by Richard D.E. Burton in *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean*.

The point of employing the greater Caribbean as a geographic framework is not to gloss over important local differences between, for instance, Havana and New Orleans. Rather, with Gaspar and Geggus, it is to stress, “an interconnectedness about this wider region, in which networks of trade and mobility of the free and the enslaved populations made it possible for news to spread from one corner to another and to produce results that could clearly transcend national, linguistic, and geographic boundaries” (viii). In a sense, what Gaspar and Geggus offer is a geography from below, or counter-geography of the colonial Americas, one defined not by the mercantile boundaries between the circum-Caribbean colonies of the various European powers, but according to the people, commodities, and cultural forms by which they were restlessly and often illegally traversed. It is crucial to the concerns of this study that the counter-geography of the greater Caribbean cuts across the area that would become the U.S. South.

That it would continue to challenge the integrity of U.S. borders throughout the ante-bellum period is clearly evident in Alexander von Humboldt’s reflections on the potentially subversive consequences of Cuban annexation. His extended remarks on the subject, as translated in an 1856 edition of his *Political Essay on the Island of Cuba*, help

to establish the spectral presence of the greater Caribbean in U.S. development, even as they convey a sense of the scope of natural historical inquiry. Crossing easily into a realm we would today call “foreign policy,” Humboldt’s meditation on the strategic importance of the most valuable Spanish sugar island flows into a cautionary history of a region we might designate the circum-Caribbean South. He writes:

The island of Cuba is not only the largest of the Antilles (being nearly equal to England proper without the principality of Wales), but from its long and narrow form, this great extent of coast makes it at once contiguous with Haiti, Jamaica, Florida (the southern State of the United States), and Yucatan, the eastern State of Mexico. This circumstance is worthy of the most mature consideration, for these countries (Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, and the southern portions of the United States, from Louisiana to Virginia), distant but a few days’ sail from each other, contain nearly two millions eight hundred thousand Africans. As St. Domingo, Florida, and Mexico have been separated from Spain, Cuba does not assimilate politically with the countries it borders, although as they were for many ages subject to the same laws, it has a similarity of religion, language, and customs (76).

Humboldt’s overview reveals at least two reasons that Cuba marked such a desirable locus of U.S. expansionism. Though the conclusion of the age of sail was fast approaching, a sizeable percentage of New World trade was still required to pass by either the eastern or western tip of Cuba. Possession of Cuba went a long way toward economic control of the Caribbean, the extended Gulf region, and indeed of the

hemisphere. For southern slaveholders, Cuba was even more desirable because it was both a slave society, and the historic location of some of the most profitable plantations of the Americas. Humboldt ominously insists, however, that as a slave society Cuba is also home to a black majority. Implicitly warning against annexation, he offers a counter-geography of the Americas in which Cuba marks the center of a black majority region that extends from Mexico to Virginia. Though at times his text celebrates the Caribbean as a “New World Mediteranean” he more often cautions against U.S. involvement in an area that, as fairly recent events in Haiti testified, might quickly transform into an *“African confederation of the free states of the Antilles.”*

Such dangers are underscored in the remainder of his startling meditation. He continues:

Florida forms the most southern link of that great chain of republics whose northern boundary touches the upper waters of the river St. Lawrence, and which extends from the region of palms to that of the most rigorous winter. The inhabitants of New England believe that the progressive increase of the blacks, the preponderance of the States they inhabit, (the slave States,) and a preference for the culture of the colonial staples, are public dangers. Therefore, they do not wish to cross the Straits of Florida, the present boundary of the great American confederacy, except for the purposes of a free commerce based upon an equality of rights. It is true they fear any event which may throw Cuba into the hands of a more formidable European power than Spain, but undoubtedly they desire no

less strongly that the ties which formerly bound Cuba to Louisiana, Pensacola, and St. Augustine, shall remain for ever broken 76).

Much could be said about Humboldt's attention to the sectional disputes that informed the annexation debate. His passage is of most immediate interest, however, for its history of Florida and Louisiana. Humboldt argues that the Gulf South possesses a remarkably turbulent geography. As two of the southernmost territories of the U.S., they could be mapped as the periphery of a coherent mainland. But their history of Spanish (and we might add French) colonization also marks them as the northern periphery of a cultural zone extending from the Spanish and French Caribbean in general and Cuba and Haiti in particular. Humboldt argues that with the annexation of Cuba the powerful cultural connections between Havana, Florida and New Orleans might be reenergized, and might act as a fatal obstacle to the very regional and national ambitions which annexation was designed to fulfill.

Within the terminology of their day, prognosticators such as Humboldt would have been known as natural historians. Over the course of the long eighteenth century, natural history emerged as the *lingua franca* of international art and thought, as the British, French, Dutch and Spanish empires alternately competed and collaborated to amass natural historical knowledge of their far-flung colonial outposts, and to found prestigious natural historical institutions (including scientific societies, botanical gardens and museums) in the metropolises. An inter-disciplinary, or more precisely a pre-disciplinary discourse, natural history covered the expansive terrain of modern-day botany, geology, zoology, ornithology, geography and anthropology, and even spilled over into the precincts of Enlightenment moral philosophy and political economy.

Literary critics and cultural theorists have been introduced to natural history through the influential scholarship of Mary Louise Pratt. Over a decade ago, in *Imperial Eyes*, Pratt identified natural history as a crucial culture of European imperialism. Throughout the colonial era, natural historians fanned out across the globe to survey the flora, fauna, society and culture of a range of colonized territories in South and Central America, the Caribbean, Africa, and the East Indies. They participated in an exhaustive effort to classify the natural productions of those places within the timeless and static hierarchies of the Linnean system and the Great Chain of Being. “Natural history,” Pratt writes:

called upon human intervention (intellectual, mainly) to compose an order. The eighteenth-century classificatory systems created the task of locating every species on the planet extracting it from its particular, arbitrary surroundings (the chaos), and placing it in its appropriate spot in the system (the order—book, collection, or garden) with its new written, secular European name (31).

By performing that classificatory act, natural historians articulated a powerful form of “planetary consciousness,” one essential to the new ideology of empire. They learned to conceive of themselves in relation to both the colonized world and other European societies. The European natural historian asserted a metropolitan, lettered, male authority within complex and volatile contact zones. His ostensibly disinterested and benevolent pursuit of scientific knowledge served to efface and naturalize the domination, exploitation and violence that went into the formation of colonial social orders. At the

same time, the European natural historian also began to conceive of him or herself as the member of an elite global society.

The core of this study is formed around the careers of three natural historians who are normally considered in terms of their contribution to an emergent national culture: J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, William Bartram, and John James Audubon. It would be folly to deny that the formation of national culture was a consuming interest of natural historical texts ranging from Bartram's 1791 *Travels*, to Audubon's 1831 *Birds of America*. Indeed, the notion that representations of nature provided the cornerstone of national cultural identity has itself been a cornerstone of American Studies since the development of the field by scholars such as Perry Miller, Henry Nash Smith, and (later) Leo Marx.³ Building on Pratt, however, this study will attempt to situate colonial American, and early U.S. natural history within both a cosmopolitan and imperial culture.⁴ Chapters one and five establish an international framework by focusing on three

³ For the foundational scholarship on American nature discourse see Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), and *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976); Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford UP, 1964). For a famous rejoinder to this strain of scholarship, one that anticipates the anti-exceptionalist concerns of my own study, see Myra Jehlen, *American Incarnation: The Individual, the Nation, and the Continent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

⁴ Not surprisingly, interest in the eighteenth-century origins of cosmopolitanism has increased with the reemergence of the term within contemporary debates on globalization. For a fascinating account of the cosmopolitanism of the new merchant class in Britain see David Hodge, *Citizen of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785* (New York, 1998). Kant's concept of the cosmopolitan has been reexamined by Jurgen Habermas, "Kant's Idea of Perpetual Peace with the Benefit of Two-Hundred Years' Hindsight," in *Perpetual Peace: Essays on Kant's Cosmopolitan Ideal*, James Bohman and Matthias Lutz-Bachman, eds. (Cambridge, MA, 1997). For one example of contemporary debates over cosmopolitanism see Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and*

European natural historians—Sir Hans Sloane, Mark Catesby, and Alexander von Humboldt—who would exert a profound influence on the U.S. imaginary of the sugar islands. Chapters two through four then foreground the West Indian dimensions of the art, thought and travels of Crèvecoeur, Bartram and Audubon.

To excavate the Caribbean concerns of these figures, and of their foundational texts, is to assist in the recovery of the global reach of early American culture. For in turning their gaze toward the Caribbean, these naturalists were forced to confront both the decadence of the imperial world-system and the nascent global ambitions of the nation that was their temporary home. An ambivalent global vision, centered on the West Indies, asserts itself from the very inception of American nature discourse. Chapter 2 argues that Crèvecoeur's traumatic encounter with the Caribbean (in his careful reading of Raynal's *Political and Philosophical History of the East and West Indies*, and his own enigmatic early manuscript "Sketches of Jamaica & Bermudas & other subjects") would continue to haunt his 1782 masterpiece, with all the force of a repressed and unwanted memory. Well versed in a strain of imperial thinking that saw the West India trade as the prime mover of the first global economy, Crèvecoeur came to realize, to his profound horror, that the fate of enlightened cosmopolitanism, and the transatlantic republic of letters he held dear, would be decided in the sugar islands. Such concerns would only intensify, for a range of naturalists and authors, as the new nation contemplated the possibilities and perils of a process I designate circum-Caribbean expansion, and trace in subsequent chapters on Bartram's Florida and Audubon's Louisiana.

Feeling Beyond the Nation (Minneapolis, 1998). For an attempt to incorporate these debates into literary criticism see Vinay Dharwadker, ed., *Cosmopolitan Geographies: New Locations in Literature and Culture* (New York, 2001).

Those chapters apply Pratt's notion of the "contact zone" to an analysis of U.S. expansion. Expansionist thinkers saw possession of both Florida and Louisiana as crucial for securing a foothold in Caribbean commerce, and thus as necessary to the future global ascendancy of the U.S. economy. In their representations of the volatile environment of the Gulf South, however, Bartram and Audubon both grapple with the problematic legacies of French and Spanish slavery and colonialism. They encounter abundant and disturbing evidence of illicit trade connections to the West Indies, of slave resistance and insurrection on a Caribbean scale, and of a racial landscape, formed by Spanish and French policies of *mestizaje* and "One Blood," that was disruptive of Anglo-American racial categories and often inscrutable to U.S. eyes. Like Captain Amassa Delano boarding the hulk of the *San Dominick*, natural historians of the greater Caribbean found themselves in the midst of a social and political reality too complex and volatile for any nationalist framework to contain. It reached back to include three centuries of Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch and English imperialism, and forward to encompass the revolutionary efforts, often intertwined, of Amerindians, Africans, and Latin American creoles. Time and again U.S. explorers of the region discovered a New World nature saturated with memory.

Chapter one will offer a full critique of the chronology and geography of *Imperial Eyes*. While Pratt's study of natural history begins with Linneaus in the mid eighteenth century, and emphasizes interior exploration in South America and Africa, an alternative account of the discourse might be centered on the West Indies, and extend back to the emergence of a system of Caribbean commerce in the seventeenth century. It is worth pausing here to discuss three additional fronts upon which this dissertation will attempt to

extend and modify Pratt's brilliant analysis. The first involves Pratt's elision of U.S. natural histories and natural historians. Though several key chapters of her study focus on natural histories of Spanish America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and though two chapters revolve specifically around the efforts of Alexander von Humboldt (a figure also prominent, as we have seen, within U.S. circles), at no time does Pratt devote more than passing attention to the attempts of North Americans to chronicle the regions to their south. Because *Imperial Eyes* frames itself as a genealogy of imperial culture, that absence creates the mistaken impression that U.S. figures did not participate in any substantial way in the wider culture of natural history, or that U.S. efforts were somehow exempt from the imperial motivations of European naturalists. Neither implication will bear much scrutiny. American Studies has seen a welcome surge of interest in natural history over the last decade and a half, one that clarifies the abundance and prestige of the discourse in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁵ A variety of scholars have persuasively argued that the foregrounding of natural history is crucial to full understanding of cultural production in the new nation. Over the same decade and a half, Americanists have also voiced repeated calls for analysis of U.S. culture within a more transnational framework, one crucial component of which would be to redress what

⁵ For some examples see Pamela Regis, *Describing Early America: Bartram, Jefferson, Crèvecoeur and the Rhetoric of Natural History* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992), Christoph Irmscher, *The Poetics of Natural History: from John Bartram to William James* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), and Ann Shelby Blum, *Picturing Nature: American Nineteenth-Century Zoological Illustration* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993). Though not specifically concerned with natural history, Katherine Manthorne's *Tropical Renaissance: North American Artists Exploring Latin America, 1833-1879* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989) demonstrates how the taxonomic impulse informed the efforts of a variety of U.S. artists to chronicle South American nature in the nineteenth century.

Amy Kaplan has called “the absence of Empire” within the field.⁶ Despite the concurrence of these developments, U.S. natural history has yet to be considered in anything approaching the global framework of Pratt’s study. “Fatal Revolutions” argues that U.S. natural histories of the greater Caribbean represent a series of tentative and ambivalent attempts to participate in a broad imperial culture, and thus to articulate the new nation’s relationship to and role within the shifting contours of Atlantic, hemispheric and world orders. In a sense, the chapters that follow attempt to flesh out Caroline Porter’s suggestive insight, in her own critique of American Studies, that, “As an alternative vantage point on North American literature, Cuba as the focalizing site of an ‘extended Caribbean’ goes a long way toward overcoming the parochialism of traditional, and even not so traditional, American literary studies.” Porter’s insight must be revised, however, to stress that a truly transnational framework would need to encompass multiple, successive and competing focal points in, for instance, Barbados in the early eighteenth century, Jamaica and Haiti in the late eighteenth century, and Havana and New Orleans in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It would also need to consider the status of the extended Caribbean within an evolving world economy.

⁶ For but a few examples of this trend see Amy Kaplan, “‘Left Alone with America:’ The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture,” in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease (Durham, Duke University Press, 1993), Jose David Saldivar, *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (Berkeley, 1997), Amrijit Singh and Peter Schmidt, eds., *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2000), Donald Pease and Robyn Wiegman, eds., *The Futures of American Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002). For a brief review essay on the movement toward transnational study of early America see Dennis D. Moore, “The Empire of Early American Studies,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 59 (2002). On the same topic see also Malini Johar Schueller and Edward Watts, eds., *Messy Beginnings: Postcoloniality and Early American Studies* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

A second extension of Pratt's argument concerns the generic fluidity of natural historical discourse. One of the most fascinating dimensions of *Imperial Eyes* was its effort to chart an area of substantial overlap between natural history and the emergent literary genre of travel narrative. An area of similar cross-fertilization can be located between natural history and nearly any literary genre operant during the long eighteenth century. In the pages that follow, studies of Sir Hans Sloane, Mark Catesby, William Bartram and Alexander von Humboldt will consider the relationship between travel narrative and natural history, while analyses of Crèvecoeur, and Audubon will consider the relationship between natural history, epistolary fiction, and autobiography. The sections on Bartram, Catesby and Audubon will also examine the interplay between natural historical illustration and a variety of aesthetic and technological developments within the visual culture of the day.

Finally, while Pratt tends to focus on the ideological content and function of natural histories, this study will devote equal attention to the role and status of natural histories as commodities within an explosive Atlantic economy. Joseph Roach has analyzed an array of cultural forms whose development coincided with the growth of what he calls the "circum-Atlantic" world. For Roach, circum-Atlantic culture is pervaded by variations on a ritual he terms "the performance of waste." Itself adapted from Georges Bataille's notion of the "profitless expenditure," the performance of waste emerges along with the Atlantic economy as an attempt to manage what Roach calls a "remarkably turbulent contradiction: the fear of superabundance" (122). Roach continues:

In the natural history of the world, according to the premise of the
'General Economy,' the 'dominant event is the development of luxury, the

production of increasingly burdensome forms of life.’ Human cultures somehow must cope with the profuse excesses produced by nature and reproduced by their own increasingly fecund manipulations of it. Their strategies for coping with this superabundance include such forms as potlatch, feasting, ritualized warfare, and sacrifice—performing the waste of excess objects, produce, and human life (123).

Among the fecund manipulations to which Roach alludes the technology of sugar production and the legal redefinition of Africans as human commodities must be prominently included. While the material surplus deriving from these manipulations is ardently desired, abundance also represents a profound threat to cultural continuity and identity. The latter is especially true in the plantation Americas, where abundance results from sanctioned and illicit forms of contact between white, red and black peoples. Excitement over increased luxury is tethered to fears of excessive human diversity, which in turn demand ritual sacrifice of the “accursed share” of material wealth.

Roach’s own analysis of the performance of waste remains focused on locales ranging from London playhouses, to Iroquois Condolence Councils, to Mardi Gras parades. But he repeatedly suggests that the concept can be expanded to include the production and consumption of a variety of luxury commodities, including “pets, chocolates and Negroes” (125). That natural histories might be among these goods is suggested by some comments on the British vogue for New World feathers in the early eighteenth century. Roach writes, “As a material object, the feather marks an act of violence: what it cost to produce was the original wearer’s life, and what it served to dramatize was the predication of overarching symbolic systems on the material basis of

waste” (131). While feathers themselves will form a prominent subject of sections on Catesby and Audubon, it should be noted that Roach’s insight might apply to the production of nearly any natural historical specimen. The representation of exotic flora and fauna entailed a kind of morbid expenditure of New World vitality.

As art historian Kay Dian Kriz argues, in her own application of Roach’s ideas to the study of West Indian natural histories, the consumption of Caribbean environments, and African and native bodies does not go uncontested within these colonialist texts. Kriz locates a process of “surrogation” at the core of Sir Hans Sloane’s germinal “Natural History of Jamaica,” one that helps her “understand how images of artifacts, of plants, and of animals helped articulate new and fraught relationships under construction in the Atlantic world” (38). Surrogation refers to the complex process by which, in the production of West Indian natural histories, living plants and animals are first transformed into static specimens, and then “replaced” by written and visual texts. For Kriz, that process is paralleled by the wholesale erasure of the middle passage and a variety of forms of genocide in the writing of colonial history, in the “forging of memories that depended on active forgetting.” Natural histories such as Sloane’s, then, strive both to classify plants and animals within a natural order, and to, “contain the diverse array of humans inhabiting the outer limits of an empire that was in flux.” Those inhabitants, however, refuse to submit to their erasure. Making innovative use of Michel de Certeau, Kriz identifies a variety of subtle ways in which the “trace of what was excluded, ‘resurfaces, it troubles, it turns the present’s feeling of being *at home* into an

illusion.””⁷ These uncanny disruptions are driven both by the repressive dynamics of a haunted colonialist consciousness, and, more pointedly, by the individual and collective resistance of Africans and their Caribbean descendants. In her reading of Sloane, then, Kriz offers a history from below to compliment Gaspar and Geggus’ geography from below.

My own efforts to analyze circum-Caribbean natural histories as part of an *imperial* and a *national* culture are driven by a similar desire to catch the subaltern agency at work in these texts. As a number of post-colonial scholars have argued, the formation of colonial culture is a process best characterized not as a one-directional imposition of an external order on a subject population, but as a series of intricate negotiations (often violent and hierarchical in nature) between colonizer and colonized.⁸ Such a process can be witnessed in all the natural histories to which this dissertation will attend, but it emerges with particular clarity in the encounter with the Florida Seminole in Bartram’s *Travels*, and in the encounter with the multi-racial denizens of Louisiana and New Orleans in Audubon’s early journals. If, as this study will argue, such circum-Caribbean texts ultimately record the break-down of natural historical orderings, then the disruptive agency of subaltern populations including Seminole and Creek women,

⁷ Quotes above are from Dian Kriz, 45. See also Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 4.

⁸ Among the best known accounts of colonial culture in this vein is Homi Bhabha’s theory of mimicry as articulated (among other places) in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994). My own thinking on the matter has benefited most from C.L.R. James’ analysis of West Indian cricket in *Beyond a Boundary* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983, c. 1963).

Caribbean and North American slaves, Floridianos, Cuban sailors, and mixed-race Louisianans can be said to determine that fragmentary aesthetic.

The attempt to locate something like an “imperial” dimension of early American and U.S. culture is fraught with complexities. That genealogy runs counter to a historiographic consensus that dates the origins of U.S. imperialism to the 1890s in general, and the Spanish-American War in particular (the Caribbean location is hardly a coincidence). In part, to designate the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as imperial moments for an emergent nation is justified by Amy Kaplan, who in her recent study *The Anarchy of Empire* herself dates U.S. imperialism from the U.S.-Mexico War, and subsequent problems related to “incorporating” an alien, multi-racial, and frequently resistant population.⁹ Such conflicts find strong precedents in the annexation of Florida and Louisiana. At same time, however, it should be clarified that to claim that U.S. figures participated in a broader imperial culture, one that pervaded the Euro-American discourse of natural history, is not quite equivalent to arguing that the early U.S. was itself imperial. As should be clear throughout, however, I find much merit in this way of approaching the study of national development and expansion.

To explore the imperial dimensions of early American and U.S. culture is also to engage with the theoretical disputes that have recently emerged within the field of American Studies, as a variety of scholars have queried the geographic and generic boundaries of eighteenth- and early nineteenth century culture. For every celebration of the willingness of “New Americanists” to transgress national boundaries, there has been another cautionary essay that the claims to a “post-national” American Studies are

⁹ Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

premature at best, and politically naïve at worst. Too much recent Americanist work, it is insisted, perpetuates a monolithic vision of the U.S. even as it expands the geographic borders of the field. Alys Weinbaum and Brent Hayes Edwards, for instance, advance a critique of Donald Pease and Amy Kaplan's collection *Cultures of United States Imperialism*. As they approvingly note, that influential collection, "'intend[s] the restoration of heterogeneous cultural histories' in contradistinction to the monohistory of US nationalism." They go on to argue that "The difficulty with this project is that the form of analysis represented by the New Americanists claims to be 'global' in scope, but maintains the US as its centre . . . What does it mean to do putatively internationalist work from the vantage point of a national literature project?" (256). Carolyn Porter's review of some recent Americanist scholarship reiterates such doubts. While applauding efforts to interrogate disciplinary paradigms, she points to "the limited capacities of any new Americanist studies that does not question the most fundamental assumption in both the old and the new field-imaginary . . . – that the nation itself is the basic unit of analysis" (485). Much new work, she maintains, perpetuates the very "nationalist critical tradition" it purports to critique. In the words of Peter Carafiol, too many recent critics continue to ask, "how to unite the disparate and fragmentary facts of experience in the New World into a coherent account about the national culture" (qtd. in Porter 486). They thus limit the transformative potential latent in their multi-cultural and transnational objects of study. Porter suggests a few ways that that transformative potential might be unleashed. American Studies might begin to encompass a quadruple set of relations between Europe and Latin America, Latin America and North America, North America and Europe, and Africa and both Americas. "The aim here," she writes, "would not be to

expand American studies so as to incorporate the larger territory of the hemisphere, but rather to grasp how the cultural, political, and economic relations between and within the Americas might work to reconstellate the field itself, reinflecting its questions in accord with a larger frame” (510).

The structure and focus of “Fatal Revolutions” reflects my own belief that, in reframing the field of American Studies, it is nearly as distorting to lose sight of the nation as to exclude any cultural, political and economic relations that exceed its confines. Just as an account of early U.S. discourse on Louisiana and Florida that ignored the revolutions in Haiti and Latin America or the historical legacy of the Code Noir would be incomplete, an account of the greater Caribbean that failed to address the integration of the U.S. market economy in the Jacksonian era would be at least as distorted. While calls for a “post-national” American studies remain necessary and compelling, so too does the rejoinder that as the U.S. grew to dominate the hemisphere economically and politically (military dominance would soon arrive) it became the primary obstacle to a range of emancipatory and democratic movements throughout the hemisphere. It is thus an entity that must remain close to the foreground of progressive visions of American Studies. What the new American Studies ultimately requires is a kind of restless migration between a national and transnational perspective, one that can attend both to the pressures exerted by the U.S. on hemispheric development, and to the multiple ways in which powerful hemispheric movements pre-dated and continued to transgress U.S. borders.

Chapter One:

Sugar Acts: Anglo-American Natural History and the West Indian Routes of Eighteenth-Century Maritime Empire

Five years before the turn of the eighteenth century, the London tea dealer and newspaper publisher John Houghton reflected on the increasing importance of the Caribbean to the development of the British mercantile economy. In *A Collection for Improvement of Husbandry and Trade*, Houghton offered some civic-minded advice regarding a trade in West Indian staples—including sugar and molasses—that had rapidly begun to transform the port-cities of the various European empires:

In order to improve this *West-Indian* Trade, I believe it would be well worth while to have it some body's Business to make a good Natural History as well as can be, and to study how every thing therer [sic] may be improved, and what useful known matters grow in other Countries, that in Probability might grow there, and also to settle the *Guinea-Trade* for *Blacks*, which are the usefulest Merchandize can be carried thither, except *White-Men* (qtd. in Dian Kriz 42).

Houghton's suggestion provides an interesting starting point for a reconsideration of the development of natural history, and of the geography of early American culture. It insists that the rise of Anglo-American natural history was inextricably linked to the explosive growth of an Atlantic economy centered on a series of revolutionary developments in the Greater and Lesser Antilles. Houghton himself suggests one source of that linkage. By injecting it with profitable botanical knowledge, the proto-scientific discourse of natural history provided the fuel for the commercial revolution that had already begun to radiate

outward from the plantations of the New World. Merchants and corporations hired natural historians to survey the exotic environments of their far-flung colonial possessions, to determine whether valuable commodities such as coffee, indigo and sugar could there be cultivated. Natural historical inquiry was focused on the Caribbean for the simple reason that the sugar islands were central to the mercantile interests of its European patrons.

Such an instrumentalist reading, however, tells only part of the story of natural history's rapid rise to cultural prestige. The efforts of natural historians were also integral to the increasingly urgent efforts of European citizenries to grapple with, and extract legible meaning from the convulsive social, political and economic transformations that had accompanied the take-off stage of the circum-Atlantic market. Houghton's reflections point to two of the most sweeping innovations of Atlantic modernity—the mass forced migration of Africans, as human “Merchandize,” to the New World, and the development of multi-racial creole societies throughout the Americas.

This chapter will argue that natural histories of the Caribbean were integral to the efforts of Europeans and Euro-Americans to relate to their new mercantile and colonialist selves. It is an argument that is in turn integral to the broad re-mapping of cultural production in the early Americas that the bulk of this dissertation will undertake. By charting the pervasive Caribbean concerns of the first British empire, and tracing their influence on Anglo-American depictions of New World nature, this chapter hopes to recover for modern scholars what was a habitual orientation for eighteenth-century Europeans: to the West Indian and away from the mainland colonies. It begins by documenting the full range of West Indian natural histories produced over the course of

the 1700s, as English, French, Spanish and Dutch naturalists answered the calls of prominent mercantilists including Houghton. The sheer quantity and scope of that natural historical corpus provides the material grounding for a challenge to the chronology and geography of Mary Louise Pratt's account of the emergence of natural historical discourse. While Pratt dates the emergence of natural history proper to the middle of the eighteenth century, and connects it to a new interest in interior exploration, an alternative genealogy suggests that natural history owes its cultural prestige, and much of its shape and content, to the acceleration of maritime trade and the emergence of a coherent Atlantic society and economy at the close of the seventeenth century. To recognize that chronology demands a shift in critical perspective from Africa and South America (the focus of Pratt's study) to the sugar islands.¹

To place West Indian natural history at the center of an account of the discourse is necessarily to insist that it responds to the stimulus of New World slavery. And indeed it is another ambition of this chapter to situate the development of natural history, and the broader imperial culture to which it contributes, within the sweeping history of the transformation of Atlantic economics and politics developed by Eric Williams and C.L.R. James several generations ago. Their efforts helped to found the field of Caribbean studies, and inspired an impressive outpouring of scholarship on Atlantic slavery, the subsequent insights of which I attempt to synthesize in a brief overview. That overview emphasizes the importance of Caribbean slavery and sugar production in Britain's largely successful efforts to achieve global maritime dominance during the first two-thirds of the eighteenth century.

¹ See Mary Louise Pratt, *Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York, 1992).

An examination of the career of Sir Hans Sloane then helps to link Britain's territorial and accumulative ambitions to the representational labors of Caribbean natural history. The author of *Voyage to the Islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica* (1707, 25), Sloane founded the nationalist institution of British natural history on the bedrock of his Jamaican botanical collections, narratives and images. His own rise to prominence (he would later help to found the British Museum), and the increasing value of his collections, were both intimately connected to the growth of the British sugar colonies. His career thus provides a valuable framework within which to trace the Caribbean routes of British natural historical inquiry, commercial expansion and imperial strategy as they evolved over a crucial half century. The poetics of his "Natural History of Jamaica," meanwhile, help to trace the multiple anxieties attendant upon West Indian possession. I argue that Sloane's massive volumes present a series of self-reflexive commodities. His images of Jamaican plants, animals and artifacts offer anxious meditations on the transformation of Caribbean environments and African bodies into objects of exploitation and exchange that serve as the highly unstable foundation of Britain's prosperity.

As a subsequent section on the career of Mark Catesby makes plain, those very transformations also provided the ground for the prosperity of British North America, as mainland colonists began to profit from their own trade with the West Indies. That shared reliance on the West India trade provides one reason that the poetics of Sloane's text are so powerfully mirrored in the Anglo-American and U.S. natural histories that the bulk of this dissertation will examine. Catesby provides a convenient figure for tracing that

aesthetic lineage.² *Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahama Islands* (1730-47) was shaped by Sloane's patronage and influence. Interpretation of Catesby's West Indian images, from sojourns in Jamaica and the Bahamas, reveals that their aesthetics of disembodiment and waste reflect a deep ambivalence, akin to Sloane's, regarding Caribbean developments that had only intensified in the decades since his mentor's own journey to Jamaica. Those developments remain a powerful shadow presence in Catesby's narratives and images of the area that would become the U.S. South. Catesby's natural history depicts the Carolinas and Spanish Florida as northern periphery of a vital zone of trade and agricultural production centered in the Antilles. Movements centered in that zone, he predicted, would come to determine the shape of North American society as the growth of mainland slavery accelerated. Recent scholars have begun to reclaim Catesby as an important precursor for representations of New World environments by figures including Jefferson, Bartram and Audubon. My own account of his career thus seeks to establish the spectral presence of the West Indies within the very fabric of U.S. nature.

The Wide Eighteenth Century and the Emergence of Natural History

By the time John Houghton drafted his plea, the compilation of a "good natural history" of the West Indies was well underway. A mere list of some of the most prominent Caribbean natural histories compiled from the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries gives a sense of the formidable scope of that branch of proto-scientific inquiry.

² As I will argue at greater length below, Catesby's natural history may be considered as an Anglo-American or early American text due to the fact that a significant portion of Catesby's funding was provided by colonists based in British North America and the British Caribbean.

Natural historical surveys including Fernandez de Oviedo's *Historia general y natural de las Indias* (1535) and Acosta's *Historia natural y moral de las Indias*. (1590), had accompanied the Spanish conquest of the New World from nearly its inception. In the early seventeenth century the Dutch East and West India Companies set the standard for natural historical inquiry. But by the middle of the seventeenth century, with the establishment of their own overseas trading empires, France and Britain began to emulate the Dutch example. British merchants hired natural historians to document the flora and fauna of their increasingly lucrative West Indian possessions.³ Natural historical concerns were central or prominent in texts including Richard Ligon's, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (1657, 1673); Edmund HICKERINGILL's, *Jamaica Viewed* (1661); Thomas TRYON's, *Friendly Advice to the Gentleman-Planters of the East and West Indies* (1684); and Richard Blome's, *A Description of the Island of Jamaica; with the other Isles and Territories in America, to which the English are Related, viz. Barbados, St. Christophers, Nievis* (1672).

Over the following century the collection, classification, description, and transplantation of the Caribbean environment would continue unabated. British natural histories of the sugar islands from the period included often extravagantly printed and illustrated volumes such as Sir Hans Sloane's *Voyage to the Islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica* (1707, 25); Mark CATESBY's, *Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahama Islands* (1730-47); Charles LESLIE's *A New History of Jamaica from the Earliest Accounts, to the Taking of Porto Bello ... in thirteen letters*

³ Details of the preceding historical sketch are derived from Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the 'Improvement' of the World* (New Haven, 2000), 14-19.

from a gentleman to his friend (1740), Griffith Hughes' *Natural History of Barbados* (1750), Reverend William Smith's, *A Natural History of Nevis, and the Rest of the English Charibee Islands in America* (1745); Patrick Browne's *The Civil and Natural History of Jamaica* (1756); and Bryan Edwards, *History, Civil and Commercial, of the West Indies* (1796, 1819). Edwards' account was complemented by the striking illustrations of Agostino Brunias, whose own West Indian paintings provided an important source of British natural historical "knowledge" of Afro-Caribbean folkways and customs.⁴ French natural histories of the Antilles, many of which were translated into English during the 1700s, included Charles de Rochefort's *Histoire naturelle et morale des iles Antilles de L'Amerique e* (1665); Jean-Baptiste du Tertre's, *Histoire generale des isles de S. Christophe, de la Gvadeloupe, de la Martinique, et avtres dans l'Amérique* (1654); Charles Plumier's, *Description des Plantes de l'Amerique* (1693); and Jean-Baptiste Labat's, *Nouveau voyage aux isles de l'Amerique* (1724).

Impressive in its own right, such a list fails to convey the full scope of natural historical activity related to the West Indies. In 1684 Sir Hans Sloane penned a letter to botanist John Ray describing the "vast number of East and West India seeds come over this year" (qtd. in Drayton 17). Replanted on the estates of prosperous merchants and collectors, those seeds would contribute prominently to the growth of important botanical gardens throughout Great Britain. Seeds were not the only natural objects to circulate along the British-West Indian leg of the triangle trade. By 1714, Sloane had concluded his tenure as secretary of the Royal Society to begin assembling a collection of seeds, live

⁴ For a fascinating study of the taxonomic impulse in Brunias' West Indian paintings see Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Picturing Imperial Power: Colonial Subjects in Eighteenth-Century British Painting* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 145.

and dried plant specimens, skins, stuffed birds and mammals, prints, treatises and narratives (many of West Indian origin) that would form the basis of the British Museum. Highly visible in the metropole, such natural historical pursuits were also considered essential to the settlement of the sugar islands themselves. In 1765 a new botanical garden was established on St. Vincent in order to test Asian and American plants in the West Indian climate. By 1775 a group of wealthy Jamaican planters had voted in the legislature to establish two botanic gardens, and to provide public funds toward the cost of a full-time botanist. A similar pattern applied to the French West Indies. In the 1730s French colonial officials in Saint Domingue lobbied hard for the formation of a botanic garden on the island.⁵

It is odd, given the sheer volume of natural historical material related to the Caribbean, that the region has been given so little emphasis in the burgeoning scholarship on the discourse. That elision owes in part to the basic thesis of *Imperial Eyes*. The history of natural history is of course profoundly indebted to Pratt's magisterial survey. Pratt was perhaps the first scholar within a cultural studies tradition to identify natural history as the dominant eighteenth-century structure of knowledge. Extending the reach of its totalizing vision across the globe, it contributed a powerful form of "planetary consciousness" to the new ideology of empire (Pratt 9-10, 15, 29-30).

While Pratt's notion of "planetary consciousness" is essential to my own understanding of the dynamics and ambitions of Enlightenment culture, I take some issue with the particular chronology and geography of her study. Over the span of the long eighteenth century a new class of cosmopolitan intellectuals, drawn largely from the

⁵ The preceding sketch is derived from Drayton, 65, 72, 80.

ranks of newly prosperous merchants and planters, did indeed begin to conceive of themselves as members of an elite global society, one with an unprecedented capacity to conceive of nature, society, culture and economics on a planetary scale. But that development need not be tied, as it is within Pratt's history, to the emergence of the Linnean system within natural history itself, and the shift toward interior exploration and territorial competition within European imperial practice.

For Pratt, the history of natural history properly begins in 1736 with the publication of Carl Linne's *Systema Naturae* (*The System of Nature*) and its highly accessible system for classifying the plants of the world. Botanical specimens were identified and classified through the simple act of counting their male and female sex organs. A convenient Latin binomial was then used to designate genus and species. In Pratt's view, Linnaeus thus provided a universally intelligible schema for natural historical collection and analysis, one that was necessary to and necessitated by the extension of territorial control into the interior of Africa and South America (Pratt 24-35)

Despite its decisive importance within Pratt's genealogy, the Linnean system did not mark anything like a radical break with prior natural historical knowledge and practice. In the late seventeenth century Joseph Pitton de Tournefort and John Ray, working amidst extensive collections of New World botanical specimens in France and England, had developed reliable criteria for identifying plants according to genera and species respectively. Their work extended the efforts of the Huguenot Gaspard de Bahuin, who had first begun to identify plants according to genera and species in the botanical garden at Basel in 1623 (Drayton 17-19). Recognizing the long pre-history of Linnean classification disrupts the causal link Pratt draws between the emergence of

natural history proper and the shift away from maritime exploration. An alternative genealogy reveals that the deep history of botanical classification coincides with the rise of Atlantic commerce and the mass transplantation of New World plants to Europe.

Indeed Pratt's own description of the inherent dynamics of natural history suggests that the growth of the Atlantic economy forms the appropriate context for a history of the discourse. Near the beginning of her study she asserts that, "Natural history as a way of thinking interrupted existing networks of historical and material relations among people, plants, and animals wherever it applied itself" (Pratt 32). She repeatedly emphasizes the potential of natural history to dislodge objects from their original contexts, and to disrupt prior systems of meaning: "Natural history extracted specimens not only from their organic or ecological relations with each other, but also from their places in other peoples' economies, histories, social and symbolic systems" (Pratt 31). In a fascinating aside, Pratt suggests that this disruptive capacity owes to the role natural history played in an era of primitive accumulation, stretching from 1500 to 1800, during which the European bourgeoisie acquired the capital necessary to the Industrial Revolution. She writes:

In the sphere of culture the many forms of collection that were practiced during this period developed in part as the image of that accumulation, and as its legitimation. The systematizing of nature carries this image of accumulation to a totalized extreme, and at the same time models the extractive, transformative character of industrial capitalism (Pratt 36).

If natural history does indeed offer the legitimation Pratt describes, then consideration of the West Indies is of paramount importance to a full excavation of the discourse. For as

Eric Williams argued over a half century ago, in a brilliant revision of Marxist theory, the process of primitive accumulation was one that took place primarily overseas, through the labor of African slaves on the sugar plantations of the Caribbean. In *Capitalism and Slavery* Williams argued that profits related to the Caribbean plantations, accrued either through the slave or sugar trade, directly financed the Industrial Revolution in Britain. Within Williams' influential thesis, those profits were accumulated through a trade in sugar and slaves that perfectly embodies the voracious, extractive character of Pratt's account of primitive accumulation. Like the descriptive practices of natural history itself, the sugar and slave trade interrupted prior social networks and relations, and extracted human beings and natural productions from preexisting contexts.⁶

⁶ Williams' thesis is among the most debated issues within economic history. One of the best-known challenges to Williams' account of the role of the slave trade and Caribbean plantation within primitive accumulation is found in Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Popular Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (New York, 1987). My own understanding of the matter is closest to Robin Blackburn's modification of the Williams' thesis in *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (New York, 1997). Blackburn concludes: "What [our survey] does show is that exchanges with the slave plantations helped British capitalism to make a breakthrough to industrialism and global hegemony ahead of its rivals. It also shows that industrial capitalism boosted slavery. The advances of capitalism and industrialism nourished, in fateful combination, the demand for exotic produce and the capacity to meet this large-scale demand through the deployment of slave labour" (572). My invocation of the Williams thesis is also influenced by Andrew J. O'Shaughnessy's provocative essay, "Eric Williams as Economic Historian." O'Shaughnessy argues that the question of the statistical accuracy of Williams' thesis is in some sense irrelevant to the issue of its usefulness to scholarship on the colonial Caribbean in the making of the Atlantic world. The author writes, "By relying on contemporary literary accounts, Eric Williams understood the past as contemporaries viewed it and ... this gave him an empathy with the cultural *beliefs* of the times which we are now in danger of ignoring. Let us begin with his claim that wealth from West Indies and the slave trade created the capital which financed the Industrial Revolution. Contemporaries *believed* colonial investments to be a prime source of national wealth and they acted on these beliefs." (100). The essay is included in Cateau, Heather and S.H.H. Carrington, eds., *Capitalism and Slavery Fifty Years Later* (New York, 2000).

By the end of the seventeenth century metropolitan London stood poised at the threshold of a staggering boom in plantation production, and at the cusp of the social transformations that would usher in Atlantic modernity. The effects of that shift were already palpable when John Houghton issued his plea for a good West Indian natural history. They would continue to be felt, in far more intense form, as substantial numbers of Anglo-American natural historians answered his call for information on the Caribbean environment over the next century. The explosion of eighteenth century commerce utterly transformed relations within and between Europe, Africa, the Caribbean and North and South America, as patterns of migration and trade helped to stitch those locales into a coherent Atlantic world.

Even a highly selective overview of that transformation provides a powerful sense of its scope and depth. On the Atlantic coast of Africa, near the mouth of the River Gambia, the communal social organizations known as chieftancies gave way. Increasingly corrupt dynasties responded to the lure of the slave trade and the presence of the British representatives of the Royal African Company in their state-financed fortress (Linebaugh and Rediker 127-132). In the Spanish and Portuguese colonies of South and Central America a range of indigenous societies suffered the ravages of continued European domination. Natives enslaved in the gold and silver mines died in vast numbers of disease, starvation and exhaustion. The sugar planters of Brazil began to rely on the new labor force provided by the Royal African Company, which had grown to dominate the slave trade by the end of the seventeenth century. The corporation did an even better business in the French and British Caribbean. In the British islands, indentured servants from the English and Irish lower classes, forced off the commons by the enclosure

movement of the Cromwelian republic, were joined by increasing numbers of African slaves. Once chattel slavery had been firmly established, a seemingly limitless European demand for sugar inspired the development of a proto-industrial mode of production on the plantations. A variety of African ethnicities, already brought forcibly together in the holds of the slave-ships, were further fused through a process of cultivation and refining that demanded close cooperation. New racial identities emerged from the sexual liaisons, whether illicit or sanctioned, between the African majority, the few remaining Natives, and the European plantocracy. Defined within the distinctive racial codes of the French, Spanish, British and Dutch Empires, the *mestizaje* of the Caribbean plantation society gave birth to a baroque array of racial and ethnic categories.

The transformative impact of the West Indian plantation was felt with equal force in the metropole. In England, external trade brought a dizzying variety of exotic commodities to local markets, spawning new patterns of daily consumption for larger and larger segments of the population. The impact of the new tropical staples on the upper classes was no less profound. Meeting in growing numbers in the new London coffee houses, over beverages sweetened by the labors of West Indian slaves, an upstart mercantile elite—with men such as Houghton at their forefront—gave birth to an early form of the bourgeois public sphere, one that would continue to pose a serious challenge to the political rule of the landed aristocracy. In British North America, where the claims of the aristocracy would of course also be challenged, the sugar revolution helped shape colonial society in a variety of ways. While northern farmers and merchants owed much of their prosperity to the coastwise trade of foodstuffs to the Caribbean, the Carolina planters owed their very legal code and social structure (including a black majority

demographic found nowhere else on the mainland) to the West Indian planters who had founded the colony from Barbados. The circum-Atlantic history sketched above provides material support for Joseph Roach's assertion that, "... a New World was not discovered in the Caribbean, but one was truly invented there" (Roach 4).

Apparent at the moment of Houghton's writing, such developments would accelerate exponentially over the next century. The entire Caribbean (and the French and British islands in particular) would continue to play a leading role. Sugar overtook grain as the most valuable commodity entering the world market around 1750. Robin Blackburn's comparative study of New World slavery provides a visceral sense of the continued explosive growth in Caribbean crop production. The total tonnage of sugar exports from the British islands increased by nearly five-fold in the period from 1700 to 1787. The volume of sugar shipped from the French West Indies increased twelve-fold over the same period. Together the French and British Caribbean provided 80 percent of the world's sugar by 1787. The increase in crop production was of course fueled by a mass influx of slaves. The slave population of the British islands grew from 64,000 to 480,000 between 1680 and 1790, while the slave population of the French islands expanded from 11,000 to 675,000.⁷

On one level, West Indian natural histories played an intensely celebratory and promotional role in this commercial boom. Natural historical narratives, images and

⁷ Statistics are from Blackburn, 403. The rise of the plantation economy of the British West Indies, and the attendant explosion of the West Indian and slave trades, is brilliantly narrated in Richard Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775* (London, 1974). See also Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (New York, reprinted 1973); Richard Pares, *Yankees and Creoles: The Trade Between North America and the West Indies Before the American Revolution* (London, 1956); Lowell J. Ragatz, *The West Indian Approach to the Study of American Colonial History* (London, 1935).

collections offered an elaborate and exhaustive display of the full range of natural resources available in a given empire's island possessions. And natural historians themselves helped to disseminate the technical and scientific knowledge necessary to the rapid advances in plantation production. As they chronicled and displayed that tropical superabundance, however, natural histories also attempted cognitively and aesthetically to manage the sheer pace and scale of economic take-off, social conflict, and cultural exchange in the eighteenth century Atlantic.

The work of Sir Hans Sloane provides a particularly prominent instance of the natural historical attempt to promote and manage a broad transformation of Atlantic society. Based on his fifteen-month journey to Jamaica in 1697 as personal physician to the colony's new governor, Sloane's "Natural History of Jamaica" follows a precedent established by seventeenth-century natural histories including Rochefort's *Histoire Naturelle et Morale des Iles Antilles de l'Amerique* (1665). Its basic elements consisted of numerous and often sumptuous images of Caribbean flora and fauna (accompanied by lengthy and authoritative written descriptions) and a relatively wide-ranging account of local society and culture. At the time of its publication, however, the breadth, technical novelty, and influence of Sloane's natural history were unprecedented. Its two volumes contained literally hundreds of finely engraved images of plants, animals and human artifacts. Sloane's was also the first natural history to include a full travel narrative, in which the naturalist offered a remarkably eclectic and detailed account of Anglo- and Afro-Caribbean culture.

Sloane would parlay the success of his early natural historical text into a long and influential tenure as president of the Royal Society from 1727-53. During that tenure he

would continue to amass one of the largest natural historical collections then in existence, one that relied heavily on the efforts of naturalists, including Mark Catesby, who traveled to the Caribbean in the half century after Sloane's expedition. The carefully preserved and archived specimens of his Jamaica botanical collection would swell to fill six substantial volumes.⁸ Near the end of his life, Sloane arranged to sell his entire collection to the British government for the impressive but likely sub-market price of 20,000 pounds sterling. The collections would form the founding core of both the British Museum and the Natural History Museum at South Kensington. According to Richard Drayton, Sloane "symbolized the new cultural prestige of natural history in the early eighteenth century," as that proto-scientific pursuit, "captured the attention of the upper and middle classes of imperial Britain" (37).

The details of Sloane's career provide dramatic substantiation for the argument that the new cultural prestige of natural history was inextricably tied to the new economic centrality of Britain's Caribbean colonies. Both developments were dependent on, and contributed to, the elaboration of the Atlantic markets. At precisely the historical moment that British planters and merchants were working (through the development of new processes of production, technologies of travel, and systems of credit and exchange) to transform the natural productions of the West Indies into valuable Atlantic commodities, British natural historians were engaged in a parallel effort (through the labor of collection and representation) to transform Caribbean nature into the new luxury commodities that

⁸ A digital edition of the images from Sloane's Jamaican Botanical Collection (6 volumes), now part of the Sloane Herbarium housed in the Botanical Library at the Natural History Museum in South Kensington, provides a visceral sense of the scope of his activities. The images may be accessed at <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/botany/databases/sloane/index.htm>.

were natural historical texts and specimens. The increasing value of Caribbean natural histories was directly related to the increasing value of Caribbean staples. Sloane's mercurial rise to cultural prominence testifies to the heavy demand for natural histories as markers of status for Britain's rising mercantile and slaveholding elite. Natural histories provided that new elite with a powerful and much-needed form of legitimation. For the morality and acceptability of the forms of colonial enterprise in which they engaged remained highly contested (Sandiford). Unlike molasses and sugar themselves, natural histories were self-reflexive commodities, capable of offering potent ideological justification for the processes of extraction, manufacture and exchange that brought the entire array of new Caribbean products into being.

That effort is palpable in "Sucrerie," an engraving included in Jean-Baptiste du Tertre's, *Histoire Générale des Antilles Habitées par les François* (**figure 1.1**). At a relatively early stage in the development of new processes of refining, the *Histoire Générale* offers its metropolitan audience this consoling image of the inherent rationality of the plantation order. A French planter, standing in the foreground of the image, calmly directs two cane-laden and nearly naked slaves uphill toward the sugar mill in the background. From there, a series of numbers directs the viewer on a circular tour of the plantation, from the refining ovens, to a group of palm trees in the background, to a cluster of tropical plants in the foreground, before returning to rest on the central figure of the sugar planter or overseer. Beginning with the final stages of production, then, the image returns the viewer to the organic origins of the commodity. Equally consoling is the figure of the European, who directs his slaves using nothing more threatening than a thin staff. On its surface, the engraving elides the coercive violence necessary to slave-

driven agriculture. Slaveholder force is indirectly evoked, however, as the planter's staff finds its compositional echo in the whip one of the slaves uses on two oxen. While establishing a strong association between order and punishment, that visual analogy also serves to emphasize the legal status of the displaced Africans as human chattel.

The sole image related to sugar in Sloane's "Natural History of Jamaica" employs slightly different tactics to perform a similarly complex cultural function. Michael van der Gucht's engraving "Sugar Cane" (**figure 1.2**) goes beyond du Tertre's elision of the disciplinary aspects of plantation production to conceal the production process in its entirety. As Dian Kriz perceptively argues, "In the process of making the sugar cane into a specimen and the specimen into an image, this most lucrative West Indian commodity has been refashioned as (just another) plant." (71). The economically valuable cane has been amputated, to leave a specimen more suggestive of the reeds and grasses in the section of volume 1 in which Sloane inserts the image.

Images such as "Sugar Cane" participated in the broad cultural struggle surveyed by Keith Albert Sandiford. During three centuries of Caribbean colonization, he argues, planters persistently sought metropolitan approval for their novel forms of enterprise. As patrons, and sometimes as authors, they helped to disseminate an array of West Indian texts (from natural histories to Georgic poems) that dramatized their own efforts to gain literary authority in the eyes of European elites. That aesthetic strategy was vital to securing the legitimacy of a still contested colonial culture. Sandiford writes, "As the texts seek authority for their producers, they simultaneously assume the role of courting legitimacy for the rather narrow special interests of a colonial planter class deriving its wealth and power from slave-produced sugar in the colonies and of their commercial and

political allies operating from the metropolises” (12). Sloane’s sugar cane bolsters the planter cause in a parallel manner. It presents the collection and classification of sugar cane not as a commercially motivated act, but as a disinterested contribution toward the early Enlightenment drive for comprehensive knowledge of the natural world.

In her own reading of Sloane, Kay Dian Kriz focuses on another set of anxieties at the heart of his West Indian natural history, one that places the text squarely in the cultural terrain of the performance of waste.⁹ Her argument begins with the insight that the production of natural histories requires the relentless “destruction of living plants and animals, their transformation into inert specimens and their eventual ‘replacement’ by textual descriptions and full-scale drawings” (45). She goes on to claim, much like Pratt before her, that the very forms of displacement, destruction and replacement necessary to the making of natural histories parallel, and serve as surrogates for, the far more brutal historical processes of native genocide and African enslavement upon which the Caribbean plantation system is founded. Her concept of surrogation serves to foreground subaltern resistance to these new realities. The shape and content of colonial narratives and images, she argues, was driven as much by the threat of convulsive violence from below, as by the fear of disapproval from above. Just as the colonial order could never wholly eradicate the memory of native genocide and middle passage, or the reality of slave resistance, Caribbean natural histories could never wholly efface them.

Dian Kriz’ general thesis emerges from close reading of a set of eleven plates that are numbered separately from the 274 plates that make up the “Natural History” itself, and precede them in most copies of the text. Their prominent positioning testifies both to

⁹ For a more extended discussion of Dian Kriz’ concept of “surrogation” see page 20-1 in the Introduction above.

the importance attached to them by Sloane, and the depth of the imprint they were designed to make on the consciousness of the reader. It is crucial to her argument that the early eighteenth century audience for natural histories such as Sloane's was thoroughly conversant with a subtle and demanding process of emblematic reading, one that required them to draw multiple connections between a visual image, its label, and its descriptive text.¹⁰ Sloane cued his reader/viewer to interpret the curious images at the beginning of his natural history in a similar manner. All but one of those introductory images combine natural specimens with human artifacts in a manner found nowhere else in Sloane's volumes. In so doing, they rely on a form of "heightened visual interplay," establishing striking figurative connections between the disparate objects within a single image. It is in just these uncanny linkages, as well as the disjunctions between the images and their accompanying written texts, that Kriz is able to detect the trace of subaltern agency and repressed colonialist memory.

The first plate in the series is titled "Land Crab and Potsherds Found in a Cave" (**figure 1.3**). The image draws a strong visual corollary between the two land crabs at the top of the image and the fragments of pottery beneath them. Through the use of finely engraved cross-hatchings and parallel lines, along with subtle manipulations of scale, Sloane's engraver presents the human artifacts and natural specimens as roughly equivalent in form, size and mass. Sloane's own written text provides several clues as to the underlying import of that visual resemblance. By informing his European viewers that land crabs, while sometimes good to eat, can also be highly poisonous, Sloane invites

¹⁰ Her argument relies on the work of William B. Ashworth, "Natural History and the Emblematic World View, in *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*, ed. David C. Lindbert and Robert S. Westman (Cambridge, 1990), 303-32.

them to contemplate the many hidden dangers of the Caribbean environment. His written comments on the shards of pottery, meanwhile, evoke a different set of West Indian perils. In the Latin descriptor, the fragments are initially associated with the “vanished” indigenous population of Jamaica. At first, the longer written description seems to corroborate such an origin. Sloane writes that the pottery was found on the outskirts of a plantation, in a cave where locals also discovered “a human Body’s Bones all in order, the Body having been eaten by Ants.” He goes on to note that the cave also contained many “Pots or Urns, wherein were Bones of men and Children” (Sloane 1: lxx). In light of these revelations, the visual connections discussed above take on new meanings. The skeletal form of the land crabs allows them to serve as surrogates for the newly unearthed human remains, underscoring the written text’s indirect evocation of the genocide of the Carib population. The crab on the right is depicted on its back, with claws and legs splayed out haphazardly, like a corpse washed up by the waves.¹¹ The bones of the dead resurface in Sloane’s ostensibly taxonomic image.

Despite the initial association with the memory of the Caribs, however, Sloane’s longer written description ultimately associates the shards with the bodies of the island’s black population. Commenting on their original funerary function, Sloane goes on to comment that, “the *Negroes* had remov’d most of these Pots to boil their Meat in” (Sloane 1: lxx). For Dian Kriz, that reference would have conjured the unruly presence of Jamaica’s numerous maroons, who regularly attacked plantations during the decades when Sloane was compiling and composing his volumes. Among the dangers evoked by

¹¹ While my reading of this image is deeply indebted to Dian Kriz, the details regarding the skeletal form of the crabs, and the status of crabs as alternate food source for Caribbean slaves (see below) are my own.

this opening image, then, are those of revolt and race warfare. The written description may refer not only the maroons, however, but to the general slave population as well. In order to supplement the meager rations allowed to them by the planters, slaves commonly employed their few free hours in hunting crabs. Sloane may have paired the land crabs with the pottery shards because the species, though sometimes poisonous, provided a significant portion of the “Meat” the island’s “*Negroes*” boiled in the pots. The skeletal crabs and the funerary shards, in such a reading, stand in as surrogates for the pervasive “waste” of African and Afro-Caribbean life in the hostile and dangerous environment of the sugar plantation. The ultimate point of such images, however, is less to fix the precise meaning of the central juxtaposition, than to multiply the range of subversive and disruptive implications that adhere to it. It as if the intensity of the natural historical effort to repress the memory of the violence (whether subaltern or colonialist) that underlies its calm, static and putatively “neutral” orderings, gives rise to an equal and opposite eruption of the uncanny.

Both slaveholder violence and slave resistance are more directly invoked by the odd juxtaposition at the heart of a subsequent image, “African ‘lutes’ and Jamaican *luteus*” (**figure 1.4**). The Latin descriptor includes a verbal pun between the names of the instruments and plant depicted in the image. Visual cues reinforce the sense of interconnectedness. Three stringed instruments, identified as African in origin, are grouped together in the upper left quadrant. The form of the two long-necked instruments closest to the viewer is mirrored by the coiled stalk and slender, straight root of the *luteus* plant. Once again, written descriptions tease out the multiple meanings of such visual connections. Sloane claims to have witnessed a slave festival in which the three

instruments in his image were prominently employed. That a transcription of one of the slave songs Sloane claims to have heard at the festival (**figure 1.5**) is reproduced elsewhere in his text (marking the earliest attempt to transcribe music of African origin into European notation) testifies to the depth of his interest in the semi-autonomous culture of the slave quarters. Sloane persistently foregrounds what he views as the vitality and excessive sexual energy of the slaves. Commenting on the festival music, he writes that, “The *Negros* are much given to Venery, and although hard wrought, will at nights, or on Feast days Dance and Sing; their Songs are all bawdy, and leading that way” (Sloane 1: xlviii). Shocking as such “savage” pleasures would have been to his European audience, a more disturbing sense of the unruliness of slave bodies lurks at the edges of his depiction. Working from Sloane’s transcription of the slave song, Richard Cullen Rath argues that it records a poignant slave lament about homeless wandering ghosts, one that speaks to the function of the festivals as occasions for the powerful yet covert expression of slave protest and resistance (Rath 723). Sloane’s written description of the *luteus* plant further emphasizes the primitiveness of Jamaican slaves. He claims that slaves commonly worked the roots of the plant into a kind of rudimentary toothbrush. Yet the form of the root and vines at the foreground of his image also suggests another set of analogies, one that adds a further level of latent violence to Sloane’s representation. While the vines resemble the ropes commonly used to bind the limbs of slaves, the root calls to mind the switches of lance-wood that Sloane elsewhere observes were used to inflict ritual torture on their allegedly resistant bodies, the very bodies to which Sloane has attributed an almost limitless energy and appetite. The visual connections between plant and instruments can thus be understood in another light. As Kriz’ adeptly sums up,

“The hidden logic of such an association is that only harsh physical punishments will contain a labor force of enslaved bodies that engage in such savage and wanton pleasures” (Dian Kriz 61).

Kriz concludes her essay with the intriguing observation that the “next major American natural history to appear after Sloane’s,” Mark Catesby’s *The Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands*, foregoes representations of artifacts such as those discussed above. Speculating on the causes of the omission, she argues that, “The fear of violence registered in the curious images that introduce Sloane’s ‘Natural History of Jamaica’ suggests that the pressure for restructuring scientific knowledge derived . . . from the colonial periphery, where subject peoples refused to submit peacefully to the ‘natural order’ of an economy based on their exploitation and commodification” (Dian Kriz, 78). Dian Kriz thus places Sloane at the beginning of a line of influence that passes to Catesby. She further suggests that the continued evolution of the poetics of natural history was driven by the very subaltern forces that disrupted Sloane’s Caribbean taxonomies. Close examination of Catesby’s images, written descriptions, and narratives substantiates her claims. While relying on a distinctive set of aesthetic tactics, Catesby’s natural history also invites his reader/viewer to discern the latent meanings of his New World specimens (whether Caribbean or North American) through an elaborate process of emblematic reading. As in the work of his mentor, repressed memories and subaltern voices persistently surface in Catesby’s uncanny representations.

The Worldliness of Catesby’s *Natural History of Carolina*

In 1722, under the patronage of Sloane, Mark Catesby traveled to the New World for the second time. There he would explore the Carolina wilderness and the Florida borderland, before journeying to the Bahamas in 1725. Those travels would bear remarkable fruit in his *Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahama Islands* (1731-43). Just as Catesby's own travels to the Bahamas followed a lengthy stay in the southern colonies of British North America, full understanding of Catesby's Caribbean images and narratives might best begin far to the north of the islands, with a specimen the British naturalist encountered in the woods of South Carolina.

That "The Whip-poor-will" (**figure 1.6**) is one of the most haunting images in Catesby's natural history owes as much to the accompanying textual description as to the visual composition itself. The composition is indeed striking. A specimen of the bird (common in Virginia and the Carolinas) stands in static profile beneath a sharply rendered and vibrant ginseng plant. Employing a technique characteristic of his art, Catesby's image establishes a strong visual corollary between bird and plant, as the tail-feathers of the whip-poor-will are mirrored in the root system of the ginseng (Meyers, *Empire's Nature* 235). The accompanying text includes some fascinating remarks, drawn from the colonial naturalist John Clayton's *Flora Virginica*, on the indigenous folklore that surrounded the species. Catesby writes:

The Indians say these birds were never known till a great massacre was made of their countryfolks by the English, and they are the souls or departed spirits of the massacred Indians. Abundance of people here look upon them as birds of ill omen, and are very melancholy if one of them happens to light upon their, or near their door, and set up his cry (as they

will sometimes upon the very threshold) for they verily believe one of the family will die very soon after (*Birds of Colonial America*, 72).¹²

As if this evocation of genocide and mourning in a colonial context were not suggestive enough on its own, a separate appendix provides further material for speculation on the image's latent meaning. In a lengthy textual account of "The Ginseng, or Ninsin of the Chinese" Catesby writes:

Most of the writers of China take notice of the Ginseng, yet it was very little known till Father Jartoux, a Jesuit and missionary in China, who being employed, by order of the Emperor, in making a map of Tartary in the year 1709, had an opportunity of seeing it growing in a village, about four leagues from the kingdom of Corea. That father took the opportunity to make a draught of the plant, and give an accurate description thereof, which, being published in the *Memoirs of the Academy of Sciences at Paris*, gave light to the discovery of the same plant in Canada and Pennsylvania; from which last place it was sent to Mr. Colinson, in whose curious garden at Peckham it has, the proceeding two or three years, and also this year 1746, produced its blossoms and berries as it appears in the figure here *exhibited* (*Birds of Colonial America*, 72).

This second description celebrates the global knowledge system of natural history.

Catesby's identification of the specimen, and determination of its range, depends upon an

¹² As manuscripts of Catesby's *Natural History* are extremely rare, references will be to Alan Feduccia, ed., *Catesby's Birds of Colonial America*, foreword by Russell W. Peterson (Chapel Hill, 1985). For portions of Catesby's text that were not included in the Feduccia edition, references will be to the 1754 edition of the *Natural History* housed in the Library of Decorative Arts at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and reproduced digitally at: <http://libtext.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/DLDecarts>.

extensive and integrated network of botanical agents and institutions. Once published by a French scientific society, North American botanists (likely including John Bartram, who had established an important botanical garden in Philadelphia) can compare their own notes to the description provided by a missionary in Tartary. They can thus tentatively establish the presence of the plant at the farthest eastern and western reaches of Britain's colonial periphery. That discovery is later confirmed when Peter Colinson receives a shipment of seeds from North America, and cultivates a specimen of ginseng in his metropolitan botanical garden at Peckham. Given the medicinal properties of the plant (Catesby provides a catalog of its uses by Chinese physicians for "the better sort of patients") that discovery will be of potentially vast human benefit.

Catesby's account of the rapid circulation of natural historical knowledge helps illuminate the odd juxtaposition at the heart of his image. In describing the "hybrid nature of Catesby's plate" Alan Feduccia notes the lack of any environmental connection between the whip-poor-will and ginseng, and goes on to claim that "the plant and bird were no doubt placed together because of the mystical and supernatural connotations attached to both" (*Birds of Colonial America*, 76). The appendices, however, suggestive a more pointed and conflicted relationship. Read in conjunction with both its accompanying texts, it is possible to see "The Whip-poor-will" as a highly ambivalent image of British colonial expansion, registering both its alleged humanistic profit (in the form of scientific progress and medicinal healing) and violent human cost (in the form of native genocide).

It is less important to discern Catesby's particular attitude toward British colonialism, however, than simply to register his acute awareness that his own natural

historical efforts were conducted within and dependent upon the extensive maritime circuits of the eighteenth century British Empire. Interestingly, the homology between natural historical and mercantile efforts is reflected in the very terminology of the publication process Catesby engaged in. David Brigham observes that, “Notably, the word subscription, upon which Catesby’s travels and publication depended, was also used in contemporary business practice to refer to investment in trading companies” (122). The interpenetration of natural history and colonial enterprise is further reflected by a survey of Catesby’s actual subscribers. Brigham goes on to note that, “At least two dozen of Catesby’s subscribers had substantial interests in the American colonies, including those in regions visited during his two journeys to North America. They included former and present colonial proprietors, governors, and founders as well as people whose wealth was built upon investment in trading companies that spanned Africa, North America, and Asia. (122).

Reflecting the common anxieties and interests of those patrons, Catesby’s *Natural History* offers a representation of the economic superabundance the nation will continue to garner through its extensive networks of Atlantic and East Indian trade. In some ways this is evident in Catesby’s very decision to focus on ornithological specimens. Roach has argued that in the aftermath of the Treaties of Utrecht and the British victory in the War of the Spanish Succession new world feathers were consumed as complex and powerful signifiers within a wide range of British writing and visual art, and as a valuable luxury commodity within its explosive economy. Surveying performances of Alexander Pope’s poem “Windsor Forest,” and Apra Behn’s Surinam-based narrative *Oronooko, or the Royal Slave*, Roach finds that feathers serve a prominent role in the broad cultural

phenomenon we have defined as the performance of waste. Their conspicuous display helped to celebrate the rapid transformation of new world nature into Atlantic commodities, even as it anxiously and indirectly registered the forms of violence required by (and opposed to) that transformation (130-31).

Roach's insight may be extended to apply to nearly every kind of New World specimen Catesby collected. It holds particular relevance for the surprisingly numerous Caribbean specimens in Catesby's *Natural History*. Though the bulk of its pages were devoted to texts and images of the southernmost colonies of British North America, a substantial number are filled with the West Indian productions he garnered either through a 1714 trip to Jamaica, a 1725 trip to the Bahamas, or his correspondence with other naturalists. A few of these depict the tropical staples that made the sugar islands so economically vital. Catesby's striking image of "The Cacao Tree," a species he first observed on Jamaica, is one example (**figure 1.7**). The status of the plant as a profitable crop is evoked by the emphasis on its interior structure and reproductive capacities. A cross-section of a large pod fills the foreground, while to its side we see an isolated rendering of single seed. Economic value is further evoked by a textual reference to Spanish domination of the cacao trade. Unlike his image of the cacao pod, however, most of Catesby's West Indian specimens fall under a category we might call *exotica* or *Caribbeana*. Like his image of "The Bahama Unicorn Fish" (**figure 1.8**) they are notable for reasons other than their agricultural and commercial value. Catesby's text stresses the unique trait for which the species is named. He writes that, "The structure of this fish as well as its marks are very singular and different from any other. Yet the most remarkable part of it is a tapering sharp-pointed Bone, growing from the Top of the Back, a little

behind the eyes, which it can raise and point backward at its pleasure” (*Natural History of Carolina* 19). Catesby carefully renders the vibrant colors and unusual patterning of the specimen’s scales, an effort he underscores in the text: “A brown olive-coloured skin without scales covered the whole fish, with blue waved lines of many lengths, some long ones resembling worms, and others maggots” (*Natural History of Carolina* 19).

Joyce Chaplin argues that Catesby’s inclusion of fish and shells reflects his status as a belated natural historian. She writes: “Catesby’s work marked the maturation of Britain’s imperial natural history. In its first and primitive stage, only certain of America’s natural products had received attention according to their commercial promise. But in a later (indeed, belated) phase, Britons began to discover other uses for American specimens and began to welcome ‘these Strangers into England.’” (Chaplin, 81-2). As in Sloane’s “Natural History of Jamaica,” in which so many images served as surrogates for the volatile commodities that were sugar and slaves, Catesby’s text also directs its primary gaze away from the most economically crucial “specimens.” This shift in natural historical collection may have been driven by the desires of the planters and absentee owners who patronized Caribbean journeys such as Catesby’s. Through possession of such exotica they could simultaneously display their vast wealth, acknowledge its Caribbean origin, and obscure its ultimate source in plantation labor. At the same time, to collect the full array of West Indian productions helped to present the colonialist efforts of an entire class as motivated less by financial reward than the disinterested pursuit of knowledge. Sloane himself helped drive this shift. Catesby writes that while in the Bahamas he took particular pains to acquire, “many submarine productions, as shells, corralines, *Frutices marini*, sponges, astroites, etc” (*Birds of Colonial America* 138).

These were transported to the collections of his “curious friends” among whom only Sloane is directly named.

Catesby’s focus on submarine productions, however, also marks the fact that British colonization of the region had reached a highly advanced stage, one in which it was possible to discern the first signs of exhaustion and collapse. One source of the shift toward maritime specimens may have been the decline of the inland environment. As the islands converted to virtual monocultures, the largest plantations ate up more and more land, and eliminated more and more species, both plant and animal.¹³ More likely, Catesby’s decision owed to the quotidian fact that the market for some kinds of exotic specimens (even some submarine ones) had been all but saturated. In Catesby’s narrative of his stay in the Bahamas he notes that the shells on its beaches and in its shallow seas provided a significant feature of the Caribbean abundance he observed. He pens an exhaustive litany of the situations in which shells might be found: “. . . Some in shallow water. Others lying flat on the rocks or sand. Some sticking flat to the sides of rocks. Others sticking to the sides of rocks horizontally . . .” Yet he also notes that he has declined from visually or verbally representing many of these. “Shells, as well as other productions of nature,” he writes, “abound more in number of species, and are more beautiful between the tropics, than in the other parts of the world.” “The vast profusion that are here found,” he continues, “with the more frequent opportunities of collecting them, has caused the cabinets of the curious in England to be more furnished with them from thence, than from any other parts of the world” (*Birds of Colonial America* 168).

¹³ This trend, however, would not apply to the Bahamas which were never a plantation-driven colony.

Catesby's nod to market forces testifies to the fact that by the 1720s the West Indian routes of his natural history were well traveled.

The rapid transformation of the British Caribbean is also reflected in Catesby's representations of island society and culture. An especially intriguing anecdote accompanies an eclectic image entitled "The Largest Crested Heron, The Spotted Eft, The Chego, The Cockroach" (**figure 1.9**). The discovery of a species identified as *Scarabaeus capricornus minimus cutem penetrans* depended on a not unusual combination of happenstance, technological accomplishment and cross-racial familiarity. Catesby writes:

In the year 1725, I being at the house of his Excellency Mr. Phinney, then Governor of the Bahama Islands, who, as he was searching his feet for chegoes, at the time we were viewing them through a microscope, produced an odd insect on the point of his needle, as at Fig. 4. Which he then picked out of his foot. I showed it to Negroes and others, and none of them had seen the like. The natural size of this insect was that of the spot over its head; but magnified, it appeared of the size and form here exhibited. I think it may be called as above.¹⁴

In opening a window onto the dynamics of race relations in the islands, the incident returns us to the question of subaltern agency within colonialist discourse. The content of natural history, it suggests, is shaped in part by the long familiarity between slave and owner in a black majority region. Catesby presents a state of affairs in which the naturalist habitually turns to the slave community and its extensive knowledge of the

¹⁴ According to Feducdia (22) the specimen remains unidentified.

local environment in his efforts to fill any gaps in the taxonomic record. At the same time, however, the governor and his naturalist are able to transcend mere local knowledge through the use of a microscope. Though on one level the passage exalts the governor, on another it may contain a pointed comment on the cultural phenomenon of creolization. In some prior comments on the chego (during which he again refers the reader to Sloane's earlier depiction of the specimen) Catesby had written that, "it is a very troublesome insect, especially to Negroes and others that go barefoot, and are slovenly . . ." (*Birds of Colonial America* 21). The fact that the Governor of the colony had just been searching his own feet for Chegoes must lead the reader to assume that, like the other "slovenly" inhabitants of the colony, he is also accustomed to "go barefoot." The implicit association between the characteristic dress and behavior of slave and slaveholder in a colonial situation resonates with metropolitan warnings that the outposts of the British empire were sites for the rapid degeneration of European health, manners, and morals. It provides one instance of Catesby's more general ambivalence regarding the transformation of the Caribbean environment, whether social or natural.¹⁵

That ambivalence is reflected by an aesthetics of "disembodiment" in several of Catesby's Bahamian images. As discussed above, the "poetics" of natural history customarily revolve around the isolation of a specimen that has been forcibly extracted from its "natural" context. Images such as "The Razor-billed Black-bird of Jamaica" (**figure 1.10**) offer a subtle form of self-reflexive commentary on that very process. The image appears to depict the bird in accurate relation to its botanical environment, as the

¹⁵ As I will discuss at greater length below, Amy Meyers makes a similar argument in her splendid essay, "Picturing a World in Flux: Mark Catesby's Response to Environmental Interchange and Colonial Expansion," *Empire's Nature*, 228-261.

black-bird grips the stem of a ladyslipper in its claws. As Joyce Chaplin notes, however, the perch is, “not steadily fixed in the material world, as its roots are represented as exposed through transparent earth” (Chaplin 57). Close examination of the image removes the representational ground from beneath the viewer’s feet, as it reminds him that the botanical and ornithological specimen he sees before him have been literally uprooted. What Kriz and Chaplin call the troubling “disembodiment” of such images is more powerfully conveyed in Catesby’s two renderings of the Flamingo. In the first image (**figure 1.11**) Catesby appears to represent the Flamingo at home in its West Indian environment. Two rocky islands in the background, one topped by two palm trees, evoke a characteristic landscape. His Flamingo stands erect on a rocky beach, in front of a specimen of local coral. The gestures toward verisimilitude will not bear closer scrutiny. Chaplin notes that the coral in the image, “would not have grown on the dry land on which the flamingo stands” (57-8). A subsequent image of the same ornithological species seems to underscore and comment upon the human artifice necessary to the construction of this tableau of Caribbean “nature.” Catesby’s depiction of the “The Bill of the Flamingo in its full Dimensions” (**figure 1.12**) offers a haunting deconstruction of the prior image. Its composition echoes that of the previous image while dispensing with any gestures toward verisimilitude. The isolated head of the bird, which floats in space before another specimen of coral, alerts the viewer that the Caribbean abundance in such images is wrested from the natural environment through human labor. Bird and coral are brought together in a decidedly unnatural manner to create a striking visual display. Through its evocation of a hunting trophy, the disembodied head also reminds him that such images are dependent upon violence and death.

That very link between superabundance and death is emphasized in the accompanying Bahamian travel narrative, when Catesby describes some of the difficulties of capturing the brilliant coloring of many tropical fish. “Fish,” he writes, “which do not retain their colors when out of their element, I painted at different times, having a succession of them procured while the former lost their color” (138). Catesby’s artistic process provides a visceral instance of the performance of waste. In his efforts to convey the exotic abundance of the Caribbean, he paints specimen after specimen of a single species as their vibrant scales rapidly fade and the fish themselves expire.

It is crucial to insist that while the narrative of Catesby’s travels in the Carolinas and Florida is far longer than his account of the Bahamas, and while his visit to the islands consumed only one of the four years he spent in the Americas during his second visit, the Caribbean images we have just examined are anything but peripheral to the broad concerns of Catesby’s *Natural History*. Evidence from throughout the two volumes suggests that, like so many other British naturalists before him, Catesby charted New World nature within a thoroughly Caribbean-centric map of the colonial Americas. The links between Catesby’s development as a natural historian and the rise of England’s Caribbean colonies to economic prominence can be traced from at least 1714, a watershed year in the global ascendancy of the British Empire. That year, during his first visit to the New World, Catesby left the Virginia estate of his friend William Byrd for a tour of the West Indies that included a lengthy stay in Jamaica. Details of Catesby’s sojourn in Jamaica have remained sketchy. The very fact of the journey, however, indicates the extent to which Catesby’s own natural historical activities were initiated in the formidable shadow of Sir Hans Sloane. The debt to Sloane was one that Catesby

willingly acknowledged. Looking back on his efforts on the mainland and the Bahamas he would write that, “Both in Carolina and on these Islands, I made successive collections of dried Plants and Seeds... These I imparted to my curious Friends, more particularly (as I had the greatest Obligations) to that great Naturalist and Promoter of Science, Sir Hans Sloane, Bart to whose goodness I attribute much of the success I had in this undertaking!” (*Birds of Colonial America* 138). Catesby’s contributions would swell to fill two volumes of Sloane’s herbarium.

Sloane in turn owed much of his own success to the broad economic transformation traced in the opening of this chapter, as it evolved over the second decade of the eighteenth century. In a booming metropole, Sloane continued to labor on the second volume of his West Indian natural history. Catesby’s 1714 visit to Jamaica (likely at Sloane’s request) coincided with a major transformation of the imperial economy from which his patron was benefiting. At the conclusion of the War of the Spanish Succession, officials from the major European powers met to hammer out the Treaties of Utrecht. Great Britain was ultimately granted the coveted *Asiento*—the exclusive, legal right for British merchants to ship some 4,800 slaves a year to the Spanish West Indies via the South Sea Company.¹⁶ Roach has aptly summarized the prevailing scholarly consensus on the impact of the treaties: “According to *The New Cambridge Modern History*, the watershed Peace of Utrecht—whereby Great Britain acquired the coveted *Asiento*, the monopoly on the slave trade in the Spanish West Indies—‘marks the passing of the Mediterranean as the centre of world trade and power rivalries [when] attention shifted to the Atlantic’ (Bromley, 571). Alfred Thayer, summarizing the War of the Spanish

¹⁶ A. Macgregor, ed. *Sir Hans Sloane: Collector, Scientist, Antiquary, Founding Father of the British Museum* (London, 1994).

Succession ... describes its consequences: Before that war England was one of the sea powers; after it she was *the* sea power, without any second” (8-9).

That Catesby was acutely aware of this broad geopolitical context is evident from the opening plates of the second volume of his natural history. The plates contain an adaptation of Henry Popple’s *Map of the British Empire in America with the French and Spanish Settlements Adjacent Thereto* (1733).¹⁷ Popple’s map (**figure 1.13**) advances a powerful visual argument regarding the locations of empire. While the bulk of Catesby’s narrative, and a solid majority of his images would be devoted to the chronicling of the Carolinas, his text prominently includes a map of the British Empire that places the Bahamas at its precise center, and positions the Carolinas at its northern periphery. The eye of the viewer is drawn to the southerly, Caribbean areas of the map by the bright yellow that Catesby used to designate the Spanish territories of Florida, Cuba, Yucatan, and Santo Domingo. The color scheme thus emphasizes the significance of the Greater Antilles in general, and by implication, British Jamaica in particular. A prominent heading in the upper right corner, embellished with renderings of coral and shells, stresses the maritime character of the British colonial system. For Americanists schooled in a variety of Puritan origin theories, this depiction of the location of Britain’s American empire (which excludes any colony north of Virginia) can be extremely disorienting.

The preeminence of the Greater Antilles within Catesby’s worldview emerges with further clarity in some remarks on Cuba near the beginning of his Bahamian travel

¹⁷ Amy Meyers and Margaret Pritchard claim that this is the location of the map in most bound sets of the *Natural History*. In the edition housed at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, it should be noted, the map is placed near the end of the second volume. See Amy R.W. Meyers and Margaret Beck Pritchard, “Introduction: Toward an Understanding of Catesby,” *Empire’s Nature*, 16.

narrative. A discussion of the local atmosphere takes on vast imperial significance.

Catesby writes:

The north side of Cuba also enjoys the benefit of these refreshing winds, particularly that part of the island on which the Havana stands, to this, no doubt, is owing the healthiness of the air and good character of that proud emporium; the conquest of which, by British arms, would put us in possession of a country much more agreeable to British constitutions, than any of the islands between the tropics, and under God, enable them to multiply, and stand their ground without the necessity of such numerous recruits from their mother country, as has been always found necessary to prevent a total extinction of the inhabitants of our unhealthy Sugar Islands.

(165)

The notion of Cuban conquest as key to New World dominance is one we will return to in chapters on Bartram's *Travels*, and Humboldt's *Political Essay on the Island of Cuba*. In this, the only explicit comment the *Natural History* offers in the realm we would today call "foreign policy," Catesby reveals that such notions regarding Cuba were both longstanding and widely circulated. In an England still excited by its success in the War of the Spanish Succession, such aggressive expansionism, centered on Cuba, was the order of the day. Catesby's comments are especially intriguing, however, for the way they capture a sense of the fragility of the British Empire at the very moment of its full ascension. Cuban conquest is imagined as necessary to the survival of a nationally vital sugar industry that teeters on the verge of "total extinction."

That the threat of extinction owes to the exotic dangers of the Caribbean environment allows us to read many of the Bahamian images and textual descriptions discussed above in the context of Catesby's views regarding British imperial strategy. The specter of environmental and cultural decline raised by those images has repercussions that extend far beyond merely local interest. The fall of the British Empire might ensue from a variety of causes, including the corruption of colonialist manners, the exhaustion of the environment, or, as one passage suggests, the lack of a diversified commercial perspective among the sugar planters.

Such a notion is prominent in the text that accompanies "The Cacao Tree." In some comments on the many beautiful cacao walks left over from the days when Spain possessed Jamaica, Catesby writes:

Whatever infatuation continues to possess our countrymen in the neglect of it, 'tis certain that the balance of trade, in this branch, is considerably against us; the *Spaniards*, and of late the *French*, supplying not only us, and our northern Colonies, but all *Europe* with this valuable commodity, I cannot but think it serves the consideration of the legislature, for were a method found to encourage its cultivation, our Sugar-islands (being as well adapted to the growth of it as any part of *America*) might not only supply our home-consumption, but come in for a share of exportation to foreign markets (qtd. in O'Malley, 173).

The naturalist derides Creole planters for their failure to capitalize on a tropical commodity of such obvious potential value, and, by implication, of such strategic importance in the ongoing economic and military struggles between England and Spain.

That very inter-colonial rivalry becomes the explicit subject of the remarks that accompany Catesby's "The Green Lizard of Jamaica" (**figure 1.14**) The image provides yet another conspicuous display of Caribbean abundance. Against the rough background of a sprig of logwood we see the smooth skin of a lizard notable for the vivid scarlet of its swollen throat. Yet the celebration of abundance is again tethered to an evocation of violence. In discussing the logwood Catesby writes:

The bloody disputes which this usefull Tree has occasioned between the *Spaniards* and *English* are too well known to say much of here, only I could wish that the Inhabitants of our Southern Plantations could be induced to propogate it, as well for their own Advantage, as that we may be supplied by them, when wholly deprived of getting it from the *Spaniards* as we have hitherto done either by Force of Stealth (*Natural History* 2: 66).¹⁸

Like Sloane before him, Catesby here self-reflexively alludes to the acts of imperial force and subterfuge that allow for the natural historical "possession" of the New World environment. Intervening in the realm of colonial politics, Catesby's verbal and visual representation of the logwood attempts to address pointed and widespread anxieties regarding the stability of Britain's tropical possessions.¹⁹

¹⁸ O'Malley perceptively argues, "That Catesby brought political and economic concerns to his work is suggested by his discussion of logwood. He found this tree, a valuable source of black and violet dyes, growing on the island of Providence in the Bahamas from seeds collected from the Bay of Honduras," 173. It is interesting to consider whether there is any meaningful resonance, intentional or otherwise, between the prominent use of scarlet in Catesby's visual composition and his textual reference to blood.

¹⁹ The reference to "Southern plantations" is highly ambiguous and intriguing. While it is possible that "Southern plantations" refers to the Caribbean, it is more likely meant to refer to the Carolinas (or at least to include the Carolinas). Catesby may well have picked

The frequently bloody disputes between imperial rivals provide one referent for the pervasive violence of Catesby's tropics. Like other natural historians of his time, the *Natural History of Carolina*, presents tropical locales as home to an extreme version of "nature, red in tooth and claw." Chaplin writes that, "It was a standard trope of natural history that such places were, in comparison to cooler areas, teeming with noxious and dangerous creatures." She goes on to note that, "Some of Catesby's most violent images came from southern latitudes (68-9)." Such images come in both textual and visual form. An anecdote that accompanies Catesby's "The Alligator" (**figure 1.15**) provides a particularly vivid instance. The naturalist writes of the intensity of predation in the mangrove swamps he explored in the Bahamas:

. . . Ravenous Fish, Turtles, and other Animals . . . prey continually one upon the other, and the Alligators on them all, so that in no Place have I ever seen such remarkable Scenes of Devestation as amongst these Mangroves, in Andros, one of the Bahama Islands, where the Fragments of half devoured Carcasses were usually floating on the Waters (*Natural History* 2: 63)."

The passage presents this scene of superabundant carnage as a quotidian event. So too does Catesby's depiction of the Barracuda. An image of the species graces the first plate of his second volume (**figure 1.16**). The specimen is pictured with mouth slightly open in order to emphasize its ferocity and predatory skill. Those traits are underscored in a subsequent narrative. Recalling an incident in which he saw a barracuda consume another

up the term from his one-time William Byrd, whose *History of the Dividing Line* may be seen as an important moment in the construction of something like the American south (or the area that would become the U.S. South) as a region.

fish with startling rapidity, Catesby notes that, “These and other like Accidents I have often been diverted with in the shallow Seas of the Bahama Islands (*Natural History* 2: 10).” Such marvels are presented as events relatively common to tropical locales. In glimpses such as these, Catesby’s Caribbean emerges as a southerly and in many ways more volatile location for the “fatal environment” Richard Slotkin finds at the fringes of North American society in the colonial and early-national era.

From the Caribbean to the Carolinas

Images such as “Green Lizard of Jamaica,” then, resonate with a more general depiction of tropical violence to express deep concern and ambivalence regarding the stability and prosperity of Britain’s colonial order. In doing so they reveal the extent to which colonialist and mercantile strategy had become obsessed with the Caribbean. The decades after the Treaties of Utrecht, however, produced a slight shift in focus, one essential to understanding the terms of Catesby’s depiction of the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida. Within the “foreign policy” debates of the 1720s and 30s, relations between the British West Indies and British North America occupied an increasingly central position.

This was partly due to the fact that North American staples were increasingly necessary to the continued boom in sugar production. As the British sugar islands converted to virtual monocultures, North American farmers, planters and merchants moved to supply their colonial cousins with the foodstuffs and building materials necessary to daily survival. On one level, North American prosperity related to Caribbean sugar was wholly in the interests of the metropole. On another, however, it was the source of a growing conflict. For the economic historians John McCusker and John

Menard, the improved fortunes of North American colonists gave rise to incipient visions of Creole independence. They write:

The demands of the sugar planters proved central to the economic development of the mainland colonies. Traders were able to operate independently of the major metropolitan merchants (although sometimes on London capital); farmers had customers for their surplus; the credits earned—‘returns via the West Indies’—helped settle unfavorable trade balances with England; and the elaborate linkages generated made the mainland economies more diverse, more flexible, and less ‘colonial.’ By 1770 all the continental colonies, but notably those in the North, depended on West Indian markets to a greater or lesser degree (155).

By providing North Americans with alternative markets to London, the coastwise trade with the West Indies facilitated a shift from a colonial mindset to a subversive trans-colonial consciousness. Hemispheric networks disrupted the tidy and exclusive channeling of goods and information between colony and metropole that anchored mercantile strategy. Even more disruptive was the thriving clandestine trade between North America and the Spanish and French Caribbean. Formally outlawed by the Navigation Acts of the seventeenth century, such commercial transactions were largely ignored by metropolitan officials. In the French and Spanish islands North Americans found more lucrative markets for their own staples, and purchased sugar and molasses (often of higher quality) at prices far below those that prevailed in the British Caribbean. But in the aftermath of the Treaties of Utrecht pressure for strict enforcement became more intense. Resentful of their “betrayal” by North America, the sugar planters would

form a powerful London lobby, one that would win an impressive Parliamentary victory with the passage of the so-called Molasses Acts. The tightened restrictions on trade between the mainland and the Latin Caribbean sparked North American hostilities toward the metropole and the sugar planters that would flare up with more intensity in the aftermath of the Sugar Acts of 1764. As the middle of the eighteenth century approached, the question of how to manage the relationship between its North American colonies and the British, French and Spanish islands of the West Indies was preeminent in British debates over how to structure the political economy of its overseas empire. The coastwise trade was prominent in the minds of metropolitan officials, and colonists throughout British America (O'Shaughnessy 58-64).

Scattered evidence from throughout the mainland sections of the *Natural History of Carolina* suggests that the subject of inter-colonial trade was also prominent in Catesby's mind. One important aim of Catesby's depiction of the southern mainland colonies was to map them in relation to the tropical environment of the greater Caribbean, to discern the precise environmental continuities and distinctions between those highly interconnected regions. That attempt coincides with the vigorous mercantile effort to order the commercial relations between colonial outposts, and is inflected by many of the same interests and anxieties that drove calls for and resistance to the restrictions of the Molasses Acts.

Catesby's attempt to chart the relations between the Carolinas and Caribbean was driven by multiple and sometimes competing interests. The stakes of determining precisely where, on the continuum from tropical to temperate, the climate of the southern mainland should be located were high. On the one hand, to identify the Carolinas as a

kind of quasi- or sub-tropical region would augment the value of the colony, by supporting the prospect that one or more tropical staples might there be cultivated. Like many naturalists of his day, Catesby persistently associated the tropics with diversity and abundance. His most extended comments on the subject emerge from some observations on the coastal waters of the Bahamas. Catesby writes:

The shallow seas encompassing these islands, on the contrary are as remarkable for their abundance and variety of its watery inhabitants, exceeding in number of species, and excelling in the elegance of their colors and marks, but inferior in wholesomeness and goodness of taste to the fish in more northern latitudes. Adequate to this, frequent opportunities has confirmed to me, that as the productions of nature in general are very scanty near the Arctic Circle, there is a graduation of increase at every degree of latitude approaching the tropics, and though the distance of one degree may not be sufficient to perceive it, yet four or five degrees makes it evidently appear, not only by the greater number of species of terrestrial animals, but of fish and vegetables, which by how much nearer the torrid zone, so much the more numerous they are. And I think it is not improbable that the numerous species of creatures that inhabit between the tropics, far exceed in number all the rest of the terrestrial world. (*Birds of Colonial America* 168)

Despite the lure of tropical abundance, however, the question of climate held significant negative implications for the stability of a given colonial society. Environmental connections between the Carolinas and Caribbean would imply that the southern

mainland was also subject to some of the fatal revolutions we have traced above. In the Carolina sections, that association between tropicality and volatility emerges in a discussion of mainland natural disasters. Catesby writes:

Usually once in about seven years these rains are attended with violent storms and inundations, which commonly happen about the time of the hurricanes that rage so fatally amongst the Sugar Islands—between the Tropics, and seem to be agitated by them, or from the same cause, but are much mitigated in their force by the time they reach Carolina; and though they affect all the coast of Florida, yet the further north they proceed, so much the more they decrease in their fury, Virginia not having often much of it, and north of that still less. (140)

Here, in an attempt to allay fears that the Southeast may be subject to the turbulence of the Caribbean environment, Catesby's written text insists on a distinction between the tropical climate of the sugar islands and the temperate climate of the southern mainland.

The problem of discerning why, at any given moment, Catesby's natural history might insist on the continuities or distinctions between the mainland and islands is complicated by the fact that Catesby was subject to the conflicting demands of patrons from a variety of positions within the British colonial system. David Brigham usefully reminds us that, "Catesby's subscription was by no means definite to him and remained in a certain amount of flux throughout his journey. While his patrons in England continued to seek out additional supporters, Catesby also sought patrons in the colonies" (Brigham 107). Amy Meyers corroborates this account of the text's patronage, arguing that decisions regarding how to portray colonial enterprise always factored in the danger

of alienating any one audience, and thus diminishing the marketability of his text (Meyers, *Empire's Nature* 260). While his work was certainly informed by metropolitan desires, it likely also grew to reflect the interests of the Carolina colonists who often supported him, to the extent that it might be regarded as the first properly Anglo-American natural history. Indeed, scattered evidence from Catesby's letters suggests that, as he came to identify with his North American hosts and patrons, he may have begun, like them, to chafe against the restrictions of the mercantile order. In 1724, Catesby wrote to Sherard and Sloane to request support, financial and otherwise, for an expedition with the Charleston physician Thomas Cooper to "the remoter parts of the Continent particularly Mexico," during which he promised to assemble, "No Mean Collection of Unknown Productions." His natural historical ambitions were frustrated when his requests went unanswered. And indeed it is hardly surprising, given the raging conflicts between Spain and England, that an exploration of Spanish America would not have garnered much British interest. Discouraged by the lack of response, Catesby set out in 1725 on a less ambitious journey to the Bahamas.²⁰ Such conflicts between field man and patrons provide one particularly concrete rationale for regarding Anglo-American natural histories as the complex products of transatlantic negotiation and exchange.

The kinds of complexities traced above, however, are well worth confronting. Understanding the *Natural History of Carolina* as an attempt to grapple with the volatile conflicts surrounding the West India trade might contribute to a reconsideration of colonial North American and early U.S. nature discourse. As Amy Meyers has forcefully argued, Catesby's work provided the precursor for a unique strain of American natural

²⁰ This context is related in Amy R. W. Meyers and Margaret Beck Pritchard, "Introduction: Toward an Understanding of Catesby," *Empire's Nature*, 10.

history. Tracing a variety of aesthetic connections between the images of Catesby, John and William Bartram, and John James Audubon, Meyers identifies their collective efforts as a vital, “sub-tradition within American natural history illustration . . . [which] countered the trend toward systematic classification.”²¹ All four naturalists, she contends, were often more concerned to trace the manifold connections between a given specimen and its immediate environment, than to classify it within a taxonomic order. For Catesby, as for the U.S. naturalists that follow his example, that attempt emerges with particular clarity in their efforts to chronicle specimens brought to North America by movements and forces that originated in the West Indies.

Passing references from Catesby’s narrative reveal that he was well aware of the multiple social and commercial connections between the mainland and the sugar islands. While describing Bahamian agriculture Catesby casually notes that, “wheat is imported to them in flower from the northern colonies.” While describing the salubrious atmosphere of the islands he observes further that, “The healthiness of the air induces many of the sickly inhabitants of Carolina to retire to them for the recovery of their health” (*Birds of Colonial America* 165). That these very forms of exchange exert their influence on his renderings of New World specimens begins to be evident, in an indirect fashion, in his portrayal of “The Red Curlew” (**figure 1.17**). In the accompanying text, Catesby specifies the range of the species. He writes, “These birds frequent the coast of the

²¹ Amy R.W. Meyers, “Imposing Order on the Wilderness: Natural History Illustration and Landscape Portrayal,” in Edward J. Nygren, ed., *Views and Visions: American Landscape before 1830* (Washington, D.C.: The Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1986), 121. . . Meyers’ further elaborates her thesis in “Sketches from the Wilderness: Changing Conceptions of Nature in American Natural History Illustration, 1680-1880 (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1985). For more on this topic see chapter 4 below.

Bahama Islands, and other parts of America between the tropics; and are seldom seen to the north or south of the tropics” (*Birds of Colonial America* 29). Current ornithological opinion, however, holds that Catesby instead painted a scarlet ibis, a species found within a much more limited tropical range, in northern South America through Trinidad. The obvious question arises of how Catesby had knowledge of the bird and even acquired a specimen from which to paint. For Alan Feduccia, both are likely due to the fact that, “during colonial times there was a great deal of boat traffic from tropical America and the West Indies to the United States and many exotic birds were taken along either alive or as skins to be traded or sold” (*Birds of Colonial America* 29).

Intercolonial exchange, then, helps to shape the content of the *Natural History*. Perhaps more significantly, two other images suggest that it also shapes Catesby’s visual aesthetics. One example is found in “The Rice Bird” (**figure 1.18**), an image that plays an important role in Amy Meyers’ provocative argument regarding Catesby’s innovative depiction of environmental connections. Meyers argues that Catesby sought to describe, “organic relationships recently introduced to the colonies through European settlement and global trade,” in order to arrive at an “ethical assessment of English empire building” (Meyers, *Empire’s Nature* 243). In images such as “The Rice Bird,” Catesby worked to express environmental relationships through a visual language of reflected form. Its overall composition works to suggest the close organic relationship between bird and plant. A female specimen on the right holds a seed in her mouth while perching atop an arched stem of rice. While the golden tones of its body reflect the color of the rice, the lines of the bird’s outstretched body follow the plant’s graceful bend. As a male specimen hunts the ground beneath her for fallen rice seeds, the form of his body corresponds to

that of the one leaf that sweeps elegantly down from the stem of the plant. The accompanying text underscores the impression that bird and plant are closely associated and linked. Catesby writes that:

In September, 1725, lying upon the deck of a sloop in a bay at Andros Island, I and the company with me, heard, three nights successively, flights of these birds (their note being plainly distinguishable from others) passing over our heads northerly, which is their direct way from Cuba to Carolina. From whence I conceive, after partaking of the earlier crop of rice at Cuba, they travel over sea to Carolina for the same intent, the rice there being at that time fit for them. (*Birds of Colonial America* 126)

Catesby presents the rice bird as a species whose presence in the Carolinas owes to the environmental connections between Cuba and the Carolinas.²² It also owes to the cultural connections, across national lines, between two rice-producing colonies. One fascinating dimension of this passage is that, if Catesby's theory is correct, the migration of the rice bird between Cuba and Carolina would have been a phenomenon of rather recent origin. Rice had only been successfully introduced into Carolina in the last half century. And it had taken several decades for it to become the primary crop of the colony.²³ That

²² Such observations played a role in the development of Catesby's innovative theory of avian migration, one of the contributions to ornithological knowledge for which he is best known. On Catesby's theory of migration see Meyers, *Empire's Nature*, 246-7; see also Chaplin, *Empire's Nature*, 60-64.

²³ On the transformative impact of rice on Carolina society, culture, and economy see Daniel C. Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Baton Rouge, 1981); see also Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 to the Stono Rebellion* (New York, 1974).

transition would have been underway at almost precisely the moment of Catesby's residence in Carolina.

The rice bird could thus have only have recently altered its pattern of migration to follow the crop. Catesby's depiction of the bird marks an attempt to gauge the environmental impact of changing patterns of colonial development. In doing so it offers two intriguing arguments. One is that an event as momentous as the introduction of rice to Carolina, which would do more than any other crop to promote the wealth of the colony, owes entirely to happenstance. Catesby writes that the crop was first introduced by the colonial governor in 1688, but only took hold in 1696, when, "a ship touched there from Madagascar by accident, and brought from thence about half a bushel of a much fairer and larger kind, from which small stock it is increased at present" (*Birds of Colonial America* 152).

Another implication is that the potential consequences of rice cultivation in Carolina are anything but certain. Catesby relates an anecdote about the disastrous impact that the migration of the rice bird has had on one lowland plantation:

In the beginning of *September*, while the Grain of Rice is yet soft and milky, innumerable Flights of these Birds arrive from some remote Parts, to the great detriment of the inhabitants. *Anno* 1724 an Inhabitant near *Ashley* river had forty acres of Rice so devoured by them, that he was in doubt, whether what they had left, was worth the expense of gathering in (*Natural History* 1: 14).

Catesby's depiction of the rice bird argues that rice cultivation on the mainland, itself a chance occurrence, has set in motion a chain of environmental events, linking the

Carolinas to Cuba, that are largely beyond the awareness and control of both the colonial and metropolitan elite, and can run counter to their interests.

It is likely that the ambivalence toward colonial enterprise in an image such as “The Rice Bird” owes in part to an equal ambivalence regarding the social and cultural transformation brought about by the introduction of rice into British North America. As the controversies around the Molasses Act made plain, the development of profitable staples on the mainland also set in motion a chain of *economic* events that were beyond the control of mercantile authorities, as a lucrative clandestine trade emerged between North America and the Latin Caribbean, and resistance to imperial policy grew.

Catesby’s image also implicitly invokes a second transformation, one that was the source of deep mainland anxiety. For the emergence of large rice plantations required the importation of a cheap and plentiful labor source. By the time Catesby visited the colony in the 1720s, roughly 20,000 slaves (over half imported directly from Africa) labored on the lowcountry plantations. That number represented a marked increase from the 2,400 slaves present in the colony at the turn of the eighteenth century. South Carolina had rapidly grown, like the Caribbean before it, into a black majority colony. The slave population would continue to grow exponentially. By the time Catesby published the second edition of his natural history in the mid 1750s, the slave population of the colony stood near 50,000.²⁴

Catesby was at least peripherally aware of the connection between rice and the explosive growth of Carolina slavery. In a section of his Carolina narrative entitled “Of the Gain Pulse, Roots, Fruit and Herbage, with Their Cultivation,” he describes at length

²⁴ Figures are estimated from tables in Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill, 1998), 61.

a process of rice cultivation, led “by Negro slaves, which is very laborious and tedious” (127). There he likewise notes that the ship that first brought rice to the region set out from an African port. The presence of rice on the mainland, such allusions proclaim, owes to a triangle trade that links North America with Africa and the Caribbean, from whence many of the colony’s early slave population was imported.

Anxieties regarding the growth of plantation slavery, especially as part of Catesby’s broader meditation on the effects of coastwise trade with the sugar islands, lie closer to the surface of images such as “Brown Viper and Arum” (**figure 1.19**). It is easily one of Catesby’s most dramatic and striking images. For Meyers, the plate contains another of the images in which the naturalist explores, “the ways in which newly introduced organisms from around the globe were changing existing patterns of organic interaction” (Meyers, *Empire’s Nature* 240). Catesby again pursues this theme through a visual language of reflected form. As Meyers observes, both the curve of the newt’s body to the left and the curling form of the large leaf to the right are echoed by the coiling body of the viper. All three organisms are mirrored by the shape of the arum flower directly beneath the snake. Such compositional associations are further multiplied. The swollen form of the arum blossom corresponds to a bulge in the lower segment of the snake’s body, which may contain some recently devoured prey, while the long stamen of the flower suggests the color and form of the snake’s flicking tongue.

As in his description of the rice bird, the text that accompanies this image presents the origin of the species as decidedly foreign, only recently imported into Carolina through human industry. After referring his reader to an authoritative delineation of the species in Sloane’s “Natural History of Jamaica,” he observes that the *Arum maximum*

Aegyptiacum is a, “Tropick Plant, not caring to increase much in Carolina.” He later notes the introduction of another kind of arum, source of a common “*African* food, which a great part of *Africa* subsists much on” (*Natural History of Carolina* 2: 45). The arum has only survived in an inhospitable Carolina environment, Catesby notes, due to the dogged efforts of the colony’s slaves, who cultivate the plant as food source, presumably during the one day a week when they are not compelled to labor in the rice fields.

The accompanying text, then, invites the viewer to read “Brown Viper and Arum” as an image of how the rapid growth of chattel slavery, and the presence of increasing numbers of Africans, has altered the Carolina environment. By referring his reader to Sloane’s “Natural History of Jamaica” for information about this “Tropick” species, Catesby suggests that with the emergence of growing numbers of Lowcountry plantations the continuities between the Carolina and Caribbean environment have multiplied. That connection is underscored by the violence of Catesby’s image. The combined effect of his visual and linguistic depiction of the arum is to link the plant with the labors of the colony’s slave population on the one hand, and with a dramatic scene of predation on the other, one in keeping with the volatility and ferocity of his representation of the Bahamas.

The reference to Sloane also prompts the viewer to read “Brown Viper and Arum,” along the lines of Dian Kriz’ interpretation of the “Natural History of Jamaica,” as a surrogate for the forms of brutal displacement, destruction and replacement that went into the production of New World commodities.²⁵ The emphasis on a kind of quasi-

²⁵ In a fascinating note to the text on the brown viper and arum, Catesby claims to have based his image on a scene he witnessed after “a great Inundation” that “dislodged” a number of local species from their customary homes, and threw them together in chaotic mass, where the predators among them began to devour smaller species, and sometimes even their own kind. We might read “Brown Viper and Arum,” then, as another image

tropical violence in “Brown Viper and Arum” suggests that Catesby regarded the transformation of the Carolina environment as source of profound anxiety. Some comments in the accompanying written description reveal that his anxiety flowed from an at least occasional discomfort with the pervasive brutality of plantation society. Like Sloane’s image of “African ‘lutes’ and Jamaican *luteus*,” Catesby’s visual rendering of the arum contains a subtle evocation of slaveholder violence. Just as the climbing vine of the “luteus” plant in Sloane’s image mimics the ropes and whips used to discipline the bodies of resistant slaves, the elaborately coiled body and lashing tongue of the viper in Catesby’s image evoke “that most ubiquitous instrument of pain” and punishment.²⁶ In an image containing a plant of African origin, that subtle evocation of slaveholder violence suggests the extent to which the existence of a substantial slave population and the need for extreme forms of corporal discipline were inextricably linked in the minds of British colonists and colonial travelers. Catesby’s text, meanwhile, quietly alludes to physical violence of a different order. He notes that the recent introduction of that African species of arum, “was a welcome improvement among the Negro’s, and was esteemed a blessing” (*Natural History* 2: 45). In so doing, Catesby reveals the unsavory truth that the rations provided by slaveholders themselves were so meager as to be inadequate to basic subsistence. From his experiences in the Caribbean, Catesby was well aware that planters, ever careful of profit margins, frequently subjected slaves to malnourishment. In a discussion of some local species of land crab he observes in passing that, despite their reputation for being poisonous to humans, they provide an important food source for

that self-reflexively alludes to the processes of disembodiment and dislocation necessary to the production of natural historical commodities. See: Catesby, *Natural History* 2: 45.

²⁶ Kriz, 60-61.

Caribbean slaves. “In some of the Sugar Islands,” he writes, “they are eat without Danger, and are no small help to the Negro Slaves, who on many of the Islands would fare very hard without them” (*Natural History* 2: 32).

Slaveholder force and neglect, however, may not be the only form of violence to which the image alludes. To invoke slaveholder discipline is of course to raise the possibility of slave resistance. As the text makes clear, “Brown Viper and Arum” is an image that meditates on the subaltern agency of the slave population, on how the initiative of the colony’s black majority, in the semi-autonomous realm of the slave garden, has actively transformed the Carolinas. That a depiction of the very crop those efforts yield is linked to a scene of violence within Catesby’s image may owe to the fact that by the 1720s, the decade of his residence in the colony, the agency of the enslaved was beginning to be felt in far more disruptive forms. The kinds of pressures that would lead to the Stono Rebellion of 1731, part of a cycle of major insurrections across the Caribbean and South Carolina throughout the decade, were steadily building.²⁷

The subtle presence of such disruptive Caribbean movements within Catesby’s depictions of South Carolina and Florida suggests the need to draw some careful distinctions between British and Anglo-American natural histories of the sugar islands and the circum-Caribbean South. Mainland colonists largely shared a metropolitan worldview in which Caribbean enterprise remained the primary impetus of trade and ground of prosperity on the one hand, and potential cause of domestic corruption on the other. Responsive to that shared outlook, early mainland natural histories such as

²⁷ For an account of the Stono Rebellion in the context of the discontent of the 1720s see Michael Mullin, *Africa in America: Slave Acculturation and Resistance in the American South and the British Caribbean, 1736-1831* (Chicago, 1994), 44.

Catesby's borrowed crucial elements of their representation of the greater Caribbean from the works of European naturalists such as Sloane. But Catesby's southern environment also bears the traces of the region's unique and shifting relation to the Caribbean, one based in close physical proximity, a similar sense of Creole identity, and the shared experience of a social reality based in plantation slavery. The full story of how Catesby's insights would be elaborated by subsequent mainland naturalists must wait for chapters three and four on William Bartram and John Audubon. In their depictions of Florida and Louisiana, those two iconic figures of American nature discourse would extend Catesby's explorations of a complex and volatile trans-Caribbean environment, one in which the southern fringes of North America were intimately linked to the islands through a variety of natural and commercial movements.

Before pursuing that path of influence, and focusing on those complex local histories, however, we must first step back to the wider circum-Atlantic perspective with which this chapter began. Chapter two will attend to the writings of the Franco-American naturalist J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur. Analysis of his enigmatic "Sketches of Jamaica & Bermudas and other subjects," and its subsequent influence on his 1782 *Letters from an American Farmer*, lends crucial support to the attempts of this chapter to recover a Caribbean-centric perspective within the nature discourse of early America, even as it allows us to extend that effort to a text that has been celebrated as one of the foundational documents of U.S. literature. Powerfully informed by the metropolitan outlook of his mentor Abbé Raynal, the sugar islands would come to occupy a pivotal position within Crèvecoeur's cosmopolitan imagination. His writings allow us to excavate a French colonialist perspective on the Caribbean and the Atlantic market that

alternately complements and competes with the British perspective traced above. The need to attend to that alternative framework, for a full understanding of Euro-American discourse on the Caribbean, is suggested by the very format of Catesby's pages. In an effort to appeal to the international audience of natural history, Catesby's publisher printed French and English versions of his narrative in adjacent columns. That formal decision makes plain that an account of American nature discourse must be willing to transgress multiple linguistic borders, and to negotiate a variety of national frameworks.

Chapter Two:

“The Itinerant Man”: Crèvecoeur’s Caribbean, Raynal’s Revolution, and the Fate of Enlightened Cosmopolitanism

July of 1779, Magistrate Dubois of New York City wrote a detailed report to the colonial governor. Its subject was a Frenchman, J. Hector St. John, arrested a few days earlier for alleged possession of rebel maps of New York Harbor. Though no maps were found, suspicion intensified upon discovery of the curious trunk the man had secreted through British lines outside the seaport. Dubois reported: “When he came into this City, from among the Rebels, he brought with him Some Boxes in which he had curious Botanical plants and in the Bottom of those Boxes under the Earth in which the plants were, he had private Drawers or Cases in which he had papers” (qtd. in Chevignard 173). Even after a reading of the papers revealed their author’s loyalist sentiments, he was held in prison for three months, before finally receiving permission to sail for England and then France.¹

The papers were the thirty-two manuscript sketches from which their author—J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur—would assemble *Letters from an American Farmer*. Dubois’ report suggests that the very production of *Letters* demanded painstaking negotiation of an Atlantic world troubled by a succession of imperial disputes. So too did the career of the author himself, who transformed from a French lieutenant during the French and Indian War, to a loyalist British subject and farmer in rural New York during the 1770s, to a British prisoner, to French trade consul to the United States in 1784. Throughout his life, Crèvecoeur treated identities and allegiances as provisional strategies designed to ensure his continued mobility and prosperity. In keeping with those

¹ The anecdote, and the biographical details provided below are from Gay Wilson Allen and Roger Asselineau, *St. John de Crèvecoeur* (New York, 1987), 61-7.

biographical circumstances, Crèvecoeur's consuming artistic and philosophical interest—from the travel sketches of the early 1770s, to the English *Letters*, through the expanded French *Lettres* of 1784 and 1787—lay not in the delineation of any one parochial identity, but in the fate of a point of view rooted in enlightened cosmopolitanism.

The recovery of this transnational dimension of Crèvecoeur's art and thought has marked a particularly welcome development within the general transformation of scholarship on the author. If a variety of forceful readings have challenged the notion that *Letters* offers a celebratory account of an ideal America, by situating the first three letters within a longer and more complex literary creation, it is nonetheless too often assumed that *Letters* struggles to reconcile a set of conflicts *internal* to an emergent mainland society. It is further assumed that at stake in that struggle is the fate of American identity. Essays by Grantland Rice and Christine Holbo pose a suggestive alternative. Rice argues that the shifts of tone and narrative perspective within *Letters* work to, “elide potentially dangerous political affiliations in a rapidly nationalizing world . . . address the plurality of rising national audiences and to mediate the changes in attitudes within and between these audiences.” Holbo similarly argues that the tensions within *Letters* express Crèvecoeur's plight, “as an international wanderer, both immigrant and émigré; as an individual with intellectual and personal affiliations in many nations, but without a basis for his sense of identity in one national tradition.” With his multi-national audience, and his own restless migrations across a variety of shifting borders, Crèvecoeur emerges such readings as an author whose concerns were continually refashioned by his itinerancy in the eighteenth-century Atlantic.²

² Quotes are from Grantland Rice, “Crèvecoeur and the Politics of Authorship in Republican America,” *Early American Literature* 28 (1993), 108; Christine Holbo, “Imagination, Commerce, and the Politics of Associationism in Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer*,” *Early American Literature* 32 (1997), 57. Prior to the 1960s readings of *Letters* tended to stress the idyllic aspects of the text, and to privilege the earlier letters. Since the 1960s most critics have complicated that vision, either by arguing that the narrator undergoes a profound shift in consciousness, or by establishing a distinction between a naïve Farmer James and his sophisticated author, or both.

Magistrate Dubois' report alludes to one important aspect of Crèvecoeur's cosmopolitanism. That the author's manuscripts were concealed beneath some "curious Botanical plants," suggests his familiarity with, and circulation within, the transatlantic currents of natural historical commerce and meaning-making. Like Sloane and Catesby before him, Crèvecoeur likely intended to carry his specimens back to Europe, to sell among the growing ranks of wealthy collectors of New World exotics, and to bolster his reputation as an international man of letters. Their presence also suggests his awareness that the disguise of natural historian was most likely to render his cosmopolitanism benign in the eyes of imperial authorities.³ As evidenced by Catesby's career, natural history was a discourse crucial to the exploration, settlement, and economic development

Prominent contributors to the earlier consensus include Marcus Cunliffe, Henry S. Commager, Richard B. Morris and Vernon Parrington. That such views retain some currency is evidenced by the *Columbia Literary History of the United States*, ed. Emory Elliot et. al. (New York, 1988). For some representative examples of the later criticism see: A.W. Plumstead, "Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur," in *American Literature, 1764-1789: The Revolutionary Years*, ed. Everett Emerson (Madison, 1977), 213-31; Doreen Alvarez Saar, "Crèvecoeur's 'Thoughts on Slavery': *Letters from an American Farmer* and Whig Rhetoric," *Early American Literature*, 22 (1987), 192-203; Nathaniel Philbrick, "The Nantucket Sequence in Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer*," *New England Quarterly* 64 (1991), 414-32; Norman Grabo, Crèvecoeur's American: Beginning the World Anew," *William and Mary Quarterly* 48 (1991), 159-72; Larzer Ziff, *Writing in the New Nation: Prose, Print and Politics in the Early United States* (New Haven, 1991), 18-33. Recent criticism often shares the focus of earlier scholars on questions of mainland society and identity. It is interesting to note that this concern still creeps into the transnational readings of Rice and Holbo. Thus Holbo claims that Crèvecoeur's task was, "understanding—and at the same time creating—a national identity for America" (33). I am closer to agreeing with her assertion, elsewhere in the essay, that, "Crèvecoeur's reflections on American nationality were formulated in the context of Raynal's larger meditations on the problem of nationality in an age of international capitalism" (32). I would stipulate, however, that Crèvecoeur's meditation is centered on the problem of cosmopolitanism in an age when nationalism and international capitalism simultaneously emerged.

³ The argument that Crèvecoeur's crate demonstrates his active engagement with natural history is drawn from Pamela Regis 111-12.

of England's colonial possessions, and thus to the formation of a global empire centered throughout the eighteenth century on the sugar islands of the Caribbean.

The details of Crèvecoeur's biography make it clear that his familiarity with natural history was far from superficial. He was expert in botany by the early 1770s, through the instruction of his New York neighbor Cadwallader Colden, "master of Linnaeus's method of classification and the author of *Plantae Coldenhamae*, the first work on New York plants" (Regis 112). Throughout his life he maintained an extensive botanical correspondence with American figures as prominent as Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, James Madison, and John and William Bartram. During his Paris years, he became personally acquainted with some of the leading lights of the French natural historical community.

Crèvecoeur's natural historical pursuits make him crucial to the concerns of this dissertation for at least two reasons. First, they alert us to the fact that his writings, including the 1782 *Letters*, provide rich evidence of the centrality of natural history to cultural production in the early Americas. That the importance of natural history to the text goes well beyond its extended meditation on humming-birds and predatory snakes in Letter X, and its portrait of the naturalist John Bartram in Letter XI, is an argument that has been persuasively advanced by scholars including Pamela Regis. Regis writes that, "As in the works of William Bartram and Thomas Jefferson, natural history is the primary intellectual orientation of *Letters* . . . governing the construction of the entire text . . . More generally, natural history provides a context for the content of the entire book: *Letters* is an extended attempt to find and describe the type specimen of a new kind of man—the American" (107). Regis first point is all but indisputable. Crèvecoeur's

approach to the analysis of human societies is clearly homologous to the taxonomic methods of natural history. Regis second point, that the naturalist Crèvecoeur offers his reader a specimen of a form of proto-national identity, is in need of interrogation. What *Letters* provides instead is a rich cultural history of a form of cosmopolitan identity that was both dependent on and necessary to the prestige of natural history. If the very notion of cosmopolitanism emerged in part through the exemplary cooperation of natural historians scattered across the globe, the republican ambitions of a transatlantic cosmopolitan elite were in turn crucial to the self-understanding of the natural historical community—to their avowed desire to forge bonds of sympathetic understanding, across national boundaries, and to work toward the universal improvement of man through the dissemination of useful knowledge.

The concern of this chapter is less to explore the natural historical aspects of Crèvecoeur's aesthetic, than to establish the specific geography of the form of cosmopolitan identity that natural historians (including Crèvecoeur's) both advocated and attempted to embody. Expanding and refining recent transnational approaches to Crèvecoeur, I shall argue that his writings are deeply implicated not only in a larger Atlantic world, but in a particular vision of that world that depended on the Caribbean. That vision first emerges in Crèvecoeur's 1773 "Sketches of Jamaica & Bermudas & other Subjects," a text that, though concealed at the bottom of the author's crate, remained unpublished until 1995.⁴ "Sketches of Jamaica" insists that the very notion of stable and

⁴ J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, "Sketches of Jamaica & Bermudas & other Subjects," in *More Letters From the American Farmer: An Edition of the Essays in English Left Unpublished by Crèvecoeur*, ed. Dennis D. Moore (Athens, Ga., 1995), 106-113. Crèvecoeur also wrote a substantially revised French version of the sketch, entitled

discrete cultural identities is untenable in an interconnected and volatile Atlantic world. It is an insight that would have powerful implications for Crèvecoeur's subsequent career.

"Sketches of Jamaica" grapples with a new maritime reality through its experiment with a narrative structure—involving the journey of a naïve colonial from an agrarian utopia, to a decadent plantation society, and back again in disillusionment—that would be crucial to the organization of *Letters*.

While the neglect of "Sketches of Jamaica" may in part be attributed to its brevity, and its fragmentary syntax, it is also likely due to the North American focus of many Crèvecoeur critics. The two other manuscripts collected for the first time in Dennis D. Moore's *More Letters from the American Farmer* also chronicle societies beyond the mainland. Like "Rock of Lisbon" and "Sketch of a Contrast Between the English and Spanish Colonies," "Sketches of Jamaica" has been overlooked for its seemingly anomalous subject matter. Consideration of all these texts, and of their relationship to the rest of Crèvecoeur's writings, is increasingly desirable now that eighteenth-century American studies has begun to reexamine America's position in the larger world. "Sketches of Jamaica," however, holds special potential due to the prominence of Caribbean concerns within the general transformation of the field. A variety of Americanists grounded in Black Atlantic studies have continued to build upon the revisionist insights of Eric Williams and C.L.R. James. Several generations ago, those founding figures of Caribbean studies placed North America firmly at the periphery of an Atlantic economy centered on West Indian sugar production. Now that their counter-geography of the colonial Americas has received fresh attention, we can ask how it might

"Voyage à la Jamaïque et aux Isles Bermudes," which he included in *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1784), 229-240.

inflect understanding of an author whose canonical status is unmatched by few texts of early American literature.⁵

To pursue that question is, oddly, to recover an essential component of the intellectual world in which Crèvecoeur lived and wrote. In describing the voluminous flow of persons, commodities, and cultural forms between the mainland and the West Indies, “Sketches of Jamaica” marks Crèvecoeur’s earliest and most intense effort to come to terms with the theories of Abbé Guillaume-Thomas-Francois Raynal—the man to whom *Letters* would be dedicated. In his *Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*, Raynal propounded a theory of global development and decline centered on the Caribbean sugar revolution and the attendant growth of the Atlantic slave trade. The elaboration of that theory was dependent on Raynal’s own intimate involvement in the planetary networks of natural history. Raynal gathered the information for his remarkably detailed account of the development of global politics and economics through the same networks that Sloane had used to augment his collection of rare natural historical specimens, and that Buffon used to compile his famous encyclopedia. Through those networks Raynal gained a comprehensive sense of sweeping trends within the mercantile economy, and of the minute details of West Indian crop production. That natural historical knowledge would help to establish the authority of his claim that developments within the Caribbean

⁵ For a discussion of this trend see Dennis D. Moore’s review essay “The Empire of Early American Studies,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 59 (2002). In particular, Moore cites the contributions of Mulford and Tennenhouse to *Finding Colonial Americas: Essays Honoring J.A. Leo Lemay*, ed. Carla Mulford and David S. Shields (Newark, NJ, 2001). For some other recent efforts to include the Caribbean within eighteenth-century American Studies see: Keith Albert Sandiford, *Cultural Politics of Sugar: Caribbean Slavery and Narratives of Colonialism* (New York, 2000); Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, 2000). The classic statements by Williams and James have been reissued in recent decades. See: Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, intro. by Colin A. Palmer (North Carolina, 1994); C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York, 1989).

plantations would determine the direction of world history. Crèvecoeur's writings demonstrate a similar awareness, extrapolated from the work of the *philosophe*, that relations between the West Indies and the mainland British colonies were of sweeping consequence. Given the importance of the Caribbean to Atlantic mercantilism, both men came to believe that the fate of enlightened cosmopolitanism—and the vision of global republicanism it cherished— would be decided in the sugar islands.

The Emergence of Cultural Geography

The earliest of the manuscripts concealed in Crèvecoeur's crate were composed in the early 1770s on the author's New York farm at Pine Hill. As Thomas Philbrick describes them, those years were a time of prolific and varied literary output: "The earliest of his writings . . . consist chiefly of impressionistic travel sketches that center on such varied locales as Lisbon, the islands of Jamaica, Bermuda, Nantucket, and Martha's Vineyard, and the colonies of Virginia and South Carolina" (Philbrick 20). The pieces on Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard and South Carolina would of course evolve into Letters IV through IX of Crèvecoeur's 1782 masterpiece. The very core of *Letters* was extracted from a larger body of work the cosmopolitan geography of which spanned the Atlantic and the hemisphere.⁶

⁶ For extended discussion of this process see the section titled "Extended Ramifications" below. For a survey of some critical questions related to the composition and publication of *Letters* see Plumstead, 213-31. Responding to speculation that Crèvecoeur's London publisher may have arranged the earlier manuscripts into the 1782 *Letters*, Plumstead argues from internal evidence that Crèvecoeur himself revised and arranged the earlier sketches. This argument is pursued in Chevignard, 173-190. Chevignard suggests that the bulk of the revisions were made during Crèvecoeur's detainment in New York City. My own belief is that the early sketches certainly underwent significant revision during the late 70s and early 80s. *Someone* transformed a transnational body of work into an exclusively mainland narrative. Crèvecoeur's own experiences with his North American neighbors and British authorities may well have inspired him to conceal a form of cosmopolitan identity (and the fluid "political affiliations" it implied) to which the Revolutionary Atlantic had grown increasingly hostile. His London publishers may have selected only the mainland sketches in order to satisfy the growing vogue for accounts of North America. See Grantland Rice for versions of both these arguments. The textual

That comparative body of work marked its author's attempt to engage with the emergent cosmopolitan culture of the late Enlightenment. Thomas Schlereth provides a valuable description of the "republic of letters" that connected intellectuals and learned societies throughout the Atlantic: "Within the eighteenth-century societies, the *philosophes* came to realize that, although they belonged to a variety of countries, they were also a nation unto themselves; it was an elitist republic whose citizens of the world united in an effort . . . to promote 'all useful Knowledge of Benefit to Mankind in General'" (32). Essential to that effort was the new encyclopedic project of cultural geography, or, "the study of the earth as a universal habitat for man." As a kind of newly prestigious sub-field of natural history, cultural geography was characterized by its focus on two related questions: the "physiographic conditions of the terrestrial globe and its origins," and, "the vicarious, yet worldwide, anthropological study of man" (32). While Crèvecoeur's interest in physiographic questions—including the transatlantic debates that raged around the Buffon thesis—is well documented, his immersion in a kind of global anthropology emerges with a focus on his writings of the early 1770s.

The early 1770s were the period when his Pine Hill neighbor, the well-known naturalist Cadwalder Colden, first introduced him to Raynal's *History*. In many ways, the *History* provided a cultural geography *extraordinaire*. First published in 1770, it would be released in 55 editions in five languages over the next thirty years. Its six-volumes assay a comprehensive history and analysis of the major European colonialisms, and the societies they conquered and enslaved, from the first voyages of discovery through the revolutionary ferment of the late eighteenth century. Raynal and his fellow encyclopedists laboriously compiled histories of nearly every locality subject to

history sketched above provides one way of understanding the narrative instability remarked by so many modern critics of *Letters*. The text may be viewed as a complex palimpsest in which the transnational concerns of the earlier versions of the sketches remain visible beneath the mainland narrative that is written over them.

European encroachment.⁷ While the bulk of the first two volumes is devoted to the East Indies, volume three closes with a survey of the settlement of “the great Archipelago of America.” The *History* then turns to a scathing indictment of the pillage of Africa to fuel to the Caribbean slave trade. It returns in volumes four and five to detail the Spanish, Dutch, French, and English efforts to establish dominion over various West Indian islands. Volume six covers North America, celebrating, near its close, the republican character of the northern British colonies.

In the travel sketches of the early 1770s, Crèvecoeur sought to incorporate Raynal’s cultural geographic ambitions within his own more fictional project by experimenting with a series of cosmopolitan narratives and narrators.⁸ “Sketch of a Contrast” is the most rudimentary experiment, involving a series of methodical comparisons between Peru and Pennsylvania. “Rock of Lisbon” is more elaborate, relying on an extended central flashback. An urbane narrator remembers a journey to a mountaintop convent near the Portuguese seaport and capital “for the recovery of [his] health” (*More Letters* 71). “Sketches of Jamaica,” marks Crèvecoeur’s most intense engagement with Raynal both for the subversive implications of its narrative structure and its specific geographic location. The journey of Crèvecoeur’s young narrator to Jamaica effectively undermines comparisons between agrarian New York and the plantation

⁷ The “Raynal” to whom I refer throughout this chapter is in many ways a term of convenience. Though Raynal compiled and edited the volumes, he did so with the help of a large editorial staff. Individual sections were contributed by prominent intellectuals including Diderot.

⁸ Following Thomas Philbrick, most critics of *Letters* describe the text as a “novel in embryo.” The phrase captures my own sense of the generic indeterminacy of Crèvecoeur’s entire corpus, which positions itself somewhere between the conventions of fiction and Enlightenment discourses including cultural geography and natural history. For a persuasive reading of *Letters* as a natural history see Regis, *Describing Early America*. While in one sense the writings of Crèvecoeur and Raynal are located in distinct generic categories (fiction and history), in another sense they share a deep engagement with these proto- and quasi-scientific discourses.

culture of the British West Indies by stressing the involvement of both regions in the wider commercial culture of the Atlantic rim.

Crèvecoeur, it seems, was a remarkably astute interpreter of Raynal's treatise, one attentive to the prominence of the Caribbean within its volumes. In a crucial passage in the *History*—between its lengthy consideration of the West Indies and its overview of North American settlement—Raynal offered a sweeping summary of the particular role of the Caribbean in the development of world commerce:

The labours of the people settled in those islands are the sole basis of the African trade: they extend the fisheries and the cultures of North America, afford a good market for the manufactures of Asia, and double, perhaps treble, the activity of all Europe. They may be considered as the principle cause of the rapid motion which now agitates the universe. This ferment must increase, in proportion as cultures, that are so capable of being extended, shall approach nearer to their highest degree of perfection (5: 107).

The sugar revolution, and the slave trade by which it was fueled, would continue to link the economic fates of five continents. In "Sketches of Jamaica," Crèvecoeur developed a narrative structure that allowed him to work through the implications of that Caribbean-centric vision for the culture and society of the middle colonies that were his adopted home.

Crèvecoeur's Caribbean

The sketch depicts the voyage of a pre-Revolutionary American youth to Jamaica, then the most lucrative of England's Caribbean possessions, and a primary source for the coveted West Indian staple. The sketch is narrated by the youth himself after his return to his father's thriving farm and mill. He addresses a letter to a close friend—another young gentleman—whom he imagines to be somewhere in Pennsylvania. "Are you still

the Itinerant Man,” the narrator asks his confidant” (*More Letters* 106). His friend’s movements are of considerable import. The West Indian travel sketch at the core of the letter is framed by two urgent appeals. Unless his friend returns to their farming community in rural New York, the narrator’s faith in humanity is in danger of being permanently lost. “Every motive I can possibly present you with ought to Induce you to repair here,” the young protagonist writes his friend, “even a conscientious one, that of preventing an honest Man from taking an errative path” (113). His problems began when his father, anxious to initiate his eldest son into the family business, sent him to serve as agent for his “great consignment of Flour” on Jamaica. (107) From his arrival, the decadence of white-settler society, and the barbaric violence of the slave code shock the young man. He quickly flees back to the mainland, via an excursion through Bermuda.

The trajectory of “Sketches of Jamaica” will feel familiar to readers of *Letters*. In a similar manner to “Description of Charles-Town,” the essay establishes a seemingly stark contrast between the plantation culture of the Caribbean (and the Carolinas), and the homogenous communities of smaller, more subsistence-oriented farmers in the northern colonies.

To set up this contrast, the sketch employs a variant of the then widely-debated natural historical theory of his fellow Frenchman George Louis Leclerc Buffon. In his *Histoire Naturelle* Buffon proposed that due to an unhealthy New World climate, plants, animals *and* human beings all tended to quickly degenerate in America. American mammals, Buffon asserted as his crucial piece of evidence, were invariably inferior in size to their equivalent European species. His theory was a severe blow to rising colonial consciousness. As his depiction of Native Americans implied, any New World society, including those of European settlers, was doomed to degeneracy. Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* typified the response of the American natural historical community. Jefferson systematically refuted Buffon’s account. He produced a series of

exhaustive tables to document the size and quantity of mammals in the New and Old World. His refutation, however, left Buffon's central assumption—that the cultural, social and political condition of a region is tied decisively to climate—wholly unchallenged.⁹

“Sketches of Jamaica” is structured around that central assumption. From his first comments on Jamaica, the narrator attempts to explain the distinctions between British colonial society in North America and the Caribbean by reference to climate. “It appeared to me an horrid climate,” he writes, “I was shocked at that perpetual collision and combination of Crimes and Prophligacy which I observed there” (107). His quintessentially enlightenment thesis is reiterated a few lines later: “the Island itself looked like a Great Gulph, perpetually absorbing Men, by the Power of Elementary Heat, of Intemperance by the force of every Excess—.. Life resembled a Delirium Inspired by the warmth of the sun urging every Passion & desire to some premature Extreme” (107).

The limits of the narrator's Buffonian framework are almost immediately apparent. In his discussion of Jamaican religion the narrator wonders at the conspicuous lack of a connection between climate and culture. The frequent hurricanes and earthquakes which afflict Jamaica, the learned young narrator believes, should have produced correspondingly intense forms of worship: “this is the Climate which ought to produce the most sincere Devotees & the greatest Saints—... For the lease which Nature and her Elements hath given them for the Period of their Existence is but at will ‘tis precarious Indeed” (108). Throughout the island, however, the narrator “could perceive no Traces

⁹ For a good summary of Jefferson's response to the Buffon thesis see Daniel Boorstin, *The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson* (Boston, 1960). Jefferson's own remarks are found in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Peden (Chapel Hill, 1982) 58-59.

whatever of Religion save few Temples” (108). Caribbean society, such passages imply, is too complex for European natural historical conceptions to contain adequately.

Crèvecoeur’s subtle debunking of natural historical theories of climate helps to explain why the moral crisis initiated by the narrator’s experience in Jamaica is only accelerated after his return to the temperate (and thus ostensibly more virtuous) middle colonies. Shortly after his return, his father unexpectedly dies, without a will, leaving his son to resolve a series of complex transactions before he can claim his patrimony. Troubles increase when the narrator immediately gives his brothers and sisters their share of the father’s estate, “reserving to myself no other Priviledge of Primogeniture than that of Posing the old paternal Roof” (109). The narrator must settle his father’s affairs, or face financial ruin. Comforted by his belief that trade in his native colony is conducted on more virtuous principles than in Jamaica, the youth sets out to emulate the forthright business practices he learned from his father. He declares, “the first principle I fixed upon was to think no Man a Rogue until I had Experienced the Contrary, this Principle I had not Imbided in Jamaica” (110). That policy, however, results in his near bankruptcy. The youth is subjected to repeated “evasions, subterfuges, positive denials.” He loses, “above . . . 400 [pounds] by the absurdity of my first principles” (110). It is then that the social and moral distinction between life in Jamaica and New York, between the virtue nurtured by a sedentary life in a northern farming community and the vice produced by a life of travel and trade, breaks down. The narrator writes: “My Journal through this laborious Carrier wou’d in Point of difficulties, soundings observations &ca by far Exceed those of the boldest Navigators who have Ventured in quest of the North West Passage & all these

dangers came from the Native Keeness of an appearantly simple & Ignorant people who had not/ as I had lived in Jamaica & Bermudas” (110-11).

The basic narrative pattern of “Sketches of Jamaica” advances a penetrating argument regarding the coastwise trade between the mainland and island colonies of British America. The distinction between commercial practices in Jamaica and rural New York proves illusory because the two societies had been economically integrated for more than a century. Since the mid-seventeenth century, merchants in the rapidly expanding port cities of North America had traded extensively with their fellow colonists in the West Indies. Trade with the islands of the French and Spanish Caribbean, though formally outlawed by British Parliament in the Navigation Acts, and strictly policed after the Sugar Acts of 1764, was also intense. As the Caribbean colonies transformed into a virtual sugar monoculture, devoting their scarce land resources to production of that increasingly profitable commodity, North American merchants quickly moved to supply the planters with the foodstuffs, lumber, and livestock necessary to daily survival.¹⁰

In Georgia and the Carolinas goods shipped to the British West Indies (primarily rice and lumber) accounted for over one-fifth of the total exports of the region between 1768 and 1772, the period just prior to the composition of “Sketches of Jamaica.” In the narrator’s own middle colonies, sale of grain and grain products to the West Indies comprised the single largest export from 1768-72. Total exports to the Caribbean accounted for just under half of the total annual average value of exports from the region during the same period. At 223,610 pounds the value of exports to the West Indies more

¹⁰ On the transformative effects of this trade on both North America and the British Caribbean see O’Shaughnessy, 69-76; John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America* (Chapel Hill, NC., 1985), 144-6.

than tripled that of sales to Great Britain. In New England, including the islands depicted in sections IV through VIII of *Letters*, this imbalance was further exaggerated. Exports of fish, livestock, wood, and whale products to the British West Indies accounted for over half the total exports of the region. Estimated at 278,000 pounds, the average annual value of New England's trade with the Caribbean nearly quadrupled that of its exports to Great Britain.¹¹ Significant in their own right, official figures fail to account for the thriving clandestine trade with French and Spanish islands.

By specifying that the patriarch in his sketch is both a flour merchant and mill-owner, Crèvecoeur demonstrates an acute sense of the social and cultural impact of the West India trade. By the early eighteenth century the miller-store keeper was a common figure in British North America, found in nearly every rural community where grain was grown in any quantity. Through their extensive interactions with seaport merchants, they were able to provide local farmers with information on and access to wider and more profitable markets for their surpluses, often buying them to sell on consignment. By the 1740s, a broad shift had occurred. Large numbers of mill-owners began to trade overseas directly, in order to eliminate the costs exacted by port-city middlemen. They became "country merchants" to use Crèvecoeur's term, thus drawing rural farm communities deeper into the Atlantic market. The miller-storekeeper become, "the most immediate link for colonial farmers in a commercial chain that stretched all the way to Great Britain or the West Indies and back again" (McCusker and Menard, 321-25. Quotation is on 322).

By invoking this transformative figure, Crèvecoeur's sketch dramatizes the question of whether the virtues of an "Eminent Farmer" are compatible with the market

¹¹ These figures are adapted from tables in McCusker and Menard, 115, 130, 174, 199.

values necessary to success in his “multiplied business” as merchant and mill-owner. In doing so, the essay addresses paradoxical fears of the material abundance resulting from the West India trade. The crisis of agrarian virtue within the narrative is decisively linked to the Caribbean transit of its youthful American narrator. Just after his first appeal to his “itinerant” friend, the narrator nostalgically recalls the details of his moral training and development:

I was born with a natural Inclination to do humane actions, there is a something in obliging which always appeared to Exceed any other Pleasure—.. this disposition I believe I have Imbibed from my Father who never dismissed a man even when he refused what was asked, without sending him away Tolerably satisfyed—..he had Talents he had a disposition to effect this which I have not—I was too young to think & Inquire of him by what means he preserved the good will of all yet cou’d watch very carefully over his Interests;— what a resource this Knowledge wou’d be to me in that scituation in which I am; he did not think that he shou’d have quitted us so soon—from him I had received what Ideas of Right & wrong I have cultivated since, as well as those principles of Relligion which have since directed the operations of my Mind—.. no sooner had I pursued this Carrier than he thought proper to send me to Jamaica where his great consignment of Flour had often made him wish to have a Faithfull Correspondent (107).

The father, it seems, had little trouble accommodating the pursuit of private interests in overseas trade to his underlying agrarian values of public virtue, benevolence and faithfulness. But the true drama of the sketch turns on the question of whether the son will inherit that ability. The paragraph intimates that the narrator’s journey to Jamaica may have disrupted the smooth transmission of knowledge and values from generation to

generation, by removing the narrator from the resource of his father's example. "Would to God," the narrator elsewhere pines, that "I had never seem Jamaica & had spent that Time with my Father" (111). Crèvecoeur finds an apt correlative for this disrupted transmission in his narrator's crisis of primogeniture. His father's agrarian virtues, the sketch argues, are the moral equivalent of the narrator's financial inheritance, the security of which has also been threatened by the penetration of the maritime market.

As Jay Fliegelman has so perceptively argued, this preoccupation with intergenerational dynamics was widely shared in the literary culture of the Revolutionary era. In 1774, the three best-selling books in the rebellious colonies were *Lord Chesterfield's Letters to his Son*, John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughter*, and the first American edition of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Like Crèvecoeur's essay, all three texts offer visions of a proper moral education, and meditate on the simultaneous dangers and potentialities of the prodigal child. For Fliegelman, it is hardly a coincidence that these texts attained such popularity at the advent of the Anglo-American crisis. All the novels, but especially *Crusoe*, "offered the American reading public a theologically and hence politically acceptable model for successful filial disobedience, a justifiable assertion of independence" (76). When read by an American public, the novels mediated colonial's anxieties regarding revolt against the fatherland. The West Indian location of *Crusoe's* island, near present-day Trinidad, is significant in this light. That setting, "encouraged colonial readers to perceive an analogy between the fate and significance of *Crusoe's* island and their own Atlantic nation" (77). Crèvecoeur's essay performs a similar cultural function, by narrating the trials of another youth unexpectedly transposed to a Caribbean locale.

The broader implications of the youth's crisis extend far beyond familial interest. Crèvecoeur employs a variety of subtle strategies to suggest that at stake in the youth's struggles, and the wave of commercialization that impelled him toward Jamaica, is the fate of enlightened republicanism. The only direct reference to republicanism occurs in some

remarks on a visit to the Treaty Maroons of Jamaica. While in general the island seems, “a chaos of Men Negroes & things which made my Young American head Giddy,” the narrator finds maroon society uncannily familiar. “I observed,” he writes, “the singular contrast of a Republic of Blacks in the middle of that Island.” “Surrounded on all sides by slavery,” he continues, “this object pleased me much” (108). The narrator’s use of the term “Republic”—pinnacle of European achievement for Montesquieu and other political theorists of the day—to refer to an Afro-Caribbean society is integral to his critique of the planters. The decadent luxury of the slave-holder society that surrounds the maroons is presented as incompatible with republican values.

When, after his narrator's return home, Crèvecoeur begins to link the corrupt business practices of settlers in Jamaica and New York, he also begins to undermine the basis of the mainland colony's self-image as an exemplary New World republic. Such implications are particularly strong given Crèvecoeur’s focus on a farming family with newly “multiplied business.” The sketch opens an ambiguous space between two figures—yeoman and merchant—who occupied opposite poles of society in republican thought. By the late eighteenth century the independent farmer had long occupied a privileged position within republican ideology. Strongly influenced by the French physiocrats, Thomas Jefferson declared that, “Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue.” “Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators,” Jefferson continued, “is a phaenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example.”¹²

¹² Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. with an intro. and notes by William Peden (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995), 164-5. Jeffersonian notions of agrarian virtue, and their relation to classical republicanism, were central to the development of a “republican synthesis” thirty years ago. For the classic statements of that synthesis see J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, N.J., 1975); Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1976); and Gordon Wood, *The Creation of an American Republic* (New York, 1972). These seminal works were challenged by a liberal

Crèvecoeur's rural New York threatens to furnish something very like this example. His imperiled narrator, heir of a newly commercialized agrarian world, makes frequent recourse to a language of male sympathy that was deeply embedded in republican notions of civic virtue. Near the beginning of the sketch the narrator pointedly claims that he "was born with a natural Inclination to do humane actions," which makes the assistance of his fellow man, "Exceed any other Pleasure" (107). Later he similarly insists that his virtuous division of his father's estate among his siblings was guided by "... the secret calls of Equity the powerfull wisper, of an Inward sentiment" (107). Gordon Wood argues that late eighteenth-century theorists envisioned a republican polity held together by the collective exercise of, "a natural social disposition, a moral instinct, a sense of sympathy in each human being."¹³ When, near the end of the sketch,

counter-thesis, which questioned the characterization of republicanism as an inherently anti-commercial and anti-capitalist ideology. For a summary of this position see: Joyce Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, MA, 1992); Isaac Kramnick *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism: Political Ideology in Late Eighteenth Century England and America* (Ithaca, NY, 1990). More recent scholars generally argue for the tense coexistence of liberalism and republicanism as competing and overlapping ideologies. For an example of this pluralism in literary studies see: Bruce Burgett, *Sentimental Bodies: Sex, Gender, and Citizenship in the Early Republic* (Princeton, 1998). In my own view, Crèvecoeur's writings demonstrate that republican discourse struggled to accommodate the liberal values necessary to a commercial society. For a stimulating account of the transformation of republicanism in the context of commercialization see: Cathy Matson and Peter Onuf, "Toward A Republican Empire: Interest and Ideology in Revolutionary America," *American Quarterly* 37 (1985), 496-531.

¹³ Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1991), 239- 40. It should be noted that Wood relies in part on Gary Wills' understanding of the importance of Scottish Common Sense philosophy to late eighteenth-century America in *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (Garden City, 1978). Wills' argument has been severely questioned by Ronald Hamowy, "Jefferson and the Scottish Enlightenment: A Critique of Gary Wills' *Inventing America*," *William and Mary Quarterly* 36 (1979), 502-23. For a nuanced examination of the combined influence of Common Sense philosophy and Lockean sensationalism on notions of civic virtue, one that incorporates key aspects of Hamowy's critique, see: Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority* (New York, 1982), 23-6. For some recent attempts to link republicanism with a broader discourse of masculine

Crèvecoeur's narrator threatens that he "shall repell those swellings of the heart from whence comes Kindness Good will &ca" (111), he warns of the imminent corruption of the moral instinct in a descendant of the very social group that was to provide its mainstay.

The sketch attempts to balance the threat of moral decline against the addition of a cosmopolitan dimension to the narrator's classical education. Comparing himself to his provincial neighbors, the narrator boasts that he has "read Cicero ovid sallust &ca & . . . seen great Plantations" (111). Yet while broadening his horizons, the youth's experience in plantation America has challenged both his affective *and* rational capacities. Mary Rucker argues that *Letters* raises profound questions regarding the efficacy of Enlightenment rationality. Overwhelmed by his journey to the plantation South, its narrator is rendered, "incapable of penetrating phenomena to discover either scientific or spiritual laws" (Rucker 193-212). The narrator of "Sketches of Jamaica" suffers from a similar inability, one that Crèvecoeur dates from his residence in the decadent and polyglot space of the British sugar islands. On a stylistic level, the collapse of rationality is represented through syntax. In the central paragraphs on island society, the narrator shifts from subject to subject in a disjointed, loosely associative manner that belies his intermittent gestures toward systematic analysis. Individual sentences cover a dizzying array of Caribbean subjects, ranging from the climate, to the sexual exploitation of female slaves, to the contraband trade with neighboring French and Spanish colonies, to the vulnerability of the island to natural disasters.

Enlightenment rationality is questioned at a deeper level through the narrator's sporadic attempts to implement a range of scientific and philosophical theories. As exemplified by texts including Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*, the new science of cultural geography sought to determine the effects of the physical environment upon

sentiment see Burgett, 112-134; Julie K. Ellison, *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (Chicago, 1999).

societies and the political systems produced by them.¹⁴ As discussed above, Crèvecoeur's narrator engages in a related, and ultimately failed attempt to link the climate of a region to the character of its society. By the time a respectable elderly gentleman, resident in New York, declares that "vices and virtues are often local and geographical," the authority of such Enlightenment wisdom has been wholly subverted by the narrator's experiences with a commercial culture that subsumes the middle colonies and the West Indies. (112)

Anxious meditations regarding the fate of Enlightenment rationality and republican virtue, then, play around the edges of Crèvecoeur's Caribbean travel sketch. In order to comprehend the full scope of those meditations, however, we must ultimately place them in the context of Raynal's *History*, and its vision of the potential global effects of an accelerated West Indian commerce. The plight of Crèvecoeur's young narrator provides a particular North American instance of a phenomenon that Raynal feared would ultimately pervade Atlantic society, as cosmopolitan humanism was undermined by a system based on the exploitation of slaves and the circulation of Caribbean commodities. That fear, moreover, powerfully informed Raynal's analysis of a variety of New World transformations and revolutions—attitudes that would in turn influence Crèvecoeur's subsequent depictions of the mainland colonies. Careful attention to Raynal's West Indies is essential to understanding "Sketches of Jamaica" and the 1782 *Letters* as broad reflections on the fate of enlightened cosmopolitanism.

Raynal's Revolution

¹⁴ Charles L. de S. Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, trans. T. Nugent, intro. by F. Neuman (New York, 1949). On Montesquieu's relation to cultural and political geography see Karl Marcus Knessel, "Montesquieu: Possibilistic Political Geographer," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 58 (1968), 557-74.

In Christine Holbo's insightful reading of the *History*, republican virtue and Enlightenment rationality occupy central positions in its analysis of New World colonialism and the commercial system to which it gave rise. Holbo writes:

On the one hand, Raynal saw commerce as the source of the global, humanitarian sympathies which ground his critique of slavery, and help to hold together the diverse histories presented in his book. Economically and socially, commerce gave rise to the discoveries of science, to the expansion of sentiment, and to the possibility of universal or philosophical reflection . . . On the other hand, Raynal recognized that commerce caused the enslavement of Africans and native Americans, and transformed their owners into unfeeling monsters, slaves to passion and to limitless appetite (31).

That paradoxical thesis plays out in two opposing narratives: "a narrative of Enlightenment, of progress toward a world united by sympathetic knowledge; and a narrative of disintegration, of an entropic worldwide slide toward slavery and anarchy." Raynal's central examples of these movements, Holbo rightly contends, were "the establishment of new, republican, and virtuous settlements in North America, and the spread of multiple forms of slavery" (32).

Holbo stops short of noting that Raynal's imagination of slavery was also centered in a specific region. While the middle colonies of North America (and especially Pennsylvania) were his exemplary republics, the Caribbean plantation formed the epicenter of Atlantic slavery. Recognizing that geography has significant implications for interpretation of the *History*. With the West Indies at its center the *History* offers a far less ambivalent, and far more despairing account of the effects of international commerce. Raynal believed that the West India trade would continue to propagate the vices of chattel slavery and decadent luxury along its triangular routes, and would thus destroy the bonds

of sociability necessary to his redemptive project. That belief emerges with particular clarity in his analysis of a variety of anti-colonial movements.

Crèvecoeur's own West Indian narrative displays his grasp of the darker implications of Raynal's New World geography. He was, it seems, a more careful reader of the *History* than his Anglo-American contemporaries. In pre-Revolutionary America Raynal was normally read as prophesying the birth of a New World republican power (Moras). The thirteen North American colonies, in such a reading, would inspire a series of Old World revolutions against feudalism and tyranny. To read Raynal as expecting global redemption to result from American independence, however, readers would have had to elide the staggering pessimism of his conclusions. In the lengthy recapitulation at the close of Volume VI, Raynal attempted to determine, "The influence which the intercourse established with the New World has had upon the opinions, government, industry, arts, manners and happiness of the Old" (6: 215). Balancing advances in knowledge and political culture against the atrocities of conquest and slavery Raynal's ultimate judgment on the age of discovery is unflinching:

Let us stop here, and consider ourselves as existing at the time when America and India were unknown. Let me suppose that I address myself to the most cruel of the Europeans in the following terms: There exist regions which will furnish thee with rich metals, agreeable clothing, and delicious food; but read this history, and behold at what price the discovery is promised to thee. Dost thou wish or not that it should be made? Is it to be imagined that there exists a being infernal enough to answer this question in the affirmative? (6: 491)

Looking back on three centuries of European settlement of and commerce with the New World and Asia, Raynal judges them a colossal mistake, not a necessary prelude to North American republicanism.¹⁵

The despair of the *History*'s conclusions is intimately linked to its Caribbean-centric worldview. The fate of enlightened republicanism turned on the empirical question of whether events in North America or the West Indies would have greater effect on world history. Raynal felt he could answer that question with relative certainty. A dark corollary to his belief that ideas and sentiments (whether virtuous or decadent) circulated along the same international routes as commodities, was that the magnitude of a region's influence on world history depended on the volume of its trade. Like Eric Williams and C.L.R. James after him, Raynal viewed the colonial Caribbean as the prime mover of world commerce, "primary cause of the rapid motion which now agitates the universe." An American War of Independence would be of limited global impact, given the poverty of British North America in relation to the Caribbean, and the relative paucity of its commerce with Europe. In 1773, as Williams reminds us, imports to Britain from Jamaica alone were nearly five times as valuable as imports from the mainland colonies combined.

Concluding his analysis of the British Caribbean, Raynal notes the detrimental effect on the British Empire of, "the revolution which hath detached North America" (5: 112). His interest immediately turns to the impact that revolution might have on the West Indies: ". . . Is the possession of the islands, which are become very wealthy, and have been placed by nature in the vicinity of that great continent, which is still in a state of poverty, better secured to the nations that have cultivated them? It is in the position, in the interests, in the spirit of the new republics that we must endeavour to explore the

¹⁵ Explicit discussions of the American Revolution are, of course, to be found solely in post-Revolutionary editions of the *History*. It should be noted, however, that the threat of colonial rebellion also stalks the earliest edition. Internal evidence from the 1782 *Letters*, moreover, suggests that Crèvecoeur continued to consult later editions of the *History*.

secret of our future destiny” (5: 112). Raynal’s entire analysis of North American society is framed as an extension of his attempt to determine whether conditions in the island colonies might foster revolutionary movements that would be truly shattering to the European world-system.

Raynal’s answer to that question was deeply informed by his location in metropolitan France. While he claims to offer a synthesis of planter attitudes in the Spanish, French and British islands, his account of a growing West Indian unrest reflects the particular situation of French Caribbean colonists. Since the 1720s, sugar cultivation in Saint Domingue had enjoyed such explosive growth that the island had quickly become the most productive colony in the Caribbean.¹⁶ At the start of the American Revolution it produced more sugar than all the British islands combined. Due to their importance to a rising French maritime bourgeoisie, the Caribbean colonies, "constituted a major cornerstone of France's pre-Revolutionary political economy" (Fick 52). With their newfound prosperity, French West Indian planters and merchants had grown to resent mercantile restrictions—whether in the form of the French *exclusif* or the British Navigation Acts— against trading with their imperial rivals and their colonies. It was solely due to those restrictions that French Caribbean colonists still struggled to compete with planters in Jamaica and Barbados, despite producing cheaper and higher quality sugar.

Attentive to the interests of an important sector of the metropolitan economy, Raynal predicted that easing mercantile restrictions, and allowing the colonists a limited form of political autonomy, might address their grievances. The prospect of West Indian rebellion marks the sensational climax of this anti-mercantile argument. Warning of the eventual loss of Caribbean revenues, Raynal offers a paradoxical logic whereby allowing

¹⁶ The following historical sketch is derived from: Carolyn E. Fick, "The French Revolution in Saint Domingue: A Triumph or a Failure?," in *A Turbulent Time*, 52-61; and O'Shaugnessy, 58-62.

colonial trade to transgress national boundaries will strengthen the bonds between the center and periphery of each European empire. In a more prosperous and cosmopolitan future, such bonds would be based on mutual gratitude rather than edict and force. Generalizing from the plight of French Caribbean colonists, Raynal argued that the national attachments of *all* West Indian settlers had been weakened by resentments over imperial trade policies. This was, however, far from the case in the British West Indies, where planters were in full support of mercantile restrictions that protected them from fierce French competition. British Caribbean colonists lobbied intensely for the tightened restrictions in the 1764 Sugar Acts, which moved to limit the clandestine trade between British North America and the French West Indies through stiffer inspections and higher duties

The French Caribbean bias of Raynal's cosmopolitan vision was one source of his popularity in the mainland British colonies. Elite North Americans largely shared the Abbé's opposition to British mercantile policy regarding Caribbean trade. Like Raynal, they kept a keen eye on the lucrative arena of the French West Indies, and were increasingly frustrated by the influence of the British planters. Indeed, those frustrations were an important factor in the rise of revolutionary sentiments. Crèvecoeur composed his bitter portrait of Jamaican colonists in the midst of the continued after-shocks from the 1764 Sugar Acts, and their reinforcement in the Townshend Revenue Act of 1767 (O'Shaughnessy 62-9). Throughout the 1770s, the link between the Sugar Acts and the movement toward rebellion was relatively clear. Looking back on the Sugar Act protests, John Adams would later declare, "I know not why we should blush to confess molasses an essential ingredient in American independence, many great events have proceeded from smaller causes" (qtd. in O'Shaughnessy 66). In *Capitalism and Slavery*, Eric Williams offered an even stronger assessment. The Sugar Acts, he argues, were a "greater blow to rising colonial consciousness than the Stamp Act . . . The attempt to render the Act

effective and stamp out smuggling led directly to the American Revolution" (Williams 120).

A more nuanced interpreter of the *History* than his contemporaries, Crèvecoeur perceived that Raynal's anti-mercantilism in no way sanctioned colonial revolt. For if Raynal's cosmopolitan viewpoint was opposed to mercantile restrictions, it was even more hostile to the amoral and insatiable desire for profit that lay at the root of his imagined West Indian rebellion. Crèvecoeur transposed aspects of this portrait of profligate Caribbean colonists to his depiction of the social transformations that would lead to the American Revolution. In 1773, mere months before militias would begin drilling throughout the northern colonies, his "Sketches of Jamaica" linked the incipient breakdown of moral and social order in colonial New York to the penetration of a maritime market that stretched to Jamaica. Extending that insight, the 1782 *Letters* would adopt a highly ambivalent stance toward the Revolution itself.

In order to grasp the full influence of Raynal's Caribbean on the North America of *Letters*, we must first attend to the most sensational aspect of Raynal's West Indian revolt. When, amidst the predictions of volume five, Raynal asks "If a revolution should take place in [the islands], by what means will it be brought about, and what people will reap the advantage of it" (5: 109), his question resonates with some especially haunting passages from the beginning of his Caribbean analysis in volume four. In perhaps the best-known passage from the *History*, Raynal prophesied that Caribbean revolution would erupt not in white settler rebellion, but in a slave-led insurrection:

If then, ye nations of Europe, interest alone can exert its influence over you, listen to me once more, Your slaves stand in no need either of your generosity or your counsels, in order to break the sacrilegious yoke of their oppression. Nature speaks a more powerful language than philosophy or interest. Already have two colonies of fugitive Negroes been established, to whom treaties and power give a perfect security from your attempts.

These are so many indications of the impending storm, and the Negroes only want a chief, sufficiently courageous, to lead them on to vengeance and slaughter.

Likely composed by Jean de Péchmèja, who Robin Blackburn identifies as “an early utopian socialist of colonial extraction,” such passages made the *History*, “one of the most remarkable, radical, and widely disseminated attacks on slavery to be published in the pre-Revolutionary epoch” (*Overthrow of Colonial Slavery* 52-3). These are the words that provided crucial inspiration to Toussaint L’Ouverture:

They will rush on with more impetuosity than torrents; they will leave behind them, in all parts, indelible traces of their just resentment.

Spaniards, Portuguese, English, French, Dutch, all their tyrants will become the victims of fire and sword. The plains of America will suck up with transport the blood which they have so long expected, and the bones of so many wretches, heaped upon one another, during the course of so many centuries, will bound for joy. The Old World will join its plaudits to those of the New. In all parts the name of the hero, who shall have restored the rights of the human species, will be blest . . .” (4: 128-9)

Raynal’s vision of slave revolution points to the limits of his vision of cosmopolitan fellowship in a future era of international free trade. Even if national restrictions on West Indian enterprise were eliminated, Raynal recognized, there was no guarantee that the abuses of slavery would be lessened. Indeed, by creating unprecedented opportunities for the pursuit of profit, such a system might intensify the brutalities of the middle passage and the sugar plantation, thus sparking a far more explosive form of Caribbean discontent. Fearing that Euro-American elites, corrupted by the decadence of the West India trade, could not redeem the age of empire from its violent excess, Raynal here espouses a form of radical anti-slavery well beyond the norms of cosmopolitanism, with its belief in the

saving function of elite humanism.¹⁷ Incorporating the politics of Pechmeja, Raynal attributes the virtues of cosmopolitanism to the future rebels. Black revolutionaries would become the true defenders of the universal rights articulated by the Enlightenment. Their broad-scale movement would transgress the boundaries of nation and language between the Caribbean colonies of the various empires.

Raynal's reference to "two colonies of fugitive negroes" establishes Jamaica as a crucial center of the "impending storm." Those fugitives were the Treaty Maroons of Jamaica, an island that, according to Blackburn "was notable for the frequency of revolts and the stubbornness of maroon resistance" (*Overthrow of Colonial Slavery* 55). Throughout the early eighteenth century, the Treaty Maroons waged continual war on British plantations, until a series of settlements in the late 1730s officially recognized their sovereignty (Mullin 45-61). Raynal's description of Jamaica devoted four pages to the Treaty Maroons, in which he declared the righteousness of their long and bloody struggle against the colonial order. His account of Jamaica also stressed its vulnerability to a large slave insurrection, one that might inspire rebellious slaves on neighboring islands. In 1760, he recalled, Tacky's Revolt had threatened to topple the colonial regime. Despite the ultimate failure of that rebellion, Raynal felt certain that a future uprising would fulfill Tacky's ambitions. He speculated that a French invasion of the island from without, coordinated with a massive slave revolt from within, could wrest Jamaica from British control. France's treachery, however, would ultimately lead to its own demise. News of a Jamaican revolt would spark a similar insurrection on Saint Domingue.¹⁸

¹⁷ Raynal's advocacy, elsewhere in the *History*, for gradual emancipation of slaves over 25 years, with training and education, is more consistent with the cosmopolitan viewpoint of most anti-slavery *philosophes*. See Blackburn, 170. Blackburn writes that, "Pechmeja's extreme anti-slavery passages were retained as a warning of what might happen if a more moderate reform were not adopted" (170).

¹⁸ Linebaugh and Rediker share Raynal's sense of the importance of the revolt. News of Tacky's, they argue, spread by the multi-racial networks of sailors that crisscrossed the Atlantic and Caribbean, instigated a cycle of slave rebellions during the 1760s and 70s: "In the cycle of the American Revolution, Tacky struck the tocsin of freedom's uprising, and

Crèvecoeur's portrayal of Jamaican slavery is generally far removed from the more apocalyptic moments in the *History*. His depiction of slave-holder violence is limited to a curiously detached account of the daily whippings administered by his British-born landlady, while his depiction of slave resistance is limited to a comment, prior to his departure, on "the perpetual struggle subsisting between the 2 great factions which Inhabit this island" (107). As noted above, however, Crèvecoeur devotes one sentence to the Treaty Maroons, in a paragraph filled with revulsion for white settler society. Its reference to republicanism suggests that, like Raynal, Crèvecoeur was capable of a radical, if momentary identification with the political aims of *marronage*. Whatever his specific attitude toward the maroons, and the prospect of a broad insurrection, however, there is considerable evidence that Raynal's prophecy exerted a strong impact on Crèvecoeur. To register that impact we must ultimately look beyond Jamaica to *Letters*, where New World slavery and slave resistance play a pivotal role in the text's broader meditation on the fate of enlightened cosmopolitanism in an age of accelerated maritime commerce.

"Extended Ramifications": The 1782 *Letters*

In his dedication of *Letters* to Raynal, Crèvecoeur describes the transforming experience of reading the *History* on his New York farm:

For the first time in my life I reflected on the relative state of nations; I traced the extended ramifications of a commerce which ought to unite, but now convulses the world. I admired that universal benevolence, that diffusive goodwill, which is not confined to the narrow limits of your own country, but, on the contrary, extends to the whole human race. As an eloquent and powerful advocate, you have pleaded the cause of humanity, in espousing that of the poor Africans (*Letters* 7).

the Philadelphia Convention sounded the knell of its death, though the murmuring undertones would continue, in diminuendo, and in San Domingue" (236).

The dedication insists that the depiction of North American society in *Letters* must be understood in the context of a broader comparative framework, one that, like the *History* itself, and Crèvecoeur's own writings of the early 1770s, encompasses the territories of and relations between a variety of nations and their New World colonies. The "convulsions" with which the text will concern itself—including the growth of the plantation economy of the Carolinas in Letter IX, and the outbreak of the American Revolution in Letter XII—are to be interpreted in relation to the development of maritime trade. By adopting that commercial worldview, the author-narrator of *Letters* attempts to emulate a form of cosmopolitanism exemplified by Raynal. With his "diffusive goodwill," Crèvecoeur's Raynal bears a striking resemblance to Robert Ferguson's enlightened cosmopolitan. "The true *philosophe*," Ferguson writes, "thinks in terms of a universal language, identifying less with nations than with the republic of letters . . . as Enlightenment thinkers, they believe in the global sphere of connections and the promise of republicanism throughout the world" (34). From nearly the first words of *Letters*, Crèvecoeur announces that his primary interest in a form of elite transnational fellowship subsumes his mediations on American identity. A passionate anti-slavery stance, he further declares, is integral to the particular cosmopolitanism he encountered in Raynal's treatise.

Such a reading begs the question of why cosmopolitanism plays such a seemingly limited role in the subsequent narrative, with its exclusively North American setting, and its primary reliance on a narrator (Farmer James) with limited experience of the world beyond the mainland. Near the end of the dedication, the author-narrator provides an oblique answer. "There is, no doubt," he writes, "a secret communion among good men throughout the world; a mental affinity, connecting them by a similitude of sentiments. Then, why, though an American, should not I be permitted to share in that extensive intellectual consanguinity" (7-8). Crèvecoeur fails to specify the forces that prohibit alliances between residents of late-colonial America and the members of a wider

intellectual community. Fresh from his experiences with anti-Loyalist violence in rural New York, and the suspicion of British colonial officials in New York City, however, Crèvecoeur was well aware that since the advent of the Anglo-American conflict, his identity as an Atlantic cosmopolitan had become increasingly difficult to maintain.

Crèvecoeur's complaint points to the new limitations on mobility and allegiance in a "rapidly nationalizing" Atlantic (Rice 108). Negotiating that new reality, the narrative of *Letters* appears to limit itself to the subject of mainland identity.¹⁹ Yet Crèvecoeur produces the core of that text by reworking a series of sketches rooted in a cosmopolitan outlook that situated North America within a range of overlapping comparative frameworks. The alternative geographical perspectives of the earlier travel sketches, encompassing Lisbon, Lima and the British Caribbean, haunt the 1782 narrative. In the complex palimpsest that is *Letters*, the broader concerns of the original body of work are never wholly effaced by the mainland narrative that is written over them. They enjoy a textual after-life, disrupting the narrative with their insistent yet spectral presence. By bringing *Letters* into conjunction with the *History*, the dedication helps to raise those residual cosmopolitan perspectives, and the interpretive possibilities that adhere to them, to the very surface of Crèvecoeur's later text. The perspective carried over from "Sketches of Jamaica" is of particular importance. For Crèvecoeur draws on his sketch of the West India trade both for the basic narrative structure of *Letters*, and for a dystopic account of Atlantic society that was centered in the Caribbean.

That alternative geography surfaces with particular clarity in Letters IV through XIII on Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard, the first of the revised travel sketches that we encounter in the 1782 narrative. Though comprising the central five sections of *Letters* the depiction of those islands is marginalized by most critics. For Nathaniel Philbrick, however, the island letters provide a crucial if subtle transition from the utopianism of

¹⁹ See the textual history in footnote 6 above.

“What is an American?” to the despair of “Description of Charles-Town.” Similarly, for Holbo, those spatially central letters ponder the central thematic question of the text as a whole. They offer, “an extended meditation on the effect of commerce upon manners” (44). At first, commerce appears to have a salutary effect. Because the sterility of their soil obliges the islanders to “seek abroad for the means of subsistence,” the development of a decadent, landed elite is forestalled. Later, however, James worries about the use of opium among the islanders, and warns that, “could the manners of luxuriant countries be imported here, like an epidemical disease they would destroy everything” (87). Read in the context of “Sketches of Jamaica,” and the plight of its narrator, such contamination is all but inevitable in an island that maintains such extensive overseas connections.

The West Indian voyages of the New England islanders have an especially powerful impact on their overall behavior. James writes, “They employ also several vessels in transporting lumber to the West-Indian Islands, from whence they procure in return the various productions of the country, which they afterwards exchange wherever they can hear of an advantageous market” (112). Tellingly, it is in this West Indian allusion that the association between seafaring and market values is made most explicit.

This is by no means the only appearance the Caribbean makes in the Massachusetts *Letters*. Letter VIII, “Peculiar Customs at Nantucket,” concludes with a description of the home of a Nantucket family built at the extreme eastern point of the island. The home is representative of the industry, moderation, and sociability James purports to find in Nantucket society. Crèvecoeur’s description, however, also stresses the unpredictability and invasiveness of the ocean that surrounds the home. While the dedication to Raynal referred to a commercial network that “ought to unite, but now convulses the world,” Farmer James describes an Atlantic that “seems to be the destroy of this poor planet, yet, at particular times, accumulates the scattered fragments, and produces continents and islands fit for men to dwell on” (7, 48). The Atlantic convulsions both men observe have their ultimate source in the Caribbean. For the imagery of the

Nantucket passage is derived from a similar moment in “Sketches of Jamaica,” in which, just before leaving Bermuda, Crèvecoeur's young narrator witnesses a Caribbean hurricane. As does James in Nantucket, the youth describes the local custom of gathering plunder from shipwrecked vessels, and stresses the visual contrast between small, isolated societies and “the great Circumjacent ocean.” “How diminutive,” James declares, “does a man appear to himself when filled with these thoughts, and standing, as I did on the verge of the ocean.” The young narrator in Bermuda similarly exclaims “How diminutive did this little spot appear when I compared it to the Vast Extent of the watery mass whose percussion seems to shake the very Foundation of the Island” (109).

Holbo argues that the sublime imagery of the Nantucket passage literalizes Crèvecoeur's troubled realization that, “if societies are no longer concretely defined by their land, people, and history, but are extended around the globe by commercial and intellectual relations, then no society can ultimately be defined” (45). Crèvecoeur first arrived at that realization, and that literary technique, in his essay on the West India trade. In “Sketches of Jamaica,” the hurricane passage blurs distinctions between Jamaica, Bermuda and the mainland. After the storm, the simple virtue of Bermudan society, based, as that of Nantucket would later be, on the poverty of its soil, no longer seems stable. Nor is the contrast with decadent, soil-rich Jamaica sustainable. His Bermuda idyll shattered, the narrator flees, “for a securer habitation, on a large Continent,” but that distinction also breaks down. Back in New York, the young man exclaims, “But where was I? If not in ye Midst of the Great Storm at Bermudas, I found myself full as Exposed” (110). Like its companion text in “Sketches of Jamaica,” the ocean passage in *Letters* also blurs the distinction between an island and mainland society, this time between the New England fisheries and slaving Charleston. The transition from Nantucket to Charleston in *Letters* provides a mirror image of the transition from the Caribbean to rural New York in “Sketches of Jamaica.”

It is in Crèvecoeur's depiction of Charleston and the surrounding lowcountry, another of the pre-1774 writings revised for inclusion in his later work, that the alternative geographies of the early travel sketches attain their greatest prominence within *Letters*. The first sentence of Letter IX establishes a hemispheric frame uncharacteristic for the narrative voice of the first sections. Echoing similar statements from "Sketch of a Contrast Between the English and Spanish Colonies," James declares that, "Charleston is in the north what Lima is in the south; both are capitals of the richest provinces of their respective hemispheres" (151). A few pages later, James again surprises by situating southern slavery in a global frame worthy of his author's mentor. Speaking of Carolina traders, James declares: "With gold dug from Peruvian mountains, they order vessels to the coasts of Guinea; by virtue of that gold, wars, murders, and devastations, are committed in some harmless, peaceable, African neighbourhood" (153). As the passage indicates, the Atlantic and hemispheric perspectives of Letter IX derive from its imperative to portray the violence and exploitation of slavery in its full dimensions. That imperative also explains the specific presence of the Caribbean within the letter. While Crèvecoeur's Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard are in part written over his earlier representation of the Bermudas, the Charleston of 1782 is written over the Jamaica of 1773. Both texts stress the litigiousness, physical debility, moral decadence, and brutal slave regime common to the societies they chronicle.²⁰

Nor is the West Indian connection merely implicit. In a long passage near the opening of Letter IX Crèvecoeur begins to write of Charleston high society:

²⁰ In a fascinating reading of Letter IX, Jennifer Rae Greeson makes a similar argument: "The very fact that the 'extended Caribbean' region had been at the center of European representation of the American *colonies* meant that portrayal of the Southern U.S. was inflected by centuries of ideological associations dictated by European imperialism." Jennifer Rae Greeson, "The Figure of the South and the Nationalizing Imperatives of Early United States Literature," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 12 (1999): 221.

The inhabitants are the gayest in America; it is called the center of our beau monde, and is always filled with the richest planters in the province, who resort hither in quest of health and pleasure. Here is always to be seen a great number of valetudinarians from the West-Indies, seeking for the renovation of health, exhausted by the debilitating nature of their sun, air, and modes of living. Many of these West-Indians have I seen, at thirty, loaded with the infirmities of old age; for, nothing is more common, in those countries of wealth, than for persons to lose the abilities of enjoying the comforts of life at a time when we northern men just begin to taste the fruits of our labour and prudence. The round of pleasure, and the expences of those citizens tables, are much superior to what you would imagine: indeed the growth of this town and province have been astonishingly rapid. (151-2)

The passage contains a series of unmarked transitions between discussions of residents of the West Indies and Carolinas. While the first sentence speaks of Charleston planters who visit the city to restore their health, the second speaks of valetudinarians from the West Indies who come to Charleston for the same purpose, as if to include them among the “richest planters of the province.” Similarly, when the end of that sentence distinguishes between the poor health of West Indians, and that of northern men, it leaves open the question of whether residents of Charleston are numbered among northern men, or among West Indians “loaded with infirmities.” The syntax remains ambiguous throughout the passage. When at the beginning of the final sentence Crèvecoeur refers to “those citizens tables” the likely referents for the preposition are the visiting West Indian gentlemen. The end of the same sentence, however, concerns the growth of “this town,” meaning Charleston. It is highly uncertain whether at any moment in the passage James is speaking of Charleston or a Caribbean seaport. In Crèvecoeur's palimpsestic text such a distinction is largely without a difference.

Farmer James' only direct reference to Caribbean slavery holds similar implications. While deploring the inhumane treatment of lowcountry slaves, James pauses to rehearse a familiar defense of their southern masters: "It is said, I know, that [slaves] are much happier here than in the West-Indies; because, land being cheaper upon this continent than in those islands, the fields, allowed them to raise their subsistence from, are in general more extensive." While he here offers a tentative distinction, based on the availability of fertile land, between the slave regimes of two New World locales, the next sentence disrupts his comparison. "The only possible chance of any alleviation," James declares, "depends on the humour of the planters, who, bred in the midst of slaves, learn, from the example of their parents, to despise them; and seldom conceive, either from repetition or philosophy, any ideas that tend to make their fate less calamitous" (156). By failing to note whether it here refers to planters in the West Indies or Carolinas, the text again leaves its reader in a telling state of confusion.

References such as these implicitly map South Carolina as the periphery of an extended Caribbean, and thus as a region thoroughly implicated in the commercial revolution, radiating out along the networks of Atlantic slavery, that grounded Raynal's global analysis. Recovering that broader perspective illuminates the dramatic impact of Letter IX on the overall narrative. Caribbean slavery, however, exerts its most profound influence on Letter IX not in any direct reference, but through a largely unremarked aspect of James' infamous encounter with a tortured slave near Charleston. From a cage suspended in the branches of a tree, a man, left to starve to death by his master, begs James for a fatal dose of poison. Birds of prey have plucked out his eyes, and picked the flesh from his cheeks and arms. The incident has long been acknowledged as a decisive turning point within *Letters*, the moment when the relatively coherent narrative voice of the early sections suffers an irrevocable collapse.²¹ By James' own admission, the

²¹ For some examples of critics who locate the turn in the ninth letter, and James' encounter with the caged slave, see Saar, 192-203; Rucker, 193-212; Grabo, 159-172; Thomas Philbrick, 82. For a related reading of *Letters* see: Stephen Carl Arch, "The

encounter provides the immediate impetus for the series of bleak global meditations that pervade his account of Charleston. Those meditations do indeed mark a shocking departure from the tone of earlier letters. "The history of the earth!" James declares at one especially sweeping moment of his invective against slave-holder violence, "doth it represent any thing but crimes of the most heinous nature, committed from one end of the world to the other?" (159). James' belief in republicanism is but one casualty of this new worldview: "Republics, kingdoms, monarchies, founded either on fraud or successful violence, increase by pursuing the steps of the same policy, until they are destroyed, in their turn, either by the influence of their own crimes or by more successful but equally criminal enemies" (162).

Such declarations amount to a grotesque parody of the cosmopolitan viewpoint. Filled with the international and transhistorical knowledge that characterized the texts of the *philosophes*, they remain void of nearly all belief in the redemptive possibility of humanist sympathy. Cosmopolitan optimism is profoundly threatened in *Letters* at almost the precise moment that the characteristic global scale of cosmopolitan awareness fully surfaces.

This is of course the very paradox we have traced within "Sketches of Jamaica." Yet the fact that James' crisis of faith is linked to the dramatic expression of anti-slavery sentiment suggests that Letter IX is shaped by an even deeper engagement with the lessons of Raynal's West Indies than marked that earlier manuscript. Cosmopolitan optimism is initially undermined through an anti-slavery perspective that stresses the susceptibility of the Carolinas to the degenerative influence of West Indian intercourse. And while in Raynal's Caribbean analysis, the loss of cosmopolitan faith was expressed through a radical and apocalyptic vision of a hemispheric slave insurrection, the specter of slave revolt also plays a pivotal role in the final disillusionment of *Letters*. The caged

'Progressive Steps' of the Narrator in Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer*," *Studies in American Fiction* 18 (1990), 144-58.

slave episode both obscures and evokes the revolutionary agency of the enslaved as depicted in the *History*. While James' initial encounter with the slave stresses his passive status as victim, his later conversation with some planters stresses the slave's active resistance. "The reason for this slave's being thus punished," the planters inform him, "was on account of his having killed the overseer of the plantation. They told me that the laws of self-preservation rendered such executions necessary" (165). The planters' recourse to a rhetoric of "self-preservation" intimates that they viewed the slave's resistance not as a random and isolated act, but as symptomatic of the genuine threat that wider revolt posed to the plantation order.²²

Other references to slave revolt within the letter also evoke the possibility of collective black resistance. The plantation order is only partly maintained, James had earlier insisted, by a system of corporal discipline. Lowcountry slaves are, "perpetually awed by the terrible cracks of whips, or by the fear of capital punishments, while even those punishments often fail of their purpose" (158). More pointedly, after documenting a variety of forms of exploitation, James wonders, "Is there any thing in this treatment but what must kindle all the passions, sow the seeds of inveterate resentment, and nourish a wish of perpetual revenge? They are left to the irresistible effects of those strong and natural propensities" (157). In James' view, the growth of insurrectionary sentiments within the entire slave population is all but inevitable. I am suggesting neither that Crèvecoeur invokes the threat of broad-scale slave revolt with anything like the directness and intensity of Raynal, nor that he shared the radical politics of a Juan de Péchmèja. Rather, I am arguing that one way to understand the highly disruptive effect of the caged slave episode, and the notorious narrative discontinuity of *Letters* in general, is to recall the dramatic and fiery rhetoric of Raynal's revelation. In order to account fully

²² According to Linebaugh and Rediker the 1770s saw a particularly intense cycle of revolts in the Caribbean. In 1775 mainland insurrections were plotted in New York, Maryland, Virginia and Charleston, South Carolina (224).

for the radical perspectival shift within Letter IX we might attend both to the hemispheric dimensions of plantation slavery in the letter itself, and the potentially world-historical significance of West Indian insurrection within the *History*. Crèvecoeur's dystopic vision of Charleston and the lowlands is haunted both by his own earlier account of Jamaican corruption, and by the sensational prophecy at the heart of Raynal's Caribbean.

Though the residual West Indian narrative within *Letters* reaches its climax in Charleston, the crisis of cosmopolitan faith with which it is closely associated continues to play a prominent role in the remainder of the narrative. As in "Sketches of Jamaica," a disillusioned narrator returns from a decadent plantation society to view a northern colony through altered eyes. Upon his return to Pennsylvania in Letter X, James offers a depiction of its natural environment, as a volatile and predatory space, largely at odds with the celebratory early letters. The section ends with a dramatic account of a battle between a white water snake and its black challenger. Greeson suggestively argues that the battle contains a subtle echo of Raynal's Caribbean revolt (219, n. 26).

It also recalls Mark Catesby's representations of the Bahamas and South Carolina, and images such as "Brown Viper and Arum" in particular. Crèvecoeur's depiction of the battle may well have been inspired by the efforts of New World natural historians, and by natural historical tropes traced to their Caribbean origin in the preceding chapter. Crèvecoeur's familiarity with natural historical discourse becomes a theme in Letter XI, which, on its surface, appears to counter the sweeping pessimism of the previous two sections. A Russian visitor to John Bartram's home and garden praises his host's participation in an extensive natural historical network that spans the Atlantic [see the opening of Chapter 3 below]. The knowledge gleaned from Bartram's cosmopolitan activities is presented as invaluable to the developing colony. By introducing an entirely new narrator, however, Crèvecoeur distances a now worldly James from such humanist dreams.

In the most dramatic reversal of his earlier idyll, James' vision of universal violence and exploitation in Letter IX finds its rhetorical echo in the anti-Revolutionary sentiments of Letter XII. James interprets the outbreak of hostilities within the thoroughly dystopic account of world history and human nature first advanced in his portrait of New World slavery. "Why has the Master of the world," he asks in a representative passage, "permitted so much indiscriminate evil throughout every part of this poor planet, at all times, and among all kinds of people?" (197). Within the text of Letter XII itself, Crèvecoeur remains relatively silent as to how he interpreted the origins of the American Revolution, and why he might have applied the rhetoric of his critique of plantation slavery to his lament on the violence of the Anglo-American conflict. The dedication to Raynal, however, reveals that Crèvecoeur viewed both phenomena as products of the development of Atlantic mercantilism, as it cues the reader to understand events in the British North American colonies within the framework of the *History*. It is extensive commerce, the author-narrator insists, that "now convulses the world." For the Raynal of the *History*, and the Crèvecoeur of "Sketches of Jamaica," the volatile and corrupting effect of Atlantic commerce could always be traced to its ultimate origin in West Indian sugar and slavery. Recognizing "Sketches of Jamaica" as an important shadow text within *Letters*, and recalling Adams' comments on the link between sugar and independence, we might speculate that Crèvecoeur's earlier lament over the degenerative influence of Caribbean trade (and the wider maritime system it made possible) plays a role in his later refusal to endorse the American Revolution as advent of universal republicanism. Whatever the specific source of Crèvecoeur's anti-Revolutionary position in 1782, however, it remains clear that with the outbreak of war James desperately seeks a society beyond the reach of the entire Atlantic commercial network. The narrator hopes to flee North American hostilities not, as his author did, through a return to Europe, but by moving his family inland to join an unnamed indigenous tribe. Disillusioned by his experiences in a range of port cities, James turns his back on the Atlantic world that

formed the natural habitat of enlightened cosmopolitans including his author and his author's mentor.

Coda: The 1784 *Lettres*

Or so we might reasonably conclude had the career of Crèvecoeur's best-known work ended in 1782. In 1783, however, Crèvecoeur quickly compiled the two volumes of *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain* while preparing to depart from Paris for his new post as trade consul to New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. According to Rice, the 1784 *Lettres*, "reinvented Crèvecoeur as the French champion of American democratic idealism" (Rice 112). In nearly all instances, Crèvecoeur revised material from the English edition so as to qualify its anti-Revolutionary and pessimistic aspects, and augment its idyllic qualities. Among the new writings that filled out his volumes were included the portraits of Franklin and Marquis de Lafayette that Thomas Philbrick calls "sops to the French enthusiasm for the celebrities of the American Revolution" (Philbrick 140). Concessions to contemporary French taste made *Lettres* an immediate and rousing success.

It is odd, then, that Crèvecoeur would include "Voyage à la Jamaïque," a much revised version of the most critical of his early travel sketches, in the French editions of *Lettres*. The inclusion of a version of "Sketches of Jamaica," however, was essential to its author's simultaneous attempt to reinvent himself as the champion of cosmopolitan idealism. The very encyclopedic form of *Lettres* marks a kind of tribute to the project of the *philosophes*, as its two dense and varied volumes strive to fulfill some of the cultural geographic ambitions of the early 1770s. In the more comprehensive 1784 text, the face of America extends south beyond the mainland, into the sugar islands.

The major revisions of the earlier sketch all serve to soften the critique of West Indian trade as morally corrupt and corrupting, and to underscore the possibility that its dangers might be off-set by the civic virtue of a scattered yet enlightened elite. In the most

significant revision, Crèvecoeur reflects on the slaves who often manned and piloted Bermuda's extensive merchant fleets:

The majority of these vessels are commanded by Negroes; a race of men completely regenerated, no less by their long stay on this island, than by the education they receive from their Masters. They assist in the construction, and sail afterwards to the other islands, where they are preferred over all others for coastal trade and smuggling. Their skill as Mariners and Carpenters, their fidelity as supercargoes, the punctuality with which they carry out the business of their Masters, and bring back their vessels, is a truly edifying spectacle. I have seen several of these black Skippers at the tables of the rich planters of Jamaica, treated with all the respect their intelligence and faithfulness deserve.²³

The new passage is addressed to the very root of Raynal's anxieties regarding the fate of cosmopolitanism. His vision of a general insurrection had expressed his fear that the form of free trade he advocated might simply expand an inherently violent and exploitative slave system. In "Voyage à la Jamaïque," Crèvecoeur accommodates the development of international capitalism to a far more conservative form of anti-slavery than prevails in either Letter IX or the *History*. Through their central role in a transcolonial contraband trade—an illicit precursor to a system of free trade—the black pilots of Bermuda gain their gradual emancipation. In Crèvecoeur's view, their travels provide them broad training and education, and allow them to achieve a social status (as evidenced by their presence at the tables of prosperous planters) unimaginable in his earlier depiction of Jamaica. The pilots are presented as an elite class of black cosmopolitans, whose prospects for social mobility, economic prosperity, and cultural refinement increase as the maritime enterprises of their colonial masters expand.

²³ Crèvecoeur, *Lettres*, 236 (translation mine).

Of course few passages in Crèvecoeur's writings may be taken at face value. Just as the form and content of *Letters* reflects its author attempt to negotiate the volatile context of Anglo-American hostilities, *Lettres* is shaped by his efforts to negotiate the varied demands of his French audience.²⁴ It is intriguing to note that by the time "Voyage à la Jamaïque," appeared in print, trade between North America and Jamaica had ceased due to a British embargo. Rather than depicting an American reality, the revised essay may address French attitudes toward their own Caribbean colonies. During the compilation of *Lettres*, French politics was marked by contentious debates over the sugar islands. A 1784 decision to relax the *exclusif* bitterly divided metropolitan merchants and colonial proprietors. The same year brought a reform of the Code Noir, over planter protests, to confer more rights to free coloreds in the colonies.²⁵ To grasp the full implications of Crèvecoeur's renewed cosmopolitan optimism in "Voyage à la Jamaïque," would require detailed understanding of French debates over slavery and colonial involvement, and of how works such as *Lettres* circulated in France and the French Caribbean.

Such questions are beyond the scope of this chapter, and I raise them here merely to stress the fact that recovering the Caribbean dimensions of Crèvecoeur's art and thought raises at least as many new critical problems as it illuminates familiar ones. Full understanding of "the man and his masks" demands a supple awareness of shifting and overlapping attitudes toward Caribbean colonies and colonists in England, France and North America, of the variable winds of literary fashion within each of these locales, and of the intra- and inter-imperial trade disputes that often lay beneath specific attitudes and tastes. Works such as "Sketches of Jamaica" should continue to pose exemplary problems

²⁴ Rice notes that Crèvecoeur found it difficult to obtain a license to publish *Lettres* because its exaltation of American political and religious liberty was too incendiary for pre-Revolutionary France (112).

²⁵ Blackburn, 164-166; David Patrick Geggus, "Slavery, War, and Revolution in the Greater Caribbean, 1789-1815," *A Turbulent Time*, 2.

for eighteenth-century American studies as it moves toward a multi-lingual and transnational understanding of the colonial Americas.

The following chapter on William Bartram's depictions of colonial Florida will explore yet another transnational perspective on the colonial world of the greater Caribbean. While the rise of Haitian fortunes in the late eighteenth century informed the writings of Raynal and Crèvecoeur, the explosive growth of the Cuban economy, and the attendant revival of the Spanish American Empire, would animate Bartram's account of Florida's semi-tropical environment. Analysis of Bartram's writings and images will also help to foreground an important shift in the terms of the relationship between North America and the greater Caribbean. As something like a coherent nation continued to emerge in the post-Revolutionary mainland, that new nation's designs on the Caribbean increasingly shifted from trade to territorial expansion. Fears of the full range of West Indian contaminants alluded to in Crèvecoeur's writings would only increase as, approaching the turn of the nineteenth century, the new nation grappled with the question of expansion into the circum-Caribbean territories along the North American coast of the Gulf of Mexico. As the works of Bartram and Audubon make evident, possession of Florida and Louisiana gave rise both to visions of Empire, and to a troubling confrontation with the legacies of Spanish and French colonialism in those regions.

Chapter Three:

Bartram's *Travels* and the Place of Florida in the Eighteenth Century Americas

... When we survey the harbours, *Charlotte, Tampe, St. Joseph, Pensacola*, all proper for the admission of ships of rank, besides others we know not yet; what a field is open here! What a prospect of power and grandeur seems to be already welcoming us! No country had ever such inexhaustible resources; no empire had ever half so many advantages combining in its behalf: methinks I see already the *American* fleets inhabiting the ocean, like cities in vicinity!

--Bernard Romans, *A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida* (1775)

Sun and rain and bush had made the site look old, like the site of a dead civilization. The ruins, spreading over so many acres, seemed to speak of a final catastrophe. But the civilization wasn't dead. It was the civilization I existed in and in fact was still working towards. And that could make for an odd feeling: to be among the ruins was to have your time-sense unsettled. You felt like a ghost, not from the past, but from the future. You felt that your life and ambition had already been lived out for you and you were looking at the relics of that life. You were in a place where the future had come and gone.

--V.S. Naipaul, *A Bend in the River*

Access to the West Indies is indispensably necessary to us.

--Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, June 17, 1785

In Letter XI of *Letters from an American Farmer*, Crèvecoeur's narrator, a Russian gentleman named Iw—n Al—z, pays a visit to the renowned colonial botanist John Bartram at his home, farm and garden near Philadelphia. Within the over-arching narrative of *Letters*, the Bartram section provides an odd interlude. Between the text's indictment of a South Carolina society built on the systematic brutality of the slave-trade, and its poignant protest against the indiscriminate violence unleashed by the American Revolution, Letter XI returns to a tone and political and social vision close to the naïve celebrations of rural republicanism typified by "What is an American." The agrarian utopia of Letter XI, however, is distinguished from its antecedents by its embrace of transatlantic exchange and cosmopolitan connection. The Russian narrator wishes to meet Bartram because of, "the extensive correspondence which I knew he held with the most eminent Scotch and French botanists," and with the Queen of Sweden. John Bartram himself declares that, "The greatest advantage ... which I receive, from what thee callest my botanical fame, is the pleasure which it often procureth me in receiving the visits of friends and foreigners" (Crèvecoeur, *Letters* 174). Visitors to John Bartram's garden included the British natural historian Mark Catesby.

After his extended depiction of a colonial world transformed by the explosive growth of mercantilism, Crèvecoeur can no longer maintain his earlier vision of rural Pennsylvania as isolated from the Atlantic world. He can, however, attempt to render

international exchange benign, through his foregrounding of the exemplary humanist discourse of natural history. If the West Indian trade has given rise to a morally decadent plantation culture, the values of which threaten to subsume both the southern and northern colonies, then it has also enabled the international cooperation, and circulation of sympathies, which promise to redeem it. That sympathetic cooperation is exemplified by John Bartram's botanical exchange and correspondence. The cosmopolitanism of his natural historical endeavors provides a counterweight to the fears of moral corruption and colonialist involvement that haunted Crèvecoeur's portrayals of maritime exchange in Jamaica and Charleston (Holbo 48-52).

An off-hand remark of the narrator's, however, challenges this vision of John Bartram's botanical pursuits. After a tour of his garden and greenhouse in which he emphasizes the spiritual dimension of his natural historical activities John Bartram mentions "that he had been employed by the King of England to visit the two Floridas" (177). In 1764 John Bartram and his son William set out to explore East and West Florida, acquired from Spain in exchange for the return of Cuba at the close of the Seven Years War. Indeed, many of the "great variety of curious plants and shrubs" which the narrator viewed in Bartram's greenhouse were collected during that expedition. Bartram's garden, an important locus of late-colonial pride and early-nationalist sentiment, can in many ways be viewed as a testament to the North American contribution to the "discovery" and possession of Florida.

John Bartram's Florida journey suggests the extent to which his natural historical efforts were connected with both the West India trade and the volatile intrigues of Caribbean empire-formation. The very fact of Britain's possession of the Floridas was

another result of the influence of the powerful West India lobby on Parliament. England returned Cuba to Spain, and traded Martinique and Guadeloupe for the rights to French Canada because the wealthy planters of Jamaica and Barbados fiercely opposed the addition of rival and economically superior sugar colonies to the British Empire. (Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* 112-13). Metropolitan officials hoped that North American resentments, aggravated by the loss of potentially lucrative West Indian trading partners, would be appeased by the addition of East and West Florida. Those territories would provide fertile ground for the expansion of the rice and indigo empire of the Carolinas and Georgia, and convenient Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico harbors for increased commerce with the West Indies, Europe, and Central and South America. Such prospects inspired Bernard Romans' ecstatic vision, from this chapter's first epigraph, of a future Anglo-American maritime empire along the North American coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Published in 1775, around the time of the Russian narrator's visit to Bartram's garden, Roman's *A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida* sought to determine what crops, including some West Indian staples, could be most profitably raised in and exported from the Floridas, and what opportunities that strategic coastline might provide for Anglo-American shipping to and from the rest of the New World. The potential imperial benefits of Floridian possession are made even more explicit in William Storck's 1766 *Description of East-Florida*, a text that would be bound together with an edition of John Bartram's journal of his Florida expedition. Anticipating Alexander von Humboldt's vision of the strategic importance of the peninsula in controlling the West India trade, Storck reflects that: "The importance of East-Florida, in a national sense depends upon two grounds: first, its fertility in producing such articles of commerce as

will be beneficial to Great Britain; secondly, upon its convenience, from its situation and other circumstances, to carry on a beneficial commerce with the Spanish settlements in time of peace; and to intercept the trade, and cut off their communication with Europe in time of war” (Storck ii).

Deeply engaged with the mercantilist worldview of such texts, William Bartram’s 1791 natural historical classic *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida* is addressed to the post-revolutionary possibilities of Florida’s circum-Caribbean geography and culture. Recollecting his revolutionary era journey for an early national audience, at a moment when the fortunes of the plantation South increasingly turned on U.S. trade with the French and Spanish Caribbean, Bartram presents Florida’s sub-tropical environment as a potentially marvelous and superabundant resource.¹

Superabundance is, as we have seen, a concept central to British natural histories of the Caribbean by figures including Sloane and Catesby. Bartram’s argument for the potential economic benefits of Floridian possession shares important aspects of the geographic vision of those earlier texts. In Bartram’s eyes, the value of East and West Florida to the early republic owes to a climate suitable for the cultivation of West Indian commodities,

¹ As will become clear below I use the term “marvelous” here in Stephen Greenblatt’s sense of a set of rhetorical strategies and aesthetic responses that were deeply embedded in New World discovery narratives dating back to Columbus’ *Diario*, and often subserved an imperial ideology. See his *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). In Greenblatt’s eloquent phrasing, “the marvelous gestures toward the world by registering an overpowering intensity of response. Someone witnesses something amazing, but what most matters takes place not ‘out there’ or along the receptive surfaces of the body where the self encounters the world, but deep within, at the vital emotional center of the witness” (17-18). While the documenting of the marvelous was an integral feature of the act of taking possession of New World locales and peoples, it also marked a threatening limit to European power and insight. The experience of the marvelous turns on a “cracking apart of contextual

and a location that allows for access to and control of Caribbean trade routes. Such environmental and commercial connections to the sugar islands, however, also make the isthmus a highly turbulent locale. Just as *Letters from an American Farmer* remained haunted by the counter-geographic vision of Raynal's *History*, Bartram's narratives and images are persistently disrupted by the intrusion of Caribbean commodities and movements. The importance of Florida within competing visions of American empire provides one important source of the instability of the text. Bartram's *Travels* maps the isthmus both as the southern fringe of an emergent Carolina rice empire, and as northern periphery of an economic and cultural zone centered in Havana, one that posed a profound challenge to the integrity and survival of the early republic. The prominence of such aspirations and anxieties within *Travels* make it an ideal text for tracing the continuities between British imperial ambition, republican-era political economy, and the cultural work of early American natural history.

In attempting to trace those continuities, this chapter will also intervene in the heated critical debates over the political implications of Bartram's natural historical practice. On one extreme of that debate, scholars including Pamela Regis and Christopher Looby have argued that Bartram's narratives and images are driven by his desire for mastery over the land and its inhabitants. For Regis, the imperial implications of *Travels* inhere in its reliance on the principles of Linnean taxonomy. Introduced by Linneaus' 1735 *Systema Naturae*, that taxonomic method allowed botanists across the globe to identify and classify plants within a universal order through a simple counting of pistils and stamens. For Regis, the plants, animals, and indigenous peoples Bartram represents

understanding," that is simultaneously "thrilling, potentially dangerous, momentarily

are often violently wrested from their local environment and context. Through the Linnean method, they are then placed in their appropriate position within the static and universal order of the Great Chain of Being. What Bartram's Linnean practices ultimately achieve, in her view, is a radical effacement of history:

This method makes the land appear new; it strips the land of its history. Natural historical description is static and atemporal. As represented by the method, the Southeast is a place where there are no verbs. Thus Bartram's America seems to be waiting for history to happen and for individuals to live their lives there. The remains of Spanish settlements are represented by means of the same rhetoric that Bartram uses to describe the plants or the soil of a given locale. American Indians, also represented by the same rhetoric, are not individuals with a personal history, nor are they a group with a collective history (Regis 78).

At the same moment that the new republic was moving to expropriate native lands, the rhetoric of natural histories such as Bartram's effectively denied the history and agency of the indigenous peoples they claimed to chronicle. Christopher Looby adds a further political dimension to such accounts. Noting that *Travels* was drafted contemporaneously with the United States Constitution, Looby argues that both documents mark a conservative backlash against an American Revolution sanctioned by "nature and Nature's God." Bartram's taxonomies present American nature not as a place of flux and upheaval but as a timeless and eternal order, one that naturalizes the social and political order that had emerged after the turmoil of anti-colonial revolt. Like the Constitution

immobilizing, charged at once with desire, ignorance and fear" (20).

itself, *Travels* attempts to foreclose the revolutionary possibilities opened for slaves, Native Americans, and women by the mainland elite's own rebellion against England.²

While it is essential to note the hegemonic aspects of *Travels*, such accounts tend to ignore the pervasive unruliness and disorder of Bartram's Floridian environment. That unruliness is admirably captured in Lawrence Buell's alternative vision of Bartram's politics and aesthetics. While Buell half-seriously acknowledges the imperial implications of Bartram's "botanical conquest of Florida," his highly nuanced reading of *Travels* ultimately asserts that "Bartram's idiosyncratic spirituality leads him to the brink of cultural relativism and biotic egalitarianism" (Buell 62-3). *Travels* is recovered, in such a view, as a prescient forerunner of radical environmentalism, not to mention multiculturalism. Bartram's complex interactions with the diverse habitats and peoples of Florida leads him beyond the dualist epistemology upon which natural historical classification depends. While not explicitly concerned with the politics of *Travels*, Amy Meyers' account of Bartram's visual aesthetic tends to corroborate Buell's sense of a more progressive text. While keenly aware of the hierarchical assumptions of Linnean taxonomy, Meyers nonetheless insists that Bartram's images cannot be reduced to simple expressions of enlightenment desires for transparency and order. "It is important to point out," she writes, "that many of Bartram's drawings are not simply the reflections of a classifying mind. Indeed, many of his works pointedly undermine the conventions of the specimen drawing. In these revolutionary images, organisms are not isolated from their environments but are compositionally united with them." Tracing the evolution of that technique in a variety of images, Meyers argues that Bartram followed the example of

² Christopher Looby, "The Constitution of Nature: Taxonomy as Politics in Jefferson,

naturalists such as Catesby to arrive at a “radical notion of environmental unity” (Meyers, *Views and Visions* 120-121)³ As suggested by Meyers’ account of Catesby’s visual aesthetics [see pages 51-85 above] such challenges to taxonomy could often go hand in hand with a subtle critique of colonialism.

While conflicts between Bartram’s most astute interpreters will likely persist, a full examination of the Caribbean dimensions of his vision can help to historicize the tensions between imperial desire and republican egalitarianism within *Travels* itself. Attention to the West Indian movements of the text can help to recover the global implications of early U.S. attempts to establish dominance over the Spanish borderland. By the same token, it can help to contextualize the ultimate collapse of order found in Buell and Meyers as a result of the early U.S. encounter with the alternative colonial arrangements of Spanish America.

Before delving into the circum-Caribbean contexts of *Travels* it is worth turning briefly to an image that embodies the contradictory impulses traced above. The superabundance of Bartram’s Florida is on full display in his 1775 drawing *The Great Alachua-Savanna in East Florida*, composed during the botanist’s first expedition into the Seminole territory (**figure 3.1**). The drawing celebrates Anglo-America’s first venture into the circum-Caribbean South, one that would be renewed in the post-revolutionary era as U.S. settlers disregarded the Florida border to challenge Spanish Empire’s tenuous foothold on the mainland (Weber 278-80). A column-like royal palm, icon of tropical exoticism and possibility in the visual culture of Bartram’s day, casts its shade over a

Peale, and Bartram,” *Early American Literature* 22 (1987), 252-273.

³ See Meyers’ contribution to *Views and Visions: American Landscape before 1830* (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1986).

high promontory from which the viewer surveys a vast and richly varied savanna.⁴ The viewer there observes a veritable catalog of the flora and fauna Bartram found characteristic of Florida's environment. Palm, magnolia grandiflora, and water lotus grow in and around a wetland fed by one of the region's many sinkhole fountains. Deer, turkey, Seminole horses and cattle, and several specimens of the exotic Florida Sandhill Crane thrive in its environs. The Seminole capital of Cuscowilla is reduced to a single building near the bottom right of the savanna, leaving the entire landscape conveniently available to Euro-American desires.

Such imperial desires are inherent in the very perspective of the image, which provides a perfect instance of what Mary Louise Pratt terms the "monarch-of-all-I-survey scene." Typical in male European views of the New World in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that elevated perspective signaled that an alien landscape had been safely circumscribed within a Euro-centric "planetary consciousness" through an instantaneous act of inspired seeing and knowing. From the promontory, the European viewer "takes possession without subjugation or violence."⁵ By adopting such a perspective for *The Great Alachua-Savanna* Bartram pictures British North America's

⁴ On the significance of palm trees in landscapes of Latin America by 19th-century U.S. artists and explorers, see Katherine Manthorne, *Tropical Renaissance: North American Artists Exploring Latin America, 1839-1879* (Washington, 1989), 11-20. I am suggesting that the palm serves a similarly iconic function in Bartram's landscape, and contemporaneous images of the greater Caribbean. Palms are ubiquitous, for instance, in Agostino Brunias' West Indian paintings of the 1770s and 80s. For a fine analysis of Brunias' Caribbean period, and of the disruption of natural historical taxonomies in his work, see Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Picturing Imperial Power* (Durham, NC, 1999) 139-173.

⁵ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York, 1992), 57 and chaps. 2, 3 and 4. For the relations between botany and imperialism see also Fowkes Tobin, chapter 6.

imperial designs on the Spanish borderlands at the very moment that North Americans were fighting a self-proclaimed anti-colonial struggle.

Part of the brilliance of the image, however, is that it simultaneously suggests the hazards and limits of imperial desire. Bartram's "monarch-of-all-I-survey" is distinguished from his eighteenth-century peers by his inability to construct a rational and stable order. For Meyers, the drawing provides the quintessential example of Bartram's attempt to link plants and animals within a unified natural environment through the use of a visual language of reflected form. The same undulating lines that denote the boundaries of the savanna, she argues, are repeated in the forms of the plants and animals that feed upon and inhabit it. Such formal reflections express Bartram's emerging concept of, "a wholly integrated cosmos in which clear distinctions between organic types become problematic" (Meyers, *Views and Visions* 122). Bartram's drawing, in such an account, subverts the very classificatory distinctions necessary to the construction of the Great Chain of Being and the social and political orders it helped to legitimize. Thomas Slaughter's reading of the image locates a separate but related form of disorientation. The drawing, in his view, subtly violates conventions of perspective and scale. Slaughter writes, "In William's landscape, there are flowers larger than the trees that surround them, which suggests that foreground and background don't have the relationship traditional in Western pictorial art. Animal size doesn't shrink as we move toward the top of the picture; the scene does not recede into either a distant horizon or a dim past. Our view takes in the whole savanna with the same focus and depth" (Slaughter 181). Such compositional choices suggest that the Floridian environment resists cognitive and perspectival management by the rational observer.

Narrating his first visit to the Alachua Savannah in *Travels*, Bartram writes, “How is the mind agitated and bewildered at being thus, as it were, placed on the borders of a new world” (169). The disorientation of the landscape drawing also conveys the impression that the viewer has discovered a terrestrial paradise unknown to European eyes. To maintain that impression, of course, requires that the viewer selectively forget over two centuries of Spanish explorations, missionary projects and planting schemes since the discovery of the peninsula by Hernando de Soto. Bartram’s “as it were” acknowledges that by the late eighteenth-century any “discovery” of Florida was purely figurative. The disorientation of the image marks the disruptive realization that the natural environment Bartram represents as a New World is in fact saturated with memory. By effacing the Spanish presence from the Florida he visited, Bartram paradoxically invokes the history of Spanish discovery that his own image reenacts.

That invocations of Columbian encounter were prominent in post-revolutionary literary culture is evident from even a cursory survey of poems including Joel Barlow’s *The Vision of Columbus* and Philip Freneau’s “The Rising Glory of America.” That they were integral to the poetics of late eighteenth century natural history is evident from a survey of Alexander von Humboldt’s *Personal Narrative*. The result of a journey that began on the southern periphery of the greater Caribbean (on the coast of Venezuela) less than a decade after the publication of *Travels*, Humboldt’s narrative presents the naturalist as a “self-conscious double of the first European inventors of America” (Pratt 126). Bartram himself invokes the deep history of tropical encounter through his gestures toward an aesthetic of the marvelous that dates back to Columbus’s *Diario*. Stephen Greenblatt has brilliantly documented the frequent eruptions of the marvelous within

Columbus's Christian imperialist text. Columbus's chronicles of the marvelous often included monstrous New World phenomenon, whether in its reference to "one-eyed men, and other with snouts of dogs" (*Diario* 77-8), in its description of a province in Cuba where people are born with tails, or its report of a sighting of mermaids off the coast of the same island. That Bartram shared a fascination with the monstrous is evident in his famous drawing of *The Alegator of St. John's*, which departs from scientific accuracy to depict a species akin to a Renaissance dragon (**figure 3.2**). Water cascades from the powerful jaws of the specimen in the foreground, while steam ascends from its upturned nostrils. An even larger specimen in the background thrashes its radically foreshortened body while devouring a large fish.

For both Columbus and Bartram, however, the marvelous more often involves the encounter with a natural world of pleasing surplus, variety and beauty, one that exceeds the viewers understanding and recognition. Thus Columbus writes of observing "many trees very different from ours, and among them many which had branches of many kinds, and all on one trunk. And one little branch is of one kind, and another of another, and so different that it is the greatest wonder in the world." In passages such as these, as in Bartrams drawing of the Alachua savanna, New World tropicality ultimately resists the viewer's attempts to chronicle, classify, and possess his surroundings.

By acknowledging that British North America followed in the colonizing footsteps of Spain, *The Great Alachua-Savanna* depicts the creation of an imperial palimpsest in Florida—the super-imposition of one colonial system over another. The imperial palimpsest was a defining feature of the societies of the colonial Caribbean, where claims to individual islands changed European hands with dizzying speed and

frequency. It is one source, along with the repression of histories of enslavement and genocide, of the sense of hauntedness and vertigo that is characteristic of natural histories of the region. Transfers of possession and transformations of culture were never smooth or complete. While imperial efforts often turned on the “forging of memories and histories that depended on active forgetting ... such attempts at erasure did not go uncontested” (Dian Kriz 45).

The particular histories that resurface to trouble Bartram’s narratives and images of Florida cluster around the legacy of Spanish possession. Proclaiming itself the first post-imperial nation the world had seen, the New Republic worked diligently to suppress the dawning realization that in establishing dominion over Spanish Florida it might reenact the Black Legend of Spanish brutality, and thus repeat the cyclical history of imperial corruption and decline. Such uncanny recognitions, however, were hardly the only source of the disorientation and uneasiness in Bartram’s narratives and images. Bartram’s tropical idylls are also disrupted by the active resistance and mobility of subaltern populations including fugitive slaves, Cuban fisherman, and Seminole traders along the fluid boundary between North America and the Caribbean.

“Failure in Xanadu:” William Bartram’s Plantation⁶

The subject of excluded history returns us to William’s father. It is tempting to imagine Crèvecoeur’s Bartram bidding good-night to his Russian guest and retiring to pen the following words to the European botanical collector John Fothergill: “I have left

⁶ The phrase serves as the title for a chapter on East Florida in Bernard Bailyn’s *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1986).

my son Billy in florida. Nothing do with him now but he will be A planter upon St. Johns river about 24 miles from Augustine & 6 from ye fort of Picolata.” By January of 1766, having recently explored the Florida wilderness with his father, William Bartram resolved to establish a rice and indigo plantation in Britain’s newest colonial possession. The young Quaker thus joined his talents and energies to the coordinated Anglo-American effort to extend the profitable slave empire of the Carolinas deeper south into the circum-Caribbean borderland. However reluctantly, John Bartram was a full participant in the scheme, lending his son necessary capital and the support and expertise of the influential southerners known to him through an inter-colonial natural historical network.

William’s biographers have cast his Florida plantation experiment as the misguided lark of an eccentric colonial youth. In so doing they elide the fact that William’s venture was undertaken in the broader context of a coordinated imperial policy. After obtaining Florida, British parliament awarded substantial land grants to individuals with the means and desire to initiate large-scale, slave-driven agricultural development on the isthmus. They supported those individuals by infusing Florida with Caribbean capital and knowledge. In 1764, the new colonial governor James Grant arrived in St. Augustine fresh from a tour of the Caribbean colonies, where he had been schooled in the intricacies of crop production and slave repression. Intending to lead by example, Grant organized his own planting scheme with the London merchant Richard Oswald, owner of prospering estates in South Carolina, Georgia, and Jamaica (Schafer 11-31). British attempts to settle East Florida involved many of the same actors who, earlier in the century, had brought the black majority demographic of the West Indies to

the Carolinas and Georgia with dazzling economic success. The Florida planters expected to prosper on a similar scale to their Carolina predecessors. The Bartrams' own ambition can be measured by their selection of Henry Laurens, the mainland's biggest slave trader, as their advisor. Their willingness to emulate the practices of Caribbean slaveholders on their own plantation is suggested by the opening of John's April 1766 letter. The bulk of that letter describes the six slaves he has purchased with the help of Laurens for William's plantation. Before describing the slaves, John advises his son on how to feed himself during his first months: "I have procured 4 good yams two white & two red a present from ye colonel [Laurens] & sent. A west India gentleman said thay cut of one half of ye yam & planted ye upper part of it . . . Etc" (661). During his brief tenure as slaveholder, the letter suggests, William Bartram was literally sustained by the cultural exchange between North America and the British West Indies.

The exchange of capital and knowledge between the sugar islands and Florida has inspired a variety of contemporary historians to stress Florida's liminal position between the North American and Caribbean worlds, and in many cases to argue that colonial Florida was a Caribbean territory in its own right. Sir Philip Sherlock evokes a regional vision that continues to resonate in the U.S. imagination of contemporary Florida:

Geography and history have combined to link Florida intimately with the Caribbean. In pre-Columbian times, Indians from the peninsula of Florida migrated into the northern islands of the Caribbean archipelago, and the space age has seen a large migration of Cubans and Puerto Ricans into Miami and many other cities of Florida. In the centuries between Spanish conquistadors and explorers, Cuban tobacco workers, Haitian political

exiles, Jamaican and Dominican cane-cutters, students from every Caribbean country, and Floridians of every class and income bracket have been part of this movement back and forth, so much so that one might claim with reason that the northern boundary of Florida forms the northern boundary of the Caribbean (Sherlock 44).

In Sherlock's revisionist geography, Florida is defined regionally according to the women, men, commodities, and cultural forms by which it was restlessly traversed.

Among the more important cultural forms to circulate between Florida and the Caribbean was, of course, the plantation system itself. Gaspar and Geggus give the dissemination of that system special emphasis in their definition of an extended Caribbean. In their view, the exchange of information amongst the planter elite of this region brought into being the primary economic unit—the plantation—around which the French, English, Spanish and Dutch structured their colonial systems (3-13). The colonial greater Caribbean—with its black majority demographic, and *melange* of African, European and indigenous cultures—was largely produced by plantation slavery and crop production. Plantations such as William Bartram's, to extend such logic, were responsible for importing the society and culture of the greater Caribbean to the Floridas.⁷

More precisely, William and his fellow planters attempted to bring the British Caribbean to the peninsula. Its intimate connections to, and strategic importance for the Spanish Caribbean had long shaped the society and culture of Florida. By the time of

⁷ The African elements of Caribbean plantation culture are interesting in light of the discussions of yam and rice cultivation featured in the Bartram's plantation correspondence. It has been argued that both crops were introduced into the New World by Africans. For a provocative discussion of historical debates surrounding rice

William's arrival widespread slave insurgency and maroonage—two phenomena Gaspar and Geggus identify as characteristic of the greater Caribbean—had shaken colonial Florida for close to a century. With the founding of Carolina in 1670 the inter-colonial conflicts typical of Caribbean empire-formation engulfed the Southeastern frontier.⁸ Such conflicts were not only mediated through Native Americans, with English Carolinians and Spanish Floridians competing fiercely for alliances with the Cherokee, Creeks and Seminoles. Spain continually encouraged South Carolina's slave population to rise up against their British masters. Charles II, supported by the Council of the Indies in Madrid, instituted a fugitive slave policy designed to destabilize the Carolina rice empire, and strengthen Spain's own seaport at St. Augustine, the strategic location of which straddled, "the border between two major regions in the world marketplace—the American South and the Caribbean" (Cusick 168). In 1693 a royal cedula offered freedom to fugitives escaping from Carolina into Florida. By 1746 a flourishing free-black community named Gracia Real Santa Teresa de Mosa existed on the outskirts of St. Augustine. St. Augustine's 403 free black residents, comprised of Negro militiamen from Cuba and fugitive slaves from South Carolina, accounted for a third of the total population. The Governor of Florida hoped these black residents might spark, "a massive slave revolt in South Carolina that would bring that colony back into the Spanish imperial orbit" (Cusick 12). They very nearly had. In the 1731 Stono River Rebellion a large group of Angolans

cultivation see Judith Ann Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas*, Cambridge, MA, 2001).

⁸ The following discussion of Spanish Florida's fugitive slave policy is drawn from John J. TePaske, "The Fugitive Slave: Intercolonial Rivalry and Spanish Slave Policy, 1687-1764," in *Eighteenth-Century Florida and its Borderlands*, ed. Samuel Proctor (Gainesville, 1975), 1-11.

attempted to fight their way south to St. Augustine, burning plantations, and killing over forty whites along the way. Officials in Madrid regarded the free black population of St. Augustine as integral to the effort to bolster their Caribbean empire.

The tradition of slave insurrection and relative black freedom in Spanish Florida haunts John Bartram's April 1766 letter. "All thy friends here," he writes to William, "laments thy resolute choice to live at St. Johns & leave off drawing or writing that say ye negros will run away or murder thee." An August 9th 1766 letter from Henry Laurens to John Bartram reiterates the threat of slave violence. Laurens describes visiting William's plantation and finding the despondent youth alone among, "six negroes, rather plagues than aids to him, of whom one is so insolent as to threaten his life" (672). There is every reason to believe Laurens' assessment. His familiarity with South Carolina slave rebellions makes him a credible observer. That familiarity led him to choose his slaves, and William Bartram's, with great care. John Bartram's letter specifies that one slave is "cromantee." To designate slaves according to African ethnicity was a regular feature of Caribbean slavery, but was rare in the Carolinas. According to Michael Mullin, Southerners identified slaves ethnically for only a brief period, in the 1760s, during the settlement of the Georgia and East Florida frontier. In the West Indies, African ethnicity was used to thwart insurrection, by singling out the tribes most likely to rebel. It served a similar purpose in the Florida borderland. Settlers such as William Bartram were anxious to bring slaves of (supposedly) docile ethnic backgrounds into Georgia and Florida because the area had historically been such fertile ground for uprisings.

Given the critical consensus, one would not expect that the legacy of Spanish colonialism in Florida, so intimately familiar to the Bartram's from their early

exploration and plantation venture, makes its way into William Bartram's *Travels*. While *Travels* has been celebrated as "the most astounding verbal artifact of the New Republic" (Elliott, *Columbia Literary History of the United States* 90), it has not been for the depth of its engagement with the history of late eighteenth-century Florida. That Americanist scholars have found in Bartram an essentially a-historical consciousness, however, often owes to their own nationalist conception of the kinds of events and movements that count as Floridian history. Perplexed by Bartram's failure even to, "mention the American Revolution, the crucial event of our history," Edward Cashin concludes that Bartram sought to depict an ideal landscape for the future republic, an American garden, "purged of wars and other human foibles."⁹ Cashin assumes that the American Revolution—as arguably the most influential historical event for the mainland British colonies—must necessarily be of paramount importance to the recently acquired Floridas. He further assumes that any late-eighteenth century chronicler who "fails to mention" the American Revolution must necessarily be wholly unconcerned with history in general. He assumes,

⁹ Cashin, xi., 4. For another notable reading of Bartram as an a-historical thinker see Looby 257. In addition to the works of Regis, Meyers and Buell discussed above, other notable readings of Bartram's *Travels* include: Larzer Ziff, *Writing in the New Nation: Prose, Print, and Politics in the Early United States* (New Haven, 1991); Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford, 1994), 60, 76, and passim; Christoph Irmscher, *The Poetics of Natural History: From John Bartram to William James* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1999). For a recent biographical study of the relationship between John and William Bartram that offers several insights on *Travels* see Slaughter, *The Natures of John and William Bartram*. For two fine art historical studies of Bartram's *Travels* see: Amy R.W. Myers, "Sketches from the Wilderness: Changing Conceptions of Nature in American Natural History Illustration, 1680-1880 (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1985), 113-193; Michael Gaudio, "Swallowing the Evidence: William Bartram and the Limits of Enlightenment," *Winterthur Portfolio* 36 (2001), 1-17. For an overview of Bartram's writings on Native American society and culture see: Gregory A. Waselkov and Kathryn E. Holland Braund, eds., *William Bartram on the Southeastern Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

that is, that the Floridas mark the periphery of only one colonial empire, rather than a contested borderland between Anglo North America and the Spanish Caribbean.

But once we acknowledge its ties to the Spanish Caribbean, we realize that the explosive growth of the colonial economy of Havana was at least as influential as the American Revolution on the history of late eighteenth-century Florida. That development, apparent during Bartram's actual journey, only accelerated in the fifteen years between his return to Pennsylvania and the publication of *Travels*. After briefly losing Cuba to England in the Seven Years War, Madrid sought to win back its colonists' loyalty by liberalizing trade. Spain attempted to "reforge Havana as the impregnable gate of the Gulf of Mexico" (Cusick, 171). As a result of new policies, sugar production in Cuba grew three-fold and Havana became a leading transatlantic port. It also transformed the island into a prominent trade partner of a fledgling U.S., which, during and after its war for independence, supplied most of the flour and other foodstuffs to Havana and from hence to the rest of the Spanish Caribbean. Charleston's primary activity during the period was the transshipment of those goods. My epigraph from Bernard Romans suggests the extent to which American eyes looked to Florida to increase the new trade between the American South and the Spanish West Indies. Floridians cherished a similar vision when the colony reverted to Spain after the American Revolution. Throughout the 1780s officials in St. Augustine (returned from temporary exile in Cuba) modeled their trade practices and negotiations with Madrid on those of their Havana

neighbors. For Cusick, Florida's late-colonial period was, "dominated politically and economically ... [by] the rise of Cuba as an economic power."¹⁰

Ironically, Cashin accuses Bartram of a-historicism for being keenly attuned to the importance of the ties between Florida and Havana.¹¹ Though it documents his travels during the years of revolutionary foment to the north, his narrative is often preoccupied with developments to the south. Narrating and illustrating the history of Florida from the perspective of the Carolinian, Seminole, and Cuban traders whom he encounters along its clandestine trade routes, Bartram's *Travels* reduces the American Revolution the status of a peripheral tribal dispute.

West Indian and Indian Affairs: The Publication of *Travels*

To detect the Caribbean presence in Bartram's *Travels* we must begin by looking in an unexpected place—its representation of Seminole society and culture. Fifteen years elapsed between William's return to his father's garden and the publication of *Travels*. During the intervening decade he worked sporadically on his book and on a report and portfolio of 59 drawings for his patron. That same decade produced a shift in U.S.-Caribbean relations as Spanish and French islands opened to U.S. trade and a series of British embargoes were implemented and lifted. Simultaneously, while pressures for large-scale Native American removal were not quite as intense as in the first third of the nineteenth century, there were definite signs of growing desires for expropriation. Those

¹⁰ The preceding discussion of Cuba is derived from Cusick, "Spanish East Florida in the Atlantic Economy," 168-183.

¹¹ Bartram's *Travels* is put to particularly productive use in Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816* (New York, 1999).

very desires were driving U.S. settlers ever further south across the Spanish border, and inspiring calls for annexation of the Floridas.

Bartram's *Travels* is located at the intersection of these two historical movements. During the composition of *Travels*, and of his Florida drawings, he was concerned to persuade influential U.S. figures, including himself, that the expansion of the plantation South required little violence. To that end, *Travels* presents a wholly idiosyncratic argument that the fulfillment of the new nation's Caribbean designs depends on its willingness to assimilate the tribes of the Southeast. To make that argument Bartram turned to the example of Spanish America.

During the final stages of the composition of *Travels*, perhaps while working on its "Introduction," Bartram also produced the manuscript for "Some Hints & Observations concerning the civilization, of the Indians, or Aborigines of America." Gregory Waselkov speculates that the document was sent to Henry Knox, Washington's Secretary of War. In 1789 the President had asked Knox to solicit information on U.S.-Indian relations and advice regarding frontier policy. Instead of the history of relations between the American South and its Native American neighbors, which Knox had requested, Bartram opens with a curious account of the Spanish settlement of Florida:

The Spanish settlements, in Florida, extend but a small distance from the Sea Coast: For they are very careful, not to disturb or offend the Indians, by dispossessing them, or even hunting on their Lands.

They consider them as Brethren & fellow Citizens, and use all rational means to engage their friendship, to make them good Christians & consequently good Men.

I could wish the Citizens of these States, would shew their approbation of so worthy an example, by endeavouring to conciliate the affections of the Indians, especially of those Nations within the limits of the United States. Particular notice should be taken of the tribes to the S.W. the Cherokees, Muscogulges, Chicasa's and Chactaws. The Siminoles, although confederates to the Muscogees, are at present within the limits of the Spanish claims of Florida, and consequently, in a political view, they do not immediately concern us.¹²

Bartram offers a fantasy of Spanish colonialism, one that directly contradicts the self-congratulatory Black Legend which France and England had begun to construct over a century before. Spain's colonial policy is morally superior to the frontier strategy of the early republic, he claims. By limiting itself to the coastal settlements necessary for its maritime endeavors Spain avoids mixing expropriation with its missionary rhetoric. Moreover, it promises real power to the converted by extending the rights of citizenship. Bartram advises the new nation to offer a similar combination of confederacy and sovereignty to the tribes of the Southeast. He suggests that the new nation allow southeastern tribes, once converted, to be treated as "distinct, independent States," like "The People of Georgia, Virginia, Pennsylvania &c" (618).

Near the end of "Some Hints," Bartram elaborates on the form of benign relations he imagines with Native America. He advises Knox and Jefferson to introduce, "our Language, System of Legislation, Religion, Manners Arts & Sciences" among the tribes

¹² The text and textual history of "Some Hints" are from Waselkov, *William Bartram on the Southeastern Indians*. It is reprinted in Thomas P. Slaughter, ed., *William Bartram*:

of the region, and to reestablish trade and commerce. “These beget an intercourse by sensible gradations,” he continues, “act like fascination, & while they charm & please them, we effect a revolution, & secure a permanently peaceable dominion without violence or injustice” (617).¹³ Bartram’s reference to the concept of “fascination” reveals the limits of his conviction that dominion could be secured without violence or injustice. “Fascination” and “charm,” the very mechanisms of U.S. expansion in Bartram’s view, are used to describe a variety of predatory behaviors by plants, animals and humans throughout *Travels*. Such predators and predatory behaviors figure prominently, moreover, in the Florida drawings composed just prior to the drafting of “Some Hints.” [see pages 156-160 below]

Bartram’s covert reference to predation suggests his nagging awareness that his vision of benign U.S. dominion is as idealized as the account of Spanish colonialism upon which it is based. Such doubts, however, did little to alter his expansionist designs. When Bartram speaks of effecting a revolution in the Southeast, he likely includes the wresting of East and West Florida from Spanish control. His claim that the Seminoles are not of immediate concern because they lie “at present within the limit of the Spanish claims” is disingenuous. In the late 1780s Bartram took particular pains to revise his textual and visual representations of the East Florida landscape (specifically of the Alachua savanna near the primary Seminole town of Cuscowilla) and of the society and

Travels and other Writings, Library of America (New York, 1996), 615.

¹³ The passage is oddly resonant in our era of globalization. In a sense, Bartram anticipates the contemporary neo-liberal account of globalization, in which the “soft power” of American cultural and economic influence replaces the “hard power” of military force wielded by conventional empires. Like the neo-liberal account, Bartram here attempts to present U.S. dominance (which shares, after all, the same etymological root as “dominion”) as somehow free of the taint of imperialism.

culture of its diverse inhabitants (Slaughter 187-9). His representation of that territory and tribe contains the most sensational because most economically promising assertion within his larger argument against violent removal of the southeastern tribes.

It is worth skipping ahead to Bartram's narrative of Seminole country to foreground its economically sensational vision. On his way to visit the important Seminole town and trading-center at Talahasochte, after his stay at the capital of Cuscowilla, Bartram views an expansive cane-break on the banks of the Suwanee River. After describing its soil and vegetation he breaks into the following rhapsody:

This vast plain, together with the forest contiguous to it, if permitted (by the Siminoles who are sovereigns of these realms) to be in possession and under the culture of industrious planters and mechanics, would in a little time exhibit other scenes than it does at present, delightful as it is; for by the arts of agriculture and commerce, almost every desirable thing in life might be produced and made plentiful here, and thereby establish a rich, populous and delightful region; as this soil and climate appears to be of a nature favourable for the production of almost all the fruits of the earth, as Corn, Rice, Indigo, Sugar-cane, Flax, Cotton, Silk, Cochineal . . . : and lying contiguous to one of the most beautiful navigable rivers in the world, and not more than thirty miles from St. Mark's on the great bay of Mexico, is most conveniently situated for the West India trade, and the commerce of all the world. (201)

Frances Harper claims that Bartram's pages on East Florida and the Seminole, comprising the central section of his three-part narrative, "may well be regarded as the

most important section of the *Travels*.”¹⁴ For Harper the importance of Part II derives from its botanical richness, and the exoticism of the incidents and locales it vividly depicts, including Bartram’s famous battle with scores of alligators, and his visit to the Manatee Spring on the St. John’s River. Such moments are indeed significant. They construct a fable of Floridian abundance for the new nation, one anchored by Bartram’s vision of Caribbean commerce as the gateway to unlimited global exchange. Bernard Romans’ euphoria has nothing on Bartram’s superabundant prospect. North America will not only create new markets for its staple goods. It will also compete in the production of a range of profitable luxury commodities, including sugar cane, indigo, and cochineal, then cultivated almost exclusively in the Caribbean proper.

The possibilities afforded by that “vast plain” on the Gulf coast of Florida lie at the thematic and formal center of *Travels*. Bartram distorts chronology in order to place his visit to that plain near Talahasochte, along with its uncanny double the Alachua savanna, in roughly the central chapters of his central section. Similarly, he distorts space, relocating the plain some fifty miles closer to the Gulf of Mexico, to make the lure of the West India trade more seductive to his elite audience.¹⁵

Seduction is also the aim of the references to the Caribbean scattered throughout *Travels*. Such references range from passing asides to visionary landscapes reminiscent of the Suwanee River revery. Toward the minor end of the spectrum, while visiting a plantation near the border of West Florida and Louisiana in 1775, Bartram finds a rare

¹⁴ Harper, 348. In referring to *Travels* as a three-part narrative, I assume that Part IV, containing Bartram’s treatise on the Creeks and Cherokees, serves as a kind of appendix for the travel narrative proper.

¹⁵ I am indebted to Harper (343, 373) for both facts, though not for the sense I make of them.

species of grass. He notes that the locals, “introduced this valuable grass from the West-India islands” (347), and refers to its earliest description in Sloane’s “Natural History of Jamaica.” Similarly, on the St. John’s River in East Florida in 1774 Bartram comments on a species of grape vine. “The Spaniards in South America and the West Indies,” he notes, “work it into cables, that are said to be very strong and durable” (91). Toward the middle of the spectrum we find more explicit allusions to trans-colonial and transnational connections with the sugar islands. In 1775 Bartram describes a visit to a large West Florida plantation. He notes that the plantation is located, “near the White cliffs, now called Brown’s cliffs, in honour of the late governor of West Florida, now of the Bahama Islands” (348). Bartram had met Montfort Brown at another plantation a few days earlier, on his way to assume his new post in the British Caribbean. These periodic references all stress that Florida shares intimate cultural and political connections to the Caribbean, ones that often cut across national boundaries. They create a subtle texture that makes Bartram’s prophecies of North America’s West Indian fortunes more fully resonant. By the time Bartram describes the environs of the Creek capital at Coweta near the Flint River, the conclusion and significance of his enthusiastic prospect feel all but inevitable. Writing in 1776, at the very moment that North American colonies were contemplating their independence, Bartram’s attentions are decidedly elsewhere:

The territory lying upon this creek, and the space between it and the river, present every appearance of a delightful and fruitful region in some future day, it being a rich soil, and exceedingly well situated for every branch of agriculture and grazing, diversified with hills and dales savannas and vast Cane meadows, and watered by innumerable rivulets and brooks, all

contiguous to the Flint river: an arm of the great Chata Uche or Apalachucia offers an uninterrupted navigation to the bay of Mexico and the Atlantic ocean, and thence to the West India islands and over the whole world. (313)

Just returned from his sojourn through East and West Florida, Bartram's perception of the entire Southeast is colored by his experiences on its circum-Caribbean margins. He sees potential entrees into the global marketplace, via the sugar islands, wherever he looks, even in locales as unlikely as a land-locked Creek capital deep in Georgia's western frontier.

Ruins, or the Cycle of Empire

Bartram's argument regarding West Indian commerce is tied to his highly original views regarding Indian affairs. If Raynal's *History* presented its Caribbean locales as complex imperial palimpsests, in which conquest followed conquest and decline followed empire with unprecedented rapidity, Bartram's *Travels* sketches a similar landscape. Only through an enlightened Indian policy, he cautions, can the nation avoid the pitfalls of empire. In Florida, historical examples of failed empire—in the form of ancient Indian, Spanish, and even recent British ruins—are strewn about him.

Important negotiations regarding Native American policy lie close to the heart of William's two expeditions into Florida's polyglot world. In 1765 William and his father were present at the elaborate negotiations between British representatives and the entire Creek Congress for the Treaty of Picolata. Creeks ceded the lands between the St. John's River and the Atlantic coast to Great Britain, thus clearing space for the kind of

plantation scheme William Bartram would undertake (Weisman 140). In 1773 William was present at the Congress of Augusta where the British colonies again won important land concessions from a coalition of Creeks and Cherokees. In March of 1774 William was in the vicinity of St. Augustine during another Congress between British colonial officials and Creeks, including the parties of Florida Creeks known as Seminoles. Those negotiations sought to resolve tensions after the murder of two Cherokee youths led to the retaliatory slaying of seventeen white settlers and two blacks in raids on the recently ceded lands.¹⁶ Bartram made his first journey to the Seminole town of Cuscowilla (chronicled in Part II of *Travels*) with a party of traders charged with reestablishing commerce according to the agreement reached at St. Augustine. Trade was again threatened in May of 1774 when British officials instituted a trade embargo against the Creeks as the tenuous peace broke down. It was then that, again in the company of traders, and in clear violation of the embargo, Bartram paid his important visit to Talahasochte.

The chapters on Talahasochte argue that peaceful coexistence between settlers and Creeks is prerequisite for North America's increased access to the West India markets. That ambitious argument becomes apparent, when, while in the town, Bartram's observations on some cypress canoes take an unexpected turn. Seminole mariners, he explains, use those canoes to make journeys of surprising length:

In these large canoes they descend the river on trading and hunting expeditions to the sea coast, neighbouring islands and keys, quite to the point of Florida, and sometimes cross the gulph, extending their

¹⁶ For reliable accounts of all these congresses see Cashin, 42-56, 83.

navigations to the Bahama islands and even to Cuba: a crew of these adventurers had just arrived, having returned from Cuba but a few days before our arrival, with a cargo of spirituous liquors, Coffee, Sugar, and Tobacco. One of them politely presented me with a choice piece of Tobacco, which he told me he had received from the governor of Cuba.

They deal in the way of barter, carrying with them deer-skins, furs, dry fish, bees-wax, honey, bear'' oil, and some other articles. They say the Spaniards receive them very friendlily, and treat them with the best spirituous liquors.

Bartram describes parties of Seminole making maritime voyages of substantial distance in order to exchange the frontier commodities coveted by Euro-American traders directly to the Spanish and British Caribbean. Bartram's description of that far-reaching trade, corroborated by no other historian of the tribe, naturalizes the possibilities for West Indian and global commerce that Bartram envisioned as latent in the cane-breaks bordering the Suwanee River. If the noble savages of Florida trade with the Spanish sugar islands, Bartram implies, then surely such trade is harmonious with Florida's geography and landscape. That the passage naturalizes trade with Cuba is all the more exciting, as the U.S. increasingly looked to the Spanish Caribbean to compensate for the loss of its markets in the British Caribbean after the American Revolution.

The Spanish presence in the passage, however, cuts two ways. A Spanish official as prominent as the Governor of Cuba has given one of the Seminole mariners the gift of a choice plug of tobacco. Tobacco served a crucial symbolic function in Seminole diplomacy, centered as it was on the Calumet ceremony. William Bartram was himself

present at a Calumet ceremony at Cuscowilla, during which Cowkeeper affirmed the agreement reached at St. Augustine with some visiting North American traders. His subsequent reference to the largesse of the Cuban governor thus strongly implies that the Seminoles (and the Creeks in general) have powerful allies. The tribe has formed commercial connections with a seaport and Spanish Caribbean capital the population of which surpassed that of New York by some 10,000 residents in 1791. British North America, such a statistic implies, was not the only New World locale to see its fortunes rise dramatically in the late eighteenth century. Indeed, by 1791, the explosive growth of the Cuban economy promised to reenergize the entire Spanish American Empire. Bartram indirectly argues that in the pre-revolutionary era, during British possession of Florida, the bordering southern colonies could not risk alienating the Creek nation through dispossession and full-blown war without being drawn into a conflict with Spain.

The prospects for such a conflict were real. During Bartram's wanderings the Southeast was filled with rumors regarding Spanish insurgency. After the slaying of the two Cherokee youth in July 1773, authorities in Cuba offered a commission to the rising Creek Lieutenant Escochabey at Coweta and promised to provide ammunition and trade items when he opened war on the white settlements. Escochabey refused, but in the summer of 1774, just after Bartram's return from Talahasochte, the young Creek traveled to Havana to encourage expansion of the illegal Spanish trade to the gulf coast of Florida (Cashin 69-102).

Bartram's ambivalence regarding Seminole trade with the Spanish Caribbean, potential source of either North American or Spanish American prosperity, plays out in his imagination of Floridian antiquity. On one hand, North American hopes for the region

inspire Bartram's inquiry into whether a coherent Native American commercial empire, built either by the Creeks or the ancient tribes they displaced, once existed on the Florida isthmus. Throughout his wanderings Bartram finds archaeological evidence of a prior imperial presence on the land, one commensurate with the "prospect of power and grandeur" Bernard Romans sees in its future. That evidence consists primarily of conical mounds and pyramids. At Mount Royal, along the important trade route of the St. John's River, Bartram records a "very pompous Indian mount, or conical pyramid of earth" (104).¹⁷ An illustration of such a mound (**figure 3.3**), characteristic of "the vast mounds upon the St. John's, Alachua, and Musquito rivers" is included in his later text "Observations on the Creek and Cherokee Indians." The archaeological record of an Indian empire is supplemented by oral legends collected from indigenes and traders. In "Observations" Bartram reports that, "The Seminoles, or Lower Creeks, also boast of a great queen or empress in former days, whose empire, according to their account, must have been in East Florida, between the St. Mary's and St. Juan rivers and the imperial city of *Alachua*" (545-6).

Bartram's use of the term "imperial" is hardly casual. Mounds and legends lead him to conjecture early in his travels, in his report to Fothergill, that, "this powerful empire or confederacy of the Creeks or Muscogulges" has been built on the ruins of the "vast and powerful empire of red men" that were the pre-Columbian Natchez (373). That claim implies an even more prestigious lineage for the Creeks. According to Antoine le Page du Pratz, the French naturalist whose 1758 *Histoire de la Louisiane* Bartram had read prior to his travels, the Natchez were themselves descended from the glorious Aztec

¹⁷ Some other references to such ruins occur on 33, 57, 77.

and Inca empires in Mexico and Peru. In his later “Observations” Bartram would ultimately refute du Pratz’s theory of Natchez and Creek origins. Throughout his writings, however, Creeks and ancient Floridians continue to bear an uncanny resemblance to the Inca and Aztec. Elsewhere in “Observations,” Bartram discusses the fact that Creek chiefs sometimes combine the powers of both high-priest and war-chief. He conjectures that:

The first Montezuma and the Incas, founders of the mighty empires of Mexico and Peru, were cunning usurpers of this stamp. Such were the absolute kings of the ancient Floridians; for history tells us of the king of *Calos* in the Peninsula of Florida, who assumed a communion and familiarity with powerful invisible spirits, to whom he sacrificed captives, and thus he kept his subjects in awe. (538)

In *Imagined Empires*, Eric Wertheimer argues that early U.S. authors, including contemporaries of Bartram such as Philip Freneau and Joel Barlow, turned frequently to the empires of Central and South American antiquity as the basis of their vision of the U.S. as an emerging global empire. In the Inca and Aztec they found a powerful precedent of New World glory.¹⁸ Bartram’s references to Creek and ancient Floridian ruins serve a similar cultural function. They record evidence of a thriving Native American empire at or near locales that he also identifies as convenient to Caribbean commerce.

Near the Creek capital of Coweta, site of one of the extended West Indian reveries discussed above, Bartram discerns what “appears to have been a very famous capital by

the artificial mounds or terraces, and a very populous settlement, from its extent and expansive old fields” (318). More pointedly, the Montezuma-like king of ancient Florida based his empire at Calos, on present-day Estero Bay. In his depiction of Talahasochte in Part II of *Travels* Bartram had named Calos as site of much of the current trade between Seminoles and Cubans. For the Bartram of “Observations” later to locate Calos as hub of a pre-Columbian trading network points to the paradoxical significance of native ruins. If the ancient empire those ruins evoke sanctions and naturalizes Anglo-American and later U.S. designs on the region, it also venerates present-day Creeks and Seminoles as the source of potentially powerful forms of resistance.

Immediately after Bartram’s lengthy description of Seminole visits to the Bahamas and Cuba, he goes on to note that Cuban sailors likewise pay frequent visits to the Florida coasts:

The Spaniards of Cuba likewise trade here or at St. Mark’s and other sea ports on the west coast of the isthmus, in small sloops; particularly at the bay of Calos, where are excellent fishing banks and grounds; not far from which is a considerable town of the Siminoles, where they take great quantities of fish, which they salt and cure on shore, and barter with the Indians and traders for skins, furs &c. and return with their cargoes to Cuba.

The trader of the town of Talahasochte informed me, that he had, when trading in that town, large supplies of goods from these Spanish trading vessels, suitable for that trade, and some very essential articles on

¹⁸ Eric Wertheimer, *Imagined Empires: Incas, Aztecs and the New World of American*

more advantageous terms than he could purchase at Indian stores either in Georgia or St. Augustine. (195-96)

The passage borders on the sensational. The extent of Spanish trade Bartram finds in Florida would have been highly alarming to the British colonial apparatus. Cuban-Creek diplomacy, Bartram suggests, is so advanced as to render policies such as the Embargo Acts all but useless. The passages would also have been disturbing to the traders of Georgia and St. Augustine whose own commerce in West Indian staples was being undercut by an illicit Seminole market. Read in a late-colonial context the passage suggests the permeability of the Florida borderland, and the status of the Lower Creeks as potentially significant players in the international drama of Caribbean empire-formation.¹⁹

Bartram's *Travels* presents this late-colonial state of affairs to an early national audience that looked with great hope toward the Spanish Caribbean. Given the transnational flow of Seminole trade, he argues, British possession of Florida had been tenuous at best. So too, he implies, is present U.S. possession of the entire Southeast.

Literature, 1771-1876 (Cambridge UP, 1998).

¹⁹ Bernard Romans also comments extensively on Spanish trade in British Florida. He claims that North Americans thoughtlessly allow Spanish vessels free run of Florida's valuable fisheries: "The whole of the west coast of East Florida, is covered with fishermens huts and flakes; these are built by the *Spanish* fishermen from the *Havannah*, who come annually to make one or two fishing voyages on this coast, to the number of about thirty sail" (126). Romans advises his audience as to the American possibilities of such commerce. He advises Southerners to sell salt and dry goods to Spanish fishermen, and thus to set up a new route for a West India trade which, like Bartram's, would be mediated in part by the Seminole. He writes, "The same vessel that carried salt and dry goods might here drive an advantageous trade with the parties of lower *Creeks*, who come to hunt in the same season, in this part of the peninsula, and always get great quantities of skin, she might likewise get a load of fish, which would answer well in the *West-Indies*" (127).

Spanish influence over and ties with the Creek nation mean that consolidation of the southern frontier requires skillful diplomacy. Any designs the new nation has on repossession of Florida, and its spectacular potential for Caribbean commerce, also turns on the quality of its Indian policy and relations.

It is just this situation that inspires the Bartram of “Some Hints” to point to the example of Spanish colonialism. Either emulate Spanish policy, Bartram insists, or risk Spanish America’s persistent encroachments on U.S. growth and sovereignty. Bartram remains painfully cognizant, however, that to emulate Spain is by no means to resolve his text’s ambivalent fascination with Floridian ruins. For the Spanish Empire that Bartram improbably extols as humanist model for the new republic also lies in rubble all around him.

Bartram records numerous ruins of Spanish plantations, towns, and fortifications. The very road he travels to Cuscowilla and Talahasochte is a ruin, built in the seventeenth century to link the capital at St. Augustine to the extensive missionary system to the west. The persistent vertigo of *Travels*, its famous inability to locate itself accurately in time and space, is induced by its author’s attempt to project his nation’s future from a complex palimpsest of ruined civilizations.²⁰ For the U.S. to emulate the Spanish Empire, in order to unlock the fabulous economic potential evoked by ancient Indian ruins, all too likely means to share the fate of both empires. The remains of British plantations built as recently as the last decade attest to the fact that in the circum-Caribbean borderlands the future may transform rapidly into the ancient past.

²⁰ On the unreliability of Bartram’s dates and chronologies see Harper, 353 and Cashin, *passim*.

Like Thomas Jefferson's meditations on Native American burial mounds in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Bartram's meditations on Floridian ruins anticipated what would become an increasingly familiar theme in American art and literature during the early decades of the nineteenth century. Bartram's interest in ruins as powerful signifiers of the inevitable cyclic course of empire was one that was shared by the proto-romantic writings of Europeans including Condorcet, Gibbon, and Volney, whose own *Les Ruines, ou meditations sur le revolutions des empires* would be published in the same year as *Travels*. But while imported from Europe, the topos of the imperial ruin is also deeply embedded in a dominant mode of U.S. culture. By 1824 Volney's melancholy treatise had become a national best-seller, as novels and paintings including James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* and Thomas Cole's *The Course of Empire* transposed its European anxieties onto growing U.S. concerns regarding cultural decline, and the stability of the nation's newfound global prestige.²¹ But while the painters and writers of the Hudson River School remained confident that theirs was the nation of the future, Bartram's earlier text seems plagued by very real doubts regarding the survival of the fledgling republic. The aesthetic achievement of *Travels* is to embody both the enthusiasm of Bernard Roman's contemporaneous natural history, and the despair of Naipaul's novel of post-colonial Africa. The ruins Bartram encounters throughout the

²¹ William Kelly's reading of the *The Last of the Mohicans* admirably captures the cyclical logic of William Bartram's earlier meditation on the temporality of U.S. empire: "If men and the societies they create are governed by an organic process of growth and decline, America, as a nation of men, must be subject to the same temporal course. A new political entity may have emerged in the Revolution, but that beginning only initiates the same cyclic process which has led to the dissolution of the tribes and the debasement of Europe." See William P. Kelly, *Plotting America's Past: Fenimore Cooper and the Leatherstocking Tales* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983).

Floridas (including those of his own plantation) bespeak the fatal decline of the civilization he exists in and is in fact working toward. Fresh from his own failure in Xanadu, Bartram wanders British Florida and the Seminole country like a ghost from a future that has come and gone.

Botany and History

Bartram's natural history offers a theory as to why a series of empires has vanished with such startling rapidity in the Floridas. Through the complex interplay of image and text *Travels* attributes the rapidity of historical change in the Floridas to its volatile, sub-tropical environment. Environmental instability, however, ultimately serves as a trope for the geographic, political, and cultural sources of the rapid transitions to which the isthmus was subject. Those sources prominently include Florida's regional liminality (between the Plantation South and the West Indies) and its legacy of Spanish conquest and rule. More specifically, Bartram's exotic landscapes and specimens encode Florida's illicit trade connections with the Spanish Caribbean, and the illicit sexual liaisons that produce its mestizo culture. To follow in the footsteps of the Spanish colonial empire, Bartram warns, opens the North American mainland to the "creolisation, mestissage, mestizaje, and hybridity" characterizing Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic, to what was a "litany of pollution and impurity" in the eyes of Bartram's Anglo-American contemporaries (Gilroy 2).

The specter of imperial decline haunts even as hopeful an image as the *The Great Alachua-Savanna in East Florida*. In Bartram's 1789 letter to Henry Knox he advised Jefferson's administration that by introducing European trade and manners to the tribes of

the Southeast, the republic might, “effect a revolution, & secure a permanently peaceable dominion without violence or injustice” (617). In keeping with the vision of that letter, *The Great Alachua-Savanna* celebrates the establishment of an ostensibly benign form of Anglo-American dominion over a locale currently in Seminole possession. The drawing commemorates Bartram’s visit to the savanna, and the important Seminole town at nearby Cuscowilla, with a group of traders intent on reestablishing Creek commerce immediately after the 1774 congress at St. Augustine. The benefits of reestablishing that trade are plainly evident in the drawing. From a high eminence in the left foreground, the viewer overlooks a fertile prospect of extensive forests, lush lowlands, ample streams, and varied wildlife.

In Bartram’s image, as in his letter to Knox, the viewer claims the promontory not through subjugation and violence but through benign cooperation and exchange. In narrating his initial glimpse of the Alachua, Bartram celebrates the fact that, “Herds of sprightly deer, squadrons of the beautiful fleet Siminole horse, flocks of turkeys, civilized communities of the sonorous watchful crane, mix together, appearing happy and contented in the enjoyment of peace ... ” (167). Inter-spetial cooperation only increases when a Seminole hunter approaches: “See the different tribes and bands, how they draw towards each other! As it were deliberating upon the general good” (168). The passage names the very animals, and describes the same peaceable kingdom, that is pictured in the contemporaneous landscape. That image and description take on obvious overtones when coupled with Bartram’s earlier narrative of social relations in Cuscowilla, where white traders eat, drink, smoke and negotiate with the Seminole chief Cowkeeper in a

“very free and sociable manner” (165). The abundance of the Seminole territory will be made available to the new nation through the mutuality of exchange.

To construct his utopian landscape Bartram must first efface the particularity of Seminole society and culture. Brent R. Weisman argues that by the time Bartram visited the Alachua a “full Seminole agroplastic complex was in place.” The lowland would have been home to crops ranging from potatoes to rice, and to sizeable herds of cattle. The Alachua economy had transformed from one based on the deerskin trade to one based on ranching and crop production for distant markets. The tribe had thus been “drawn into a network of global relationships.”²² In his narrative Bartram partially acknowledges this transformation. He observes, “innumerable droves of cattle; the lordly bull, lowing cow, and sleek capricious heifer” (167). In the landscape, however, he reduces Seminole cattle-holdings to a single bull, one markedly smaller than the cranes and other birds that surround it.

Curiously, the Seminole history absent from Bartram’s landscape is generally restored in a more topographic image included in his report to Fothergill. That second 1775 image prominently depicts the global trade networks in which the Seminole were by then involved (**figure 3.4**). In Bartram’s *View of Alatchua Savannah*, the wetlands are bisected by the old Spanish highway leading from St. Augustine on the Atlantic coast and to St. Mark’s on the Gulf coast. The key also notes that point E on the map marks the site of a trading store ransacked during the hostilities of 1774. Cuscowilla is represented

²² Brent R. Weisman, “The Plantation System of the Florida Seminole Indians and Black Seminoles during the Colonial Era,” in Landers, 136-149. For a persuasive argument regarding the transformative effects of cattle ranching on Creek notions of property see Saunt, chapt. 2.

through the synecdoche of the central public square, the site upon which all trade negotiations of the Alachua Seminole with the outside world were conducted.

That entire commercial infrastructure is represented in the more cartographic image because it provides one powerful source of Bartram's attraction to the place. His developmental vision for the Alachua Savannah is evident in a July 1775 letter to Lachlan McIntosh:

The wide and almost unlimited prospect of this verdant plain varied with glittering pieces of water and jetting points of the hammocks forms a scene inchangingly [sic.] beautiful . . . The land about it very good and extremely proper for indigo, would grow good corn &c. . . . In short would those Indians part with this land it would admit of a very valuable settlement and would be a very considerable acquisition. (qtd. in Slaughter 186)

A rhetoric of aesthetic admiration quickly gives way to a celebration of economic value. Bartram sees the lowland as future source of a West Indian commodity as lucrative as indigo. Read in conjunction with his verbal description of Talahosachte, Bartram's map of the savanna argues that the commodities it will soon yield will have clear access to the Caribbean and Atlantic marketplace. As the letter to McIntosh indicates, the Seminole will have to abdicate possession of their lands (or be forcibly removed from them) for Bartram's vision to be fulfilled.

Prominent details, however, suggest that such a vision faces a variety of impediments. As Slaughter notes, a large sink-hole provides the central lowland feature of the image. It is hardly a coincidence that Bartram would place a sinkhole so

prominently in his drawing. Sinkholes are plentiful throughout the Floridian sections of *Travels*, where they are invariably associated with epistemological uncertainties, geologic upheavals, and clandestine flows.²³

Wandering through a palm grove near Lake George Bartram comes upon a great fountain, “a continual and amazing ebullition, where the waters are thrown up in such abundance and amazing force, as to jet and swell up two or three feet above the common surface” (150). Looking into the fountain, the naturalist sees innumerable varieties of fish (and crocodiles) co-exist peacefully in its pellucid waters. The sink presents an aquatic republican utopia similar to the terrestrial paradise of the Alachua savanna. Upon further observation, however, Bartram deconstructs his initial perceptions. “This paradise of fish,” he writes, “may seem to exhibit a just representation of the peaceable and happy state of nature which existed before the fall, yet in reality it is a mere representation” (150). The denizens of the sink do not attack one another, he realizes, only because the transparency of the water renders predatory deceptions pointless. The Lake George passage presents a key for reading all pre-lapserian vistas throughout *Travels*. Such representations of Florida’s environment, Bartram suggests, are less than reliable. So too are the prospects for amicable white-native relations those representations so often encode.

Elsewhere in his narrative, sinkholes signify not only the instability of Bartram’s perceptions and representations, but of the very ground on which he stands. A few pages after his depiction of the trade negotiations at Talahasochte, Bartram relates a white trader’s account of the sudden formation of a nearby sink known as the Alligator-Hole

²³ I am indebted to Michael Gaudio for his argument that sinkholes signify the limits of

(figure 3.5).²⁴ Standing on what appeared to be solid earth, “On a sudden [the trader] was astonished by an inexpressible rushing noise, like a mighty hurricane or thunder storm; and looking round, he saw the earth overflowed by torrents of water, which came, wave after wave, rushing down a vale or plain very near him, which it filled with water, and soon began to overwhelm the higher grounds, attended with a terrific noise and tremor of the earth” (204) Bartram’s drawing *View of the Alegator Hole in Isthmus Florida* conveys a similar sense of upheaval, one associated with Florida’s sub-tropical environment through the presence of a royal palm. The eye of the viewer is immediately drawn past the faintly sketched details at the periphery of the image, to the strongly articulated sinkhole at its center. The spiral movement of the vine on the largest palm tree, the long body of the alligator, and the steep banks of the sinkhole lead the viewer’s eye in a dynamic descent toward the depths of the fountain’s black waters. For Michael Gaudio, the drawing signifies the limits of natural historical representation. Beneath the murky surface of the sinkhole lurks “all that is unavailable to vision and therefore unavailable to Bartram as a naturalist.”²⁵ The sinkhole provides another instance of the way in which the Floridian environment frustrates Bartram’s efforts to establish a kind of natural historical dominion.

Volatile moments such as those described above are by no means exceptional. Just prior to the trade negotiations at Talahasochte, Bartram visits the famous Manatee Spring. He observes that fish and shells are regularly vomited up from the depths of the

Bartram’s enlightenment faith in transparency and visibility. See Gaudio 8-9.

²⁴ The image is reproduced in William Bartram, *Botanical and Zoological Drawings, 1756-1788* (Philadelphia, 1968).

²⁵ The quote, and other details of this reading are from Gaudio, 9-10.

spring, and sucked quickly back into the “vast funnel” at its bottom. “The ebullition is astonishing,” Bartram writes, at the beginning of a lengthy description, “and continual, though its greatest force of fury intermits, regularly, for the space of thirty seconds at a time” (198). In passages such as these, Florida’s landscape is itself productive of flux.

Bartram’s preoccupation with fountains and sinkholes intensifies at precisely the moments that his text offers its most extended West Indian prophecy and depicts extensive Seminole trade with Cuba. At such moments, his descriptions of those natural wonders take on an added resonance of secrecy and intrigue. On the very page that he describes commercial relations between Talahasochte and Havana, Bartram speculates on the source of the Little St. Juan River. He theorizes that the fertile lands between Cuscowilla and the Gulf coast are watered by numerous, “subterraneous rivers, which wander in darkness beneath the surface of the earth, by innumerable doublings, windings, and secret labyrinths; no doubt in some places forming vast reservoirs and subterranean lakes ...” (194-5). Those “subterraneous courses” eventually surface, in “surprising vast fountains” near the banks of major rivers. Bartram depicts the Great Sink, primary focus of his 1775 landscape of the Alachua savanna, in a similarly gothic vocabulary. At the sink, he notes that numerous fish descend into “vast perforations of the rocks, and from thence are conducted and carried away, by secret subterranean conduits and gloomy vaults” (181). Many of those fish, he conjectures, are likely, “strangers or adventurers from other lakes, ponds, and rivers, [carried] by subterraneous rivulets and communications to this rocky, dark door...” (181).

The natural forms of clandestine movement evoked by these passages resonate powerfully with the illicit movement of the trading mission Bartram accompanies into

East Florida. Bartram's party travels to Seminole territory in clear violation of the 1774 trade embargo. At Talahasochte they discover similar illicit travels among the Seminole. The Suwanee group's commercial relations with the Spanish Caribbean are in brazen disregard of the British Navigation Acts. Bartram sees free West Indian commerce as both source of North American prosperity (by contributing to the wealth of southern traders) and threat to North American sovereignty and cultural identity (by allowing a continued Spanish foothold in the region). The springs of East Florida are a similarly paradoxical natural force. On the surface, springs produce the forms of disorientation and upheaval cataloged above. Nonetheless, as primary water supply for savannas such as the Alachua, they are simultaneously the source of abundance. They provide a close analogy for the paradoxical social, political and economic influence of illicit trans-colonial trade between the Deep South and the Floridas, and transnational exchange between British Florida and the Spanish Caribbean.

The disorienting effects of Florida's natural environment are also emphasized in Bartram's representations of another plant that figures prominently in the *Great Alachua Savannah*. The lake to the bottom right of the savanna is covered with the broad leaves of the *nymphae nilumbo*, Bartram's Linnean tag for the American Lotus or Water Chinquapin (**figure 3.6**). Throughout his narrative, the plant is consistently associated with illusion and deception, usually with Bartram's momentary uncertainty as to whether the terrain before him is aquatic or terrestrial. Approaching a lake on the southern edge of the Alachua, Bartram writes that, "at the distance of some hundred yards" it appeared to be "a large floating field (if I may so express myself) of the Nymphaea Nilumbo" (168). Elsewhere in *Travels* he describes, an Alabama bay that resembled "a delusive green

wavy plain of the *Nymphaea Nelumb*a” (332). Bartram’s descriptions of the American Lotus reinforce the sense that the ground upon which he travels is not as stable as it first appears. Mary Louise Pratt argues that the topos of the swamp posed particular problems for European travelers of Bartram’s era, who were unable to sustain hierarchical relations between seer and seen in its liminal, indeterminate environment (Pratt 215). The lotus-covered ponds of Florida present Bartram with a similar challenge.

The risks of Florida’s deceptive environment are clarified in two other images centered on the American Lotus. The first is the watercolor *A Seed Vessel of the Calocasia* (**figure 3.7**). *Calocasia* is yet another term for Bartram’s *nymphae nilumbo*, which figures prominently in this highly dramatic image. The desiccated seed vessel in the right foreground evokes the same climate of decline as the Spanish, British, and native ruins Bartram encounters. It also suggests what Bartram views as the natural equivalents of the forms of ambush, warfare, and dissimulation those empires lived and died by. Beneath the seed vessel we glimpse the tail of the same scarlet snake whose head emerges from the specimen of black root in the left background. The snake has entrapped an unsuspecting frog by disguising its head as one of the leaves of the black root. In a companion drawing entitled *The Sarasena* (**figure 3.8**) Bartram further emphasizes the theme of predation. A lizard springs from the Trumpet Leaf in the left foreground to catch an unsuspecting ant. Even the pitcher plant (*sarracenia purpurea*) in the right background is engaged in a botanical form of hunting by deception.

In the introduction to *Travels*, Bartram extolled the predatory skill of a similar botanical specimen, the *Dionea muscipula*: “See the incarnate lobes expanding, how gay and sportive they appear! Ready on the spring to intrap incautious deluded insects! What

artifice! There behold one of the leaves just closed upon a struggling fly; another has gotten a worm; its hold is sure, its prey can never escape—carnivorous vegetable!” (17). The deceptive prowess of the species is one reason that Bartram includes it in yet another drawing centered on the American Lotus. *Colocasia* is perhaps Bartram’s most striking image (**figure 3.9**). The blossoms of five outsized specimens of *nymphae nilumbo* tower above the Great Blue Heron in the left foreground, creating an intensely surreal landscape. The vast surface of a lily pad in the right foreground tilts upward toward the viewer. The heron appears about to step on another lily pad in the left foreground, perhaps seduced by the same illusion of solidity to which Bartram was so often subject. The theme of delusion is here again wedded to that of predation. The heron prepares to strike a small fish at the edge of the lake, while the *Dionae muscipula* at the left lays in wait for the dragonfly perched on a flower directly above it. The very presence of the Venus flytrap adds to the impression of Florida as an exotic locale in which the natural order has been disrupted. Just as the scale of the image appears to reverse the position of plants and animals in the Great Chain of Being, Bartram’s remarks on the *Dionae muscipula* attempt a similar subversion of hierarchy. In his introduction, he writes: “Can we after viewing this object, hesitate a moment to confess, that vegetable beings are endued with some sensible faculties or attributes, similar to those that dignify animal nature” (17).

Among the primary subtexts for these deceptive, violent and subversive images is the series of negotiations Bartram witnessed between white, Creek, Seminole and Cherokee traders. In his letter to Knox, Bartram advised that by introducing Anglo-American trade and culture, the new nation would eventually “charm” and “fascinate” the

tribes of the Southeast through sheer diplomacy. They would practice a kind of benign artifice on Native America. Bartram's terminology reveals his doubts that such artifice was always benign. As Christoph Irmscher documents, both terms were used widely in Bartram's day to describe the predatory behaviors of snakes (149-87). Bartram himself relates that rattle snakes "are supposed to have the power of fascination in an eminent degree, so as to inthral their prey. It is generally believed that they charm birds, rabbits, squirrels and other animals, and by stedfastly looking at them posses them with infatuation" (224). Bartram's *Rattle Snake's Head* appears to depict precisely this legendary ability (**Figure 3.10**). The grotesquely shaped head of the snake is rendered in precise detail, allowing the viewer to observe the hypnotic gaze of its one visible eye, the sinuous movement of its forked tongue, and the contours of its grinning mouth from a close vantage (Irmscher 167).

Bartram's depictions of carnivorous plants reveal an additional set of anxieties regarding white-native diplomacy. By subverting the Great Chain of Being and the racial hierarchy that rests upon it such specimens raise the possibility that predatory deceptions could as easily be practiced on the new nation as by it. As Cashin writes of the Revolutionary Southeast, "Trading negotiations ... usually involved a tacit mutual cheating" (Cashin 110).

The prevalence of carnivorous plants, however, suggests a more precise context, one that brings us back to the Spanish legacy of the region. Improbable as such a suggestion might at first appear, such images record the U.S. encounter with the *mestizaje* of the Spanish American empire. Symbolically inaugurated by the coupling of Cortez and Dona Marina in Bernal Diaz' account of the conquest of Mexico, the mixing of the races was

an openly acknowledged fact of Spanish colonization by the eighteenth century. The Mexican genre of *castas* painting attempted to classify the progeny of a range of interracial liaisons. If *castas* paintings testify to Spanish anxieties regarding race-mixing, such anxieties were magnified to spectacular proportions in the eyes of Anglo-Americans.²⁶ It is hardly surprising that such anxiety would be intensified as, during Bartram's actual journey, Great Britain attempted to consolidate possession of the formerly Spanish Floridas, and as, during the composition of *Travels*, the new nation contemplated annexing the territory from Spain.

From his experience with white traders, Bartram knew that interracial liaisons and marriages often played a crucial role in diplomacy throughout the former Spanish borderlands of the Southeast and the Floridas. For instance, Bartram was hosted and assisted by both George Galphin and Lachlan McGillivray, two Florida traders who were prime movers behind the Augusta and St. Augustine congresses. Cashin usefully argues that in the interest of trade Galphin and McGillivray favored coexistence (and intermarriage) with the southeastern tribes, who they believed should retain some sovereignty over their land and affairs.²⁷ On his Georgia plantation Galphin lived openly with, and fathered *mestizo* children by two Creek women, despite having left a wife in his native Ireland. And in a form of *mestizaje* he did not officially endorse, he fathered three children by two of his over one hundred slaves. Lachlan McGillivray's *mestizo* son

²⁶ For a useful summary of U.S. attitudes toward *mestizaje* see Gary B. Nash, "The Hidden History of Mestizo America," *Journal of American History* 82 (1995), 941-964. On *castas* paintings see: Maria Concepcion Garcia Saiz, *Las castas Mexicanas: Un genero pictorico Americano* (Milan, 1989).

²⁷ Cashin neglects to perceive, however, that such interrelations were as much in service of the trader's power struggle with the Creeks and Cherokees, as they were an enlightened alternative.

Alexander became a leading if controversial player in Creek politics and diplomacy of the 1780s and early 1790s.²⁸

The link between trade and *mestizaje* is also an important theme within *Travels* itself. After the feast to celebrate the settlement of the treaty at Cuscowilla, Bartram writes of the common liaisons between white traders and Seminole women. He writes:

The Seminole girls are by no means destitute of charms to please the rougher sex: the white traders are fully sensible how greatly it is for their advantage to gain their affections and friendship in matters of trade and commerce . . . they labour and watch constantly to promote their private interests, and detect and prevent any plots or evil designs which may threaten their persons, or operate against their trade or business.” (173)

Bartram further implies that Anglo-Americans are not the first to establish such relations with the Seminole. He observes that, “The manners and customs of the Alachuas, and most of the lower Creeks or Siminoles, appear evidently tinctured with Spanish civilization. Their religious and civil usages manifest a predilection for the Spanish customs” (166).

Some of the best evidence for the association between carnivorous plants and illicit sexuality in *Travels* comes from the correspondence of William’s father. Thomas Slaughter argues that John Bartram viewed the Venus flytrap as, “a plant that seemed to contradict Linnaeus’s presumptions about the ‘natural’ relationship between animals and plants, and by implication between men and women.” In a 1762 letter to Peter Collinson

²⁸ For a provocative reading of Alexander McGillivray’s life and career see Saunt, *A New Order of Things*, 67-89.

he relates an off-color joke about, in Slaughter's words, "the vulvalike grasper that consumed meat"(Slaughter 29-30).

Within *Travels*, that link becomes clearest in Bartram's narrative of an impromptu festival at Spalding's Lower store, the most prominent white trading post in East Florida. Bartram reconnoitered to the store soon after his second visit to the Alachua Savannah, to find a party of forty Seminole men and women, just returned from St. Augustine, where the Governor had given them kegs of rum in exchange for a pledge to fight the Choctaws. Anxious for business during the lean times of the embargo, the traders began to barter for the Seminole's liquor.²⁹ Bartram writes:

In a few days this festival exhibited one of the most ludicrous bacchanalian scenes that it is possible to be conceived. White and red men and women without distinction, passed the day merrily with these jovial, amorous toppers, and the nights in convivial songs, dances, and sacrifices to Venus, as long as they could stand or move; for in these frolicks both sexes take such liberties with each other, and act, without constraint or shame, such scenes as they would abhor when sober or in their senses; and would endanger their ears and even their lives. (216)

In this the most negative of Bartram's depictions of interracial sex, the phrase "sacrifices to Venus" is especially loaded. Playing on the common name for the *Dionae muscipula*, it provides a crucial link between interracial sex and the most subversive of the forms of predation represented in the narrative. That link is reinforced by a subsequent depiction of the artifice of Seminole women during the festival. Pretending to accept mouthfuls of

²⁹ The account of the festival is drawn from Cashin 108.

rum from the men (both white and Seminole) the women secretly spat the liquor into jars hidden beneath their clothing. At the end of the festival, with rum scarce, they sold the jars back to the men for exorbitant sums. The festival at Spalding's lower store is Bartram's nightmare vision of trade and diplomacy subverted by deception and illicit sexuality. Its association between the sexual artifice of Seminole women, and the predatory deceptions of carnivorous plants, helps us to read anxieties regarding *mestizaje* into a variety of Bartram's representations of Florida nature, as one source of the instability of any society founded on its sub-tropical environment.³⁰

Coda: Docile Slaves and Black Indians

It is likely that some of Bartram's anxieties regarding race-mixing between whites and natives owes to his awareness that should his vision of Florida as plantation society succeed the territory would be inhabited by an overwhelming black majority. Troubling as white-native liaisons could be, the specter of white-black or black-native relations was far more so. Bartram unquestionably desired the establishment of a plantation society modeled on the British Caribbean in the Floridas. But he feared development of the kinds of mixed populations that had so successfully disrupted the slave regimes of the French, Spanish and British territories of the greater Caribbean. Around the time of the

³⁰ In advising Knox to introduce U.S. trade and culture among the Southeast Indians, Bartram explored the possibility of economic expansion without domination and exploitation. That search inspired his fantasy of a Spanish colonialism free of native genocide and enslavement. Moments such as the festival at Spalding's Lower store, however, reveal Bartram's fear that the form of exchange without domination he appears to advocate will lead to the utter decay of what Anglo-America recognizes as civil society. That fear is given sharpest expression in Bartram's vision of a British Florida in which, like the Spanish Empire through the eyes of U.S. chroniclers, racial divisions and sexual boundaries have been wholly effaced.

publication of *Travels* the mulatto elite of French Saint Domingue initiated a bitter and violent protest against the colonial apparatus. Communities born of unions between Africans and Indians also presented formidable resistance. Roach writes that, "The multiplication of Maroon communities (the social and military alliances of Indians and escaped slaves that flourished in parts of South America, the Caribbean, and Louisiana) offered more than practical resistance to European colonial interests. They also provided a subversive alternative to the self-proclaimed ascendancy of white people as sole proprietors of circum-Atlantic contact and exchange" (Roach 154).

The kind of black-majority slave society Bartram hopes for is evident in his visit to a Georgia plantation near the beginning of his travels. The naturalist is given a tour by his enlightened slave-holding host:

He added, come along with me towards the river bank, where I have some men at work squaring Pine and Cypress timber for the West India market . . . almost every object in our progress contributed to demonstrate this good man's system of economy to be not only practicable but eligible; and the slave appeared on all sides as a crowd of witnesses to justify his industry, humanity, and liberal spirit.

The slaves comparatively of a gigantic stature, fat and muscular, were mounted on the massive timber logs; the regular heavy strokes of their gleaming axes re-echoed in the deep forests; at the same time, contented and joyful, the sooty sons of Afric forgetting their bondage, in chorus sung the virtues and beneficence of their master in songs of their own composition.

The end of the passage implicitly acknowledges that, as a black-majority colony, the culture of southern blacks retains powerful African influences. The beginning of the passage, however, assures the reader that this black-majority in no way endangers the peace and prosperity of the white elite. West Indian exchange proceeds in an orderly manner.

The kind of black-majority society Bartram fears is evident in his meeting with a party of slaves near the border of South and North Carolina, while returning to his home in Philadelphia. It is one of the strangest passages in all *Travels*. During his northward journey, Bartram relates the following incident:

Observed a number of persons coming up a head, whom I soon perceived to be a party of Negroes. I had every reason to dread the consequence; for this being a desolate place, I was by this time several miles from any house or plantation, and had reason to apprehend this to be a predatory band of Negroes; people being frequently attacked, robbed, and sometimes murdered by them at this place. I was unarmed, alone, and my horse tired: thus situated every way in their power, I had no alternative but to be resigned and prepare to meet them. As soon as I saw them distinctly a mile or two off, I immediately alighted to rest, and give breath to my horse, intending to attempt my safety by flight, if upon near approach they should betray hostile designs. Thus prepared, when we drew near to each other, I mounted and rode briskly up; and though armed with clubs, axes and hoes, they opened to right and left, and let me pass peaceably. Their chief informed me whom they belonged to, and said they were going to

man a new quarter at the West end of the bay; I however kept a sharp eye about me, apprehending that this might possibly have been an advanced division, and their intentions were to ambuscade and surround me; but they kept on quietly, and I was no more alarmed by them. (379)

Readers of *Benito Cereno* may well be reminded of Amassa Delano's blithe confidence and Babo's masterly deceptions. Bartram's intense fears of this band of armed and unescorted blacks are as improbably allayed by the "chief's" assurance that they are slaves on an errand from a nearby plantation, as Delano's suspicions of hatchet wielding slaves are by Don Benito's claim that they are polishing the weapons to keep busy. Even though this particular party does not turn out to be a "predatory band of negroes," Bartram's assertion that such bands are known to commit frequent robberies and murders in the region remains jarring in a text in which black rebellion is nowhere else so much as hinted at. Bartram's description of an "advanced division" organized by a "chief" into possible "ambuscade" evokes the threat of the maroon armies that plagued the white settlers of the greater Caribbean. It also looks back in time to evoke the Stono rebellion, the closest thing the Carolinas had seen to a large-scale maroon uprising. Bartram chooses to strike an intensely cautionary note near the conclusion of his natural historical narrative. It is as if the volatility of any black-majority colony had only become visible to him after his exploration of the circum-Caribbean coasts of West Florida and Louisiana. Among the locales Bartram visited, after all, was the Spanish outpost at Point Coupee, which in the next decade would be the site of the largest mainland slave rebellion in history, one directly inspired by events in Haiti.

If the dual threat of slave rebellion and miscegenation has lurked at the edges of the preceding chapters on Crèvecoeur and Bartram, it is central to the following one on Louisiana during the Americanization phase of the 1820s. The prominence of slave unrest and insurrection in that chapter owes to the profound reverberations of the Haitian Revolution of 1789-1804. That slave-led revolution, and the subsequent foundation of the first black republic in the New World, was one of the crucial historical developments that brought John Audubon to the circum-Caribbean cosmopolis of New Orleans.

Chapter Four:

“Mixed and Lost in the Vortex”: The Specter of Haiti in Audubon’s Louisiana

In 1838 the Haitian-born ornithologist John James Audubon was at the height of transatlantic renown. Prominent subscribers in Europe and the United States had begun to receive the fourth and final volume of *The Birds of America*, Audubon’s monumental survey of nearly the full range of aviary variety to be found within the borders of the rapidly expanding republic. The French-reared naturalist was clearly pleased by the European recognition he gained over the course of his career. The 1831 prospectus for *The Birds of America* proudly listed his memberships in five different natural historical societies in London, Paris and Edinburgh, as well as his honorary membership in the Scottish Academy of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. Throughout his career, however, Audubon was more gratified by his rising U.S. reputation. Unlike his fellow Franco-American St. John de Crèvecoeur, Audubon desired his permanent identification with the new nation, a relation he had formalized through his lengthy and complicated efforts to gain citizenship.

The Birds of America and the intense marketing campaign that preceded it marks Audubon’s attempt to solidify his sense of national identity and belonging. It decisively links his natural historical and aesthetic efforts with the rise of Jacksonian America to international influence and prestige. Ever the subtle self-promoter, Audubon began that campaign as early as his 1826 tour of Scotland. Recording a visit to his studios in his *1826 Journal*, he puts his grandest ambitions, projected onto the nation, in the mouth of a

wealthy Scottish lady. Looking closely at his paintings, she exclaims, “that it seemed America would certainly surpass all other Countries in point of Arts & Sciences in Less than another Century” (*Writings and Drawings* 180).

The artist could hardly have conceived a more celebratory nationalist statement for his adopted homeland than the completed *Birds of America*. In 435 vibrantly colored prints, its four volumes present the vast geographical expanse extending from the Atlantic seaboard to the western fringes of the Louisiana territory as site of limitless natural resources. No expense or trouble was spared in producing its stunning visual effect. At every stage of production, Audubon sought to surpass the aesthetic achievements of earlier works of natural historical illustration. These included Catesby’s *The Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahama Islands*, Comte de Buffon’s *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière*, and (his most daunting competitor) Alexander Wilson’s *American Ornithology* (1808-14). Audubon closely supervised his collaborator Robert Havell as he engraved and hand-colored each plate. Working from original plates, Havell used an advanced aquatint process that allowed “an approximation of the continuous tone of watercolor washes” (Blaugrund 37). The prints were executed on double elephant folio sheets, the largest paper available in the period at 29 1/2 X 39 inches, so that Audubon could represent even large species in their actual dimensions. Audubon’s aesthetic also demanded a labor-intensive process of first-hand observation and fieldwork. Predecessors such as Alexander Wilson and Catesby had often painted their specimens in static, two-dimensional profile, and sometimes painted species they had never seen alive. Audubon pictured his specimens engaged in characteristic behaviors he claimed to have witnessed in nature.

The success of his approach is evident in even a cursory sampling of images. Audubon developed an impressive range of painterly styles in order to convey the diversity and exoticism of the national ornithological inheritance. An image such as *Yellow-breasted Chat*, painted in New Jersey in 1829, shows Audubon in full command of the pastel palate and whimsical tone he employed for representing songbirds (**figure 4.1**). An image such as *Great Blue ('Great White') Heron*, painted in the Florida Keys in 1832, displays the innovative compositions Audubon developed to depict large water-birds in a life-like scale (**figure 4.2**). Audubon is perhaps most celebrated for his images of birds of prey such as his 1825 *Northern Bobwhite*, *Red-Shouldered Hawk* (**figure 4.3**). In a dynamic and dramatic composition, the talons of the hawk are spread wide, as if to take in at once the entire flock of startled bobwhite it descends upon. Taking in the whole is precisely the experience provided to the reader of *Birds of America*. Flipping from image to image, through the dramatic contrasts in scale and genre Audubon so carefully arranged, the viewer becomes the privileged consumer of an overwhelming natural superabundance.

The themes of diversity, exoticism and superabundance provide one important link between Audubon's career and the focus of this dissertation. From the protests over the Sugar Acts, through the drafting of the Constitution, the new nation's superabundant prospects were frequently located to the south of the mainland, in the bountiful trade routes of the greater Caribbean. In the 1820s, at the beginnings of Audubon's career, the U.S. expansionist gaze was still directed squarely to the south, even as its scope had broadened to encompass the hemisphere. In 1823, a mere three years after Audubon had begun work on his opus, those hemispheric desires were given official expression in the

Monroe Doctrine. In a curious sense, *The Birds of America* performs a similarly grand and presumptive gesture. It delimits the migratory bird-life of an entire hemisphere as an exclusively national possession. By doing so, however, Audubon opens his work to a host of contradictory meanings. While his natural history helps to consolidate a new national self-image as wealthy, energetic, aggressive and powerful, it also reveals profound fissures in that construct. The aesthetics of *The Birds of America* betray the influence of an array of social, cultural and economic forces that resisted and disrupted the process of nation-formation in Jacksonian America. As did William Bartram's natural history of the Floridas, Audubon's later work locates such forces precisely on North America's circum-Caribbean margins. While Caribbean concerns have been revealed as dominant within a variety of eighteenth century Euro-American natural histories, Audubon's nineteenth century successor is no exception.

While Audubon would produce some stunning images in the Florida Keys, the most significant circum-Caribbean locale for his career is Louisiana. The process of publishing *The Birds of America* had begun in 1829, but its volumes marked the culmination of Audubon's laborious efforts to collect specimens and subscribers since his 1820 journey to the Louisiana Delta and New Orleans. It was during that journey that Audubon developed the dramatic, indeed graphic aesthetic we encounter in images such as "Red-Shouldered Hawk." Twenty-seven of the images reproduced in Blaugrund and Stebbins' *John James Audubon: The Watercolors for the Birds of America* were composed in New Orleans and Louisiana, where the artist lived from 1821-22, and again in 1825 before traveling to Europe in search of international acclaim. The years were

among the most productive in a long career, both in terms of the sheer number of images Audubon produced, and the importance of the aesthetic breakthroughs he achieved.

Prior to 1820, ornithology and painting had been avocations, as Audubon's attentions were consumed with the day to day operation of his prosperous mill and store in Henderson, Kentucky. "Orchard Oriole," is representative of his early efforts. Executed in pastel and graphite, it portrays the right profile of a relatively inert specimen, with little attention paid to rendering either behavior or habitat in a convincing fashion (**figure 4.4**). "Northern Goshawk, Cooper's Hawk" dramatically displays the development from Audubon's early to mature styles (**figure 4.5**). The adult Northern Goshawk to the lower left, and the Cooper's Hawk to the lower right were painted in Kentucky between 1809 and 1819. As in the previous image, the specimens are depicted in static profile. Audubon provides only a cursory sense of their markings. As Blaugrund and Stebbins usefully note, "the figures have not shed the stiffness and severity of the stuffed, mounted skins that served Audubon as models" (80). The immature goshawk at the top was painted in 1829, after the formative Louisiana period and displays several characteristics of Audubon's mature style. The artist carefully attends to the texture of the specimen's plumage, and the vitality of its expression and pose.

The rapidity with which that mature style developed during the Louisiana period is astonishing. *Peregrine Falcon* is among the most sensational and bloody of Audubon's images (**figure 4.6**). Working in pastel, Audubon composed the female specimen on the right on the banks of the Mississippi River in December of 1820, mere months after he had left his wife and children in St. Louis to pursue natural history as a full-time profession. Audubon created his most dramatic composition to date. A strong diagonal

runs from the female's taut tail-feathers, through its voracious expression, through the bright drop of blood suspended from its lower beak. The rest of the image, composed in watercolor a few years after the original pastel, shows further signs of rapid development. The stray, floating feather near the spatial center of the image establishes a heightened sense of temporal immediacy, augmenting the effect created by the suspended drop of blood. Predation is rendered in visceral terms. The female has ripped open the torso of the gadwal beneath it, and plucked its right eye, the socket of which is now limned with blood. The talons of the male falcon are painted in sharp detail. One talon actively penetrates the corpse of a second gadwal. The body of the male falcon forms an especially vibrant composition. Crouching over its prey, the falcon spreads its wings and splays its tail-feathers to create a variety of dynamic points and angles. In perhaps the finest detail of the image, the male falcon gazes fiercely back out at the viewer. Audubon breaks the frame of the natural historical image, challenging the conventional boundary between subject and object, collector and specimen.

While *Peregrine Falcon* may be especially sensational, it is by no means exceptional. Of the twenty-seven images composed during the Louisiana period, roughly one-third depict specimens engaged in predatory behaviors. The importance of such images to the development of natural historical illustration in general has been the subject of two excellent recent studies. For Amy Meyers, while Audubon's images are typical in their desire to represent the variety and abundance of New World nature, they are distinguished by their efforts to represent the intricate relationship between a specimen and its dynamic, often volatile habitat. Audubon's art attends scrupulously to the representation of life-like behaviors and environments. Audubon, "set as the main

objective for his publication the reconstruction of the complex matrix of intra- and interspecial relationships from which birds, along with all other life-forms, had traditionally been removed in scientific illustrations and texts” (Meyers, “Observations of an American Woodsman” 46). Meyers contends that this innovation found an important precedent in the work of John and William Bartram. Indeed, Audubon and the Bartrams link up with the work of Mark Catesby in a “sub-tradition within American natural history illustration . . . [which] countered the trend toward systematic classification.”¹ Audubon carried the interest in disrupted taxonomies and predatory behavior to an extreme. In sometimes grotesque images of predation Audubon depicts something like Darwin’s vision of, “an unstable world, devoid of moral law, where competition functions as the ruling mechanism by which species change” (Meyers, “Observations of an American Woodsman” 53).

Meyer’s sense of the dynamism and chaos of Audubon’s art is corroborated by Christoph Irmscher’s *The Poetics of Natural History*. The watercolors for *Birds of America*, in his account, are filled with macabre scenes of aviary predation and human violence. Irmscher describes, the “frequent murder in [Audubon’s] work, with men killing birds by the thousands and birds feeding freely on the bodies of other birds.” Audubon’s textual depictions of birds share that preoccupation. His biography of the carrion crow, in Irmscher’s words, “evokes a truly surreal scene of universal slaughter, in

¹ Amy R.W. Meyers, “Imposing Order on the Wilderness: Natural History Illustration and Landscape Portrayal,” in Edward J. Nygren, ed., *Views and Visions: American Landscape before 1830* (Washington, D.C.: The Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1986), 121. Meyers’ further elaborates her thesis in “Sketches from the Wilderness: Changing Conceptions of Nature in American Natural History Illustration, 1680-1880 (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1985).

which the lethal intentions of the human hunters mix with the desire of the birds to feed on the corpses of their companions” (213).

This chapter seeks to build on the suggestive analyses of Meyers and Irmischer by situating the aesthetics of the early watercolors in the context of Audubon’s substantial body of writing, and the history of pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue and early-national Louisiana. It is hardly a coincidence that the natural historical texts and images of Catesby, William Bartram and John Audubon share a fascination with complex inter-special relationships, unstable identities, and predatory behaviors. The aesthetics of all three naturalists were shaped in important ways by the circum-Caribbean location of their travels.

The terms in which Audubon depicts the natural environment of Louisiana resonate powerfully with the terms in which its hybrid society and culture were represented in the imagination of the early nineteenth century United States. After nearly two decades of U.S. possession, since Jefferson’s western land deal of 1803, Louisiana remained a locale shaped predominately by its history of French and Spanish colonization. The Mississippi River had linked France’s North American frontier, rich in fur and foodstuffs, with its island possessions in the West Indies since the founding of the colony by pirates from the Caribbean and fur-trappers from Canada in 1699. It became especially important after the establishment of New Orleans at the strategic mouth of the river after the 1714 Treaties of Utrecht. Throughout the eighteenth century the fertile lands of lower Louisiana were envisioned as source of rice and other staples for the more valuable sugar islands, preeminently Saint Domingue (Midlo Hall 12). After the revolt of that island at the close of the century, Louisiana was reshaped by a massive influx of

refugees including whites, free blacks and slaves. It is precisely this history that inspires Gaspar and Geggus to designate colonial and early-national Louisiana among the territories of the greater Caribbean.² The genesis of Audubon's innovative natural historical aesthetic can be located in the society, culture and economy of that transnational region. His early efforts attempt to come to terms with a complex regional history, one with profound repercussions for the artist's adopted nation, for the hemisphere it quickly came to dominate, and for Audubon's own ambiguous identity.

The same convergence of forces that made New Orleans and its environs such promising territory for a naturalist also made it what Joseph Roach describes as a teeming "circum-Caribbean cosmopolis." The strategic location, and fertile swamps and bayous of lower Louisiana made it both an ideal transit for a diverse array of ornithological species and a desirable locale for U.S. expansionist interests. Maritime currents and wind patterns placed New Orleans directly in the main flight path for New World bird-life migrating between South and Central America, the Caribbean, and North America. Those same currents of wind and water made the city the locus of complex and ever-shifting human movements. Commodities, cultural forms and populations from throughout the hemisphere mingled and were exchanged in that important seaport. In the aftermath of the Haitian Revolution the movements it facilitated were intensely disturbing to U.S. writers and thinkers, as nation-wide fears of a massive slave insurrection came to center on the Mississippi Delta. Such anxieties inspired extensive scrutiny of the perceived

² David Barry Gaspar and David Patrick Geggus, eds., *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997), viii-ix. See also Paul Lachance, "The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in Louisiana," in *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, ed. David P. Geggus (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2001), 209-230.

surplus of racial, ethnic, and national identities in the region. Audubon's substantial body of writing—including journals, narratives, autobiographical sketches, and ornithological descriptions—establishes the cultural collisions of early-national Louisiana as an important context for his heroic natural historical efforts. Audubon presents his practice of natural history as driven by a rage for order amidst the unruly violence and heterogeneity of the region. His own attempts to wrest order from the region are complicated, however, by his own French *creole*, and possibly mixed origins in pre-revolutionary Saint Domingue. The naturalist's ambivalent fascination with Louisiana—that odd mixture of wonder and loathing that permeates his art—is ultimately rooted in a life-long obsession with the enigmatic routes of his own identity.

In his study of circum-Atlantic performance, Joseph Roach offers a suggestive reading of Dion Boucicault's 1859 play *The Octoroon: or, Life in Louisiana*. He argues that “Two axes, one running north and south, the other east and west, intersect in Boucicault's play, as they once did in Louisiana: the former axis conjoins the river systems of the Mississippi basin with the Caribbean; the latter follows the path of national expansion conceived by Anglo-Americans as pre-ordained.” He continues, “*The Octoroon* stages a narrative of encounter, a dramatization of Anglo-American contact with the creolized interculture of the Latin Caribbean” (180). From the opening images of his *Mississippi River Journal*, through the final transformation of his Louisiana watercolors into the prints of *The Birds of America*, Audubon's career stages a similar narrative of encounter. The heterogeneity of Louisiana's society and culture, displaced onto its superabundant natural environment, is relentlessly sought out, classified, and represented as national resource, the spoils of the divinely sanctioned westward progress of

the early U.S. As in Boucicault's play, however, Audubon's nationalist narrative remains haunted by the creolized interculture it claims to have supplanted, in the form of the uncanny and inscrutable presence of the octoroon.

Uncertain Origins

The standard biography of Audubon remains Alice Ford's *John James Audubon*, the first two chapters of which are devoted to the establishment of Jean Audubon's plantation near Les Cayes, the birth and early years of his illustrious son, and their flight from the impending revolution on the island. Through close examination of archival records in both Haiti and Nantes, Ford has established the naturalist's birth mother as Jeanne Rabine, a French servant who Jean Audubon met on one of his frequent journeys between the sugar colony and Nantes, where his wife Ann Moynet remained in residence. Audubon's illegitimacy, Ford acknowledges, made her biographical research exceedingly difficult. Traditional sources such as baptismal records were unavailable, because, "any record of the event, with particulars about parentage, was to be avoided at all costs on Saint Domingue" (14). What Ford does not make explicit here is that Audubon's father also needed to avoid any record of Audubon's illegitimate origins in order to protect him from innuendo regarding the purity of his racial identity. In a French West Indian society where the concubinage of black women was common, illegitimacy raised the specter of miscegenation.

As one of Jean Audubon's children, the infant naturalist was particularly vulnerable to innuendo regarding his racial origins. Sanitte Bouffard, the quadroon daughter of a neighboring French sugar planter and his mulatto "wife," was Jean's long-

term mistress, who, in a relatively common arrangement, lived openly with him as *ménagère* of his plantation. Sanitte bore Audubon's father a series of children over the course of their relationship. She remained on the plantation even after Jean Audubon took Jeann Rabine as his second mistress. Sanitte gave birth to at least one child, Rose, after Jeann Rabine's untimely death in the autumn of 1785. Her death occurred mere months after the birth of John Audubon, originally Jean Rabine. Records of his illegitimacy were to be avoided because the intricate arrangement on his father's plantation rendered the boundary between illegitimacy and miscegenation extremely tenuous.

Indeed, given Ford's awareness of Jean's domestic arrangements, she might have at least considered that the records regarding the naturalist's birth were falsified. Her central piece of evidence seems to be the ledger book of physician, Laurent Sanson, which records the birth of Jeann Rabine's only child. Given that his legal wife remained childless, it is at least possible that Jean Audubon may have regarded his bastard son as his future heir, and asked Sanson to help establish his whiteness. Jean Audubon was skilled in such deceptions. After the mulatto declaration of rights in August 1789, Audubon formulated a plan to flee the island with his eldest son. Ford writes:

There was no denying that his presence might endanger his dark family more than his withdrawal once full-scale insurrection came. A means to bring his white son, Jean, out of the danger on the island into the less savage turbulence of France would, he hoped, be found among sea captains of his acquaintance. Perhaps even his daughter Rose 'Bonnitte,' his 'Good Little One,' the image of himself and a miracle of paleness, might also be brought out, and as white (20).

Racial passing was a fact of French colonial life well known to Audubon's family. So too were the legal fictions and fabrications necessary to its success. Upon finally arriving in Nantes, Jean Audubon carefully attended to the concealment of his daughter's identity. Ford writes, "'Demoiselle Rabin, white,' she was described in the roll . . . The conspicuous word 'white,' in a ledger where ordinarily only 'black' and 'mulatto' were designated, does not recur in a whole shelf of ledgers for the era. The long deceased Jeanne Rabine became an adventitious shield against the damning truth about the half-sister of her son."³ Might she not have provided an adventitious shield against the truth for John Audubon himself?

That possibility is one reason that Audubon's origins have been periodically challenged. The entry on Audubon in *American National Biography* confidently declares that "the traditional view, that Mlle Rabin was a creole woman native to Santo Domingo, has been disproved" (1: 745). The rumors of its disproof, however, appear to have been greatly exaggerated. As recently as April 2000 an exhibit of Audubon's watercolors at the New-York Historical Society (the most extensive archive of his paintings) had the unintended consequence of reviving speculation. Relying on the fascinating yet long-outdated scholarship of F.H. Herrick (cited as authoritative in older versions of the *Dictionary of American Biography*) the exhibition catalog included the claim that Audubon was "Born in Santo Domingo, now Haiti, the illegitimate son of a Frenchman and a Haitian woman."⁴ Any visitor familiar with Audubon's biography would

³ Ford, 23.

⁴ Exhibition catalog for *John James Audubon: The Birds of Winter* (New York: The New York Historical Society, 2000). The relevant passage from the 1964 edition of the *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Appleton) reads: "The facts of Audubon's birth and parentage, long obscured by the haze of legend, have been

immediately assume this unnamed Haitian woman to be Sanitte Bouffard, while any visitor familiar with the social history of Haiti would logically entertain the question of whether Audubon was racially mixed. These are precisely the speculations that Audubon and his family always feared and worked so diligently to discourage. The curatorial oversight at the New-York Historical Society speaks, with powerful irony, of the persistence with which the confusions over Audubon's parentage continue to haunt his legacy.

Curiously, Ford seems far more certain of Audubon's origins than was the naturalist himself. Audubon's writings bear the marks of a life-long anxiety regarding identity and origins. Writing in his journal in 1826, the artist lamented, "Oh! That oath of mine, never to tell a politician, or a priest, no, [that] I am—what? What? No one knows, not even my poor self" (Ford, *1826 Journal* 48).

In the end, deciding the question of Audubon's origins is of far less interest than a reconsideration of his art within the shifting and overlapping historical contexts that made that question so complex and urgent. What is the relationship between those contexts and the aesthetics of Audubon's great natural historical and nationalist work? What might a pursuit of that question contribute to a transnational understanding of the culture and history of the U.S., where, in 1820, Audubon launched his artistic and scientific career in the former French colony of Louisiana? Audubon's life and career afford a unique opportunity to locate forms of amnesia and disavowal that are essential to the formation of national culture and identity, but that opportunity is lost in the rush to put the question of his origins to final rest.

established through the researches of Prof. Herrick . . . Little is known of his mother except that she was called "Mlle. Rabin" and was "a Creole of Santo Domingo" (1: 423).

The Enigma of Arrival: Audubon's "Myself"

Like Crèvecoeur before him, Audubon would remain a thoroughly "itinerant man" throughout his life. The specific trajectory of his career and travels were shaped by developments across the Atlantic world. Two decades after his hurried departure from the Saint Domingue of his birth, Audubon would leave France at the behest of his father in order to avoid service in the Napoleonic wars. After settling in Pennsylvania, he would eventually head west for Kentucky, hoping to enjoy the benefits of the opening of the Mississippi River to U.S. commerce after the Louisiana Purchase, and the economic boom that followed U.S. victory in the War of 1812. After his bankruptcy in the Panic of 1819, the first cyclic crash of the national market economy, he would travel to New Orleans, Philadelphia, London, Edinburgh, France and New York (to name but a few destinations) in his tireless efforts to win fame and fortune as a natural historian.

Audubon also resembles Crèvecoeur in that his highly fluid identity was continually reshaped by the vicissitudes of international capitalism and the global economy. That reality was brought home to him with particular clarity and force during the Panic of 1819 and the prolonged economic downturn that followed. Like the narrator of "Sketches of Jamaica," Audubon suffered a traumatic realization that local realities were subject to an array of transnational forces. Charles Sellers has described the Panic of 1819 as a, "traumatic awakening to the capitalist reality of boom-and-bust. Not until the postwar boom had the market spread far enough to inflict general prostration in bust. Suddenly everyone committed to the money economy was in peril, as bank notes depreciated in their pockets" (*The Market Revolution* 137). As owner of a prospering

Kentucky mill and store, Audubon bore the brunt of a precipitous crash in the price of domestically grown staples including cotton and wheat. Audubon's prosperity and subsequent ruin were both driven by the penetration of the maritime market into rural Kentucky.

Republican political economists including James Madison had long realized that the profitable employment of the nation's agricultural class depended on growing foreign demand for staple foods. Once North American staples had glutted available overseas markets a massive crisis was sure to ensue. It was just this fear that made British efforts to prohibit U.S. trade with its Caribbean colonies and with the European continent so threatening and noxious to Jeffersonian-era politicians and pundits, and made British trade restrictions such a prominent theme in the build-up to the War of 1812 (McCoy 232, 257). Indeed for a critic of U.S. Empire as prominent as William Appleby Williams, the War of 1812 marked the first time the new nation resorted to military force to "open" a foreign market, and thus alter its position in the imperial economy.⁵ The opening of markets helped to fuel post-war growth. Trade with the West Indies did not occupy the dominant position it had during the colonial period. As cotton emerged as the leading North American commodity, the textile industry of France and Britain grew to absorb over half of U.S. exports. But between 1815 and 1860 the Caribbean and Latin America still accounted for a quarter of the nation's exports, and supplied twenty percent of its imports. In their efforts to meet the growing demand of such markets entrepreneurs

⁵ William Appleby Williams, *The Roots of the Modern American Empire* (New York: Random House, 1969).

including Audubon borrowed extravagant sums. When overseas demand faltered, and inflated world commodity prices collapsed, men of Audubon's ilk were left destitute.⁶

The economic history sketched above demonstrates that the complexities of Audubon's identity are rooted as much in the vagaries of the Jacksonian economy as in a French colonial history of *métissage*. Indeed, Audubon's life-long engagement in a process of "creole self-fashioning" is located precisely at the intersection of those transnational contexts.⁷ As U.S. farmers and merchants were drawn deeper into the Atlantic and West Indian economy, class identity was rendered highly fluid and fears of financial collapse intensified. In a parallel manner, the effort to incorporate the circum-Caribbean South within the nation's expanding borders led to the blurring of racial identity and the sharpening of widespread fears of miscegenation and insurrection.

The autobiographical sketch "Myself" (1835) marks one of Audubon's most intriguing attempts to grapple with these shifting landscapes of identity. Perhaps as the final stages of the production of *The Birds of America* approached, and pressures to present a coherent public persona intensified, the artist felt compelled to offer a definitive account of his origins and development. The sketch tells a familiar American narrative, akin to Franklin's autobiography, of the rise of the self-made man through a mixture of pluck and systematic daily labor. Audubon's account of his birth and early years, however, is highly unusual, for it situates the artist's own identity in a transnational framework that includes the Caribbean. In the opening paragraph of the sketch he writes:

⁶ Sellers, 135; see also Sidney Ratner et. al., *The Evolution of the American Economy: Growth, Welfare, and Decision Making* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

⁷ The phrase is from a chapter title in Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*.

The precise period of my birth is yet an enigma to me, and I can only say what I have often heard my father repeat to me on this subject, which is as follows: It seems that my father had large properties in Santo Domingo, and was in the habit of visiting frequently that portion of our Southern States, called, and known by the name of, Louisiana, then owned by the French Government.

During one of these excursions he married a lady of Spanish extraction, whom I have been led to understand was as beautiful as she was wealthy, and otherwise attractive, and who bore my father three sons and a daughter,--I being the youngest of the sons and the only one who survived extreme youth. My mother, soon after my birth, accompanied my father to the estate of Aux Cayes, on the island of Santo Domingo, and she was one of the victims during the ever-to-be-lamented period of the negro insurrection of that island.

My father, through the intervention of some faithful servants, escaped from Aux Cayes with a good portion of his plate and money, and with me and these humble friends reached New Orleans in safety. From this place he took me to France, where, having married the only mother I have ever known, he left me under her charge (*Writings and Drawings* 765).

The narrative Audubon here offers is almost entirely fabricated. He was not born in New Orleans, and his birth mother was certainly not of Spanish descent. Neither Jeann Rabine nor Sanitte Bouffard were killed in the Haitian Revolution. While such details present

powerful evidence that Audubon found the question of his origins and identity a highly complex and troublesome one, others details suggest the conscious strategies he devised in order to counter and resolve such questions. Many aspects of the account stress his commonality with a U.S. audience. His claim to have been born within the current boundaries of the nation, for instance, was likely designed to strengthen his case for U.S. citizenship, which he attained shortly thereafter. His claim to have lost his mother to a slave insurrection would have evoked the sympathies of an American audience that, especially in the slave-holding South, feared for its own fate should mainland blacks follow the example of Toussaint and Dessalines.

Those fears point to an important tension in Audubon's account in general, and in his references to Louisiana and New Orleans in particular. Audubon posits his very existence as dependent on the extensive flow of trans- and inter-colonial trade that integrated Louisiana with the greater Caribbean. Through claiming his own transnational identity, as son of a French planter on Saint Domingue and a wealthy Spanish *creole* resident of New Orleans, Audubon presents the region as historical locus of a variety of cultural collisions. So too does his claim that his father found sanctuary in Louisiana, along with several servants (who we later learn were slaves) after the revolt of the wealthiest French sugar island. On the one hand, the account thus obliquely suggests that New Orleans' Caribbean connections form an important national resource. To them, the autobiography hints, the nation owes the monument to its natural abundance and splendor that is the *Birds of America*. On the other hand, the account raises the subversive possibility that West Indian commerce might carry the spirit of insurrection to the plantation South.

Audubon's account of his origins helps us locate a crucial paradox within the early-national imagination of Louisiana as a region, and of prosperity through West Indian exchange as a concept. The Caribbean had been viewed as central to national development since before the American Revolution. Its potential for generating wealth only increased after the Haitian Revolution. Before the revolt, Saint Domingue had been the world's largest supplier of sugar and coffee to Europe and the Americas. It had also been the second largest trading partner of the United States, with some five hundred American ships devoted to carrying plantation supplies to the island, and carrying away valuable tropical staples. After revolt broke out in 1791, formulators of U.S. foreign policy, especially the Federalists among them, predicted that the disruption of sugar production by the Revolution would be more than compensated by increased freedom of trade with the Caribbean, and the weakened hemispheric influence of the French Empire (Newman 72-92).

The Haitian Revolution was also viewed as a fortuitous event for U.S. territorial ambitions. Alexander Hamilton, certainly a formidable analyst of international affairs, offered a provocative account of events leading up to the Louisiana Purchase. He wrote:

On the part of France the short interval of peace had been wasted in repeated and fruitless efforts to subjugate St. Domingo; and those means which were originally destined to the colonization of Louisiana, had been gradually exhausted by the unexpected difficulties of this ill-starred enterprize. To the deadly climate of St. Domingo, and to the courage and obstinate resistance made by its black inhabitants are we indebted for the obstacles which delayed the colonization of Louisiana, till the auspicious

moment, when a rupture between England and France gave a new turn to the projects of the latter, and destroyed at once all her schemes as to this favourite object of her ambition (qtd. in Paquette 211).

Distracted by events in Saint Domingue, Napoleon neglected to fortify and settle the thinly populated colony of Louisiana. With the loss of the jewel of his colonial empire, to retain possession of Louisiana was no longer necessary or feasible. Hamilton in essence thanked Caribbean slave resistance for U.S. acquisition of 800,000 square miles of western land.

If the Haitian Revolution was at times viewed as potential boon to the rising nation, it was at least as frequently regarded as a challenge to U.S. security and slaveholder interests. Southerners as prominent as Thomas Jefferson, the very orchestrator of the Louisiana Purchase, feared that the actions of Saint Domingue's enslaved masses would spark a race war throughout the slave states. The thousands of white planters who sought refuge in the U.S. South brought with them harrowing tales of savage atrocities committed by rebel blacks on French women and children. Such tales circulated rapidly through the press. Given their accounts of the actions of Saint Dominguais slaves, southern whites were highly disturbed that the refugee planters occasionally brought some of their slaves with them to the mainland. As early as 1792 the South Carolina legislature took action against the threat posed by slaves from an increasingly rebellious Caribbean by banning their importation. Other states heeded their example. The ultimate influence of the Haitian Revolution on the legal structure of the plantation South, however, was more sweeping. After the American Revolution, the slave states of the Chesapeake had begun to move to ease restrictions on manumission. After

the Haitian Revolution, southern legislatures uniformly acted to tighten those restrictions, and to prohibit the continued residence of slaves who had already been freed.⁸ Legal action to defend the south against the threat of Caribbean insurrection began in Charleston, South Carolina for good reason. The Carolinas shared the black majority demographic of the Caribbean, and were the locus of intense trade, migration, and cultural exchange with the islands. Response to Haiti was intense in the Carolinas because the threat it posed was palpable. It was even more palpable in early-national Louisiana, due to precisely the historical connection with Haiti that Audubon evokes at the beginning of his autobiography.

Along with other greater Caribbean locales such as Cuba, Louisiana enjoyed a significant boom economy during and after Haitian revolution. By 1794 the Frenchman Jean-Etienne de Bore had begun his famous experiment in sugar culture near the port of New Orleans, with an eye toward profiting from the severe shortages caused by the almost total disruption of the supply from the world's preeminent source of the staple. He was assisted in his efforts by refugees from the revolted island, and by higher sugar prices throughout the Atlantic. By 1804, the cane-breaks along the lower Mississippi near New Orleans, "boasted nearly eighty sugar plantations, which may have produced more than five million pounds of sugar." By 1840 the region accounted for eight percent of the sugar produced worldwide.⁹

⁸ The preceding account is derived from Newman, "American Political Culture and the French and Haitian Revolutions," 80. See also Hunt, *Haiti's Influence*, 108-10, and Jordan, *White Over Black*, 406-9.

⁹ Quoted in Paquette, 211. Other details are from Paul Lachance, "Repercussions of the Haitian Revolution in Louisiana," in *Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, 211.

The impact of Saint Domingue refugees on Louisiana went far beyond the contributions to a nascent sugar industry. In a trend that lasted through the first decades of the nineteenth century, Saint Dominguais of all races moved out from New Orleans to settle in the booming river parishes. They infiltrated Lower Louisiana commerce, politics and administration at all levels, largely transforming them in the process. Between the first rumblings of slave revolution in Haiti, and the end of the territorial period in Louisiana in 1812, some 15,000 Saint Dominguais moved into greater New Orleans. In 1809 alone, 10,000 refugees from Haiti arrived in New Orleans by way of Cuba, a number that exceeded the entire population of the city and its suburbs in 1805 (Lachance 213).

The refugees dramatically altered the racial structure of the population. Prior to their arrival, New Orleans was already a three-caste system of whites, slaves and free persons of color, though whites comprised nearly half of the population, while free persons of color were limited to a fifth and a third of the population respectively. With the influx of Saint Dominguais refugees the white majority of the territory was eroded. Whites, slaves and free persons of color each comprised roughly a third of the total refugee population. The demographic impact of the refugees is reflected in the first official U.S. census from 1810. Robert L. Paquette writes that, "The relatively equal proportions of whites and slaves and the size of the free colored class, which by 1810 amounted to almost 10 percent of the total population, distinguished lower Louisiana from every state in the union." He suggestively adds that lower Louisiana, "bore a far

greater resemblance in demography and economy at the same historical moment to the sugar plantation zone around the rising western Cuban port of Matanzas.”¹⁰

Saint Dominguais came to Louisiana in increasing numbers after U.S. possession because the territorial legislature had quickly implemented a rigid slave code. That code allowed the white refugees to retain control over the slaves they brought with them, and to protect against the kinds of revolts that had driven the slaveholders into exile. Haitian slaveholder refugees hoped to benefit from and contribute to the counter-revolutionary movement then sweeping the plantation South. In the national consciousness of Louisiana, however, the refugees were regarded as anything but a counter-revolutionary force. As demographic change increased numbers of slaves relative to whites throughout the territory, officials and planters were increasingly faced with actual and rumored insurrections inspired by events in Haiti.

In 1804, at the beginning of his administration, Governor Claiborne clearly warned his superiors that, “at some future period, this quarter of the Union must (I fear) experience in some degree, the misfortunes of St. Domingo.” His fears were exacerbated by events in Point Coupee, a cotton plantation district near Baton Rouge, which had been the center of a formidable slave conspiracy during the Spanish period in 1795. Such trouble persisted into the U.S. period, as the Haitian Revolution reached its climax. Petitioners to Clairborne claimed that, “The news of the revolution of St. Domingo and other places has become common amongst our Blacks—and some here who relate the tragical history of the Revolution of that Island with the General Disposition of the most

¹⁰ The quotes are from Paquette, 214. For further consideration of the impact of Saint Domingue refugees on the racial structure of the population of Louisiana see Lachance, 212-214.

of our slaves has become very serious—a spirit of revolt and mutyny has crept in amongst them. A few days since we happily discovered a plan for our distruction.”¹¹

The next year saw the discovery of a complex conspiracy reputedly organized by Grand Jean, a white former French soldier from Saint Domingue. Five years later, in January of 1811, Lower Louisiana experienced what one historian claims was the largest slave revolt in United States history. Up to five hundred slaves rose up along the German Coast of the lower Mississippi. A witness to the trials that followed the insurrection provocatively described it as “a miniature representation of the horrors of St. Domingo.” He may have been referring to the actions of whites as well as slaves. After the revolt had been put down, victorious slaveholders throughout the region displayed the heads of rebel leaders on stakes. That particular counter-revolutionary strategy had likely been learned from the practices of slaveholders on St. Domingue, whose atrocities have been so majestically documented by C.L.R. James.¹²

Such rebellions, and similar large-scale examples throughout the South, inspired the efforts of southern senators to restrict sale of slaves from the rebellious Caribbean. They were particularly keen to prohibit any more Caribbean slaves from entering

¹¹ The two preceding quotes are from Paquette, 216. On Point Coupee in 1795 see Jack D. L. Holmes, “The Abortive Slave Revolt at Pointe Coupee, Louisiana, 1795,” *Louisiana History* 11 (Fall 1970). For evidence of the engagement of Point Coupee slaves with the revolutionary politics of the transatlantic world see chapter 11 of Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992). See also Julius Sherrard Scott, “The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution,” Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1986.

¹² The account and quotations above are drawn from Paquette, 217-19. On the extent of the 1811 rebellion see also James H. Dorman, “The Persistent Specter: Slave Rebellion in Territorial Louisiana,” *Louisiana History* 18 (Fall 1977): 389-404. For an account of the atrocities of slaveholders see C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*.

Louisiana. One anti-slavery senator declaimed, “’Tis our duty, to prevent, as far as possible, the horrid evil of slavery—and thereby avoid the fate of St. Domingo. Nothing but the interposition of Heaven, and unusual thunderstorm, prevented the slaves, only two years since, from destroying Richmond in Virginia” (qtd. in Paquette 212). Governor Clairborne concurred, as he explained his efforts to crack down on the smuggling of slaves into his territory: : ‘I am particularly desirous to exclude those slaves who (from late habits) are accustomed to blood and devastations, and whose Counsel and communication with our present black population may be pregnant with future mischief” (qtd. in Paquette 214). Such campaigns did little to thwart further major rebellions throughout the U.S. In 1831, four years prior to the composition of Audubon’s autobiography, the nation was shocked by the momentous challenge Nat Turner and his co-conspirators offered to the entire slave system.

Colonialist Memories

Once established on the mainland, the deposed planters of Saint Domingue began to circulate numerous tales of the “atrocities” committed by their former slaves. The grandson of one refugee filled his journal with memories he had inherited from his ancestors. His family’s losses are recorded in visceral terms. The Haitian Revolution, he wrote, left, “our dwellings burned, our properties devastated, our fortunes annihilated.” Not only had all his great-uncles been massacred, but “their daughters and wives [had] fallen into the power of their former slaves [and been] put to death after having been subjected to the most horrible outrages” (qtd. in Lachance 12). The journal speaks to the

persistence and intensity of the anger, hatred, grief and fear associated with the white memory of Saint Domingue.

The opening of Audubon's "Myself" betrays the influence of similar colonialist memories. Audubon's reference to the Haitian Revolution immediately conjures the memory of the death of his late mother. His father, he claims, told him innumerable tales of his mother's demise during the uprising. That world-historical event appears to have been intimately associated in the artist's consciousness with his lifelong sense of lost origins and uncertain identity. More pointedly, the interconnected themes of violent slave insurrection and filial grief are also associated with the inception of Audubon's natural historical career. Soon after the genealogy with which "Myself" begins, Audubon inserts a bizarre fable. After the remainder of his family found final refuge in France, the artist recalls, he "was constantly attended by one or two black servants, who had followed my father from Santo Domingo to New Orleans and afterward to Nantes." He proceeds to narrate a domestic episode in which one of those servants played a prominent role:

One incident which is as perfect in my memory as if it had occurred this very day, I have thought of thousands of times since, and will now put on paper as one of the curious things which perhaps did lead me in after times to love birds, and to finally study them with pleasure infinite. My mother had several beautiful parrots and some monkeys; one of the latter was a full-grown male of a very large species. One morning, while the servants were engaged in arranging the room I was in, "Pretty Polly" asking for her breakfast as usual, "*Du pain au lait pour le perroquet Migonne,*" the man of the woods probably thought the bird presuming upon his rights in the

scale of nature; be this as it may, he certainly showed his supremacy in strength over the denizen of the air, for, walking deliberately and uprightly toward the poor bird, he at once killed it, with unnatural composure. The sensations of my infant heart at this cruel sight were agony to me. I prayed the servant to beat the monkey, but he, who for some reason preferred the monkey to the parrot, refused. I uttered long and piercing cries, my mother rushed into the room, I was tranquillized, the monkey was forever afterward chained, and Migonne buried with all the pomp of a cherished lost one (*Writings and Drawings* 766).

Audubon here presents a narrative of vocational origins. It is his childhood witnessing of a scene of inter-special violence, the grown artist claims, which “perhaps did lead me in after times to love birds, and to finally study them with pleasure infinite.” The scene provides the immediate impetus for his natural historical interests. The placement and framing of the fable, moreover, are highly suggestive. Placed immediately after his reference to Haiti, and the “ever to be lamented period of the negro insurrection of that island,” it is difficult not to read the natural conflict between monkey and parrot as an allegory of the violent struggle between slaves and masters.

The incident is explicitly linked to the memory of the Haitian Revolution through the presence of one his father’s “servants” from the island. Tellingly, the slave sides against the young Audubon when they witness a scene of violence. The theme of racial struggle is injected into the fable not only by the objections of the Saint Dominguais slave, against the wishes of her young white master, but by her solidarity with a monkey. Pseudo-scientific comparisons between primates and blacks were commonplace in the

natural historical culture of Audubon's day. They were ubiquitous in representations of Toussaint L'Ouverture and his fellow revolutionaries. Within the narrative itself, Audubon suggests the human qualities of the monkey by using the colloquial term "man-of-the-woods," a translation of the Latin binomial (*homo sylvestris*) of orangutan.

The servant's solidarity with the monkey appears to be more threatening to the young Audubon than the monkey's outburst itself. Audubon acknowledges that the primate's actions were wholly natural. Thinking that the parrot, begging table scraps from the boy, is "presuming upon his rights in the scale of nature," the monkey exercises its superior strength to reestablish the great chain of being. The young master similarly feels that his black servant is presuming upon his rights and authority when she refuses, upon his request, to beat the monkey as punishment for its crime. It is her resistance that immediately inspired his "long and piercing cries." Only after his vociferous appeal to his adopted mother, who takes her son's side, is domestic order restored through the chaining of the monkey, and the elaborate funeral given to the dead bird.

Insurrection is further evoked when the monkey's victim, Pretty Polly, is rendered as delicate, feminine, and French-speaking. Audubon had previously claimed that his wealthy and beautiful French-speaking mother was a victim of the uprising on Saint Domingue. The association of the parrot with Audubon's birth mother is one source of the vehemence with which the young Audubon, refugee son of a deposed planter, defends its cause. The fable announces that mourning is a central impulse behind Audubon's desire to depict American bird-life, at the same time that it evokes the Haitian Revolution and its aftermath as preeminent source of his grief. Audubon was not the first natural historian to be driven to the consolations of taxonomy and collection by the fallout of

New World revolution. In Susan Stewart's account, Charles Willson Peale's famous Philadelphia museum reflects its creator's efforts to come to terms with the turbulence of the decades following the American War of Independence, years that also saw a series of devastating personal losses within Peale's family. Stewart writes that, "just as Freud's theory of mourning is developed around the traumatic consequences of war, so does Peale develop his museum as an antidote to war's losses and as a gesture against disorder and the extinction of knowledge." In paintings including the *Exhumation of the Mastadon*, she argues, Peale turned to taxonomy and science as "an antidote to surplus emotion and meaning" (31-53). Within the elaborate framework of *Myself*, a similar disruption of social order inspires Audubon's heroic labors—the obsessive observing, collecting, classifying, and painting of bird-life that went into the production of his forthcoming *Birds of America*. Implicit in Audubon's account of vocational origins is the link between his later career in Louisiana, and the broad national effort traced above to maintain domestic order against the threat of a variety of Caribbean movements and revolutions.

Racist Science

Audubon's career coincides with the rise of American racist science as a prominent, indeed dominant sub-discipline of natural history. The first edition of *Birds of America* was published in 1838, one year prior to Audubon's close friend George Samuel Morton's *Crania Americana*. The publication of *Crania* is normally considered a watershed moment in American racist science, the first palpable signs of the maturation of the American school of ethnology, and the global dissemination of its

biologic vision of innate racial difference. As expensive, large-format books of scientific engravings, *Birds of America* and *Crania Americana* appealed to an almost identical audience.

George Fredrickson remains one of the best historians of the emergence of American racialist science.¹³ Theories of permanent racial inferiority did not gain wide national acceptance, he argues, until the 1830s, when intensified abolitionist attacks on the peculiar institution inspired the architects and beneficiaries of the plantation system to articulate a rational, pseudo-scientific explanation for their regime. Similarly, with the Jacksonian emergence of *herrenvolk* democracy in the north, a rationalization was required for the simultaneous expansion of white suffrage and elimination of black suffrage. Fredrickson's account attributes perhaps too little agency to the kinds of broad-scale slave insurrections discussed above. Rebellions certainly increased the anxieties of whites across the nation, and likely contributed to the appeal of the concept of innate racial difference and hierarchy. Such theories assured both north and south that white rule was the permanent artifact of racial superiority, and justified the brutal violence unleashed on blacks to ensure its survival. Nevertheless, Fredrickson's observation that natural history stepped in to provide crucial intellectual justification to new, virulently racist policies in the north and south is indisputable. Natural history lent racialist science the prestige of a discourse integral to the very founding of the republic.

American natural history had displayed a prominent racialist strain since at least the revolutionary era. Query XIV of Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, to

¹³ George Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*. See also Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: Norton, 1996), William Stanton, *The Leopards Spots*, 24-53, 113-21, and Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 125-35.

cite an especially influential example, had taken up the question of whether hierarchical racial distinctions were fixed in nature. Arriving at his own tentative conclusions, Jefferson set the agenda for much of nineteenth-century natural historical inquiry. “To our reproach,” he wrote, “it must be said, that though for a century and a half we have had under our eyes the races of black and of red men, they have never yet been viewed by us as subjects of natural history. I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind. It is not against experience to suppose, that different species of the same genus, or varieties of the same species, may possess different qualifications.” (143). Jefferson establishes two crucial points. His reference to “genus” and “species” demonstrates that racialist inquiry borrowed its nomenclature and taxonomic procedures from other natural historical branches such as botany and ornithology. His reference to the theory that Africans and Natives were “made distinct by time and circumstance” points to the main nineteenth century innovation on Enlightenment theories of race. Enlightenment natural philosophy was dominated by monogenesis—the theory that because all races had proceeded from the same Edenic stock, perceived racial differences were the result of history and culture.

That theory gave way under the assaults of the American School of Ethnology. Morton’s 1839 *Crania Americana*, and 1844 *Crania Aegyptica* signaled the new prestige of polygenetic thought. Further consolidated by the ante-bellum treatises of Josiah Nott, George Gliddon and Louis Agassiz, such a view held that the races had been created separately, and that racial distinctions were thus both biologically based and immutable. Morton’s very obsession with the human cranium was driven by his desire to place

biologic racialism on a more stable ground. Prior to his work, skin color had been employed as the primary marker of racial difference. Widespread miscegenation, and the related phenomenon of racial passing, however, had dramatically limited the reliability of skin as a racial signifier. As documented by Stephen Jay Gould, Morton built up his theories from exhaustive, if highly inaccurate, measurement of the skulls of Whites, Africans and Natives collected from throughout the Americas. Documenting the average facial angle and cranial capacity of each race Morton transferred the burden of racial meaning from flesh to bone. A relatively small cranial capacity was advanced as definitive proof of black inferiority.

Morton's arguments were lent visual support by the 76 accompanying lithographs of John Collins. Those lithographs made *Crania Americana*, in the words of Samuel Otter, "one of the most beautiful books published in the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century." His description of the volumes is worth quoting in full:

Printed on large folio pages with wide margins, the book climaxes with seventy-six near-life-size lithographic plates of human skulls, Native American skulls, prepared by the Philadelphia artist John Collins. These prints rival the vibrant, meticulous anatomical wood engravings in Andreas Vesalius's *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543), the unsparing stipple engravings of skin diseases in Jean-Louis Alibert's *Clinique de l'Hopital Saint-Louis* (1833), and the searing etchings of exposed flesh and bone by Otto Dix in *Der Krieg* (1924). Morton writes in his preface that neither care nor expense was spared in achieving accuracy in the plates, and his assurance is borne out in the magnificent illustrations. In an

advertising circular inserted at the end of the volume, Collins explains that he spent two years working almost exclusive on executing the prints (112). Otter's account suggests that Audubon's connections with racist science and craniology went beyond his long-term friendships with Morton and the Charleston scientist John Bachman. The visual aesthetics of Morton's natural historical volume bear an uncanny resemblance to those of *The Birds of America*. Working at the same moment, both Audubon and Morton chose a highly unusual folio format, in order to execute life-size images of their subjects. Both men boasted of the expense and labor that had gone into the images. The images in both men's volumes, moreover, are inscribed with the phrase, "Drawn from nature," a unique claim in the annals of natural historical illustration when made by Audubon in 1839. Perhaps the strongest link between the two works, however, is their fascination with macabre scenes of morbidity and violence.

The morbidity of the lithographs in Morton's volume is striking. Otter aptly compares their overall effect to the Renaissance tradition of the memento mori. Plate after plate depicts a skull chosen to exemplify an entire racial or ethnic group, in adherence to the natural historical logic of the specimen-type. "Arturian of the Orinoco" and "Natchez" are typical of the aesthetics of the plates (**figure 4.7 and 4.8**). Collins devotes considerable labor and attention to rendering the textured surfaces and shaded recesses of each specimen. Morton's static racial hierarchy depends upon a relentless and detailed presentation of skeletal remains, one that gestures uncomfortably toward the forms of genocidal violence against Natives and disciplinary violence against African Americans that went into the daily maintenance of U.S. racial order. The violent impulses of racist science become explicit in the work of Morton's later popularizers. The

Louisiana physician Samuel A. Cartwright sought to “draw the distinctions between the black and the white races by the knife of the anatomist,” while his colleague John H. Van Evrie graphically describes stripping the skin from black subjects. Nor did racist scientists limit themselves to deceased subjects. The African American slave John Brown described how his master’s doctor repeatedly blistered him in order to “ascertain how deep [his] black skin went” (qtd. in Otter 123).

As even a cursory survey will testify, Audubon own taxonomic efforts often yielded graphic and sensational imagery. In *Bald Eagle* the eagle’s right talon delicately slices the flesh of a Canada goose, while its left talon descends on the eye of its victim (**figure 4.9**). In *Black Vulture*, the vulture to the right of the image prepares to devour the eye of a deer, while its talons pin down the left antler of its apparently still breathing subject (**figure 4.10**). I am not suggesting that Morton’s aesthetics exert any direct influence on Audubon, or vice versa. Rather, read in the context of “Myself,” it becomes possible to interpret the unruly violence of Audubon’s art as a response to the same stimulus as the morbidity of Morton’s. Both volumes react with fear and loathing to the shifting racial landscapes of Jacksonian America.

The violence of Audubon’s volume, however, also suggests a surprising degree of self-loathing. Christoph Irmscher’s insightful reading of the fable near the beginning of “Myself” adds a further level of complexity (203). The ornithologist, he observes, is strongly if covertly identified with the monkey that murders Pretty Polly. The very term—“man of the woods”—used to refer to the chained monkey in the fable bears a striking resemblance to one of the tags Audubon frequently used to refer to himself—“American Woodsman” (Irmscher 206). Moreover, Audubon’s *Ornithological*

Biography is filled with scenes in which the woodsman commits acts of violence toward birds in as willful and composed a manner as the man of the woods in his fable. It is thus possible to read the fable as both an external drama of violent, racialized conflict, and an internal drama over the artist's own contradictory identity as both preserver and destroyer of birds. Audubon's earlier *Mississippi River Journal* is structured around the same constellation of themes. The journal, however, provides a further layer of historical and cultural context, one specific to Louisiana as a region. It is through that regional history that the link between Audubon's desire to subdue both slave insurrection, and the "savage" aspects of the self, becomes fully legible.

The *Mississippi River Journal* and the Circum-Caribbean Vortex

Near the conclusion of "Myself," Audubon alludes to the journey that launched his natural historical career. "In October of 1820," he writes to his young children, "I left your mother and yourselves at Cincinnati, and went to New Orleans on board a flat-boat" (*Writings and Drawings* 793). The purpose of his journey south was to begin collecting and painting specimens for his grand and improbable vision of a comprehensive survey of American bird-life. In 1820 his eventual success seemed unlikely at best. Audubon was in dire financial straits, having recently served a brief term in a debtor's prison. While the ultimate purpose of his journey was to produce a profitable natural commodity, the journal shows that Audubon's attentions were most often consumed by overwhelming daily concerns. Through a collection of odd jobs including portrait painting, tutoring, and hunting, Audubon needed to provide for his own food, clothing, travel and shelter, as well as help support his wife and children in Cincinnati.

The conclusion of “Myself” does not merely allude to those early travails. It refers the reader to the scrupulous record of those struggles in Audubon’s earliest narrative, the 1820 *Mississippi River Journal*. “From this date,” the ornithologist writes, “my journals are kept with fair regularity, and if you read them you will easily find all that followed afterward” (*Writings and Drawings* 793). In an important sense, then, the autobiography comes full circle. It returns us to the context of the Haitian Revolution, and the historical connections between Saint Domingue and Louisiana, with which it began. For as it documents the culture, society and natural environment of the Louisiana Delta and New Orleans, the early journal lends concrete substance to Audubon’s oblique insistence, in his later autobiography, that West Indian mobility, heterogeneity, and slave insurrection form a primary context for his natural historical career.

As might be expected, the Caribbean presence is strongest in Audubon’s depiction of the burgeoning port-city of New Orleans. But that presence subtly permeates the journal from its earliest and northernmost entries. Near its opening, Audubon narrates his entry into the turgid current of the Mississippi. Alluding to his recent fortunes, he writes: “Eleven Years ago on the 2d of January I ascended that Stream to St Genevieve Ferdinand Rozier of *Nantes* My Partner in a Large Keel Boat Loaded with Sundries to a Large Amount *our* property—the 10th of May 1819 I passed this place in an Oppen Skiff Bound to New Orleans with Two of My Slaves—Now I enter it *poor* in fact *Destitute* of all things and relying only on that providential Hope the Comforter of this Wearied Mind—in a flat Boat a Passenger” (*Writings and Drawings* 20-21).

Audubon's subsequent depiction of the Mississippi signals that representations of nature will serve as autobiography. He writes: "The Meeting of the Two Streams reminds me a Little of the Gentle Youth who Comes in the World, Spotless he presents himself, he is gradually drawn in to Thousands of Dificulties that Makes him wish to keep Apart, but at Last he is over done Mixed and Lost in the Vortex—." The gentle youth in question is clearly Audubon himself, who elaborates on his metaphor with an image that vividly evokes the challenges of his preferred medium of watercolor:

The Beautifull & Transparent Watter of the Ohio when first entering the Mississippi is taken in Small Drafts and Looks the More agreeable to the Eye as it goes down Surrounded by the Muddy Current, it keep off as much as posible by running down on the Kentucky side for Several Miles but reduces to a Narrow Strip & is Lost ... here the Traveler enters a New World, the Current of the strem about 4 Miles pr hour, puts the Steersman on the alert and Awakes him to troubles and Difficulties unknown on the Ohio, the Pasenger feels a different Atmosphere, a very Diferent Prospect" (*Writings and Drawings* 21)

Audubon feels he has entered a foreign, contaminated space in which the preservation of life demands intense vigilance, and questions of identity are subject to labyrinthine complexity.

Within the "different Atmosphere" Audubon enters, his reference to "troubles and difficulties unknown on the Ohio" is worth dwelling over. Such problems, which require a new level of alertness from the steersman as he approaches Louisiana, would have included the frequent slave insurrections to which the region had been subject since the

1790s. As documented above, those regional rebellions were a subject of continual and intense national concern through the 1820s. Strangely, Audubon fails to directly mention any signs or fears of rebellion over the entire course of his travels. As the contemporaneous journal of architect Benjamin Latrobe demonstrates, such signs and fears were prominent in the minds of U.S. tourists to the region. And as one of Audubon's later writings attests, the ornithologist was certainly aware of the threat of imminent rebellions, and the effects of past ones. "The Runaway," from Audubon's 1831-39 collection *Delineations of American Scenery and Character*, narrates a tense encounter between the naturalist and a slave on the Louisiana Delta. While searching for rare specimens in an extensive swamp, the naturalist is ambushed by a "tall, firmly built negro" (*Selected Journals* 407). Holding a rifle to Audubon's breast, the assailant marches his hostage to his family's temporary camp in a nearby cane-break.

The specter of maroonage haunts the passage. When Audubon calls his captor "a perfect Indian in his knowledge of the woods" who "kept a direct course as precisely as any 'Red-Skin I ever traveled with'" (*Selected Journals* 408), he touches upon themes of Indian-African hybridity that were central to representations of the "wild negroes" of Jamaica and elsewhere. Audubon eventually wins the friendship of the man, and convinces him to return with his entire family to their former plantation, where they receive a warm welcome from their kindly master. Though the slave system is finally reestablished (in its benign and paternalistic form) the evocation of uprising in the chapter remains powerful.

Insurrection is not the only local reality elided from Audubon's earlier account. People of African descent in general are conspicuous by their absence in his narrative.

During over a year of extended and detailed entries on daily life in Louisiana and New Orleans, Audubon records no more than a handful of passing references to “slaves” and “negroes.” Such omissions are striking when one compares Audubon’s journal to contemporaneous travel accounts of the region. Henry Latrobe’s journal of New Orleans and its environs, for instance, is filled with long and detailed accounts of Afro-Creole society and culture, including descriptions of local funerary customs and observations on his visits to the well-known dances and festivals at Congo Square. Read in the context of the vast majority of ante-bellum writers and artists, of course, Audubon’s elision of blacks and slaves is hardly exceptional. But it is important to recognize that by the 1820s readers brought particular and in many ways unique expectations to travel accounts of Louisiana and New Orleans. Indeed the desire for exotic spectacles of Afro-Creole life provided a large part of the appeal of such works. Within that particular cultural context, Audubon’s refusal to satisfy such expectations and demands begins to seem willful.

Perhaps Audubon’s refusal derived from the same set of anxieties figured in his description of the turgid Mississippi. Crossing into the “New World” of the Mississippi River Valley, the naturalist feels he has become a new man. The temporal transformation from “spotles” young gentleman to destitute adult is rendered spatially as the transition from Ohio to the South. Identity is a matter of location. Entering a new region, Audubon not only fears that his identity will be lost, but also that it will be contaminated. As he heads down-river, carried by the rapid and muddy current, he fears he will be “mixed and lost in the Vortex.” In a passage about identity, Audubon’s use of the term “mixed” is highly charged. It is even more charged in a travel narrative of a region where, due to its alternative colonial history and racial legacy, the signs of miscegenation were everywhere

evident. While it is clear that Audubon consistently saw the success of *Birds of America* as crucial to the preservation of his class standing, passages such as these, scattered throughout the naturalist's early journals, suggest that the complexities of his national and racial origins placed additional pressure on and lent particular urgency to his broader efforts to secure his identity. However strange such anxieties might at first appear, Audubon's fears that the racial identity of a vagrant French creole might be open to suspicion in the polyglot world of Louisiana and New Orleans were quite reasonable. Audubon's poverty, vagrancy, and obscure West Indian origins intersected with a complex moment in the history of racial transformation in Louisiana to render the naturalist's claim to whiteness less stable than he desired.

Audubon's personal history is viscerally evoked almost immediately upon his entering Louisiana. Having just described the marked difference in climate in the region, Audubon goes on to note that "the Plantations increase in number, and the Shores have Much the Appearance of those on Some of the Large river of France, their Lowness Excepted" (65-6). The surrounding architecture, he claims, reminds him of his boyhood home in the Loire valley. More than likely, the great plantation houses also conjure the far less consoling memories passed down to him from his late father. A few pages earlier, Audubon had provided a brief genealogy, beginning, like the later account in "Myself," with the rise and fall of his father's fortunes in Saint Domingue. With his Caribbean origins fresh in mind, Audubon would have been keenly aware that he has journeyed not to France, but to a former French colony, one with formidable ties with and an uncanny demographic resemblance to the pre-Revolutionary island of his birth. That awareness would have intensified as, approaching New Orleans, he encountered locales such as that

recorded on January 6, when his party passes “*Monsieur St. Amand*’s Sugar Plantation.” In an entry unique for its acknowledgement of the African presence in the region, Audubon describes the plantation at greater length than any other in his travels. He writes, “Mr. S. Ad own 70 Negroes and Makes about 400 Hogsheads of Sugar.” The process of sugar manufacture is described in some detail, from the harvesting of cane by slaves with “Large heavy Knifes not unlike those used by Butchers” (a detail that betrays some uneasiness), to its boiling. The harmony of racial relations on such plantations is carefully exaggerated. The slaves are grateful for the gift of a recently shot Winter Falcon. Audubon converses with, “the Overseer a Good Looking Black Man [who] told us of his being in the same Employ for 8 Years and Now obtain so much of his Master’s Confidence as to have the Entire Care of the Plantation” (*Writings and Drawings* 72).. If the tone of this passage suggests Audubon’s nostalgia for the home of his infancy, many others suggest that his characteristic response to the West Indian aspects of the Delta was a sense of overwhelming anxiety and revulsion.

Audubon’s birth in Saint Domingue made him *creole*, a term widely used in the colonial Americas to describe persons of European descent born in the New World. That term, and category of identity, are injected forcibly into the journal in the entry for January 3rd. While docked near Bayou Lafourche, only a few days up-river from New Orleans, Audubon passes a stormy day by working on some sketches. Hard at work, the artist is interrupted by the entrance of a party of locals. Audubon writes:

We Were Visited by several *french Creoles* this is a Breed of Annimals, that Neither speak french English nor Spanish correctly but have a Jargon composed of the Impure parts of these three—

they Stared at My Drawings, and when a litle Composed Gazed and Complimented Me very Highly—on asking them the names of about a dozen diferent Birds then lying on the Table they Made at once and without hesitating a Solid Mass of *Yellow Birds* of the whole. One of them a young Man told Me that he Could procure 3 or 4 dozen of them every Night by hunting the Orange trees with a Lantern—I Can said he ‘see the Rascalls’ White bellies and knock them down with a Stick very handy’ = few of these good Natured fools could answer any valuable account of the Country (*Writings and Drawings* 68).

The naturalist’s depiction of his French *creole* guests betrays the same powerful fears of mixing as his opening description of the muddy Mississippi. To Audubon’s U.S. ears, the denizens of the bayou speak a highly miscegenated dialect, one that embodies the region’s complex history of successive colonization. Audubon does not pause to consider that his own francophone English is in many ways as impure as that of his visitors. His use of the phrase *en masse* in the preceding entry is but one instance of his liberal use of French phrases throughout his writings. Such affinities, however, do not prevent Audubon from subjecting the group to his highly racist, ethnological gaze. Through an impromptu experiment, he determines that French *creoles* are unable to draw proper ornithological distinctions between the varieties of yellow birds displayed in his quarters. It is as if their own mixed identity and hybrid culture, their evident disregard for the boundaries between human populations, prohibits them from perceiving the natural demarcations among aviary species. Audubon’s own ability, as ornithologist, to

distinguish between species thus renders him distinct from the entire French *creole* community.

The further down-river Audubon's journey carries him, the more urgent his need to distinguish himself from the French *creole* community becomes. This is particularly true of his lengthy stay in New Orleans. Readers familiar with Audubon's reputation as a wilderness writer may be surprised to learn that 11 of the 14 months covered by his *Mississippi River Journal* were spent within the confines of the city. The journal contains almost as many scenes in which Audubon compulsively combs the teeming markets of New Orleans, to survey the impressive range of fresh-killed fowl available for purchase there, as depictions of hunting and collecting in more rural locales. Unable to raise sufficient funds for exploration of the surrounding frontier, or to attach himself to any of the natural historical expeditions being organized by the federal government, Audubon was literally stuck in that bustling seaport. While the surrounding swamps afforded ample specimens to collect and sketch, Audubon was less than enamored with the heterogeneous and often transient society he encountered there. Dining at the home of a Monsieur Arnould on his first night in New Orleans he comments, "We had a great deal of Mirth that I call *french Gayety*, that really sickened me. I thought myself in Bedlam, every body talkd Loud at once and the topics dry Jokes" (*Writings and Drawings* 73). His perception of New Orleans as a foreign society persists despite the fact that the following day, January 8th, would mark an elaborate, citywide celebration of the U.S. victory in the Battle of Orleans. The process of Americanization, Audubon suggests, was less smooth or complete than such nationalist pageants would indicate.

One of Audubon's entries for the following week establishes the complexities of the Americanization phase as an important context for his ornithology. On January 14, 1821 he writes an extended account of a morning visit to the crowded Levee. As the passage begins, Audubon is at a low point. Nearly penniless, he has just visited the studios of the famed American painter John Wesley Jarvis, who, after a cursory survey of some of his sketches, refuses him a menial job as an artist's assistant. Jarvis' refusal shakes Audubon's confidence that his artistic efforts will allow him to recover his social standing. His feeling of revulsion toward the urban mob he subsequently encounters is especially intense and explicit:

The Levee early was Crowded by people of all Sorts as well as Colors, the Market, very abundant, the Church Bells ringing the Billiard Balls knocking, the Guns heard all around, What a Display this is for a Steady quaker of Philada or Cincinnati—the day was beautifull and the crowd Increased considerably—I saw however no handsome Woman and the Citron hue of allmost all is very disgusting to one who Likes the rosy Yankee or English Cheeks= (*Writings and Drawings* 77).

Audubon's aversion to this New Orleans crowd has everything to do with the city's circum-Caribbean geography and culture. At an important public gathering space, Audubon perceives the full spectrum of national, racial and ethnic types that patterns of trade and mobility have collected in the port-city as a threatening and disorienting surplus. He recoils from the inscrutable "Citron hue" of the city's inhabitants—a racial marker akin to "high yellow" in the twentieth century—as he conjures the consoling image of a racially pure Yankee visage.

Such reactions were typical of U.S. visitors to the city. In his roughly contemporaneous travel diary, Benjamin Latrobe records the following tourists' verses:

Have you ever been in New Orleans? If not you'd better go,
 It's a nation of a queer place; day and night a show!
 Frenchmen, Spaniards, West Indians, Creoles, Mustees,
 Yankees, Kentuckians, Tennesseans, lawyers and trustees,
 Clergymen, priests, friars, nuns, women of all stains;
 Negroes in purple and fine linen, and slaves in rags and chains.
 Ships, arks, steamboats, robbers, pirates, alligators,
 Assassins, gamblers, drunkards, and cotton speculators;
 Sailors, soldiers, pretty girls, and ugly fortune-tellers;
 Pimps, imps, shrimps, and all sorts of dirty fellows;
 White men with black wives, *et vice versa* too.

A progeny of all colors—an infernal motley crew! (Latrobe 172).

Latrobe is far more specific as to the sources and content of the seaport's diverse populace. The presence of sailors, pirates, ships and steamboats in the catalog alludes to New Orleans' status as a complex locus of a variety of commercial movements originating in and radiating out toward the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and the western provinces of North America. Its repeated references to miscegenation suggest that those movements have had profound cultural impact. The racial arrangements of New Orleans society, the verses insist, are alien to Anglo-American sensibilities. That the visiting poet resorts to a French phrase to allude to the most forbidden form of miscegenation—the

liaisons of white women and black men—suggests that the ultimate source of Louisianan heterogeneity lies in its alternative colonial history.

Audubon's New Orleans is a similarly cosmopolitan locale. The well-traveled and genteel residents of the city are possessed of a remarkable breadth of information regarding New World bird-life. The Caribbean migrations they undertake and play host to are invaluable to Audubon's ornithology. The entry for February 5, 1821 records a conversation with one, "Mr Gordon who before he had seen my Drawing thought it a Pelican Common in some of the West Indies, [and] was much pleased at finding it a diferent species = I was assured that these Birds were seen in Immense flocks in the Neighborhood of *Buenos-aires* by a Scotch Gentleman, of respectability" (80). The entry for March 10th of the same year records a similar exchange: "Was assured to Day that the *Baltimore Oriole* Wintered on the Island of *Cuba* and the West Side of this Island was the resort of Millions of Swallows during November, December & January; So Strongly was this Afirmed, that it has determined me to go there Next Winter and to the bay of hondurass, where it is said they also are plenty during these Months Only" (85). Despite the value of such a hemispheric perspective, however, the journal persistently denigrates the very forms of mobility that make it possible.

It is almost too revealing of Audubon's psychology, that his immediate response to the crowd he encounters on the Levee is to hunt for ornithological specimens in a nearby swamp. He writes:

I took my Gun, rowed out to the edge of the Eddy and killed a Fish Crow, those Birds are plenty on the River every fair day—(when otherwise, the food is plenty in the swamps, the Crabs, Young Frogs, Watter Snakes, &c

Shewing out in great numbers)— When the one I killed fell, hundreds flew to him, and appeared as if about to Carry him off, but they soon found it their Interest to let me have him, I drew near and Loaded for another; they all rose in Circling Like Hawks extremely High (78).

The wresting of natural historical order from Louisiana nature is here presented as a violent and conflictual process. In a scene worthy of Hitchcock, Audubon must fight an outsized flock of crows for possession of the specimen he has just shot. Read in the context of the entire entry, it is as if the hostility the naturalist feels toward Jarvis, and to New Orleans' society in general, is released in a bloody act of collecting. Natural history provides a forum in which to reestablish distinction on a figurative level. If on the Levee, Audubon is subsumed by the mixed, urban mob, on the water he reemerges as heroic individual. His efforts would, of course, also reestablish distinction at a literal level once the *Birds of America* had brought him fame and fortune.

Such recognition would depend on Audubon's early aesthetic efforts, which the entry goes on to situate in the context of New Orleans' society and culture. He writes:

I brought it [the specimen] on Board and began to Work immediately—at Dusk took a Walk to Mr Gordon, from then on to Mr *Laville* where We saw some *White Ladies* and Good Looking ones—returning on Board the quartroon Ball attracted My View—but as it cost 1\$ Entrance I Merely Listened a Short time to the Noise and came Home as We are pleased to Call it— (77-78).

Audubon's taxonomic and aesthetic efforts are bracketed by two depictions of New Orleans' complex racial landscape. In the light of day, on the Levee, a racially mixed population parades before Audubon's revolted gaze. On his evening wanderings the sources of impurity are revealed to him. He witnesses a widespread and influential cultural tradition retained from the French colonial period, when, in an atmosphere of relative racial openness, free blacks and whites mingled together at public balls (Hanger 200). Audubon's complaint that he lacks the entrance fee for the ball testifies to the illicit curiosity mixed with his public disgust for interracial relations. But during the increasing racial separateness of the early Americanization phase, enforced by the development of rigid legal and cultural codes, it is no surprise that disgust predominates in the journal as a whole.¹⁴

Americanization and Race

Gwendolyn Midlo Hall provides a valuable genealogy of the term *creole* in Louisiana history (157-8). She notes that *creole* was a highly protean and unstable term,

¹⁴ For an excellent introduction to the process by which Spanish and French racial arrangements were transformed after Anglo-American possession see: Arnold Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon, eds., *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1992). For a discussion of the legal context see Judith K. Schafer, *Slavery, the Civil Law, and the Supreme Court of Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1994). For a comparison of slavery law during the French and Spanish colonial periods see: "The Law of Slavery in Spanish Louisiana, 1769-1803," in *Louisiana's Legal Heritage*, ed. Edward F. Haas and Robert R. Macdonald (Pensacola: Perdido Bay Press for the Louisiana State Museum, 1983). Kimberly S. Hanger argues that free black rights and privileges, eroded during the Spanish period, deteriorated even further under United States rule after 1803. See her essay "Conflicting Loyalties: The French Revolution and Free People of Color in Spanish New Orleans" in *A Turbulent Time*, 194. The classic study of the shifting status of free southern blacks is Ira Berlin's *Slaves without Masters: the Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon, 1974).

conveying multiple meanings when used in various eras and locations throughout the Americas. Derived from the Portuguese *criullo*, for a slave of African descent born in the Americas, the term retained racial overtones when translated into the racial taxonomies of French, Spanish, and British colonialism. In eighteenth century Spanish America, for instance, the term referred to locally born Europeans and Africans. It was redefined with the emergence of Latin American independence movements. Spanish officials argued that Latin American *creoles* were “incapable of self-rule due to their racially-mixed heritage.” Though Midlo Hall does not explore U.S. attitudes, such racist arguments also provided a powerful justification for the new nation’s refusal to support nascent republicanism in the southern portion of the hemisphere. To counter such arguments, Latin Americans redefined *creole* to refer exclusively to people of European descent.

Creole underwent similar transformations in Louisiana. During the French period, the term referred to “locally born people of at least partial African descent, slave and free, and was used to distinguish American-born slaves from African-born slaves when they were listed on inventories.” With American possession, the meaning of the term in Louisiana was subjected to a series of radical transformations. At first, “creole cultural identification became a means of distinguishing that which was truly native to Louisiana from that which was Anglo. *Creole* has come to mean the language and the folk culture that was native to the southern part of Louisiana where African, French and Spanish influence was most deeply rooted historically and culturally.” During the early phase of Americanization, then, *creole* was a racially inclusive term, encompassing both Africans and Europeans who were native to the region. Such a meaning became problematic, however, as Americanization proceeded. Midlo Hall writes that a second “redefinition

took place in Louisiana with the rise of ‘scientific’ racism during the nineteenth century. Louisiana whites of French and/or Spanish descent rejected the racial openness of Louisiana’s past, as well as, in some cases, their own racially mixed heritage, and redefined *creole* to mean exclusively white” (158).

Midlo Hall’s genealogy has three interesting implications for the early phase of Audubon’s natural historical career. First, Audubon’s career begins at a liminal moment in Midlo Hall’s history, after *creole* identity has been stigmatized, but *before* it has been successfully redefined to exclude associations with blackness. Audubon’s complex use of the term reflects this transitional moment in its racial meaning. That complexity is perhaps clearest in the entry for January 4, 1820. Mere weeks into his journey, and mere days from the northern border of Louisiana, Audubon spends a day ashore in search of two prominent residents of the town of Bonne Caré. He writes: “I paid my Respects to the Paster, to make some Inquiries respecting Mr *Lecorgne*, *George Croghan*, and the country, but I found only a tall thin dirty Creole who could not say much besides the prayer for the prosperity of the Brick Church now erecting—from this pensionnary of Bigots I went to a School House; there I had the pleasure of meeting an Old, polite, and well Instructed French Gentleman” (*Writings and Drawings* 69). The derogatory use of *creole* registers the first effects of Americanization, while his clear distinction between the *creole* and French populations in the region augurs the creative redefinition, driven by the Franco-American elite, which U.S. possession would continue to inspire. In Audubon’s ad hoc usage, *creole* appears to signify something between a racial and class distinction. Poor locals of French or Spanish descent qualify as creole, while gentleman of French descent, though long resident in the region, do not. By invoking class Audubon

attempts to distinguish himself from a racially suspect population based on his bourgeois upbringing in France. But if *creole* has become an economic distinction, and if that economic distinction in turn implies something like a racial one, then the consequences of the Panic of 1819 for Audubon's identity are dramatic indeed. The instability of that crucial term goes a long way toward explaining the desperation of Audubon's early efforts.

That desperation brings us to a second implication of Midlo Hall's genealogy. With the further onset of Americanization, she strongly suggests, all French *creoles* begin to engage in a special form of passing. They collectively disavowed the histories of racial openness that led to the mixed identities of some French *creoles*. If *any* creoles were acknowledged to be mixed, the incorporation of all *creoles* into American whiteness would be placed in profound jeopardy.

The third implication of Midlo Hall's history stems from the role of American scientific racism. Midlo Hall argues that *creole* comes to take on a racially exclusive meaning in response to the virulent, biologic arguments of the American school of Ethnology. She thus attributes redefinition to the influence of a sub-discipline of natural history—the very discourse within which Audubon worked. As both an aspiring natural historian, and a penniless vagrant of French West Indian origin, Audubon's early taxonomic and aesthetic efforts were subject to special complexities and extreme tensions. According to Joseph Roach, Dion Boucicault's 1859 play *The Octoroon*, “Enacts the story of the radical reduction of one kind of frontier—that of [the] multiple identities [of the circum-Caribbean], which are primarily a matter of culture—into another kind of frontier—that of the catastrophic antinomies of manifest destiny, which

are primarily a matter of ‘blood’” (180). Audubon is both agent and victim of this reduction. The early journal contributes to pseudo-scientific scrutiny of circum-Caribbean identities, even as it registers the cost of such scrutiny on Audubon’s own psychology.

The Audubon of the *Mississippi River Journal* is an intensely self-conscious figure. His entries are home to a recurring scene in which genteel acquaintances from his former visit to the region, when he was still a prosperous mill-owner, fail to identify or refuse to acknowledge him, so radically has his appearance been transformed by his recent bankruptcy. The naturalist is first shunned in Natchez: “I saw here a Gentleman with whom I traveled some distance down the Mississippi My first Voyage but as he did Not or Would not recognize my features I spoke not to him” (*Writings and Drawings* 61). Such encounters increase markedly during his months in New Orleans: “Many Men formerly *My Friends* passed ME without uttering a Word to me and *I as Willing* to Shun those Rascals” (130).

Yet despite the confident bluster of such passages, Audubon is painfully aware that his present situation renders his distinction from a racialized urban mob extremely tenuous. His entry for April 23, 1821 records a particularly disturbing encounter with a figure from his past: “Saw My Old Acquaintance John Gwathmey of Louisville, he was *a la guettee* on the Levee the appearance of My Clothes, did Not please him we talk but Little together” (97). Audubon is here treated as a member of the very alien crowd that he found so repellent during his visit to the Levee a few months earlier.

Audubon strongly implies that his physical appearance was one source of “Gwathmey’s” coolness. His appearance may well have been similar on October 25, 1821, when, returning to New Orleans after a rare extended visit to the Louisiana

countryside, he recorded the reactions of the city's denizens to his rustic dress and coiffure: "I had perceived that My Long flowing buckled hair was Looked on with astonishment by the Passengers on board and saw that th efect Was stronger in town—My Large Loose Dress of Whitened Yellow Nankeen and the unfortunate *Cut* of my features Made me decide to be Dressed as soon as Possible Like other folks and I had My Chevelure parted from My head" (129). Audubon here realizes that his woodsman's attire threatens to collapse the social distance between he and the "tall dirty thin" creoles he encounters throughout Louisiana. His lack of genteel wardrobe and accoutrements intensifies a fear of exposure and a sense of acute self-loathing that date from his obscure origins in Saint Domingue. The naturalist's self-consciousness places his *Mississippi River Journal* in the context of widespread creole self-fashioning and passing. It attains deep resonance within a narrative that gestures repeatedly toward the social, economic and cultural forces that made the redefinition of creole identities so complex and urgent.

The textual trace of that circum-Caribbean history is clearly evident in a range of Audubon's writings, from his early journals to his later autobiography. It is perhaps one reason that Audubon's wife Lucy, who edited and managed the publication of those writings, refused to publish either the *Mississippi River Journal* or "Myself" until well after the naturalist's death, when she released heavily bowdlerized editions. Meyer's general argument provides some highly suggestive leads as to where we might locate that same history within Audubon's early watercolors. In her account, Audubon's images record not the triumph of classification but its breakdown in the face of New World complexity and forms of heterogeneity and superabundance that were particular to colonial and early-national Louisiana. Within an aesthetic tradition that depicted inert

subjects, extracted from their environmental context, Audubon's specimens frequently refuse subordination and stasis, challenging the taxonomic gaze of the viewer from within highly particularized landscapes. Such refusal is powerfully displayed in an early image such as *Peregrine Falcon*. The male Falcon to the left stares defiantly back at the viewer, who has surprised two predators in the act of devouring their recent kills.

According to Audubon's journal, the female Falcon to the right was painted between December 25 and 27, 1820, and pasted onto a sheet including the male Falcon and the two Gadwal which were painted several years later, likely in New Orleans. The timing of the inception of the image is of great interest, for it establishes a connection between the sense of violence and immediacy in the image to the artist's persistent self-consciousness. On December 27 in Natchez, Audubon encountered "a Gentleman with whom I travelled some distance down the Mississippi my first Voyage but as he did Not or Would Not recognize my features I spoke not to him"(61). *Peregrine Falcon* dates from almost the precise moment when Audubon realized that his recent bankruptcy and the tense racial atmosphere of early-national Louisiana might have decisive repercussions for his own identity. The creole natural historian, within such an atmosphere, might transform from subject to object of the racist gaze.

Perhaps such fears were prominent in his mind when he added a male falcon to the image several years later. His rendering of that specimen violates the conventional subject-object relations of the natural historical image. Indeed, the Falcon reverses those relations, transforming the human viewer into the subject of his arresting scrutiny. And perhaps the anxiety implicit in that reversal informs Audubon's depiction of the gadwal to the right of the image, whose eye has been plucked from a blood-coated socket.

Audubon subjects the viewer of such an image to the same anxieties he experienced in Louisiana, even as those anxieties are worked out violently on the mutilated eyes of his specimens. Audubon returned to this graphic theme several times during his career. In *Bald Eagle*, painted in Mississippi in November of 1820, the predator stands above a decapitated goose, with its left talon piercing the eye of his victim in the immediate foreground (**figure 4.9**). In *Black Vulture* of 1829 the vulture to the right holds down the antler of a dying deer as it stares dispassionately into the victim's still-open eye, which, the viewer assumes, the predator will soon devour (**figure 4.10**). The image depicts a species that Audubon persistently associated with the plantation South in general, and with the markets of its large cities in particular. In his *Ornithological Biography* he writes: "Charleston, Savannah, New Orleans, Natchez, and other cities are amply provided with these birds, which may be seen flying or walking about the streets the whole day in groups" (310). Audubon also reports seeing large numbers of the species at southern markets, where they, "pick up the pieces of flesh thrown away by the butchers" (310). Like *Peregrine Falcon*, this later image conjures the memory of Natchez in 1820, where Audubon records seeing vast numbers of the species, one of which he attempted to draw.

Much later in his career, after the publication of *Birds of America* had solidified his reputation, Audubon returned to the sensational theme of early efforts such as *Peregrine Falcon* for *Golden Eagle* of 1833 (**figure 4.11**). The mutilated eye in this image is particularly graphic. The talon of the eagle is fully inserted into the rabbit's eye-socket. A bright drop of scarlet blood stands out against the rabbit's pristine white fur. One source of the fame of the image is the inclusion of a miniature self-portrait in the

alpine background (**figure 4.12**). Audubon depicts himself, in full woodsman's regalia, crossing a dangerous precipice by straddling the trunk of a fallen pine. Such are the risks, the image implies, which the production of *Birds of America* entailed. Audubon must cross the precipice to bring home the dead Golden Eagle strapped to his back. The self-portrait is highly interesting in relation to the *Mississippi River Journal*. It depicts the same attire and coiffure that occasioned such intense anxieties regarding class and racial identity during his years in New Orleans.

Through its emphasis on those details the self-portrait reminds us that Audubon fashioned and re-fashioned his public persona in response to the shifting demands of audiences on both sides of the Atlantic. By the 1830s Audubon was fully aware that while his exotic and unkempt appearance had been a liability in Louisiana and New Orleans it was a highly marketable commodity in the salons and scientific societies of Great Britain and France. Following the savvy advice of well-placed European friends, he had already begun to cultivate a rugged image that helped him to capitalize on the current vogue for American romantic heroes such as Cooper's Natty Bumppo. His *1826 Journal* is full of episodes in which the naturalist treats astonished Europeans to fabricated Indian war cries, and magnanimously grants their requests to eat corn on the cob with his bare hands.

A survey of some early renderings of Audubon allows us to trace the gradual transformation of his image. In a self-portrait of 1823 the artist appears ill at ease in his formal attire (**figure 4.13**). Staring out at the viewer with a highly circumspect expression, Audubon slouches downward in his chair, as if to conceal himself in the dark shadows at the bottom of the canvas. The image resonates with the sense of anxiety and

self-consciousness that Audubon describes throughout the *Mississippi River Journal*. The self-portrait betrays a lack of self-assurance that was entirely reasonable given Audubon's recent experiences in Philadelphia. Anxious to find a publisher, and win patrons among the natural historical community, Audubon had been unable to compete with the noble pedigree of his rival naturalist Charles Lucien Bonaparte. Perhaps an alternative marketing strategy was first suggested by some remarks of the well-known historical painter John Vanderlyn. In a journal entry of 1824 Audubon reports that Vanderlyn (who he had first met in New Orleans) asked him to sit for a portrait of Andrew Jackson, after noticing that his "figure considerably resembled that of the General, more than any he had ever seen" (qtd. in Ford 147). Vanderlyn would include an image of Audubon, in military regalia, in the background of the portrait (**figure 4.14**). Audubon eventually came to realize that his own future success would depend on advertising rather than concealing his status as a self-made man, one who, like Jackson himself, had emerged victorious from his trials in the southern borderlands. Henry Inman's portrait of 1833 demonstrates the effectiveness with which Audubon would soon project this heroic self-image (**figure 4.15**). The basic presentation is typical of the numerous portraits for which Audubon would sit in the next two decades. Gazing confidently into the distance, with his collar loosened to expose his throat and chest, Audubon proudly sports the long "buckled" locks that had occasioned embarrassment in New Orleans. But despite the assurance of such portraits, there is considerable evidence that Audubon's cultivation of this particular persona continued to provoke uneasiness. Throughout the *1826 Journal* Audubon persistently worries that his novel public image

will lead to his rejection, or the eventual exposure of his lack of proper natural historical training.

Golden Eagle provides further evidence that Audubon never fully transcended the anxieties of his early career and obscure West Indian origins. As in Inman's rendering, the miniature self-portrait in the painting emphasizes Audubon's bold hairstyle. The naturalist's long locks spill out from beneath his cap. The presence of the mutilated eye of the rabbit in the same painting that contains this self-portrait is highly suggestive. It helps us to interpret Audubon's preoccupation with such eyes in his early watercolors as a violent response to the terror of having his appearance scrutinized. Like those earlier images, *Golden Eagle* challenges the subject-object relations so crucial to natural historical taxonomy and hierarchy. Just as the predator in the foreground has become the prey strapped to the naturalist's back, Audubon himself fears that he will become the victim of his environment, perhaps falling headlong into the abyss below him. *Golden Eagle* represents a wholly different phase of Audubon's career than the *Mississippi River Journal* and the watercolors of 1820-24, and its alpine landscape is far removed from the swamps, bayous and urban markets of Louisiana. Yet the image insistently recalls the obsessive doubt and self-loathing of the 1820s. Through its extension of Audubon's early aesthetics, this iconic image of American wilderness bears the faint but indelible trace of the social, cultural, and economic turbulence that marked Louisiana and New Orleans during the 1820s, when its circum-Caribbean history, location and connections, though ardently desired by the expanding nation, were perceived as a threat to the supposed integrity of its borders and purity of its citizenry.

Coda:

Uses of Humboldt

In 1856 a New York publisher announced the release of J.S. Thrasher's unauthorized translation of Alexander von Humboldt's *Political and Philosophical Essay on the Island of Cuba*. The work had first appeared in 1826 as part of Humboldt's massive, thirty-volume compendium *Voyage aux régions équinoxiales du Nouveau Continent fait en 1799, 1800, 1801, 1802, 1803, 1804*. The section on Cuba was based on the two visits the German natural historian paid to the island during the New World travels best-known for his exploration of the Orinoco River and the interior jungles and volcanoes of South America. During his two visits to Cuba (between December 19, 1800 and March 15, 1801, and again between March 19 and April 29, 1804), Humboldt and the French naturalist Aimé Bonpland enjoyed the hospitality and assistance of Havana's extensive and highly cosmopolitan scientific community as they traversed the island to compile the raw material for Humboldt's physical and cultural geography. Their travels on the island prominently included visits to some of its most modern sugar plantations.

That the highly detailed volume on Cuba would be published as a separate work (*Essai politique sur l'île de Cuba*) within the year, and translated into Spanish and English over next three years, testifies to the level of international fascination with the most valuable Spanish sugar island.¹ It also makes *The Island of Cuba* an invaluable

¹ This brief textual history is derived from Luis Martínez-Fernández excellent introduction to the recent reissue of Thrasher's translation, winner of the Lydia Cabrera Award for 2001. See Alexander Von Humboldt, *The Island of Cuba: A Political Essay*,

document for retracing many of the central concerns of this dissertation, for it testifies to the continued nineteenth-century influence of a global political and economic vision, centered on West Indian sugar and slaves, that preceding chapters have traced from Sir Hans Sloane's "Natural History of Jamaica," through Abbé Raynal's *Political and Philosophical History of the East and West Indies*, to as unlikely a text as John James Audubon's *The Birds of America*. The anti-slavery movement and the continued evolution of imperial strategy would soon help to force the West Indies into a far less central position within the colonial networks of the European powers, as attention increasingly turned to locales including South Asia, the Middle East and Africa. The broad appeal of *The Island of Cuba*, however, reminds us that the Caribbean remained a volatile locus of fear and desire until the very eve of that later Age of Empire.

Humboldt's text also offers an intriguing object-lesson in the complexities of the form of transnational analysis to which this study has aspired. As did Crèvecoeur's "Sketches of Jamaica," Humboldt's West Indian account requires a restless movement between the competing and overlapping frameworks of the French, British, Spanish and (and later U.S.) empires. As Luis Martínez-Fernández eloquently argues, full understanding of this work of circum-Caribbean natural history demands a supple attention to the, "... various contexts in which Humboldt's work on Cuba was born and reborn," for, "each context shaped the different incarnations of the work while at the same time the work itself helped reshape the contexts in which it appeared" (*Island of Cuba* 3).

This admittedly cursory overview will sketch some of the ante-bellum U.S. contexts of *The Island of Cuba*. The very existence of Thrasher's translation immediately

with supplementary essays by Luis Martínez-Fernández, Shelley L. Frisch, and Frank Argote-Freyre (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2001).

foregrounds two themes that began to surface in our examination of Audubon's itinerant career. The first involves the newfound celebrity status of the natural historian within U.S. culture. By the 1850s, Audubon had attained sufficient visibility and appeal to have his portrait included in Matthew Brady's *Gallery of Illustrious Americans*. Nor was he the only figure working in the broad arena of natural historical painting to achieve widespread fame. The same decade saw the New York opening of Fredrick Church's painting of the Andean environment draw massive crowds and an enthusiastic media response. That response was partly due to the fame of Humboldt himself, whose own influential *Personal Narrative* had found an avid U.S. audience upon its translation into English, an audience in which figures such as Church, Emerson and Thoreau were prominently included.² His fame would only increase with the publication of *Kosmos*, which had sold some 80,000 copies by 1851. Laura Dassow Walls writes that, "Reviewed widely and enthusiastically, *Kosmos* consolidated Humboldt's reputation as one of the greatest minds of the age, and, after Napoleon, the most famous" (97).

Walls' comparison between Humboldt and Napoleon points to a second crucial context for Thrasher's translation: the continued emergence of U.S. hemispheric and global ambitions. As this study has argued, such ambitions had been centered on the greater Caribbean at least since the 1790s, when U.S. desires for informal annexation of Spanish Florida (desires that William Bartram shared) were inspired by the strategic location of the isthmus for control of West Indian trade routes. Similar concerns had formed an important dimension of Jeffersonian-era interest in Louisiana and New

² It remains an intriguing question for future research whether Emerson's own essay on West Indian emancipation betrays the influence of Humboldt's more extensive meditations on Caribbean society.

Orleans. They remained prominent in the development of the Monroe Doctrine in the 1820s, a decade that saw the U.S. become Cuba's leading trade partner and challenge the status of Madrid as primary metropolitan influence over the island. Thrasher's edition of *The Island of Cuba* marked a shrewd attempt to capitalize on Humboldt's fame for the translator's own pro-slavery, expansionist agenda. Drawing on his formidable skills as a publicist, Thrasher intended his translation as a decisive intervention into the heated ante-bellum debates over annexation of Cuba. Annexationist designs on the island had surfaced with remarkable clarity in 1848, during the expansionist fervor spawned by the U.S.-Mexico War. While the Polk administration offered Spain thirty million dollars for the island, annexationists including General Narciso Lopez launched filibustering expeditions in conjunction with Southern expansionists bent on increasing the number of slave states and acquiring cheap land for fresh plantation ventures.³ Expansionist desires for the island reached fever pitch in 1854 when the Pierce administration issued the belligerent Ostend Manifesto, which threatened to take the island by force. The same year saw Thrasher begin work on his translation in an effort to sway the nation's entire political class.⁴

³ For a brilliant analysis of these debates, and their influence on works of ante-bellum literature including Melville's "Benito Cereno" and Martin Delany's *Blake, or the Huts of America* see Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). In a sense, my own reading of Thrasher's translation of *The Island of Cuba* attempts to locate its highly unstable and contradictory meanings within a cultural landscape that includes Melville and Delany.

⁴ As Martinez-Fernandez argues, calls for annexation of Cuba largely faded after 1854, as filibustering expeditions failed miserably. The publication of Thrasher's edition, he writes, "turned out to be highly anticlimactic" (14). Many of its arguments, however, would enjoy a kind of afterlife in the 1890s, during the build-up to the Spanish-American War, the very episode from which the U.S. historiographic consensus dates the origin of U.S. imperialism. The existence of a prior discourse on Cuba suggests that full

Part of the appeal of *The Island of Cuba* to men of Thrasher's ilk was that its account of the physical geography of the island repeatedly stressed its strategic location relative to North, South, and Central America and the hemispheric trade routes by which they were linked. The importance of Cuba within such a natural historical view owes less to political and social contingencies than to a coastline blessed with well-protected harbors (and with physical proximity to Haiti, the Yucatan and Key West), and the patterns of wind and water that placed it squarely in the path of the majority of New World commerce. Humboldt's text could thus lend a powerful form of scientific authority to a geo-economic and –political vision that placed Cuba in a similarly central location. As Thrasher well knew, the North American elite had been fully cognizant of that vision since at least the middle of the eighteenth century. It is thus a vision that Thrasher cannily foregrounds in his introduction to Humboldt's volume. He presents *The Island of Cuba* as a direct extension of the complex imaginary we have traced to Crèvecoeur's meditation on the early Atlantic world. Near the beginning of his introduction Thrasher writes that, "The territorial relations of the Island of Cuba, are of a more marked and permanent character than those of any other country of limited extent in America, and justify the Abbé Raynal's assertion that it is 'the *boulevard* of the New World.'" (23).

While Thrasher alludes back to a prior era of Caribbean empire, however, many of his most crucial points revolve around the importance of Cuba to securing the gains of Manifest Destiny. It is an argument that once again relies on a shrewd reading of Humboldt's physical geography. Thrasher writes:

understanding of U.S. imperialism requires excavation of a long pre-history in which men like Thrasher, and discourses such as natural history played a prominent role.

The Gulf of Mexico, with a shore line of nearly six thousand miles, forms almost an exact circle, the great ocean outlet to which is through the narrow passage running along the northern shore of Cuba, and within a few miles of her best and strongest harbors. This formation of the land and sea, brings the rich mineral tribute paid by Mexico to Europe, and the bulky products of the region drained by the Mississippi river and its tributaries, within the control of the government of Cuba. It may close at will the only ocean outlet those countries possess, and thus inflict great evils upon all their industrial interests. (25)

Thrasher repeatedly hammers home the point that without possession of Cuba the vast promise of the Louisiana Purchase can never be fulfilled: “The geographical formation of our Atlantic and Gulf coasts places [Cuba] midway between them, enabling the power that holds Cuba, to impede at will all maritime intercourse between their ports” (26). In a particularly inspired passage, moreover, Thrasher goes on to present Cuban annexation as vital to Californian interests:

The territorial relations of the island of Cuba to the United States, have also a great importance in another branch of their domestic economy. It constitutes more than one-half of a bar of foreign territory, laying directly over the most important lines of transit between the Atlantic and Pacific States of the Confederacy, across or through which must pass the greater portion of the trade and intercourse between those sections, and of the armament and means for military defense of the Pacific States . . . (27).

The passage is characteristic of the manner in which Thrasher strains and over-determines his arguments as he attempts to induce a kind of geographically-based panic in his reader.

It is in its most hysterical passages that Thrasher's translation of *The Island of Cuba* best embodies the paradoxes of early American and U.S. discourse on the greater Caribbean, which consistently imagined the region as simultaneous source of economic independence and abundance, moral corruption, race warfare, and miscegenation. His introduction repeatedly draws on a tradition of apocalyptic rhetoric regarding Caribbean affairs that extends back to Juan de Péchmèja's vision (in Raynal's *History*) of a slave-led "revolution from below" that would engulf the hemisphere. Such a revolution would surely ensue, in Thrasher's view, should Spain follow the example of England in emancipating its West Indian slaves. "Emancipation in Cuba" he warns, "would call into existence, in immediate proximity to our southern states, a negro community, under the influence of European idea and policy, which would be dangerous to us as a neighbor." As Thrasher none-too-subtly hints, such a danger owes to the influence that the freed blacks of Cuba might have on mainland slaves, particularly in the regions through which Bartram and Audubon had so anxiously traveled. The consequences of such a fate extend beyond mere national security to encompass the global fate of republicanism. In another near-parody of Raynal, Thrasher writes that Cuban annexation is necessary for the, "ultimate success of the republican theory of government . . . If constitutional monarchy triumphs, and this Union is dismembered, the theory of a democratic representative government will have failed before the world."

Thrasher was at least partially justified in attributing some of his own calculated hysteria to the text he had translated. Humboldt's natural history had indeed, in classic Raynalian fashion, invoked the specter of a massive slave insurrection. In Humboldt's view:

If the legislation of the Antilles, and the condition of the colored population, does not soon experience some salutary change, and if discussion without action is continued, the political preponderance will pass into the hands of that class which holds the power of labor, the will to throw off the yoke, and valor to undergo great privations. This bloody catastrophe will occur as the necessary consequence of circumstances, and without the free negroes of Haiti taking any part whatever, they continuing always the isolated policy they have adopted. Who shall dare to predict the influence which an *African Confederation of the Free States of the Antilles* lying between Colombia, North America, and Guatemala, might have in the politics of the New World? (124)

It is likely that this perspective owes in part to Humboldt's extensive intercourse with a Cuban society that, like Louisiana, had seen a massive influx (as many as 30,000 in some accounts) of refugees from Saint Domingue. As the above quote makes plain, however, the political implications of Humboldt's own dystopic vision could not have been further removed from those of Thrasher and his fellow annexationists. Again like Raynal before him, Humboldt stresses the heroism of the future revolutionaries his text imagines. And he invokes their overwhelming numbers and valor as part of a broader argument for a program of gradual emancipation and education. As Martínez-Fernández aptly

summarizes the issue, “Humboldt ventured to predict that Cuba would embark on a peaceful and gradual transition toward abolition and political freedom, following a path that combined the best of the outcomes of say Venezuela and Haiti.”

The reference to Venezuela points to one reason that Thrasher’s translation could never wholly efface the anti-slavery implications of Humboldt’s own vision of Caribbean insurrection.⁵ For coastal Venezuela was of course one of the locales depicted in the *Personal Narrative*, the text for which Humboldt was best known within U.S. circles. Wide-spread knowledge of that text, and its own strong anti-slavery sentiments, meant that Thrasher’s expansionist and annexationist translation was inevitably open to a range of disruptive meanings. While they occupied a far less central position than in the later *Island of Cuba*, fears of revolution from below were indeed a prominent subtext of the extended coastal sections of the *Personal Narrative*. Before commencing the narrative of his famous journey up the Orinoco, Humboldt pauses to reflect on the wholesale transformation of Caracas in the years since his return to Europe. He writes:

We left Caracas on the 7th of February, on a fresh afternoon, ready to begin our journey to the Orinoco. The memory of this period is today more painful than it was years ago. In those remote countries our friends have lost their lives in the bloody revolutions that gave them freedom and then alternatively deprived them of it. The house where we lived is now a heap of rubble. Terrible earthquakes have transformed the shape of the

⁵ Thrasher attempted to do so in large part by entirely omitting the eloquent attack on New World slavery and slaveholders in Chapter 7 of Humboldt’s original version of the text. For Humboldt’s attack on Thrasher for this omission, printed in *The New York Daily Times*, August 12, 1856, p. 2 see page 268-9 of Luis Martinez-Fernandez’ edition (cited above).

ground; the city I described has disappeared (Humboldt, *Personal Narrative* 142).

In a remarkably suggestive passage, Humboldt's well-known interest in the effects of New World natural disasters is here closely associated with the effects of political revolution. The years since Humboldt's return had of course been especially turbulent ones for the people of Caracas and Venezuela, with Bolívar and his compatriots repeatedly wresting control of the capital from Spain only to lose it again in a series of counter-revolutions (Rippy and Braun 503-697).

Humboldt persistently associated the revolutionary efforts of Bolívar and his class with the more threatening force of slave insurrection. During one of his expeditions from the bustling port city of Cumaná, for instance, he notes that, "The independence movement, which had nearly broken out in 1798, had been preceded and followed by trouble among the slaves at Cariaco" (114). Numerous passages in the *Personal Narrative* also betray Humboldt's sense of coastal Venezuela, and Caracas in particular, as the southern periphery of a coherent greater Caribbean, a region he felt extended as far north as the U.S. coast of the Gulf of Mexico [see the passages quoted in the Introduction of this study]. Narrating his first visit to Caracas, he remarks that, "Intense commerce with Europe and the Caribbean Sea have powerfully influenced the social evolution of Cuba and the beautiful provinces of Venezuela. Nowhere else in Spanish America does civilization appear so European" (136). The colonial elite of Cuba and Caracas were not, in his view, the only people to benefit from the cosmopolitanism of circum-Caribbean society. Humboldt makes repeated reference to sub-altern mobility within this wider region. To note but one instance, when narrating his departure from the harbor at Cumaná

Humboldt pauses to describe the skill of the Guaiqueri pilots who (much like the Seminole mariners described in Bartram's *Travels*) navigate small boats to "trade between the coasts and the West Indies islands" (131). Slaves are also highly mobile figures within the pages of the *Personal Narrative*. Humboldt's depiction of Cumaná includes a lengthy narrative of an incident in which Bonpland was attacked by a mulatto. It is later revealed that the man, "had served on a pirate ship from the island of Santo Domingo" (127). References such as these powerfully resonate with more extended references to black mobility and hemispheric insurrection (such as those from *The Island of Cuba* quoted above) throughout Humboldt's corpus.⁶

Much work remains to be done on Humboldt's representations of coastal Venezuela (and Colombia). In many ways, his pages on the region transcend the racialism that pervades most of the *Personal Narrative*. In Caracas especially, Humboldt depicts a highly fluid and open racial landscape. Blacks, Natives, Europeans and "white" creoles regularly mix, in his pages, to create the polyglot and highly cosmopolitan society that is Caracas. Though in a far more liberal manner, Humboldt's chapters on the port city present a circum-Caribbean locale akin to Audubon's New Orleans. Indeed, it is highly intriguing to speculate on how Humboldt's representation of Venezuela might have resonated with its ante-bellum U.S. readers, to whom it may well have presented an uncanny mirror of the threatening diversity and volatility with which the nation was confronted throughout the Gulf South.

⁶ Indeed, this last reference is highly suggestive in light of Linebaugh and Rediker's thesis (*Many-Headed Hydra*) that black sailors carried knowledge of insurrections between the various ports of the greater Caribbean, and often linked up with seaport slaves to plot further rebellions.

That question points to but one limit of this dissertation, the majority of which has been devoted to exploration of the northern periphery of the greater Caribbean. That decision reflects my own grounding within American studies, and my abiding interest in tracing the manifold cultural forms that have circulated within the territorial bounds of the present-day United States. Full exploration of the more southerly routes of West Indian natural history would of course require an engagement with the enormous Spanish-language archive on Humboldt's travels in Latin America. As Jason Wilson acknowledges, such multi-lingual scholarship has not often been assayed. He notes, for instance, that research done in Spanish on Humboldt's Cuban, Colombian and Venezuelan visits is not normally referenced by British scholars (Humboldt, *Personal Narrative* lxxv). My own study can not go beyond pointing to its own predominant reliance on the English-language archive on natural histories of the greater Caribbean. But such limitations, it is consoling to note, are increasingly evident across the field of American Studies. To steal a phrase from Carolyn Porter, transnational American Studies repeatedly finds itself in the productive yet daunting situation of knowing that which it does not know.



Figure 1.1



Figure 1.2

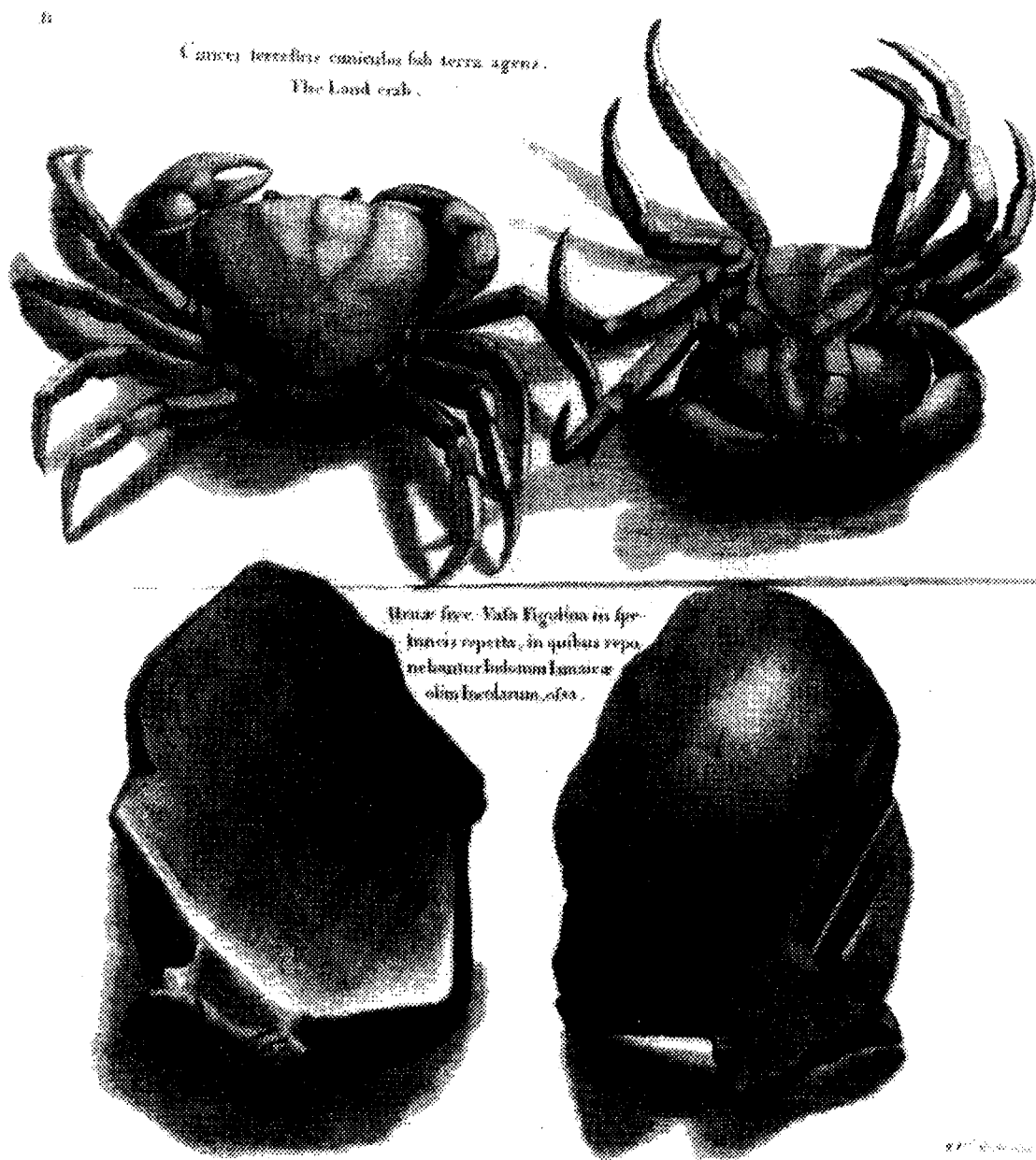


Figure 1.3

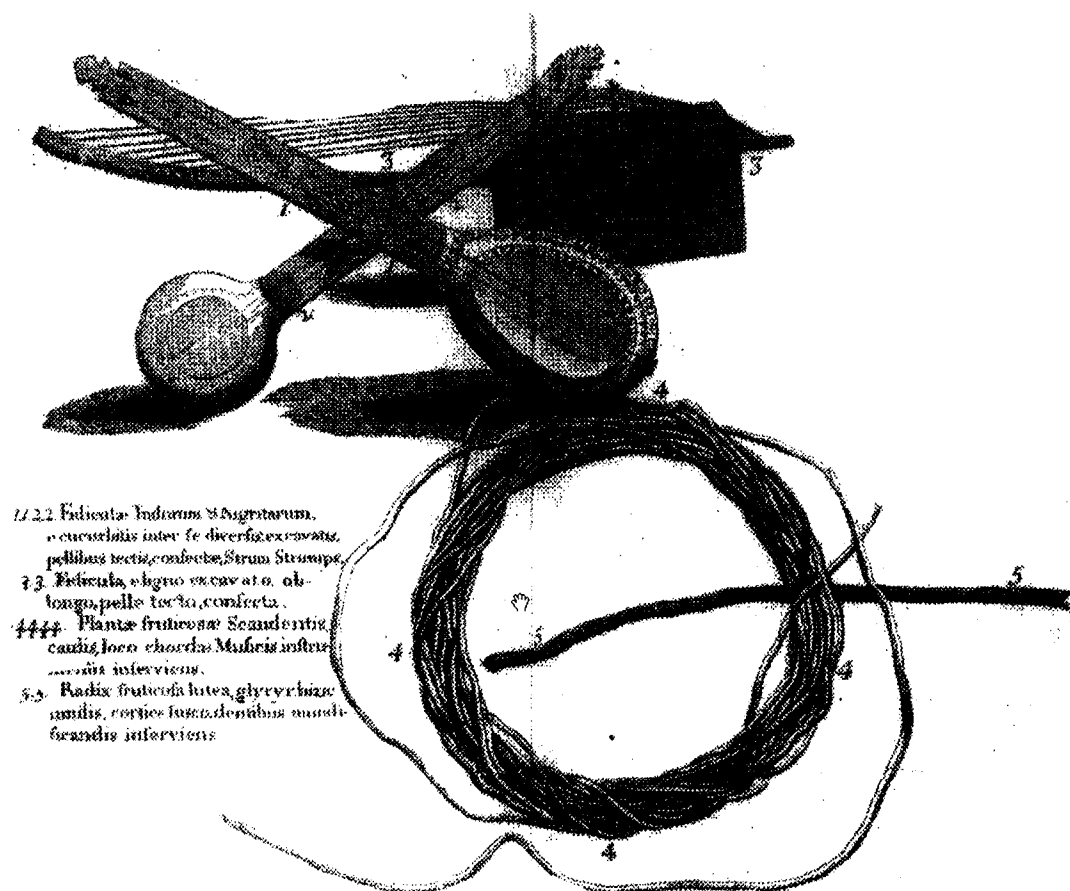


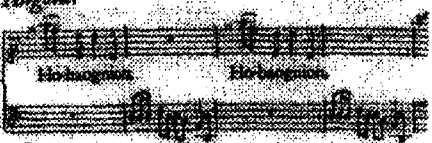
Figure 1.4

The Introduction

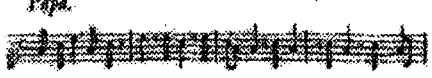
Upon one of their Festivals when a great many of the Negro Musicians were gathered together, I observed Mr. *Capote*, the best Musician there to take the Words they sang and set them to Music, which follows.

You must clap Hands when the Bate is plaid, and cry, *Alla, Alla.*

Angola.




Papa.



The Introduction

Karava.

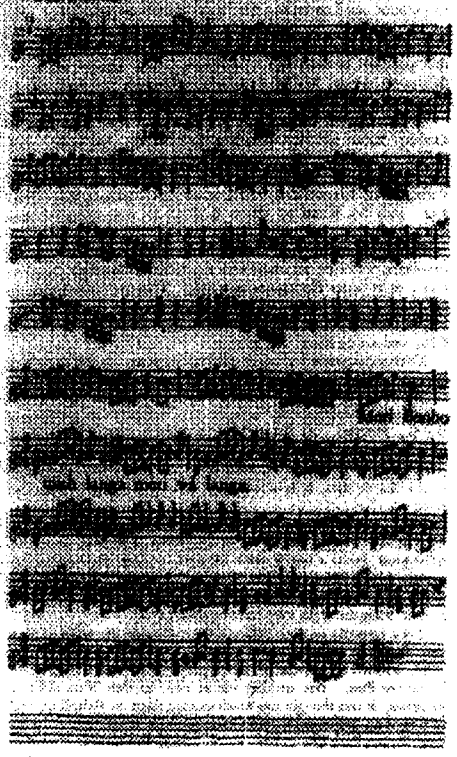


Figure 1.5

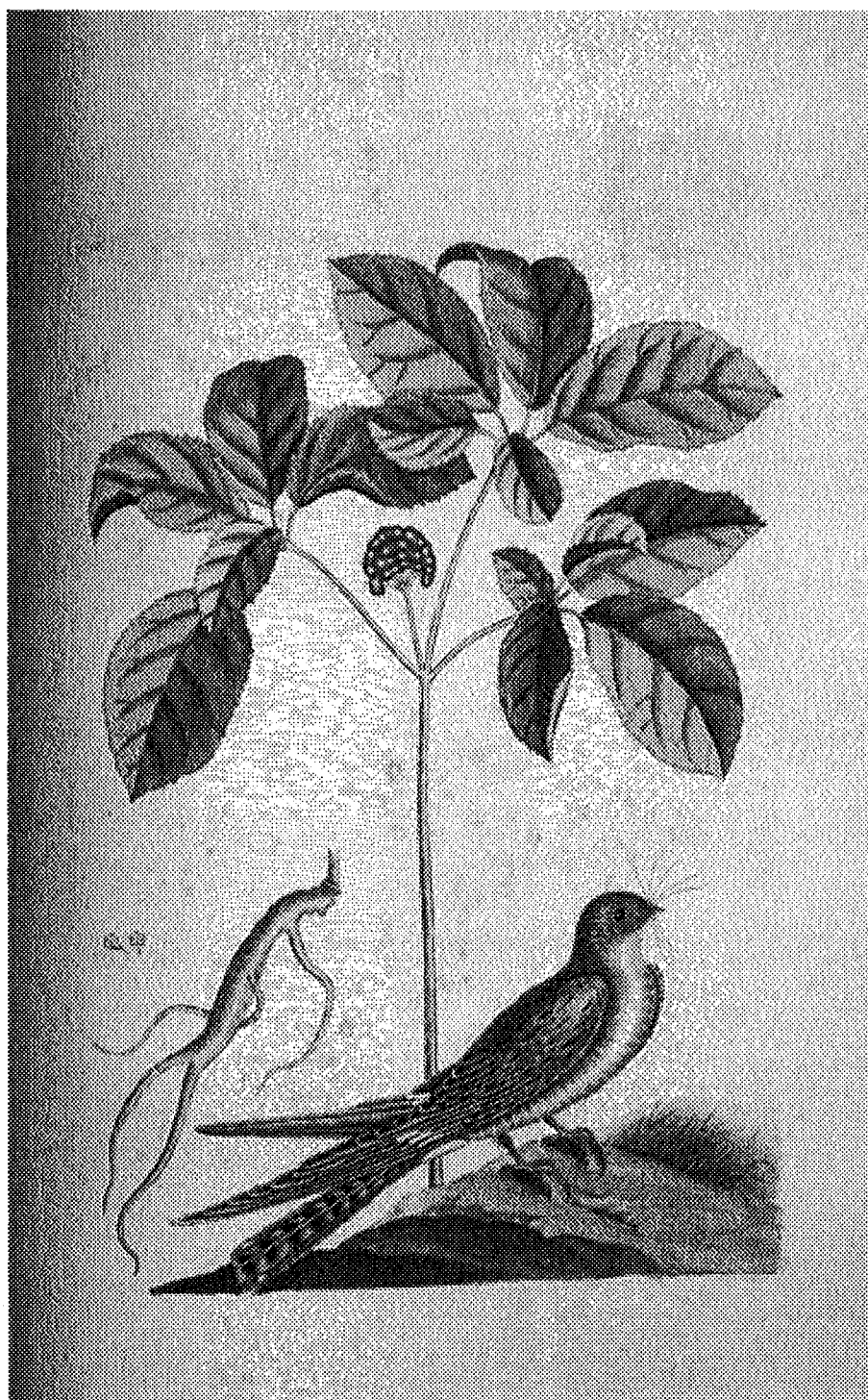


Figure 1.6



Figure 1.7

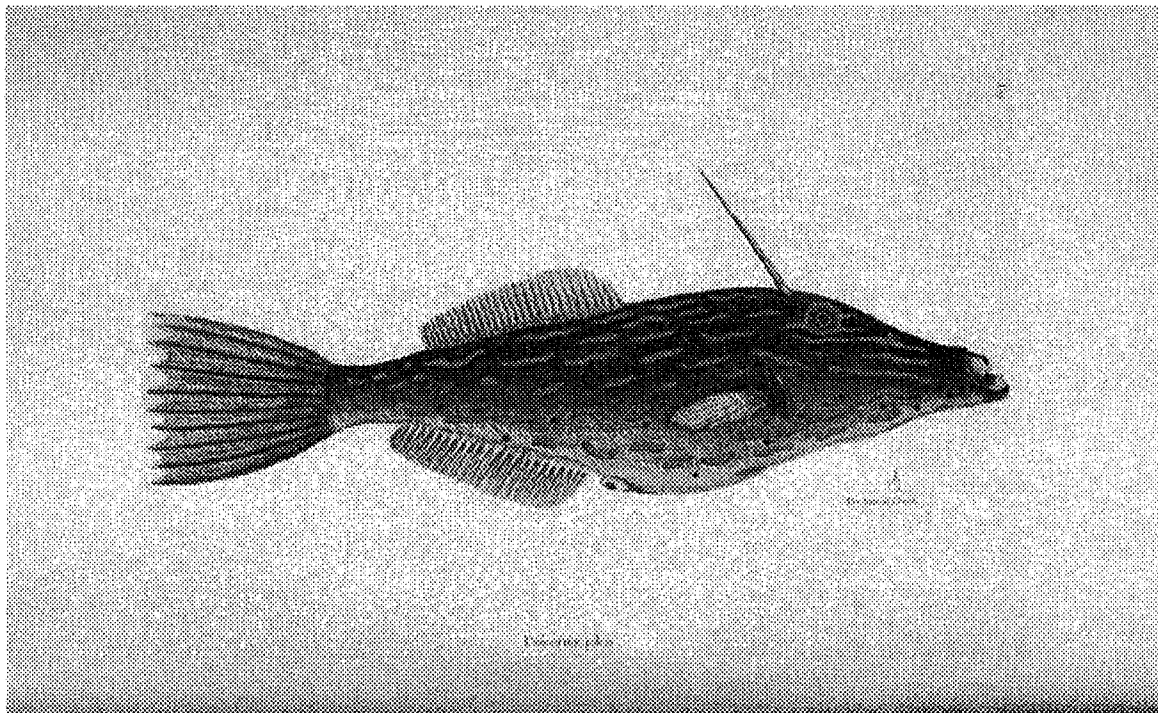


Figure 1.8

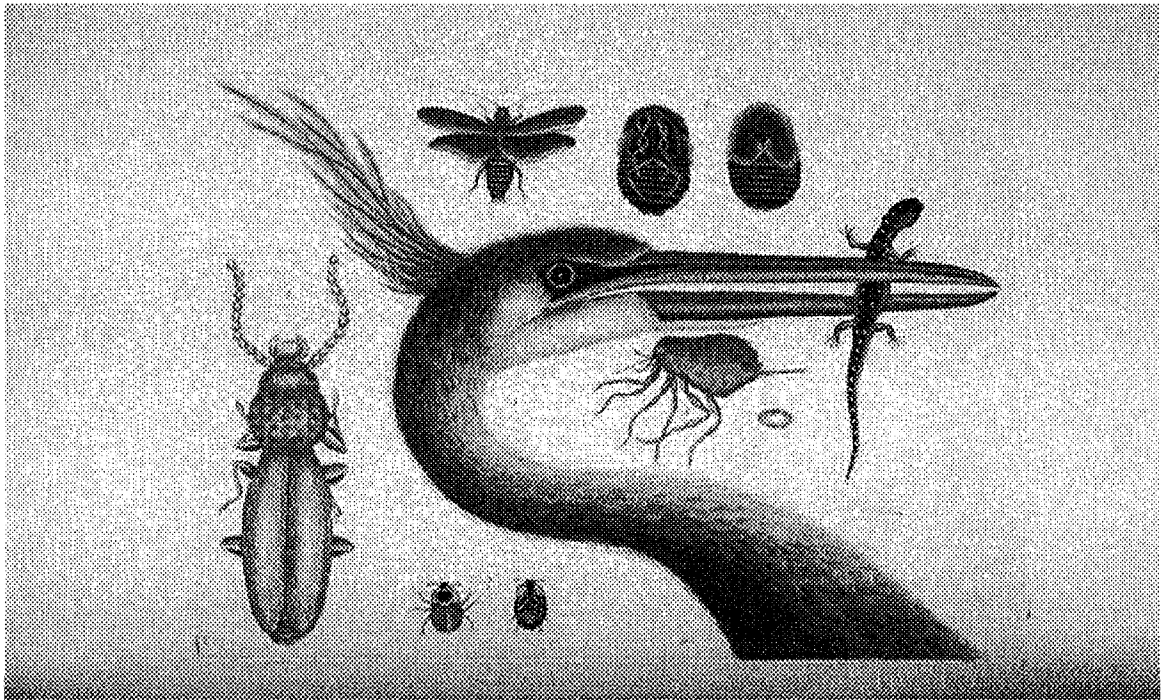


Figure 1.9

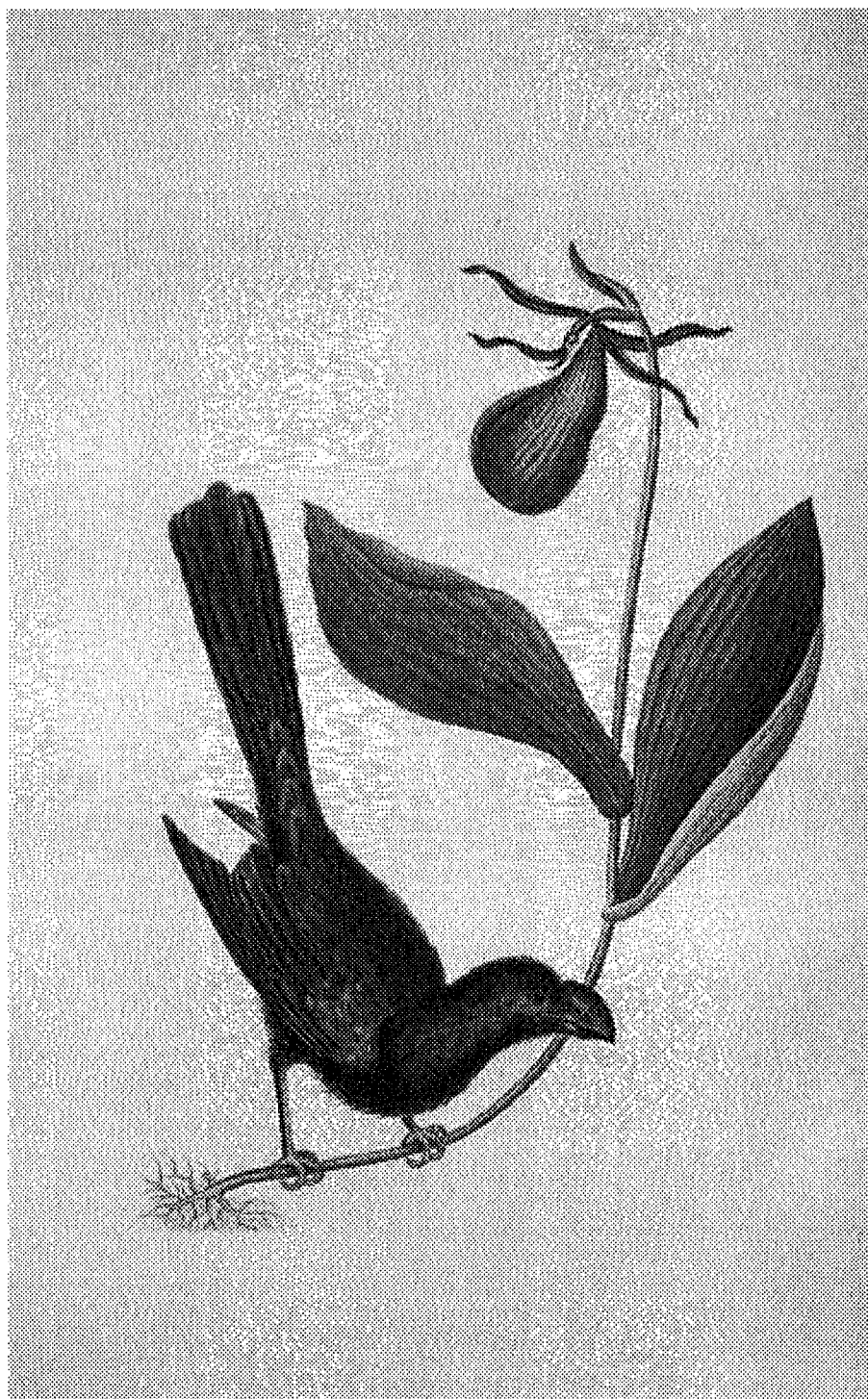


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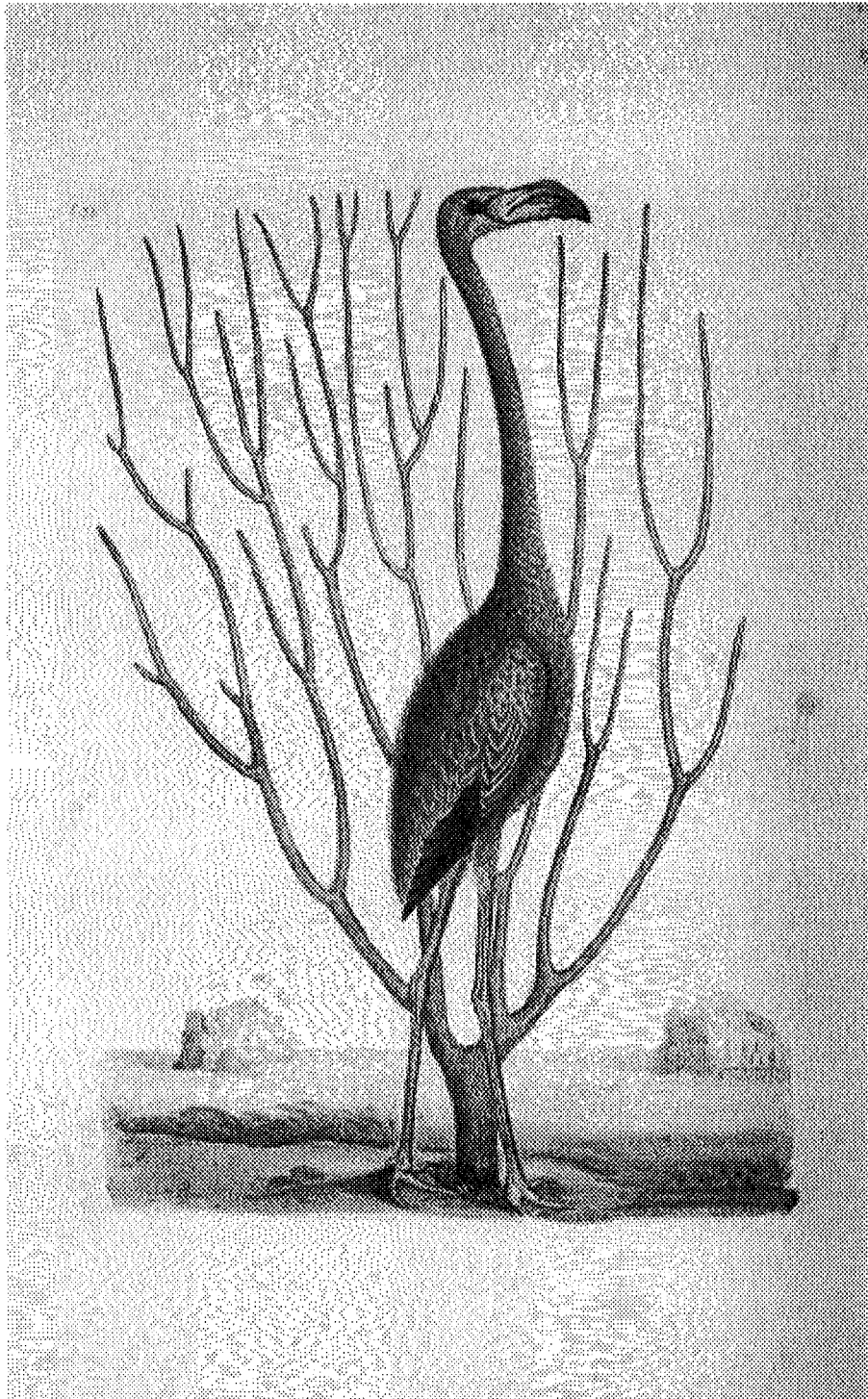


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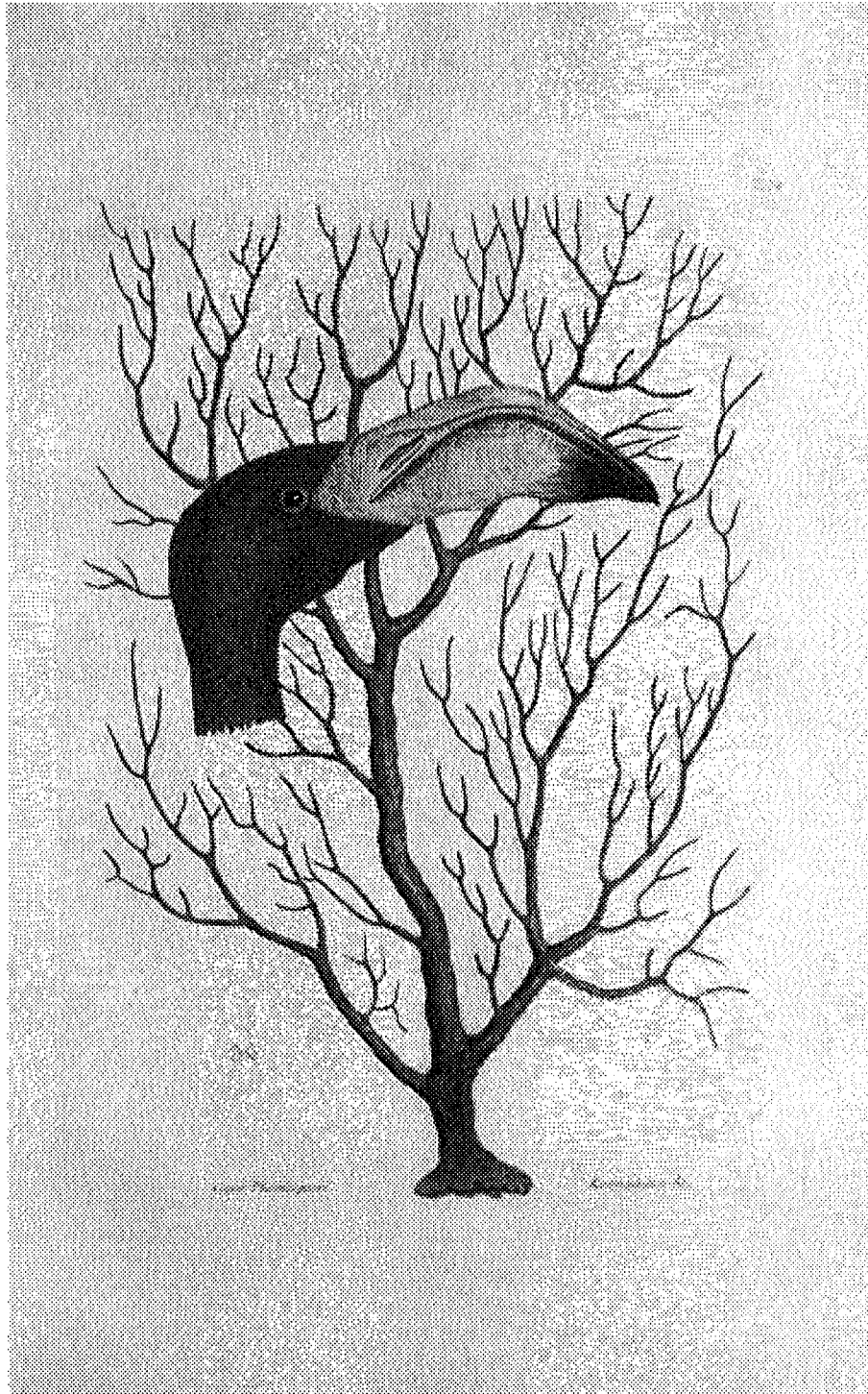


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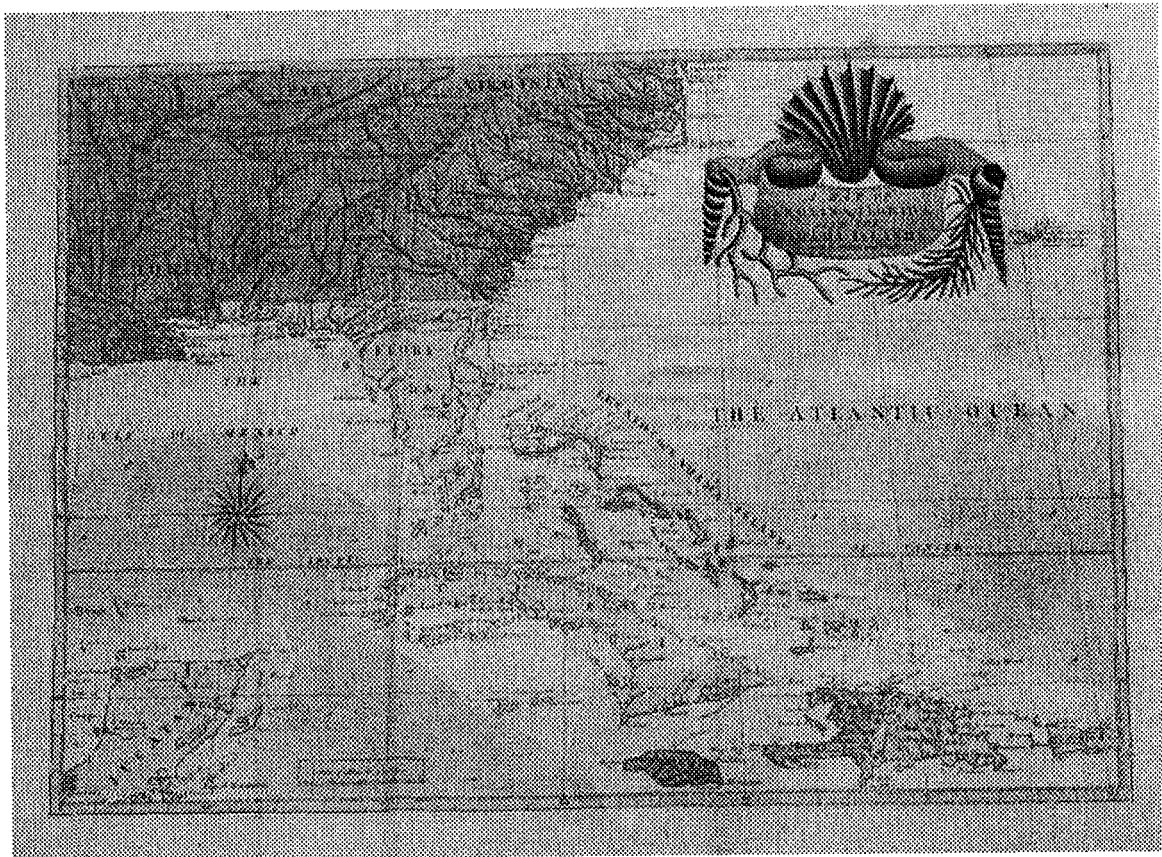


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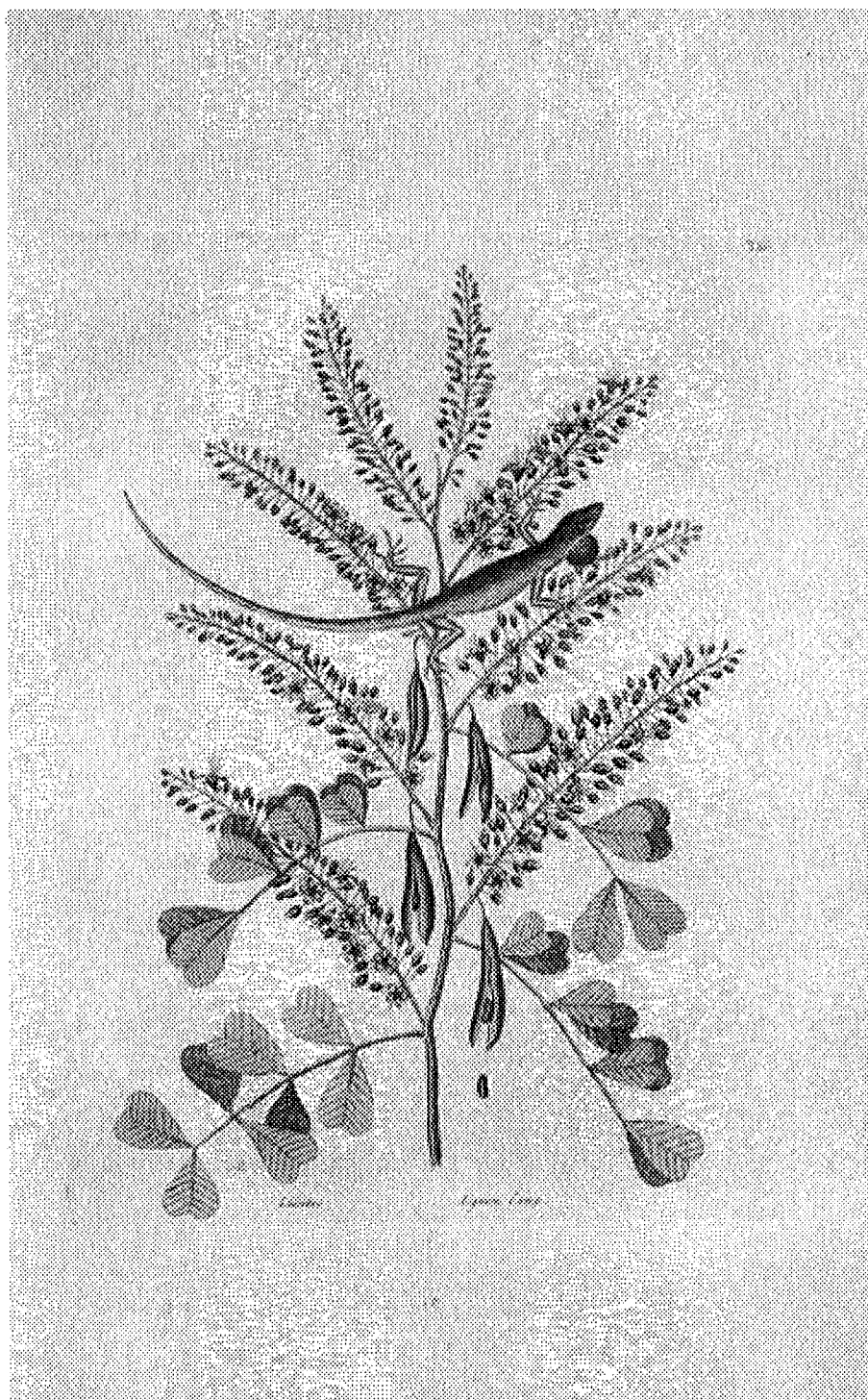


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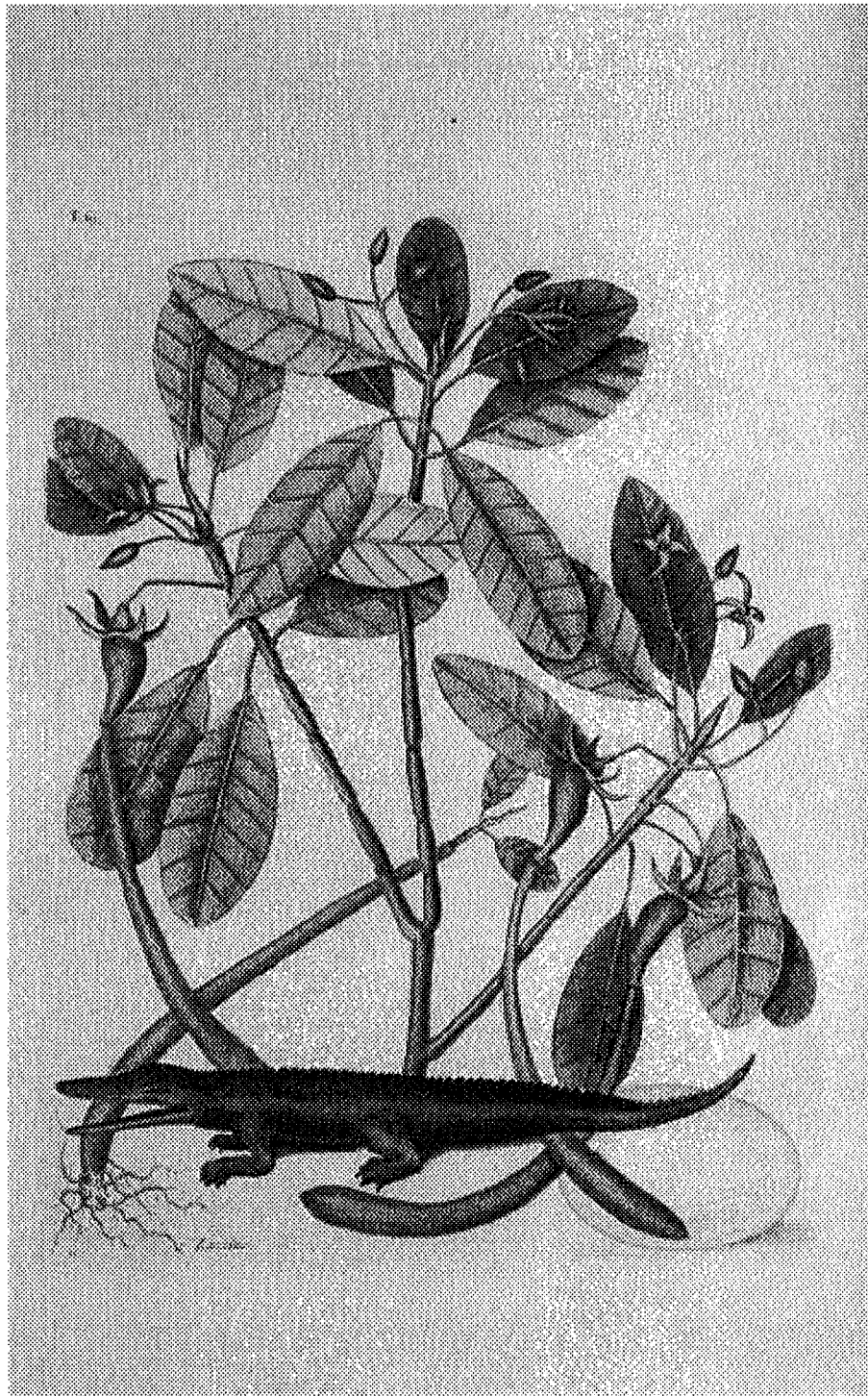


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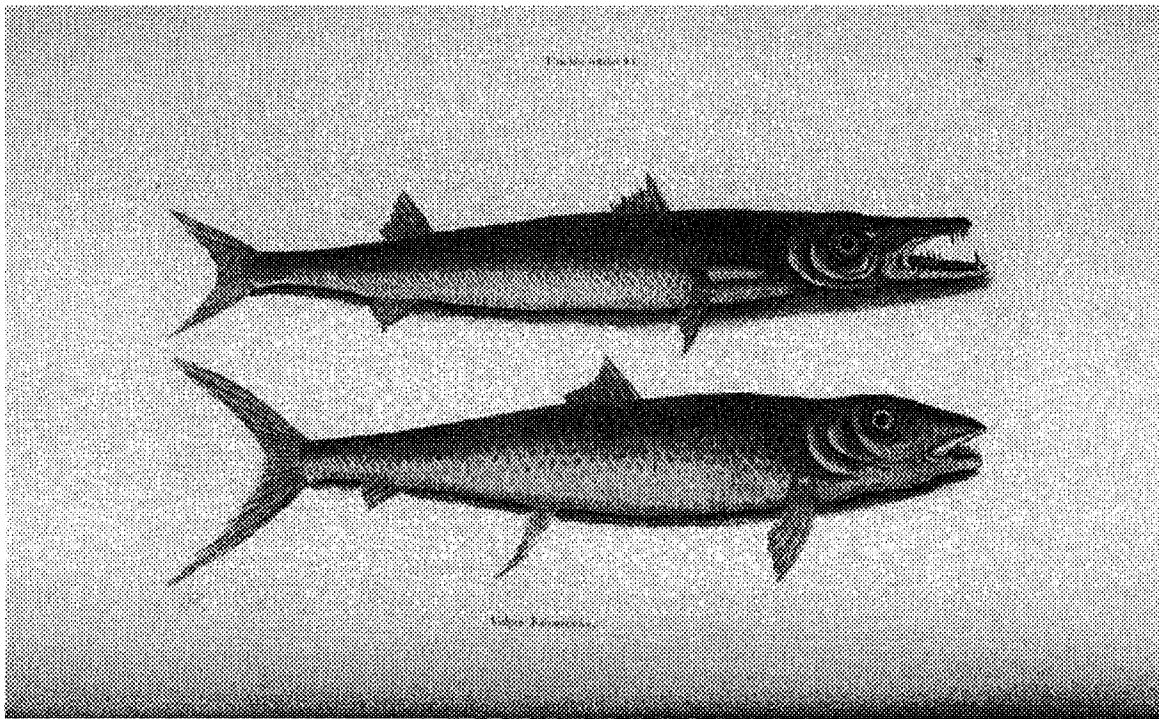


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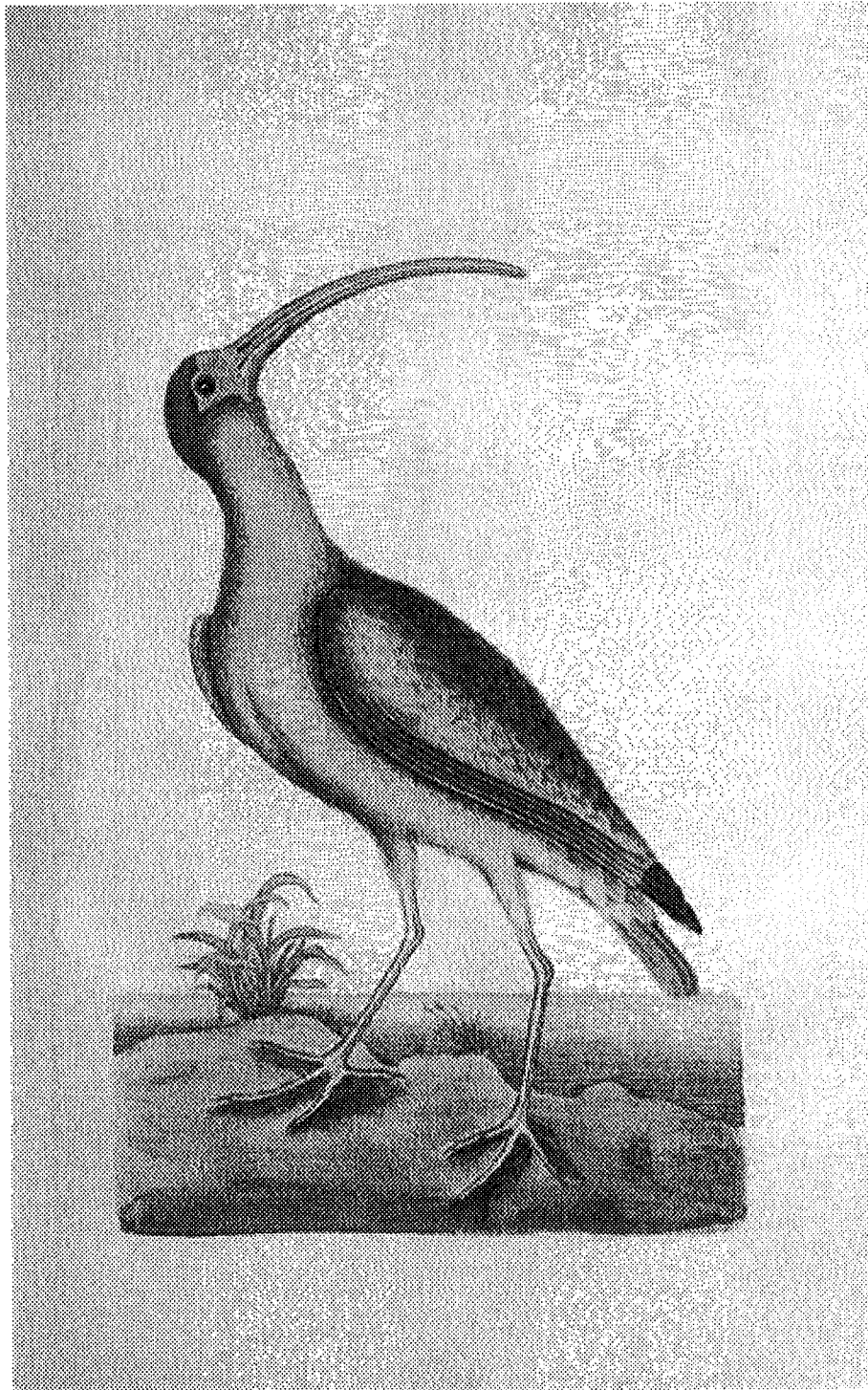


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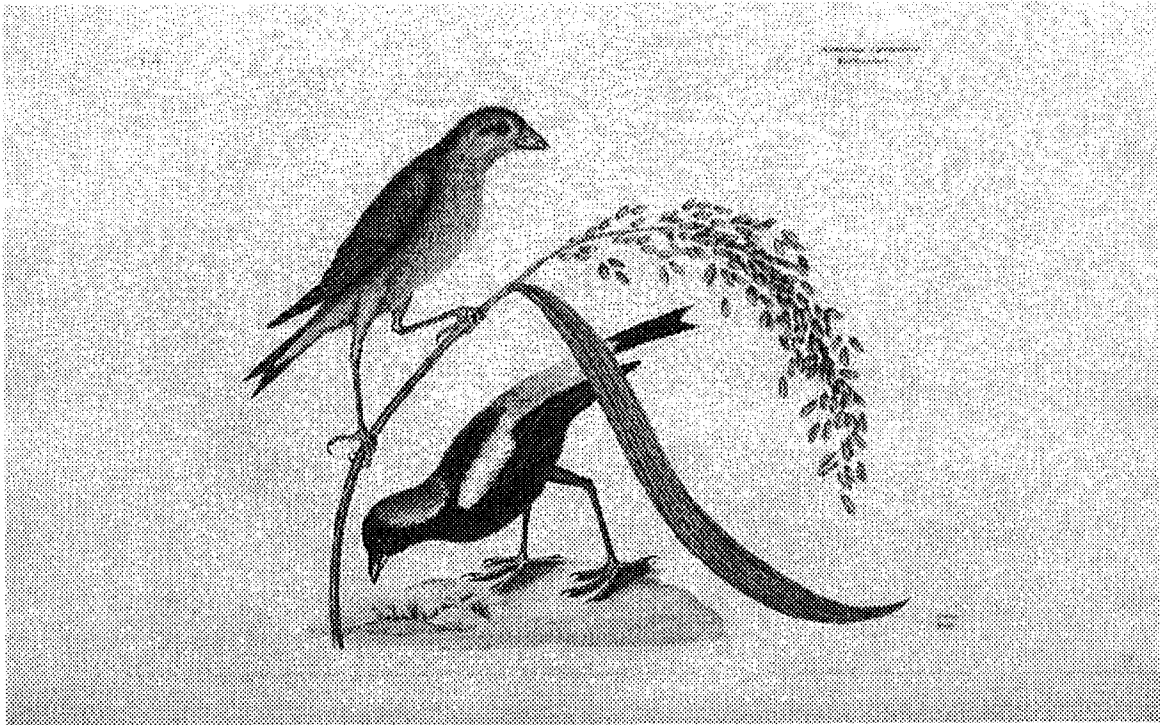


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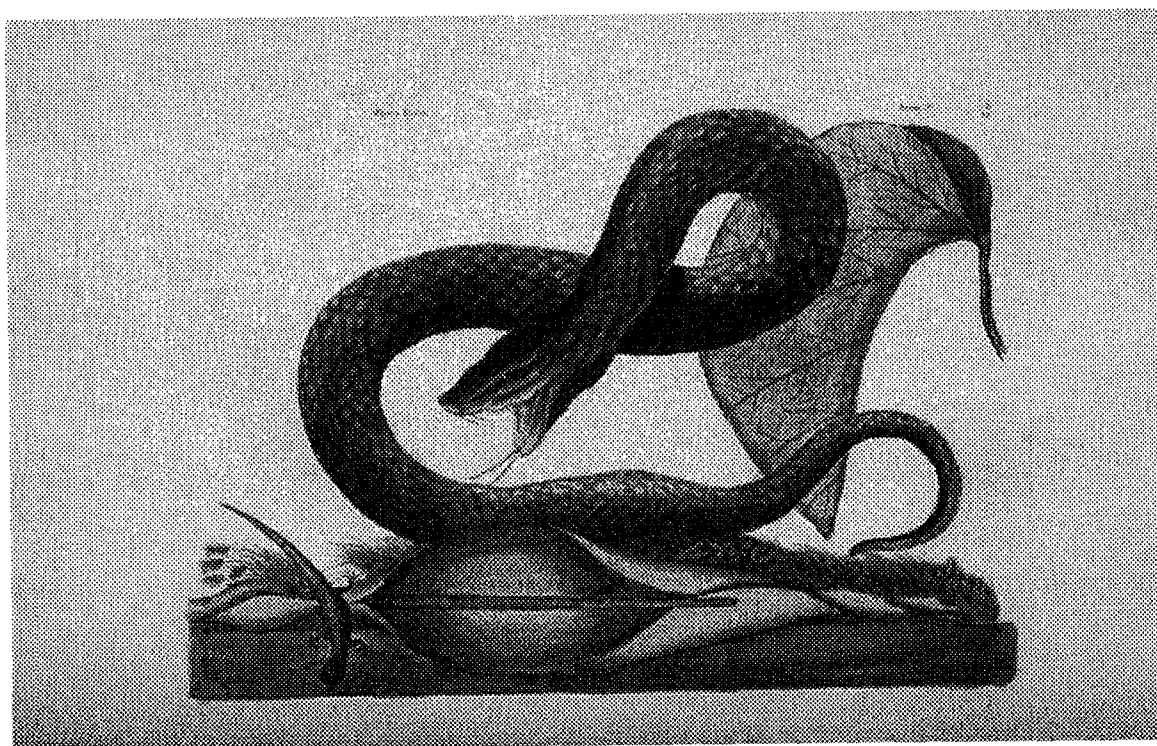


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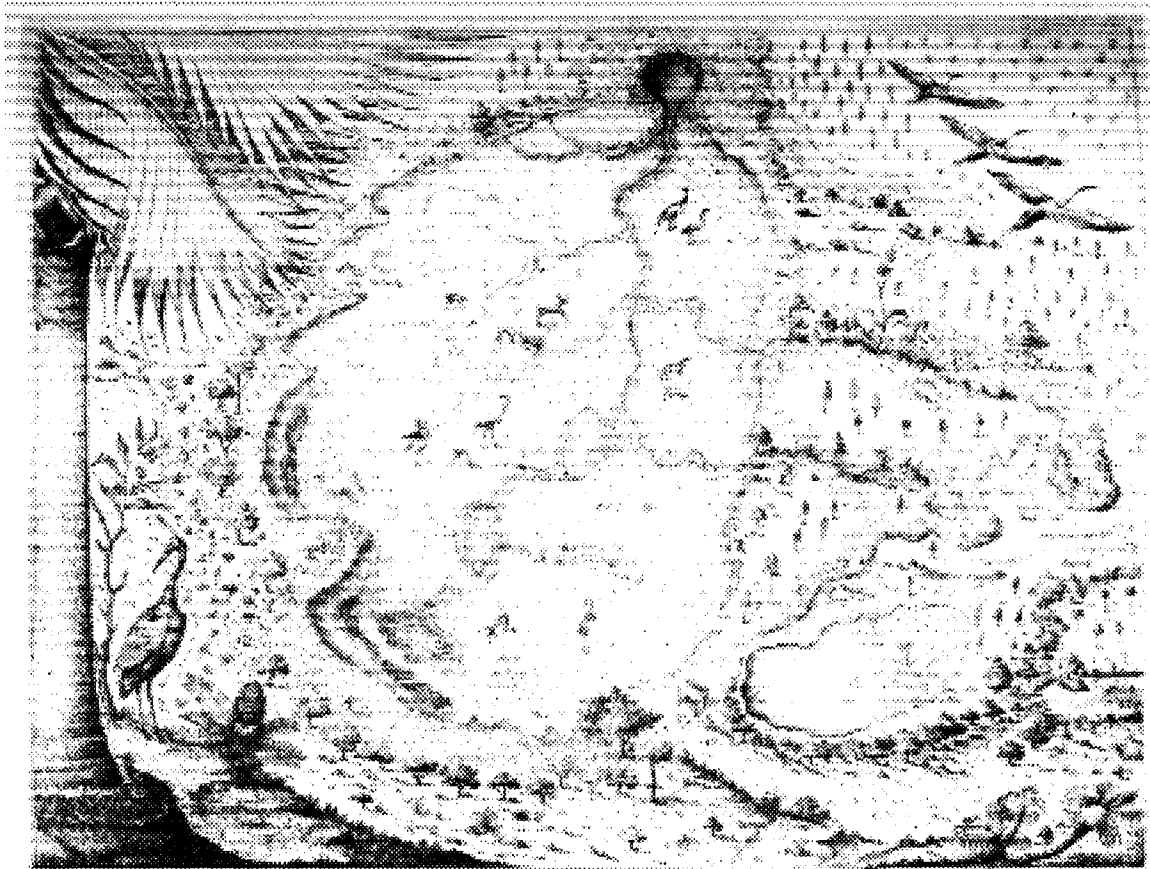


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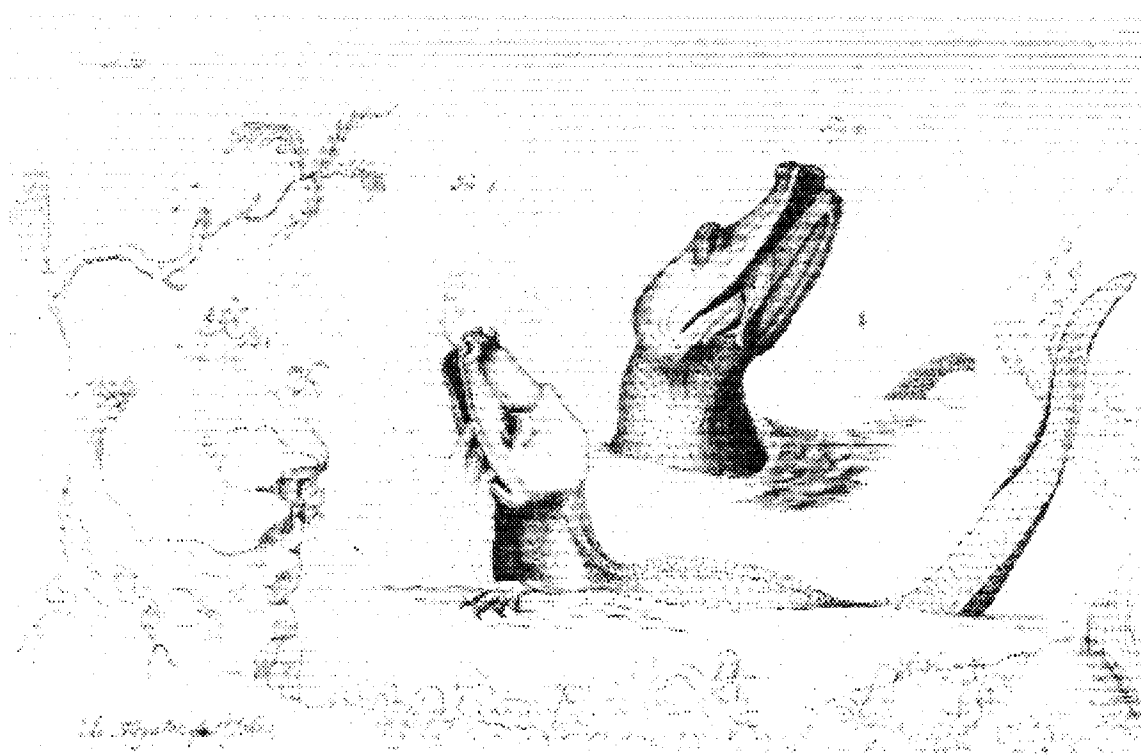


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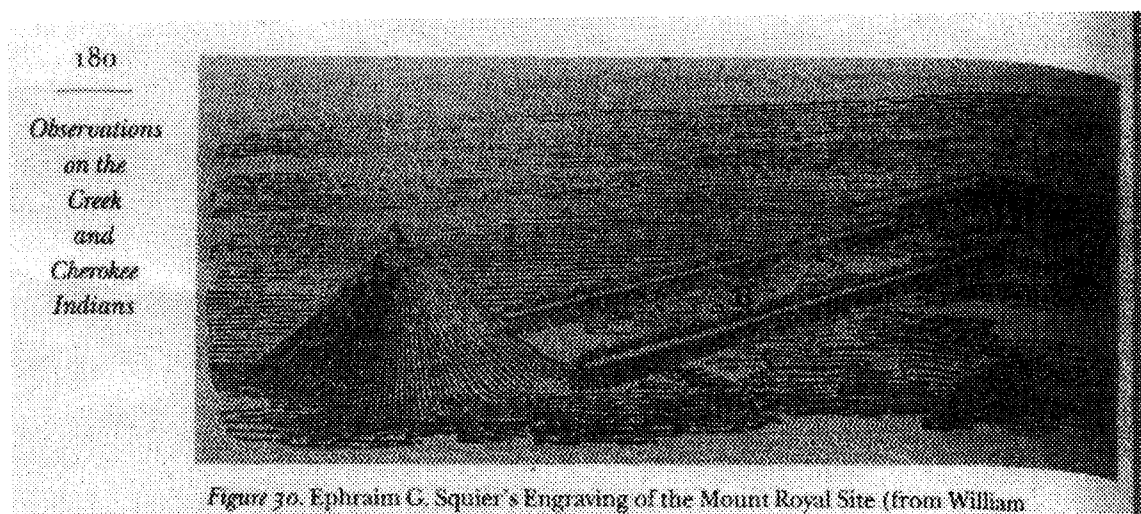


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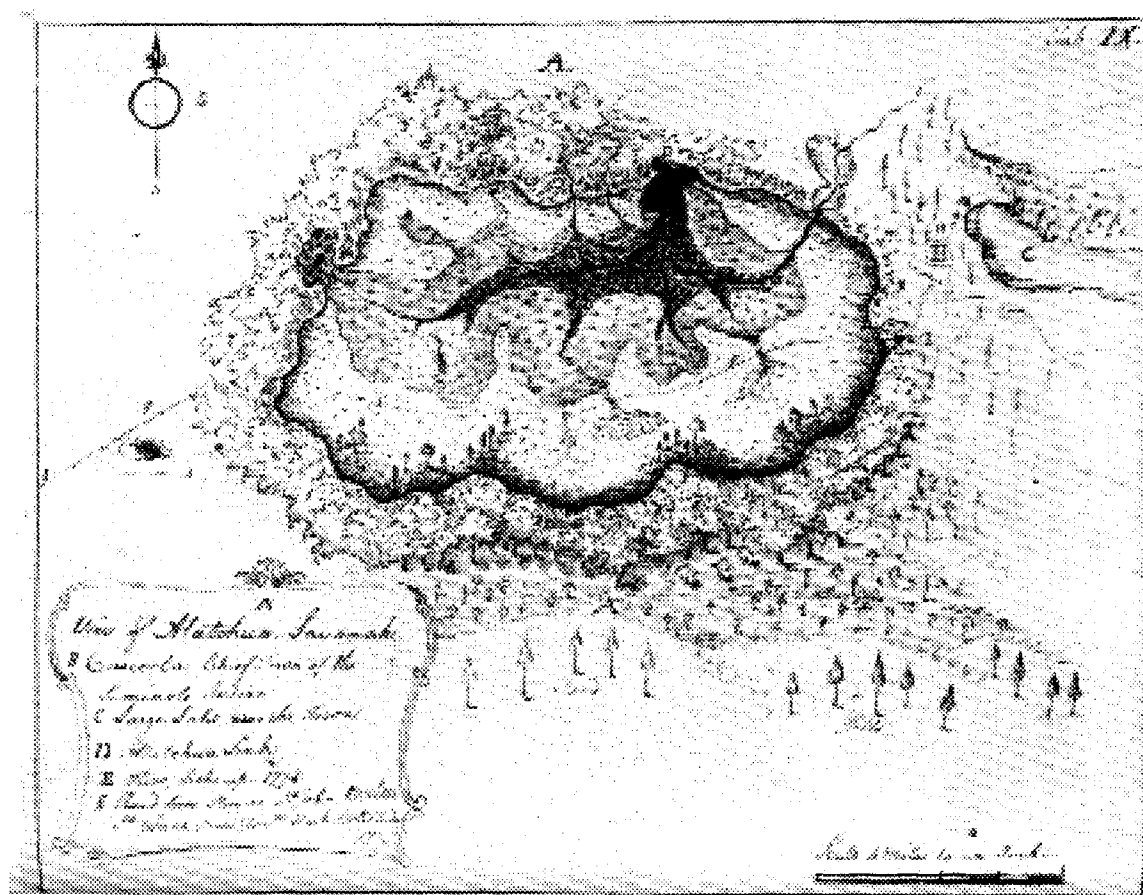


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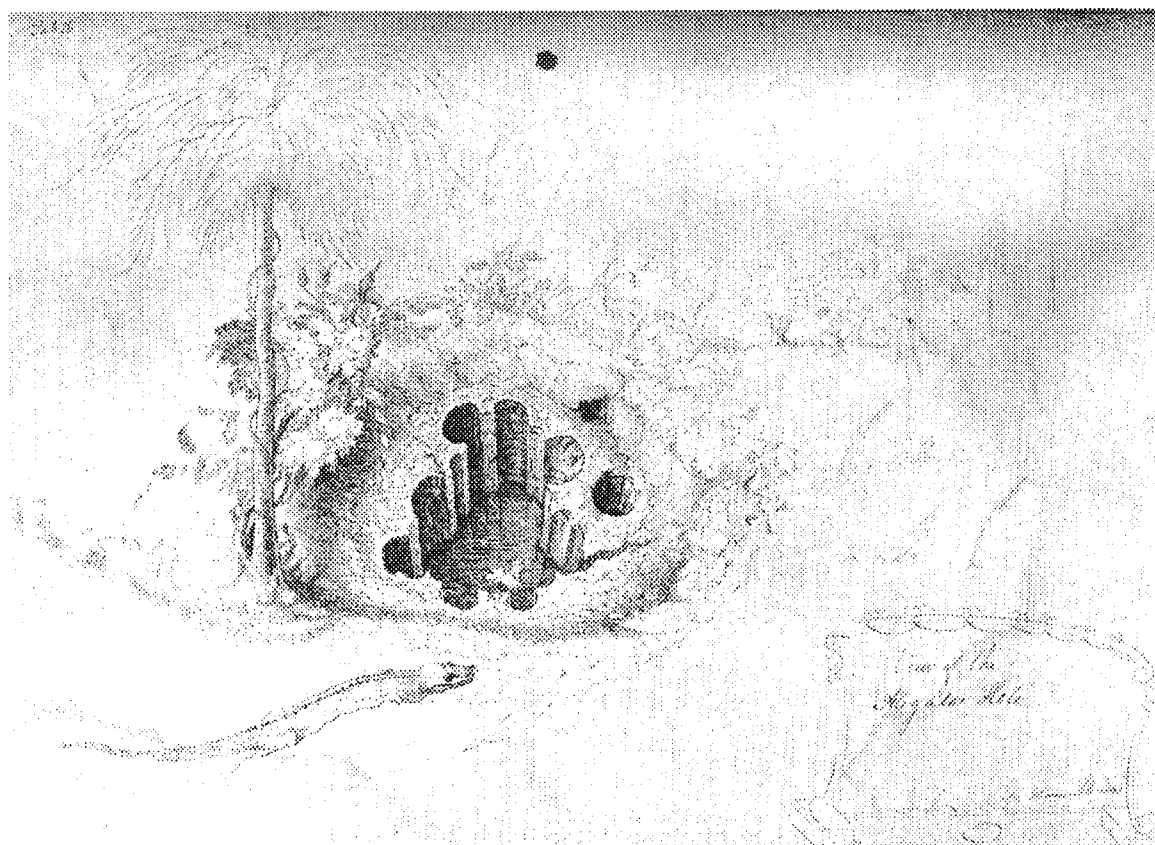


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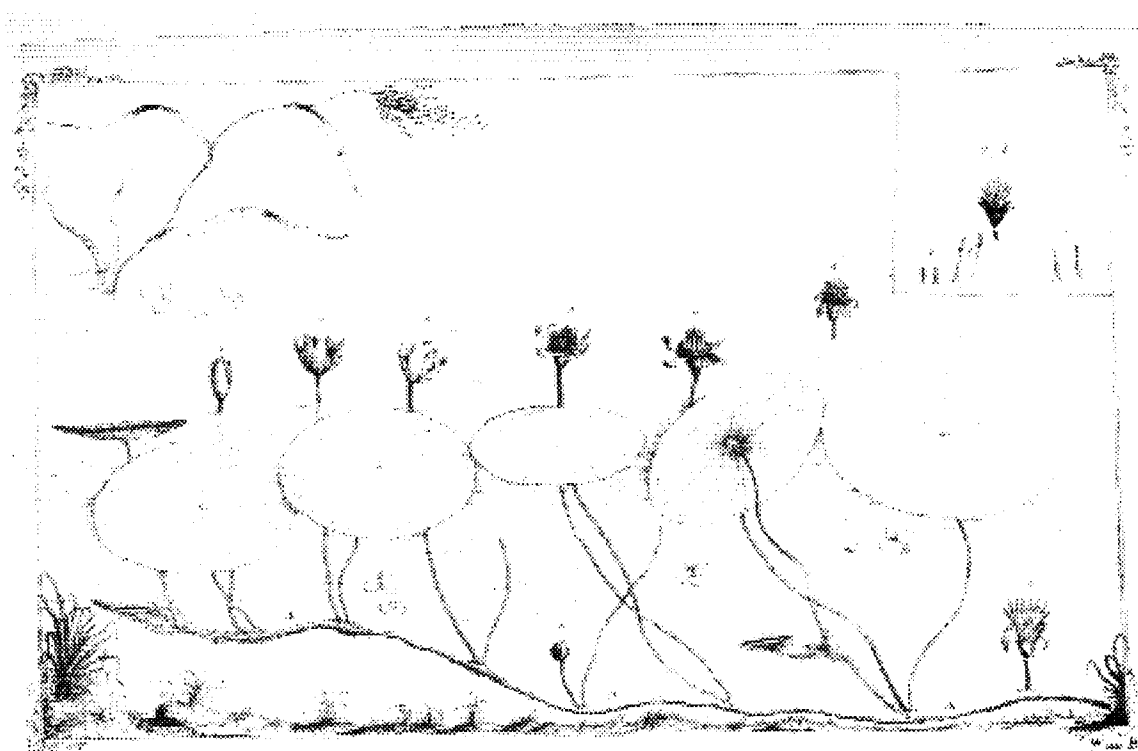


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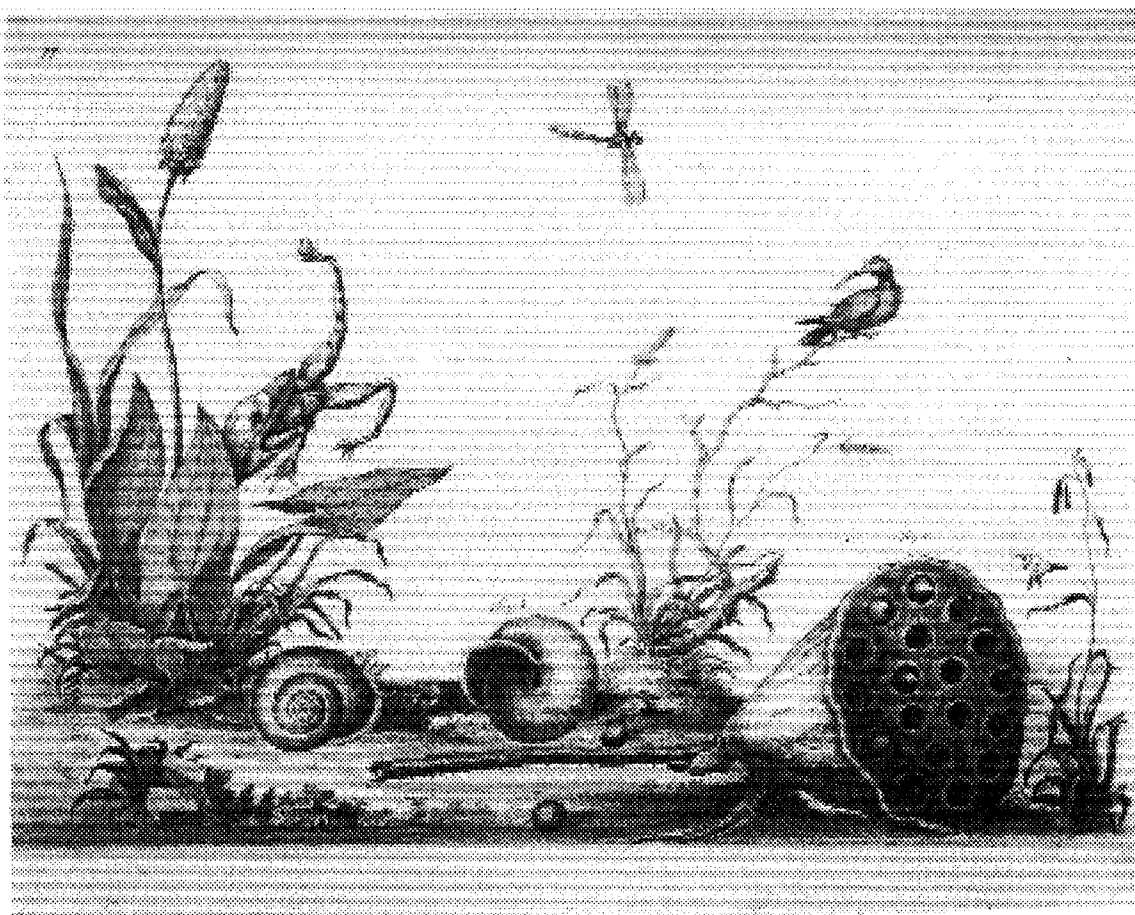


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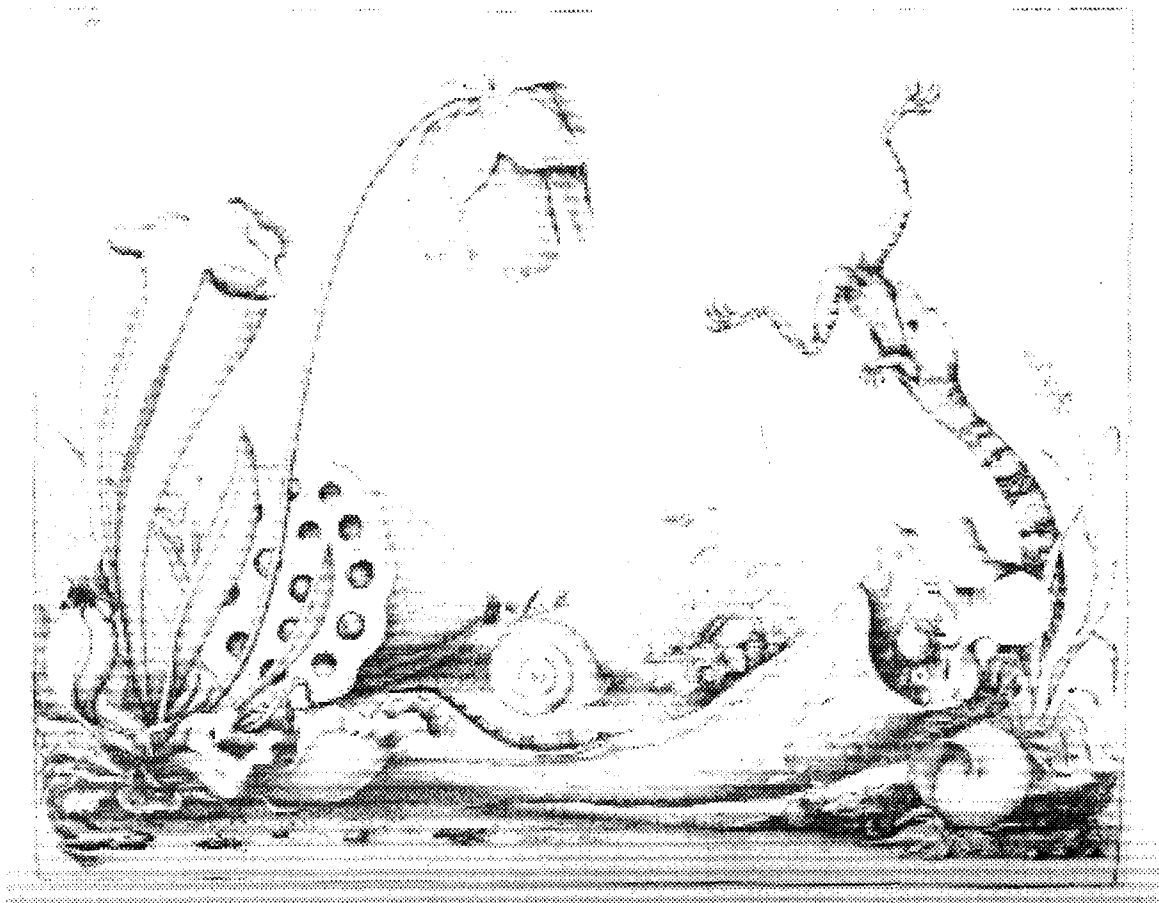


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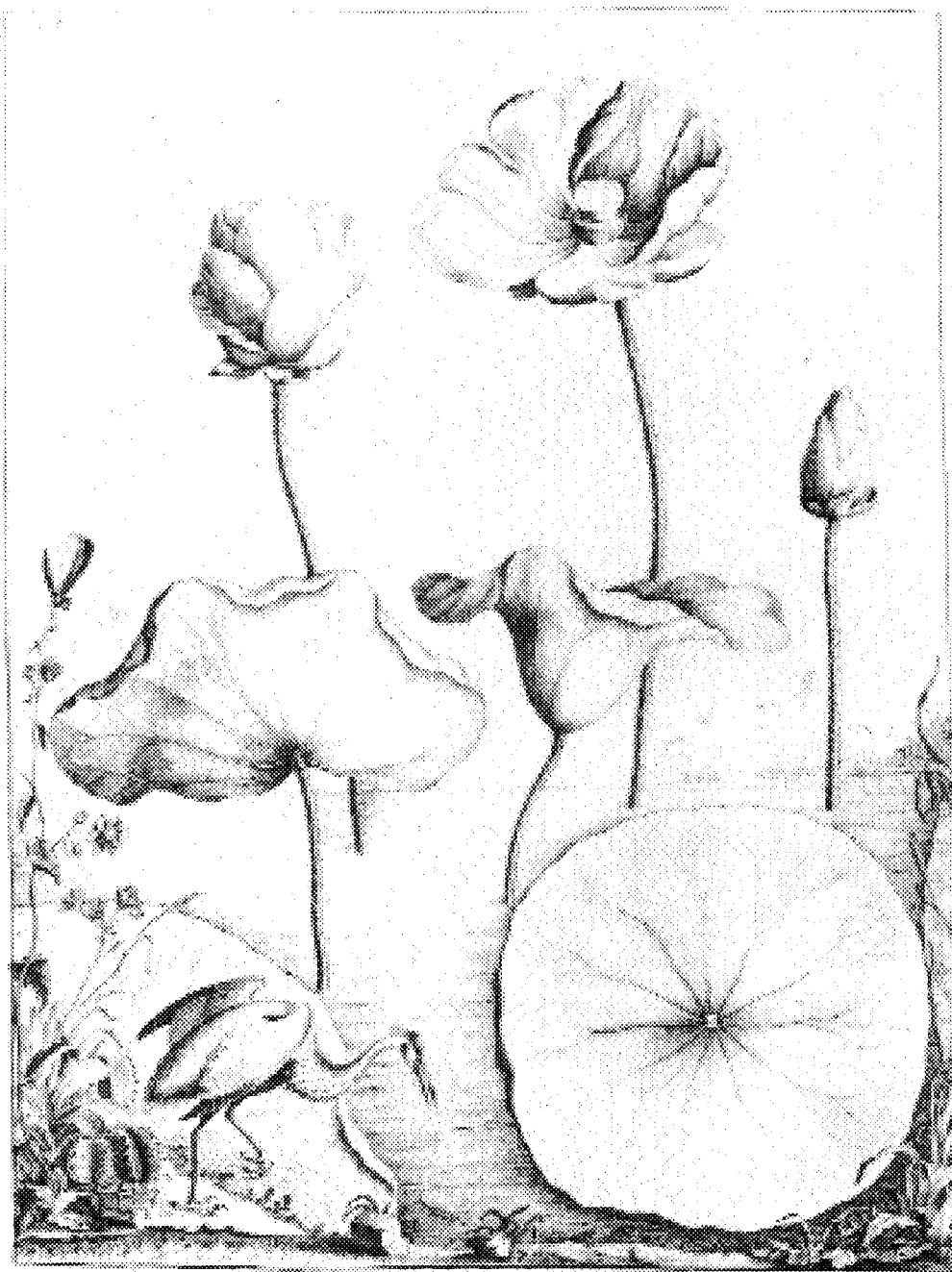


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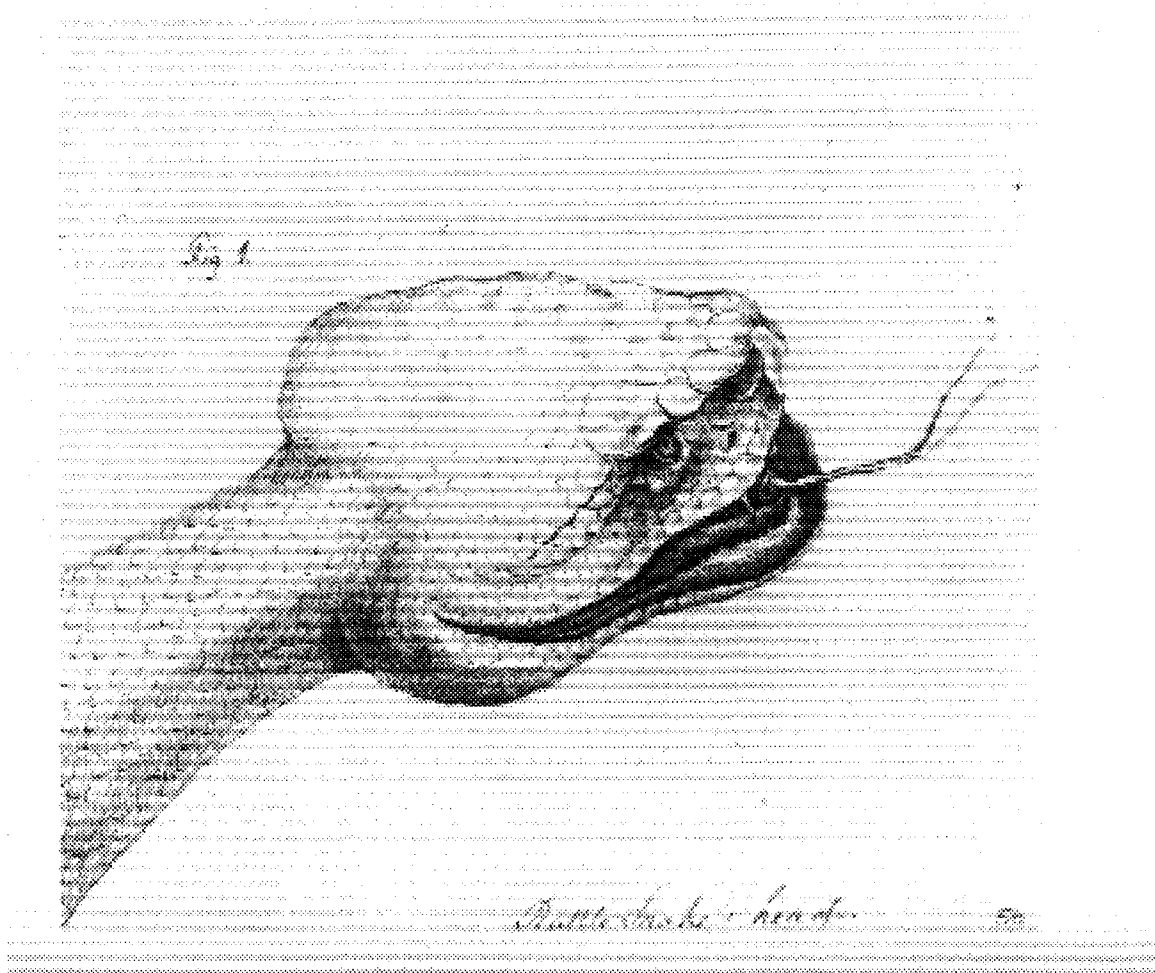


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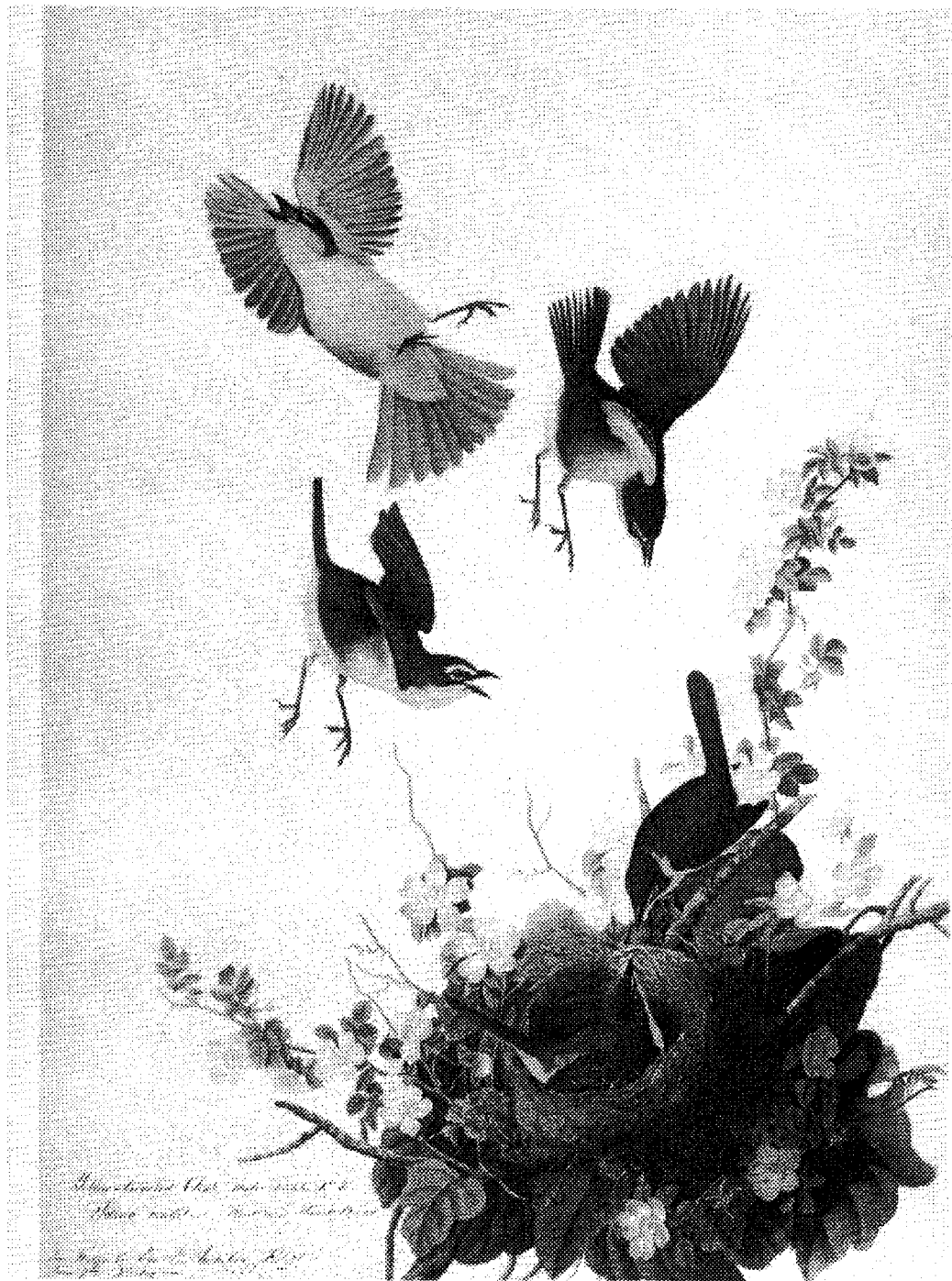


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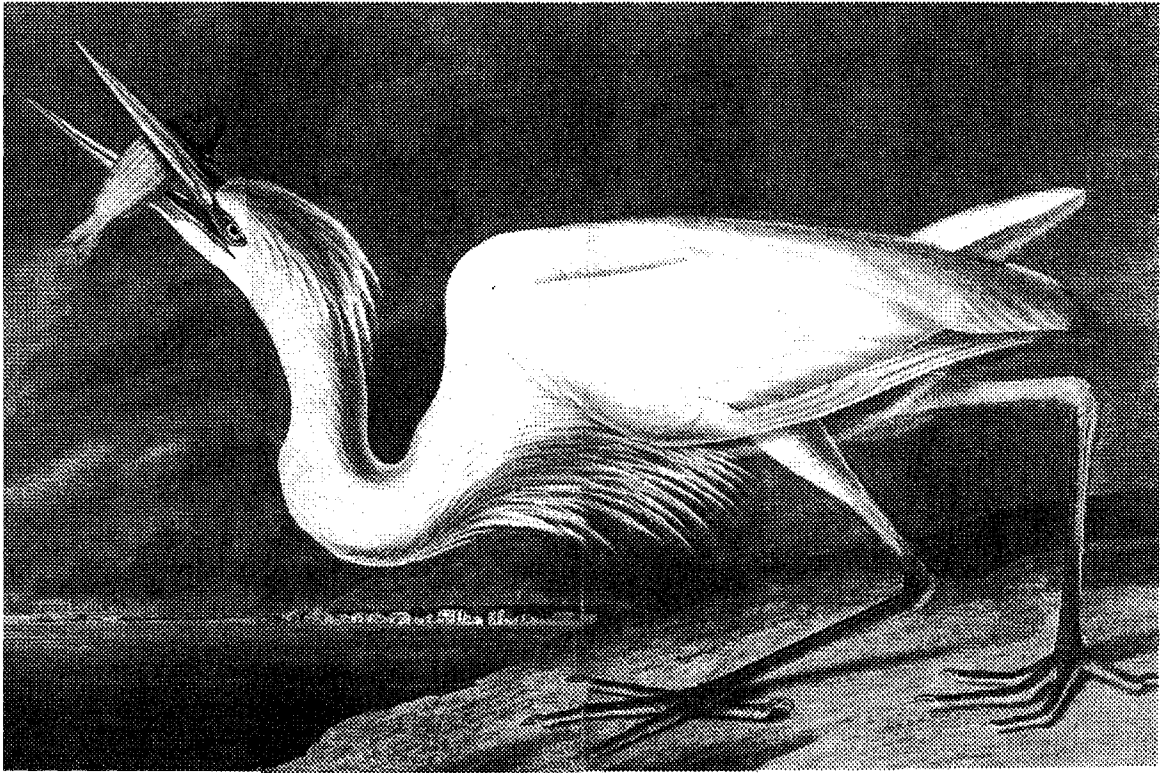


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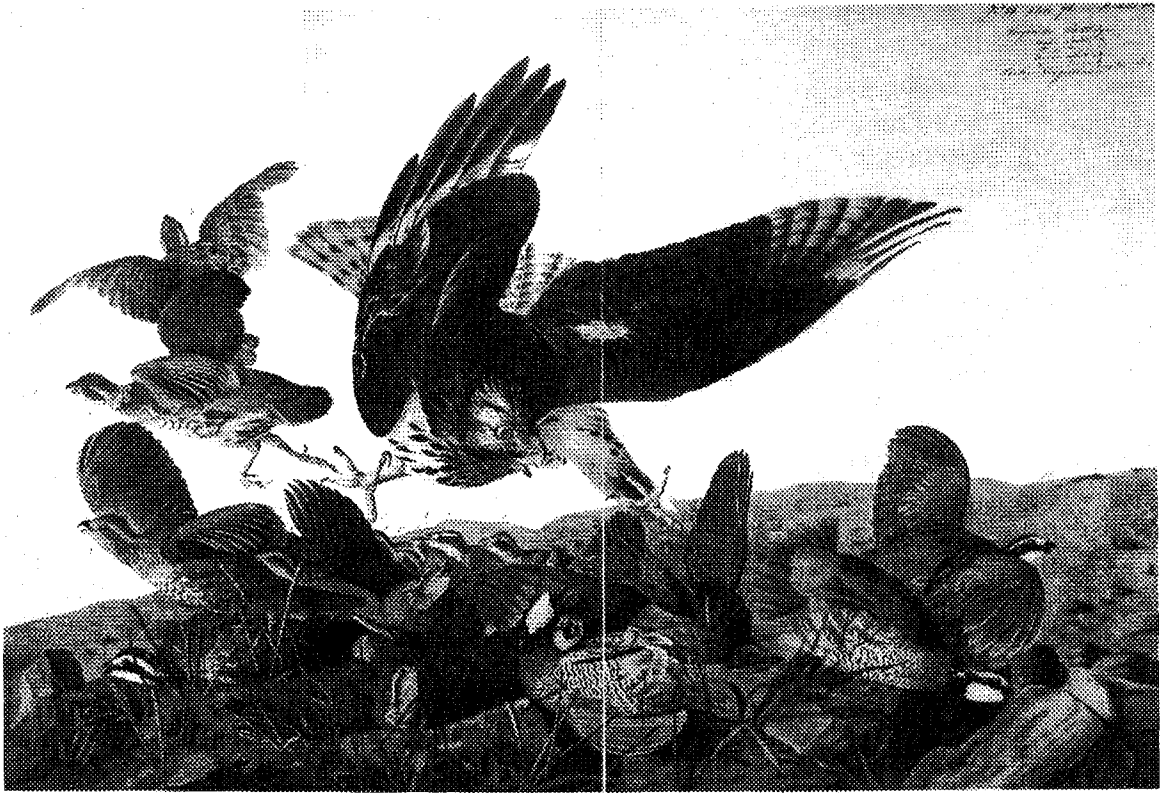


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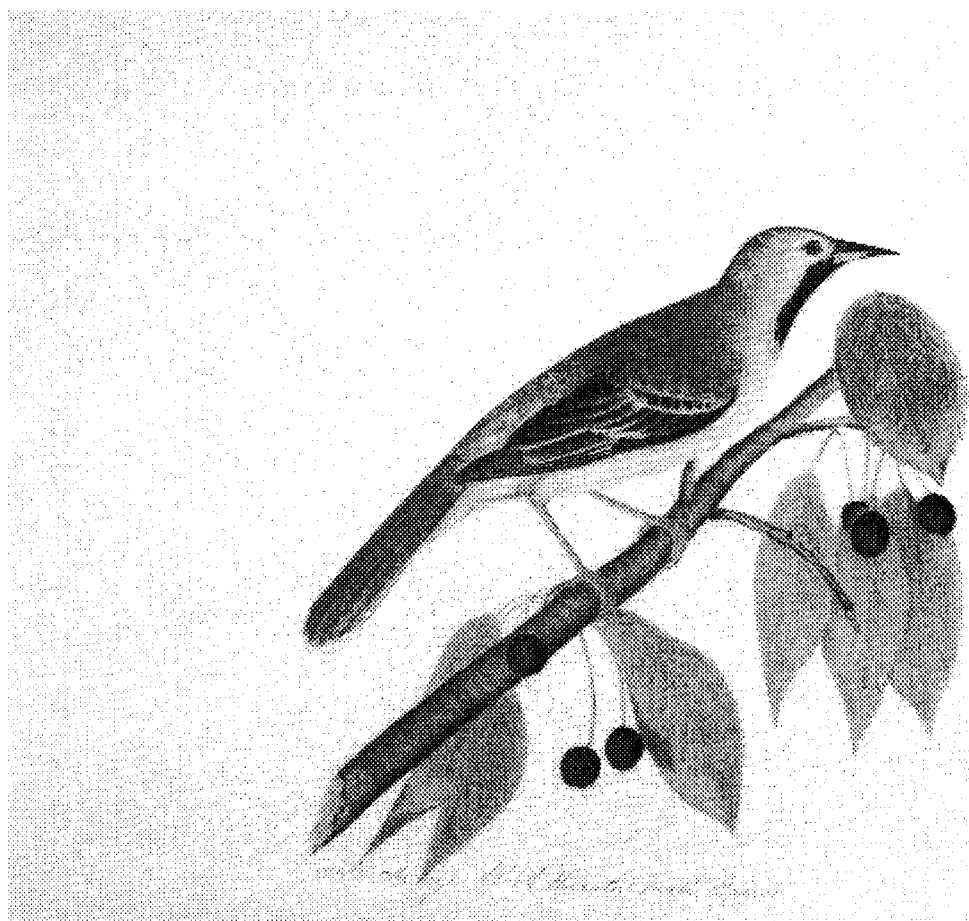


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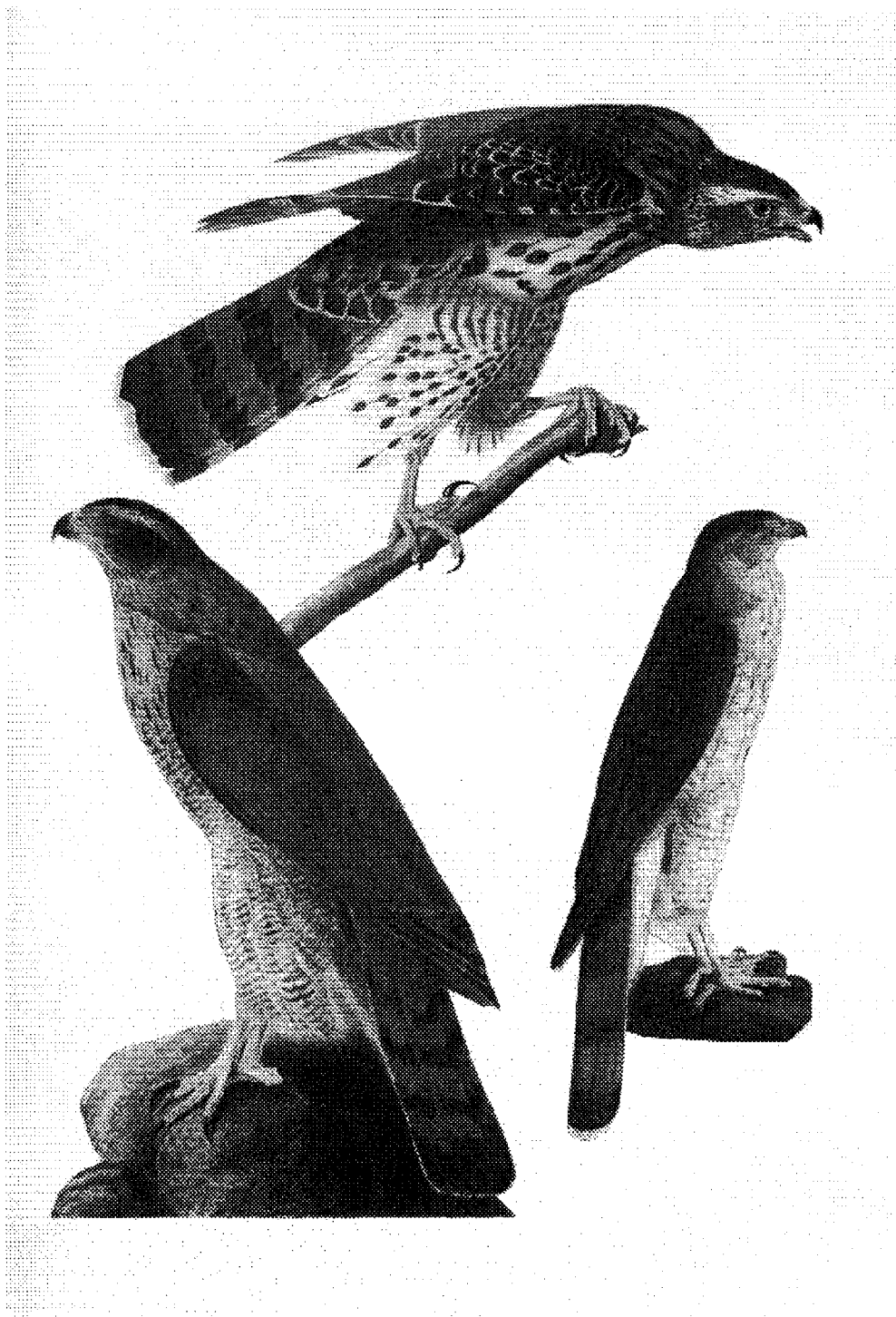


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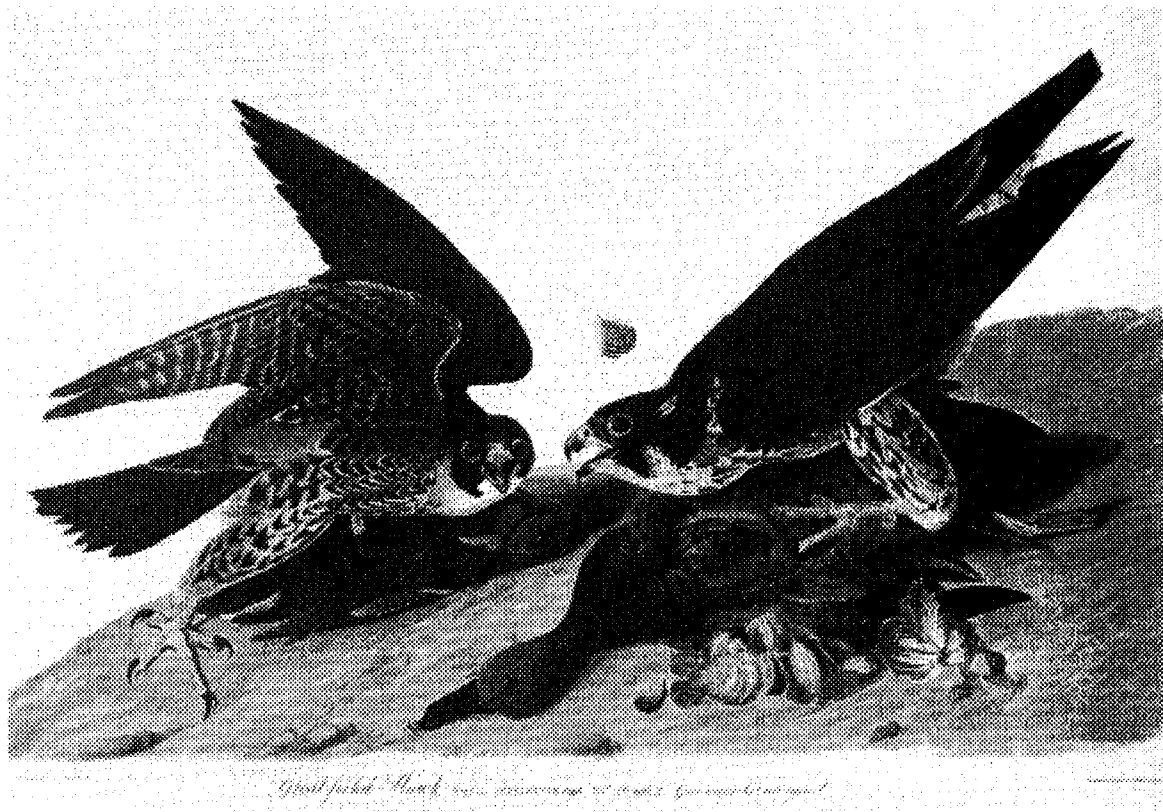


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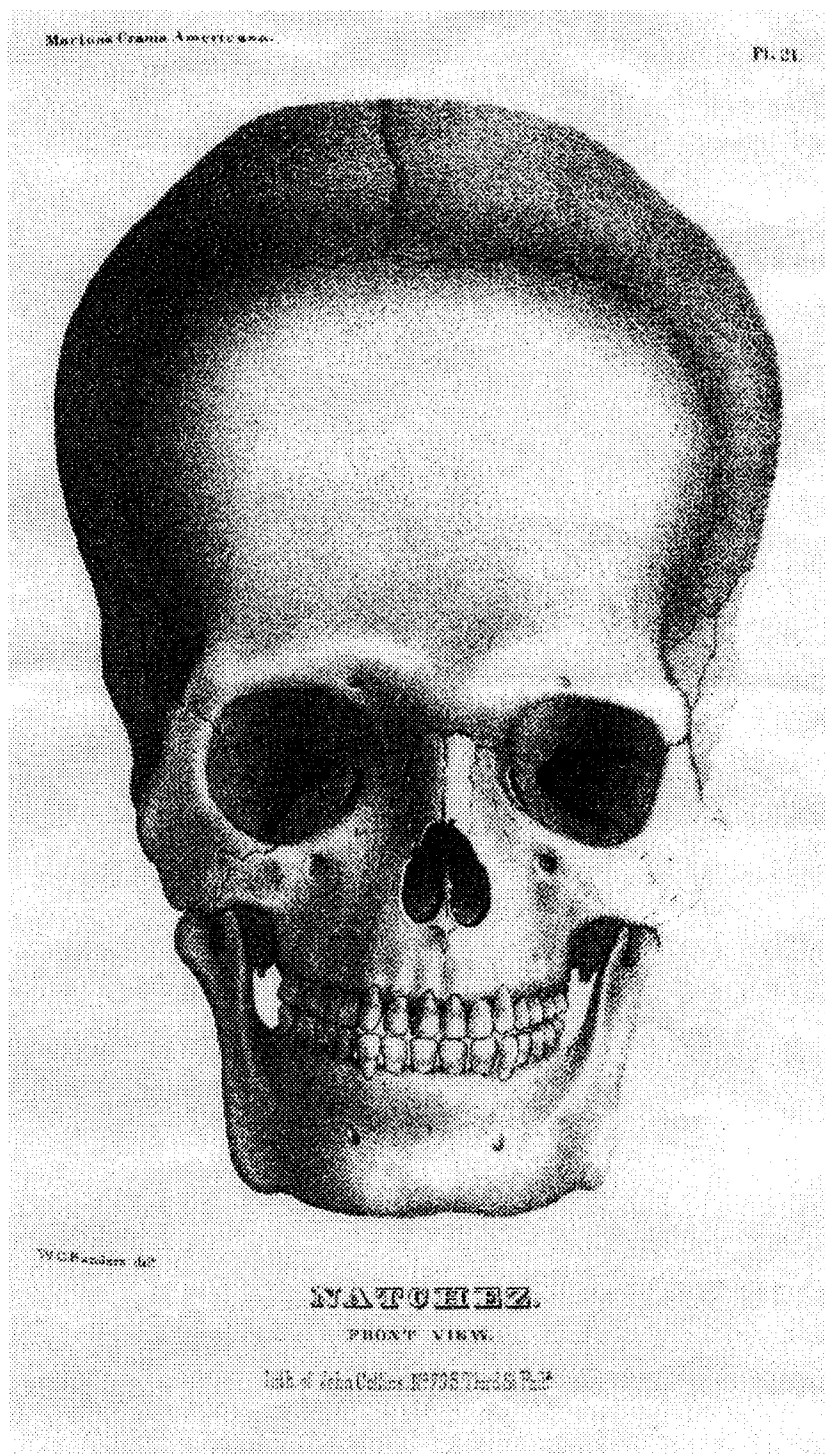


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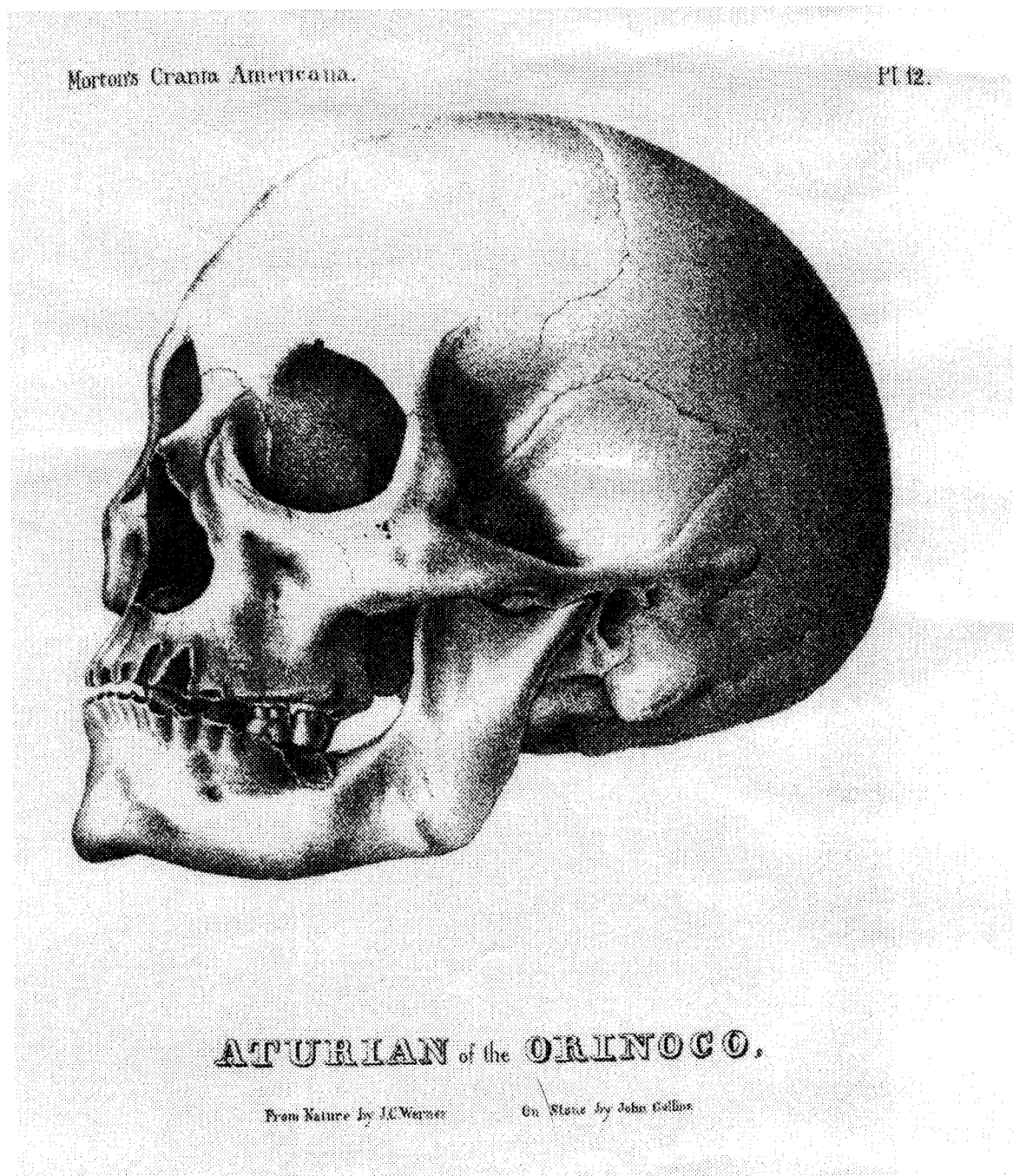


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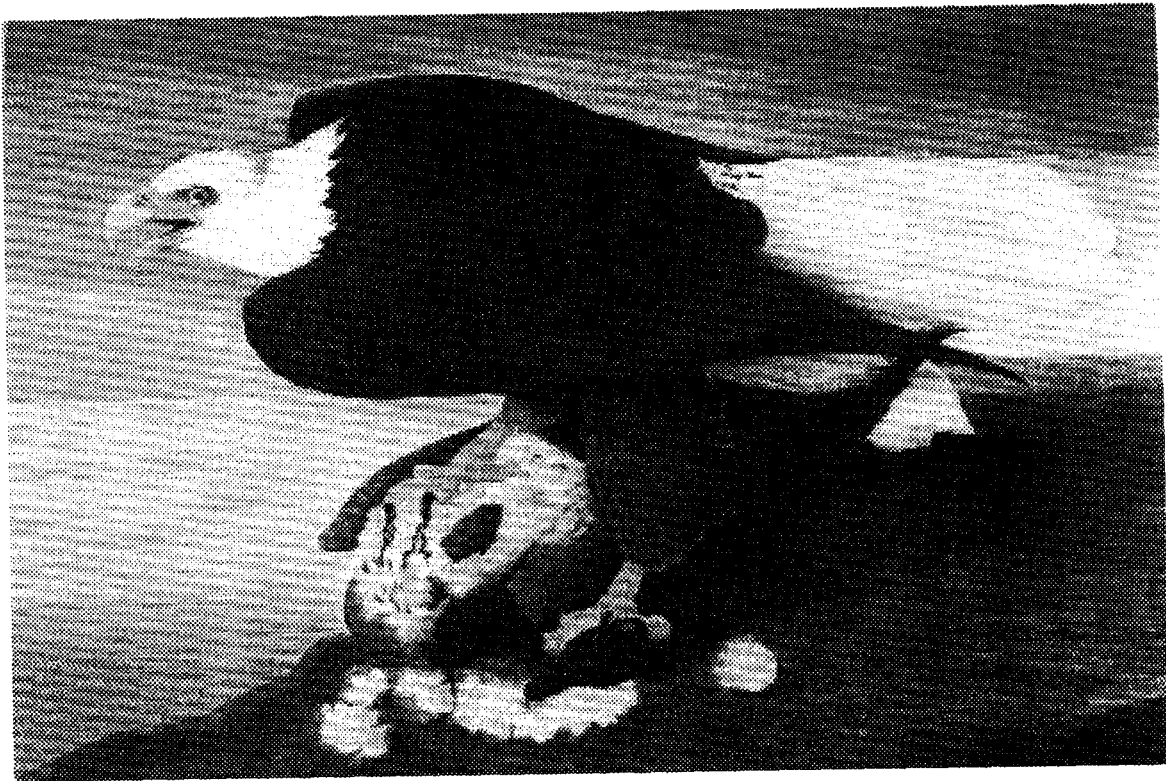


Figure 4.9



Figure 4.10



Figure 4.11



Figure 4.12



Figure 4.13

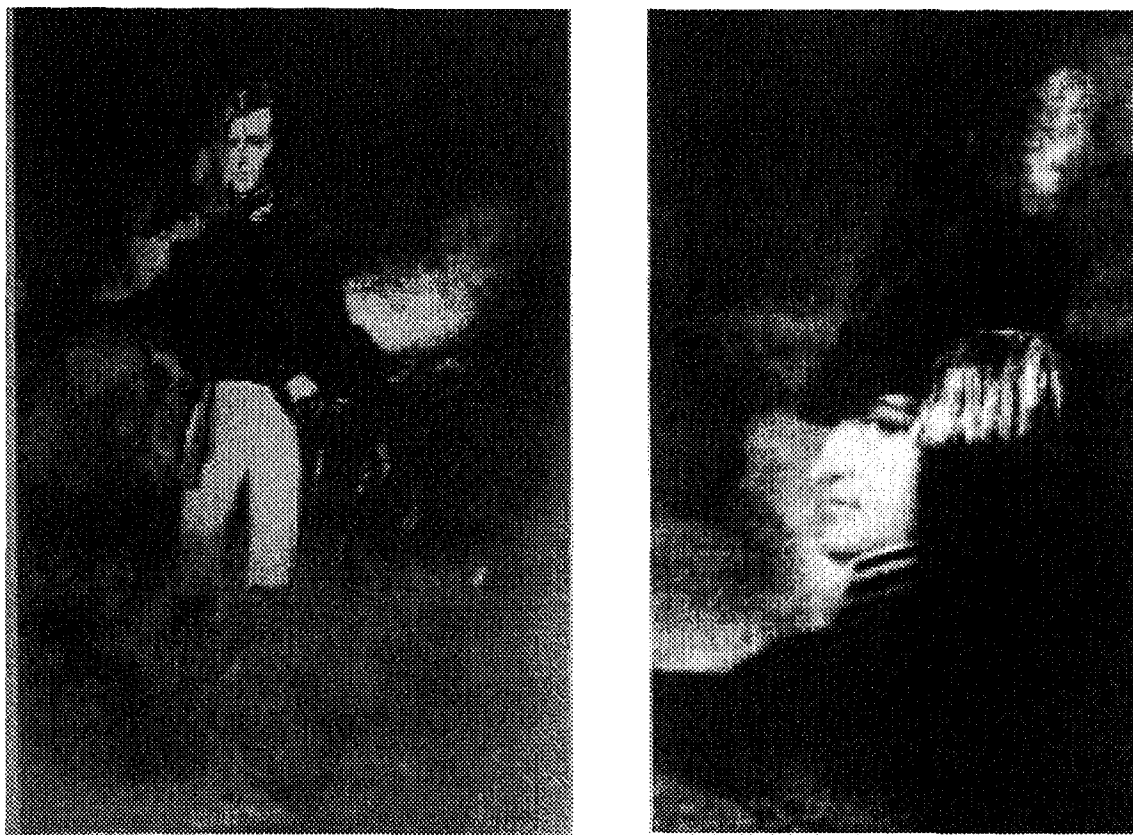


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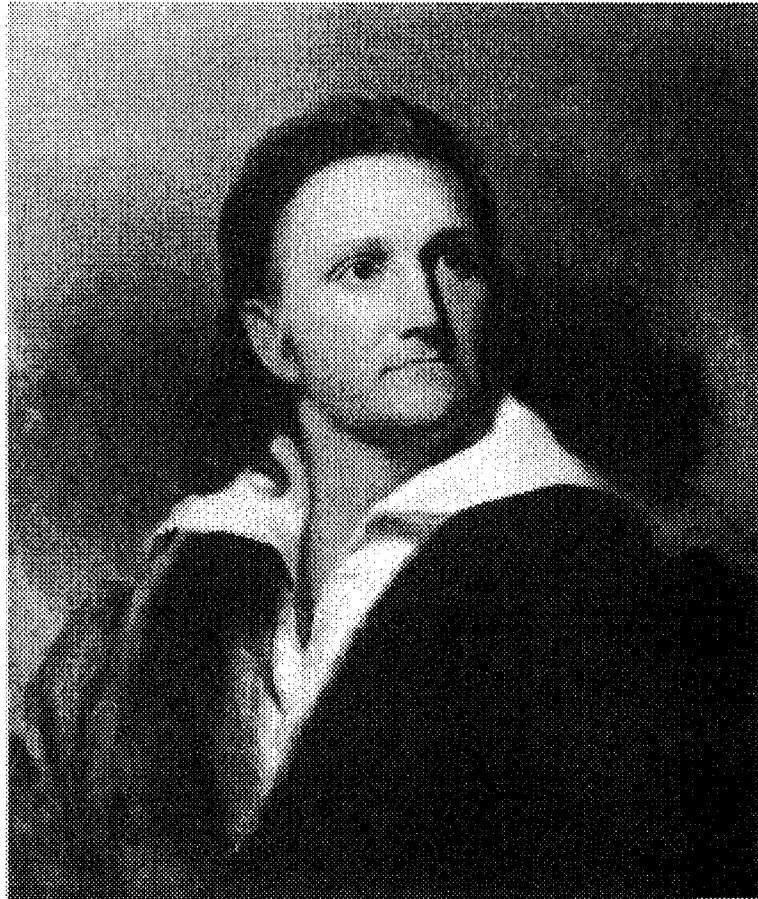


Figure 4.15

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