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Male Pleasure and the Genders of Eighteenth-Century Botanic Exchange: A Garden Tour

Thomas Hallock

IN Winter 1764 cloth merchant and botanic middleman Peter Collinson retired to his principal delight, his garden in Mill Hill, outside London. The season was unusually warm and skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*) was in bloom, which led him to write the friend who had procured that plant, Cadwallader Colden. The flowering of one specimen prompted a meditation on others, and on the many “Absent Friends” whom Collinson vicariously visited simply by strolling through his estate. His letter imagined a conversation: “See there my Honble Frd Governr Colden how thrifty they look—Sr I see nobody but Two fine Trees a Spruce & a Larch, thats True, but they are his representatives.” Each plant stood for an individual. Bristly “long Leaved Pine” saplings served as “mementos of my Generous Frd” John Campbell, the late Duke of Argyll. The “Balm Gilead Firrs” renewed “concern” for Collinson’s dearly departed Lord Petre, or Robert James, for “they came from his Nurserys.” Mountain magnolia, rhododendron, and azaleas were “the Bounty of my Curious Botanic Friend” John Bartram. Two other magnolias, plus the “Loblolly Bay,” the “Glory of my Garden,” represented Thomas Lamboll of South Carolina.¹

This garden tour reflected a common sentiment in which plants served as a shorthand for intimate relationships that were transacted across vast space. Out of a remarkable epistolary network that neared

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¹ Cadwallader Colden, *The Letters and Papers of Cadwallader Colden . . . 1711–1775* (New York, 1973), 6: 290–91.

two hundred correspondents, Collinson had actually met surprisingly few. He instead relied on letters that spoke a “Silent Language” to convey his “most intimate thoughts.” The gift of a plant commonly prompted a letter of thanks and the specimen accordingly served as the conduit of masculine, same-sex feeling.² Plant exchange also anchored heterosocial relationships, and elite women cultivated botanic networks of their own. Yet the exchange between men tapped into a deep reservoir of emotion that led to furious word weaving, often bordering on homoerotic, that left women at the margins.

Though Collinson saw Lamboll in the loblolly bay, Elizabeth (Thomas’s wife) was the more avid gardener. When curious Bartram visited the Lambolls in 1760, he toured the grounds with Elizabeth “under the Intense Heat of a Mid Day Summer.” In Charleston Bartram connected with a thriving network that also included Martha Daniell Logan, Mary Wood Wragg, Sarah Hopton, and Susannah Holmes Bee. The most famous of these women, Logan, published a “Gardener’s Kalendar” (a guide to planting, fertilizing, harvesting, and care) that ran for decades in South Carolina almanacs. She and Bartram traded visits and Logan stocked his stove house with hyacinths and lilies. Such productive exchanges, however, became the subject of jest in letters to Collinson. Bartram bragged about the Charleston women whom he had “fascinated,” and Collinson expressed mock longing for a “Mistress as Thou hath got who is always treating the[e] with Dainties.” What turned genteel ladies into fascinated subjects? (The term fascinated was used to describe how rattlesnakes supposedly charmed their prey.) What made female peers into illicit lovers?³

² Peter Collinson, “*Forget not Mee and My Garden . . .*”: *Selected Letters, 1725–1768, of Peter Collinson, F.R.S.*, ed. Alan W. Armstrong (Philadelphia, 2002), 244. Collinson elsewhere called flowers “Living Memorials” (55).

³ Logan’s “Gardener’s Kalendar” can be found in *The Palladium of Knowledge: Or, the Carolina and Georgia Almanac for the Year of Our Lord, 1796* (Charleston, S.C., 1796). On “fascinated” women and the Lambolls, see John Bartram, *The Correspondence of John Bartram, 1734–1777*, ed. Edmund Berkeley and Dorothy Smith Berkeley (Gainesville, Fla., 1992), 559, 629, 654. Christoph Irmscher uses the Bartram-Collinson friendship as a centerpiece for male botanic friendship in Irmscher, *The Poetics of Natural History: From John Bartram to William James* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1999), 12–32. Elise Pinckney assembles the Bartram-Lamboll correspondence and supplies useful commentary in Pinckney, “Thomas and Elizabeth Lamboll: Early Charleston Gardeners,” *Charleston Museum Leaflet*, no. 28 (November 1969): 12–27.

On rattlesnakes, see Benjamin Smith Barton, *A Memoir Concerning the Fascinating Faculty Which Has Been Ascribed to the Rattle-Snake, and other American Serpents* (Philadelphia, 1796); J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer and Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America*, ed. Albert E. Stone (New York, 1981), 118; Bartram, *Correspondence of John Bartram*, 40.

Attention to the history of sexuality in early America invites speculation about male pleasures in the garden. To date colonial eros has been an evasive topic. Contemporary categories rarely apply, and though letters reveal little about the sharing of physical sensation, they trafficked heavily in a language of same-sex feeling. Evidence in Europe, meanwhile, shows a clear trend in the institutionalization of heterosexuality, which accompanied the emergence of the effeminate sodomite, a third gender gathering at urban “molly houses” and increasingly the target of morality campaigns. Surely colonial cities with ties to Europe should yield the same evidence. But the record has been “profoundly silent.” In a special issue of the *William and Mary Quarterly* (“Sexuality in Early America,” January 2003), scholars offer some well-advised suggestions for clarifying terms and redirecting the search. Ruth H. Bloch notes: “To get at the stuff of sexual imagination, we need to work creatively from sources that are not explicitly sexual but are, in one way or another, about sex.”⁴

Botany supplies one such field. From the mid-eighteenth century through the 1790s, plant study intersected with issues of sexual propriety. The taxonomy developed by Carolus Linnaeus, to which Collinson and the self-taught Bartram converted in the 1740s, used pistils and stamens for classification, and commentary on Linnaeus’s system ran the gamut from moral censure to liberated delight. William Smellie blasted the “alluring seductions” of botany in the 1760 *Encyclopedia Britannica*, whereas Erasmus Darwin (Charles’s grandfather) set Linnaeus to verse in a botanic paean to sexual freedom, *The Loves of the Plants* (1789). The frontispiece to Darwin’s book-length poem, by Emma Crewe, depicted “Flora at play with Cupid,” loading up the God of Love with garden tools (Figure 1). The eroticism that Crewe teased out, meanwhile, potentially

⁴ On the history of sexuality in Europe and British America, see David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York, 1990), 18; Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, vol. 1, *Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London* (Chicago, 1998), 4; Caleb Crain, *American Sympathy: Men, Friendship, and Literature in the New Nation* (New Haven, Conn., 2001), 16. On molly houses, see Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (Boston, 1982), 92–103; Trumbach, “The Birth of the Queen: Sodomy and the Emergence of Gender Equality in Modern Culture, 1660–1750,” in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin B. Duberman et al. (New York, 1989), 133, 136.

Clare A. Lyons links the relationship between Philadelphia and European cities to molly houses, offering an insightful look into transatlantic sexualities in Lyons, “Mapping an Atlantic Sexual Culture: Homoeroticism in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 60, no. 1 (January 2003): 119–54, esp. 123–25 (“profoundly silent,” 119). Ruth H. Bloch, “Changing Conceptions of Sexuality and Romance in Eighteenth-Century America,” *WMQ* 60, no. 1 (January 2003): 13–42 (quotation, 17).



FIGURE I

Emma Crewe, "Flora at play with Cupid," frontispiece to Erasmus Darwin, *The Botanic Garden, A Poem. In Two Parts. Part II. The Loves of the Plants* (London, [1789]). Courtesy, Woodstock Books, London.

conflicted with a second side of the taxonomic project: the search for new specimens. Linnaeus's disciples spread to the far corners of the globe, where they tapped into pools of knowledge that were, if not gynocentric, gender neutral. Women participated avidly in plant studies, as elites with ties to male peers including Bartram and Collinson, and as the discoverers of new specimens. The constant was the "pleasure" (a word that appeared again and again) in botany.⁵ Women, too, took pleasure in plants and, quite naturally, could signify warm feeling through gifts from one's garden.

The variable, however, was in the ways that groups defined themselves around those pleasures. Any individual who interacts with the natural world takes on an "ecopersona," an identity or costume of manners that locates consumption of the natural within a given cultural code. These personae invariably invoke social categories (the bass fisherman as rural southern, fly fishing as genteel). Ecocritic David Mazel notes that, though the individual may forge this identity on the bedrock of nature, the drag, or performance, remains no less socially constituted. Botanic culture exacted such performances, connecting enthusiasts to matters of sexual and gender protocol. The rules changed too quickly to define set terms (here transgressive, there appropriate), but as the letter from Collinson to Colden demonstrates, plants served as conduits of same-sex feeling, supplying pleasures that were at once disembodied and immediate. How, then, did male botanists use eros to shore the boundaries of

⁵ William Smellie is in Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (Boston, 1993), 173. Benjamin Smith Barton wrote that the Linnaean system was founded "upon the beautiful doctrine of the sexes" (Barton, *The Elements of Botany; or, Outlines of the Natural History of Vegetables* [Philadelphia, 1803], 2: 3). Fredrika J. Teute remarks of Erasmus Darwin that "sexual diversity of plant life had its corollary in human cultures" (Teute, "The Loves of the Plants; or, The Cross-Fertilization of Science and Desire at the End of the Eighteenth Century," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 63, no. 3 [2000]: 326). Luisa Calè notes that the "language of botany" in the late eighteenth century was a "burning, voyeuristic issue," in Calè, "'A Female Band despising Nature's Law': Botany, Gender and Revolution in the 1790s," *Romanticism on the Net* 17 (February 2000), <http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2000/v1/n17/005889ar.html>.

On the outward scope of Linnaean science, see Lisbet Koerner, "Women and Utility in Enlightenment Science," *Configurations* 3, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 250. On gender and botany, see Patricia Phillips, *The Scientific Lady: A Social History of Women's Scientific Interests, 1520–1918* (London, 1990), 99–141; Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, 143–45, 165; Ann B. Shteir, *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora's Daughters and Botany in England, 1760 to 1810* (Baltimore, 1996), 36–57; Susan Scott Parrish, "Women's Nature: Curiosity, Pastoral, and the New Science in British America," *Early American Literature* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 198.

Peter Collinson thanks an American correspondent for seeds, noting that it "Furnish'd me with an opportunity to pleasure my distant friends in England, Holland & Germany" (Collinson, "Forget not Mee and My Garden," 37).

their community? In what ways could the shared pleasures of natural history suggest self-entitlement? As intensified feelings brought men together, what status did other groups hold in scientific work? And, more broadly, could the focus on sensuality connect natural history with the aims of empire? Cultural critics have addressed this last question in grand terms; the attention to feeling, however, reduces global issues to the filaments of individual experience.⁶ For in the affective hierarchy that male enthusiasts defined in nature, in the noble trees that they imagined as friends, they constructed a kinship that was at once tactile, elevating, and exclusionary.

Dionaea muscipula (Venus flytrap). Insectivore. White flowers clustered at the top of a leafless stalk. Leaves basal, bristly, and folded; orange inside. Only known species in its family (Dionaeaceae). Range limited to moist, sandy areas and pinelands, in a fifty-mile radius around Wilmington, North Carolina.

In 1769 British naturalist John Ellis sent the best botanic description he had, of the *Dionaea muscipula*, to the eminent Linnaeus. In this discovery especially, Ellis promised, “you will have a treat.” Scientific curiosity and erotic devotion converged around the Venus flytrap. Where Linnaeans imagined a taxonomic slot for all forms of life, the *Dionaea* posed a delightful problem: it possessed traits of the animal and vegetable kingdoms. Technically a “Decandria Monogynia” (flowers with

⁶ A searching critique that connects colonialism and “drag” is David Mazel, *American Literary Environmentalism* (Athens, Ga., 2000), 92. Mazel draws from influential work on gender and performance by Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990).

On the anticonquest, see Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York, 1992), 39; on the consideration of eros and empire, see also Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1975).

Following many queer theorists, I have taken my starting point from Michel Foucault, who remapped “the body’s erotic sites” and documented the “new forms of relations” that sensual pleasures secured (see David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* [New York, 1995], 88–89, 104). Foucault argues that the modern conception of sex has “made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures, and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle” (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction* [New York, 1990], 154). Bruce Burgett observes that we should not “abstract the ‘sexual’ from the ‘sensual’” (Burgett, “In the Name of Sex,” *WMQ* 60, no. 1 [January 2003]: 187). For queer readings of the triangulation and shared pleasure in plant exchange, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire* (New York, 1985), 3. Gayle Rubin offers an analogous argument, noting that women serve as the “conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it,” in Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York, 1975), 174.

one stamen), it also was its own family. John Bartram, who obtained a specimen from his son William, marveled that it was of an “Amphibious State neither Plant nor Animal” and asked “whether there is not a portion of the universal intellect difused in all life.” The amphibious quality made the *Dionaea* an object of particular and purple fascination. The Latin name referred to the goddess of love, though among themselves devotees used a still more salacious nickname—tipitiwitchet, or twitching fur stole. Its touch-sensitive, flesh-colored leaves drew predictable analogies to predatory female sexuality, and the difficulty of transplanting a *Dionaea* further intensified the longing to possess one. Peter Collinson wrote with playful exaggeration that “I am ready to Burst with Desire for Root, Seed, or Specimen of the Wagish Tipitiwitchet Sensitive.” He hoped to obtain a *Dionaea* from botanist and North Carolina Governor Arthur Dobbs. But the seventy-three-year-old Dobbs had taken a fifteen-year-old bride, causing Collinson to abandon hope, as the old man had a “Tipitiwichit . . . of his Own to play with.”⁷

The convergence of devotion and eros in the Venus flytrap had analogues in British science and in the Anglo-Atlantic cult of sensibility. Because the *Dionaea* defied classification, it aroused wonder, the engine that awakened curious minds to further study; the fascination with a godly force shared by all living things, in turn, brought curious men together. The early Royal Society supplies a valuable model of knowledge acquisition. Evelyn Fox Keller explains: “as desire begets love, so does love beget knowledge.” Through a pederastic or Platonic relationship, the novice learned through his teacher, and as described in the *Symposium*, both climbed the “ladder of love” to higher understanding. The object of pursuit was an alchemic relationship (which she notes outlasted Baconian empiricism); fellows sought the “participation in a hermaphroditic union” that was itself a “Godly aspiration.” The shared devotion to a fetishized *Dionaea* was hardly taboo, then, but the bud of a lofty tradition. Expressions of “sworn brotherhood”—in scientific literature as well

⁷ John Ellis, *Directions for Bringing over Seeds and Plants from the East Indies and Other Distant Countries, in a State of Vegetation* . . . [1770], repr. in E. Charles Nelson, ed., *Aphrodite's Mousetrap: A Biography of Venus's Flytrap* (Aberystwyth, Wales, 1990), 37, 46; Bartram, *Correspondence of John Bartram*, 690, 580, 633.

Daniel L. McKinley suggests the etymology in McKinley, “This Wagish Plant, —as Wagishly Described.” John Bartram’s Tipitiwitchet: A Flytrap, Some Clams and Venus Obscured,” in Nelson, *Aphrodite's Mousetrap*, 131. A related example of sexual banter is in Collinson’s report to Linnaeus of a “brown-coat apple” tree that also produced green fruit; the mixing of fruits was due to the “adulterous intimacy with one another’s blossom” (James Edward Smith, ed., *A Selection of the Correspondence of Linnaeus and Other Naturalists* [New York, 1978], 1: 7).

as in diverse sources such as church liturgy and familiar letters—ennobled the bearer and marked class standing.⁸

Linnaean science, outward reaching and hierarchical, tapped readily into heady traditions, leading male enthusiasts to more freely blend double entendre and meditations on the Godhead. As they took shared pleasure in a sexualized plant, they also drew from the rhetoric of courtship in their letters. When Cadwallader Colden initiated his correspondence with Collinson, for example, he likened himself to “a fond lover who by too earnest a desire of pleasing his mistress becomes intollerable to her.” Collinson wrote in response: “You have a Secret to beguile a Lonesome Way and Shorten a Long Journey which only Botanists know . . . By these the Mind is highly Delighted, Its Ideas Inlarged, the Great Creator admir’d & adored. These are Sensations better felt than Express’d and the more you Gratifie your self in these Inquiries, the higher will be your Sensations.”⁹ Collinson closed the letter with an anecdote about a family trip to the Isle of White that begs a Freudian spin; there, he learned that crabs severed their own legs to free themselves from a net. Yet to read such side comments for repressed desire misses a larger point: the sanctioned exchange of secret pleasures between men. Botany served as a spiritual practice, and this eroticized devotion (nurtured through the medium of plant exchange) lifted practitioners into a highly affective and lofty community.

Few men illustrated this impassioned convergence of science and spirit more clearly than Charleston physician Alexander Garden. Like his contemporary Colden, Garden studied medicine and natural history at the University of Edinburgh. He moved to South Carolina in the 1750s and lived there until the Revolution, where he maintained a busy practice and diligently cultivated his scientific reputation overseas. Two related themes ran throughout Garden’s loquacious, transatlantic correspondence: complaints about work interfering with his research, and intellectual torpor in America. Were it not for “what they Learn from the Negroes Strollers and Old Women,” he grumbled about

⁸ Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven, Conn., 1985), 23, 53 (for the “ladder of love,” Keller quotes Plato’s *Symposium*, 29). On “sworn brotherhood” and the Anglican church, see Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago, 2003), 246. On elevation and sentimentality in the colonies, see Crain, *American Sympathy*, 20–35; Lyons, *WMQ* 60: 150–51.

⁹ Colden, *Letters and Papers of Cadwallader Colden*, 2: 276–77; Collinson, “Forget not Mee and My Garden,” 118. The one surviving letter from Peter Collinson to his wife, Mary, reads much like his scientific correspondence. He writes, “the very sight of thy Dear Characters made my heart Leap for Joye, but when I read the Contents, where Love & Tenderness flows in every Line, how did my Soul Spring to thee in Extasies of Love” (4).

Charlestonians, "I doubt much if they would know a Common Dock from a Cabbage Stock." Yet close examination of Garden's letters shows how contact with locals abetted his ambitions. An anonymous slave caught fish that Garden ceremoniously presented to Linnaeus; Cherokee women gathered puccoon, which he sent to Ellis; and his medical rounds yielded unknown specimens from the American South.¹⁰

These local contexts, however, all but disappear under the ecopersona that Garden cultivated in Linnaean circles. Letters removed him from his immediate surroundings and, with a language of distilled masculine feeling, located him among distinguished peers. An eight-hundred-word missive to Ellis (written on Garden's wedding day) claimed that those eight hundred words were too short; "frequent letters from you," he wrote, are "the greatest pleasure I enjoy." Elsewhere, the correspondence explained how science invigorated his spirit. A letter from Ellis, Garden gushed, "arouses me" from the "Lethargy which a Hot Climate & much Drudgery to fatiguing business naturally produces—I awaken as out of a dream." His friend's botanic queries renewed a commitment to explore the handiwork of God. "I read your Letter over & over," he explained: "I fancy myself in Company with you by Anticipation I enjoy your Conversation—I have a long tete a tete with you—I resolve at your instigation to pursue natural history." In a description of the afterlife, Garden explained to Ellis how "I may find myself on the skirts of a meadow, where Linnaeus is explaining the wonders of a new world, to legions of white candid spirits, glorifying their Maker for the amazing enlargement of their mental faculties. What think you of this time, my dear friend? Shall we have a hearty shake of the hand, if such practices be fashionable, or in the mode?" With a conspicuous flourish of the pen, Garden suggested that the standard displays of sharing affection fell short. Should he greet his peer in heaven with a handshake or a kiss? The question brings to mind a footnote in the history of male friendship. During the second quarter of the eighteenth century, as heterosexuality was defined as normative, men redirected protocols of greeting: handshaking replaced kissing as the standard.¹¹

¹⁰ Elise Pinckney quotes Alexander Garden on Charleston in Pinckney, *Charleston Museum Leaflet* 28: 19; Garden acknowledges his debt to slaves in Smith, *Correspondence of Linnaeus*, 1: 331. On Garden incorporating native American plant uses, see Edmund Berkeley and Dorothy Smith Berkeley, *Dr. Alexander Garden of Charles Town* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1969), 29, 33. Garden acknowledged Richard Bohun Baker "for the seeds of the watermelon snake root" and "the Mouse Ear Flowers" (see Garden to Baker, Jan. 18, 1762, Nov. 26, 1764, in Baker-Grimké Papers, folder 24, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina).

¹¹ Smith, *Correspondence of Linnaeus*, 1: 359, 511; Berkeley and Berkeley, *Dr. Alexander Garden of Charles Town*, 233. Nina Reid writes that the "act of contemplating nature provided an opportunity to participate in the love of God" in Reid,

Quaintly, if even self-consciously dated, the suggestion of an embrace recalled an older, more hierarchical order. The kiss of sworn brothers emblemized knights from the Crusades, not a colonial physician hacking out a living. Garden's botanic fantasies strived upward, to the point where they reached comic proportions. Until that glorious day of meeting Ellis, meanwhile, plants were to serve as a principal currency between them. The physical specimen combined with the text of a letter gave their far-flung relationship immediacy, articulating the link between scientific study, divine mystery, sensual pleasure, and same-sex feeling. Such a lofty equation, it goes without saying, left less room for the common lore that drove Linnaean work.

Phytolacca decandra, probably *P. americana* (pokeweed). White to pinkish flower with five petals. Stem fleshy, bright red. Leaves elliptical to ovate. Small berries, purple-black. Common medicinal plant; name derives from *pocan*, Algonquian for "blood red."

Colonial Americans commonly used *Phytolacca*, or pokeweed, to treat tumors, and reports of pokeweed present a different side to the botanic exchange than the posturings of a fame-hungry naturalist. In a case study prepared for Benjamin Franklin, Cadwallader Colden described a Hannah Murray and an Isaac Dickerman, both of Connecticut. Murray learned of pokeweed from a neighbor "whose Breast had been eat off to her bare ribbs"; Dickerman treated spots on his face with medicine made from the "Leaves, Stalk and Berries" of *Phytolacca*. Elsewhere Colden cited the specimen in a justification of Latin characters: pokeweed was "known to almost everyone in America," he wrote, yet a formal name ensured the "preservation" of that knowledge.¹² The Latin *Phyto* (plant) and *lac* (crimson) supplanted an indigenous name, *pocan*, which meant the same thing. His chance remark underscores the important point of enlightenment science flow-

"Loyalism and the 'Philosophic Spirit' in the Scientific Correspondence of Dr. Alexander Garden," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 92, no. 1 (January 1991): 8; see also Margaret Denny, who argues that letters enabled Garden "to perform his duty toward mankind" in Denny, "Linnaeus and his Disciple in Carolina: Alexander Garden," *Isis* 38, nos. 3-4 (February 1948): 165. On handshaking, see Trumbach, "Birth of the Queen," 135; Bray, *Friend*, 212.

¹² Colden, *Letters and Papers of Cadwallader Colden*, 3: 121, 124, 4: 317; the note on Latin terms is from Cadwallader Colden's Copybook in the Rosenbach Library, Philadelphia. On the etymology of pokeweed, see Marjorie Harris, *Botanica North America: The Illustrated Guide to Our Native Plants, Their Botany, History, and the Way They Have Shaped Our World* (New York, 2003), 119. Harold William Rickett identifies pokeweed, *P. americana* (not *decandra*, as Colden wrote) as the northeast's only species of *Phytolaccaceae* (see Rickett, *Wild Flowers of the United States*, ed. William C. Steere [New York, 1966], 1: 98).

ing in two directions: not only inward to unite a brotherhood of curious men but also outward in the search for new knowledge to obtain.

Colden's famous daughter, Jane, listed pokeweed "no. 93" in her *Botanic Manuscript*. This catalog of 340 specimens, assembled in the mid-1750s, holds a paradoxical position in the history of science. Naturalists in Colden's lifetime regarded the *Botanic Manuscript* as a landmark for women's science; more accurately, Colden was the first woman documented to use the Linnaean method. She described pokeweed as having ten "Chives" (or stamens), "10 short hairs" for pistils, and a seed box that was "a globular Berry, a little flatten'd, with a Navel on its top composed of the Styles, containing 10 Cells." The plant had a "thick & smooth" red stalk, oval-shaped leaves, and flowers that grew "in Spickes"—first white, then turning "dark red" at fructification. A nota bene closed the entry. The root was used for "cancirs," and "some curious persons in England have endeavoured to propogate this plant by the Seed . . . from America, but could not produce any plant from the Seed." To germinate pokeweed, Colden offered this tip: pass seeds through "the Dung of birds," then plant the excrement.¹³

Such a homely (if useful) piece of advice received little notice, however, for the *Botanic Manuscript* was, and continues to be, more widely recognized as an achievement in itself, not a working source. With great visibility luminaries on both sides of the Atlantic praised the *Botanic Manuscript* as a notable exception; they regarded Colden as a model for women who should devote themselves to botany over more trivial hobbies. In a letter to John Frederic Gronovius of Leiden, Cadwallader Colden described his daughter's rapid mastery of the Linnaean system. Experiencing "a loss to fill up their time," Colden wrote vaguely, women may enjoy the "variety of dress" found in flowers. He cited Jane as a case in point: "Tho' perhaps she could not have been persuaded to learn the terms at first," she quickly assembled a "pretty large volume in writing of the Description of Plants." News of her progress spread rapidly. Alexander Garden visited the family in 1754 and reported to John Ellis that the governor's "lovely daughter" was "master of the Linnaean method," which she cultivated "with great assiduity." Sounding a consensus, Peter Collinson called her an "example to the ladies of every country."¹⁴

¹³ Jane Colden, *Botanic Manuscript of Jane Colden*, ed. H. W. Rickett (New York, 1963), 82.

¹⁴ Cadwallader Colden to John Frederic Gronovius, Oct. 1, 1755, in Colden, *Letters and Papers of Cadwallader Colden*, 5: 29–30; Peter Collinson to John Bartram, Jan. 20, 1756, in Bartram, *Correspondence of John Bartram*, 393; Alexander Garden to John Ellis, Mar. 25, 1755, in Smith, *Correspondence of Linnaeus*, 1: 343; Collinson to Carl Linnaeus, Apr. 30, 1758, *ibid.*, 1: 45; see also Collinson to Linnaeus, Apr. 10, 1755, *ibid.*, 1: 39. Joan Hoff Wilson notes the condescending descriptions of Jane

The enthusiasm for a female Linnaean eclipsed the everyday setting of the *Botanic Manuscript*. Without question formal training from her father and access to the right books fueled Colden's accomplishment; as her ease with a new method makes plain, however, she probably possessed considerable plant knowledge already. Letters to and from the family often found Alice Christie Colden (Jane's mother) in the garden, and the mother surely passed what she knew on to her daughter. Of the younger Coldens, Jane was the one to improve on family recipes and, when business took her father away, she served as family physician. The *Botanic Manuscript* emphasized the uses and provenance of many plants. Red mint, according to Colden, grew "wild in the Mohawks country." Rattle was an eighteenth-century wonder drug, brewed by "country people" for fever, "ague [chills]," and "sickness of the Stomak." Silk grass treated "Pleurisy [inflammation of the lungs]," "Colick," and the "bloody Flux [dysentery]"; the latter was "learnd from the Indians." These debts to country people, or Native Americans, passed unmentioned by Collinson and his circle; instead, they cast her as the exemplum of botanizing women. As Susan Scott Parrish has observed, Colden served as a "chaste offering" made on "the altar of science," whose "thorough dependence as an unmarried daughter made her curiosity not transgressive but marvelously devotional."¹⁵

Colden's short career (she stopped botanizing after marriage) raises a related point about prescribed roles in botanic study. Enthusiasts followed scripted models of feeling or performance (coincidentally, Colden's account of his daughter's work referenced clothing). Various modes of

Colden in Wilson, "Dancing Dogs of the Colonial Period: Women Scientists," *Early American Literature* 7, no. 3 (Winter 1973): 227. Contemporary appraisals rely on the correspondences among male Linnaeans to single out Colden as a notable exception (see Marcia Myers Bonta, *Women in the Field: America's Pioneering Women Naturalists* [College Station, Tex., 1991], 5–8; Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* [Cambridge, Mass., 1995], 44).

¹⁵ On Jane administering herbal remedies (in this case sage tea for her mother's headaches), see Colden, *Letters and Papers of Cadwallader Colden*, 8: 306. For a composite biography of the Colden family, see Brooke Hindle, "A Colonial Governor's Family: The Coldens of Coldenham," *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (July 1961): 234. Jane's cheese book, her most extensive piece of writing other than the *Botanic Manuscript*, is in Colden, *Letters and Papers of Cadwallader Colden*, 5: 55–63; see also H. W. Rickett, introduction to Colden, *Botanic Manuscript*, 23. Ruth Ginzberg argues that women's knowledge shown in pharmacology or food production rarely counts as science in Ginzberg, "Uncovering Gynocentric Science," in *Feminism & Science*, ed. Nancy Tuana (Bloomington, Ind., 1989), 71–72.

Jane Colden notes uses and provenance in Colden, *Botanic Manuscript*, 30, 46, 54, 80. On the "chaste offering," see Parrish, *Early American Literature* 37: 212–13. On women's curiosity as transgression, see Barbara M. Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago, 2001), 118–21.

female participation, including pastoral poetry and physicotheology, afforded women closeness to the outdoors and private writing, such as journals or letters, offered a medium for reflecting on the transactions of affection through the natural world. Philadelphia Quaker Elizabeth Drinker, for example, maintained ties with family and friends by distributing herbals. An almost lyrical entry in Drinker's usually terse *Diary*, in June 1760, records a full day of female intimacy and shared pleasure outdoors: she and some friends picked "beautiful wild Flowers" then got caught in the rain and could not go home; that evening, they were "much pleas'd with the vast number of Fire-flies, which appeared in the Meadows"; over the night, Drinker "loged with A[nna] Warner." With an unworried warmth, Drinker cultivated female friendship alongside the appreciation for wildflowers and fireflies; indeed, one can scarcely imagine anything more normal. Charlestonian Eliza Lucas Pinckney, likewise, shared homemade wine ("the fruit of my labours") with the first wife of her future husband, Elizabeth Lamb Pinckney; she sent seeds, pepper, and other plants to friends and family; and, as a widow, she shipped ducks, turtles, and magnolias to the caretakers of her children in England.¹⁶ These pleasures of the garden, which were acceptable forms of engagement with nature, met little resistance.

Lucas's forays into a more masculine sphere, by contrast, yielded at least some internal resistance. As an eighteen year old, Lucas rejected a marriage proposal and embarked on an ambitious plan to improve her family's estate. She read law and Virgil's *Georgics*, experimented with crops, planted a cedar grove for meditation, and grew live oaks for shipbuilding. A modicum of self-censoring, however, led her to describe these projects with an edge of humor. A confession to Bartlett, her confidante, imagined the conversations about her back in Charleston: "'She is [a] good girl,' says Mrs. Pinckney. 'She is never Idle and always means well.' 'Tell the little Visionary,' says your Uncle, 'come to town and partake of some of the amusements suitable to her term of life.' Pray tell him I think these so, and what he may now think whims and projects may turn out well by and by. Out of many surely one may hitt." As she framed agriculture against binding gender roles, Lucas elsewhere expressed more pointed impatience with urban life. Playing "Cards or going a [sweet] figure round the room,"

¹⁶ Susan Scott Parrish discusses physicotheology and pastoral poetry in Parrish, *Early American Literature* 37: 206. Elizabeth Drinker's entry appears in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. Elaine Forman Crane et al. (Boston, 1991), 168, 62. On Pinckney's quips, see Elise Pinckney, ed., *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney, 1739-1762* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1972), 64, 35, 31, 6, 11, 113, 119-25. Anne Firor Scott offers a short biographical sketch of Pinckney and Drinker in Scott, "Self-Portraits: Three Women," in *Uprooted Americans: Essays to Honor Oscar Handlin*, ed. Richard L. Bushman et al. (Boston, 1979), 63-71; Harriott Horry Ravenel reprints some Pinckney correspondence not found in the *Letterbook* in Ravenel, *Eliza Pinckney* (New York, 1896).

she wrote, denied women the “pleasures of a superior and more exalted nature.” She might dance the occasional minuet, but too much polite society could “effaminate the mind.”¹⁷

The use of effeminate (in its now obsolete verb form) equated certain environmental practices (the georgic improvements to one’s estate) with gender. Where the gifts of grapes or magnolias required no such apologies, Lucas donned the armor of humor when taking the more conventionally masculine ecopersona of planter. Colden suggests the opposite case, where the genteel woman with interests in the natural world held to her prescribed role. Evidence suggests that she did not pursue publication. In her one surviving piece of scientific correspondence, to Edinburgh naturalist Charles Alston, Colden took a highly deferential tone. She thanked Alston for recognizing her work and returned the favor with a short botanic essay, but not before asking that the observations remain anonymous; Colden requested “that you will not make any thing publick from me, till (at least) I have gained more knowledge of Plants, and then perhaps I shall be able to make some amendments to my Discriptions.” Women could participate in mid-eighteenth-century natural history, the letter to Alston suggests, yet they were not to seek the recognition that came with publication.¹⁸ At least for the time being, Colden kept herself outside the channels of plant study typically reserved for men.

Sarracenia minor. Hooded pitcher plant. Insectivore. Leaves erect, hollow, and hooded. Flowers yellow, nodding; blooms spring and fall. Found in wet pinelands, marshes, and bogs from North Carolina to central Florida.

Eliza Lucas’s dismissal of city life on the grounds of effeminating the mind indicates an obvious gendering of environmental discourse.

¹⁷ Pinckney, *Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney*, 38, 48. Judith C. Burges discusses Eliza Lucas Pinckney’s sensitivity to gender roles in eighteenth-century South Carolina, demonstrating that the letters vary in tone according to audience (see Burges, “Audience Awareness in the Early Letters of Eliza Lucas Pinckney,” *Postscript: Publication of the Philological Association of the Carolinas* 16 [1999]: 69–77). Parrish discusses Lucas’s city-country dichotomy in Parrish, *Early American Literature* 37: 213–18. Where Parrish identifies the space of female pastoral in Lucas’s program (or, to be technical, a georgic), I would suggest that the letters operate as a kind of drag, in which the subject takes a typically masculine ecopersona.

¹⁸ Colden to Alston, May 1, 1756, in LaIII.375/48, Edinburgh University Library. Without her knowledge Alexander Garden sent Colden’s description of a “Gardenia” (actually a *hypericum*) to Edinburgh. *Essays and Observations* published a dual account by the two (Latin by Garden, English by Colden) and the unwarranted favor apparently caused a break in the relationship between Garden and the Colden family (see Berkeley and Berkeley, *Dr. Alexander Garden of Charles Town*, 48; “Description of a New Plant,” *Essays and Observations, Physical and Literary* [Edinburgh, Scotland, 1756], 2: 1–7). Ann B. Shteir notes that Elisabeth Linnaeus published a piece in *Transactions of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences* in 1762, but that she was not encouraged in botany after marrying (Shteir, *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science*, 54).

Whereas she and Jane Colden illustrate the pleasures, possibilities, and limits before women who engaged the natural world, their male peers trafficked in what could be called a hypermasculine botanic eros. William Bartram (just ten years their junior), for example, well understood the contours of this sensibility. As the fifth son of John Bartram, botanist to the king, William intuitively grasped garden homoerotics. The family home in Kingsessing, in present-day west Philadelphia, served as a heterosocial setting for understanding and appreciating the natural world; the younger Bartram's correspondence, however, traded heavily in the green language of male feeling. His pistils and stamens embraced, his correspondents longed to walk hand in hand through his family's garden, and Bartram, too, wondered whether to greet friends with a handshake or embrace. Yet the few examinations of his sexuality have faltered under presumed heterosexuality, despite Bartram never having married or leaving any record of a romantic attachment.¹⁹

His scientific work (compared with his personal papers) offers a rich field for speculation. If Bartram had a signature plant, it was carnivorous. One of his most famous sketches, the "Sarracenia" drawn for his patron John Fothergill, recalled the previous generation's fixation with amphibious species. The Sarracenia actually depicts several kinds of carnivorous plants, but most visibly mirrors qualities from the botanic and animal kingdoms. With a characteristic blend of realism and the fantastic, the reptiles and amphibians take on human traits, and the nodding pitcher plant closes the circle to the frog's splayed legs (Figure II). Bartram's published

¹⁹ William Bartram's correspondence incorporates many of the conceits of botanic homoeroticism. Writing to Benjamin Smith Barton, Bartram described a "curious aquatic plant" that they found together, in which the "Corolla . . . closely embraces the germen" (Bartram to Barton, July 6, 1800, in Barton-Delafield Collection, ser. 1, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia); Henry Muhlenberg wrote Bartram that "a true Flora of a Country is not the work of one Man, but Hands must be joined" (Sept. 13, 1782, in Bartram Papers 4: 89, Pennsylvania Historical Society); on handshaking or embracing, see Bartram to Lachlan McIntosh, May 31, 1796, in Misc. Mss. B, New-York Historical Society.

Thomas P. Slaughter speculates that Bartram "liked women" but must have suffered a "developmental crisis" during his teenage years, in Slaughter, *The Natures of John and William Bartram* (New York, 1996), 218–19. The thin argument recalls an observation by G. S. Rousseau, in which "favorite authors" seem to invoke "prudery" (see Rousseau, "The Pursuit of Homosexuality in the Eighteenth Century: 'Utterly Confused Category' and/or Rich Repository?" *Eighteenth-Century Life* 9, no. 3 [May 1985]: 137). In my reading of Bartram, I follow Jan Golinski, who suggests that discussions of sexuality avoid "historical psychoanalysis" and focus instead on the "language and motifs" of a culture (Golinski, "Humphry Davy's Sexual Chemistry," *Configurations* 7, no. 1 [1999]: 20). The only possible suggestion of a heterosexual relationship lies in a letter to Mary Robeson; to suggest a romance from this letter, however, requires considerably more context than this one document supplies (Bartram to Robeson, Sept. 9, 1788, in Gratz Scientists, 7: 21, Historical Society of Pennsylvania).

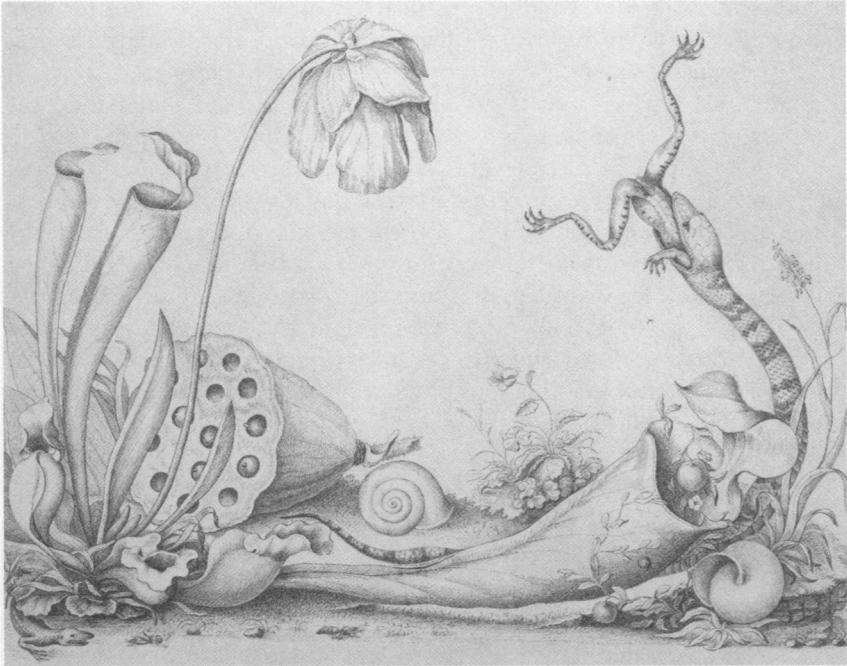


FIGURE II

William Bartram, "Sarracenia," undated, pen-and-ink drawing for John Fothergill. Courtesy, British Museum, London.

Travels (which appeared precisely at a time when other authors were investigating natural history alongside human sexuality) presented carnivorous species as the epitome of curiosity, or amphibious feeling. This sprawling, four-hundred-page work opened with accounts of the *Dionaea* and *Sarracenia*, with Bartram asking of these boundary crossers whether all "vegetable beings are endued with some sensible faculties or attributes." The Venus flytrap, "living and self-moving," possessed "motion and volition"; his pitcher plant had an anatomy rather than parts. The "stiff hairs" of the latter trapped insects, breathed through "minute pores," and perspired to "invigorate the languid nerves." A description of the *Sarracenia* later in the book was unmistakably phallic: its leaves were "erect . . . round, tubular and ventricose"; the top, "of a helmet form"; the "ventricose, or inflated part of the leaf [was] . . . beautifully ornamented with rose coloured studs or blisters," and the inside

“variegated with crimson veins or fibres.”²⁰ Given the Linnaean context and the writings of his contemporaries, it becomes more difficult than not to read this account outside a constellation of shared scientific devotion and homoeroticism.

A second pitcher plant sketched ten years later (*Sarracenia purpurea*) paid more direct tribute to an intellectual soul mate. This image served as the frontispiece to *The Elements of Botany* (1803), a work whose title page claimed Benjamin Smith Barton as author, yet is more accurately read as the flower of a scientific friendship. (It would take careful analysis to determine where Barton’s work stops and Bartram’s begins.) In the preface to volume one (of two), the younger Barton recognized how much “my happiness . . . in the study of natural history” was owed to Bartram; this tribute was punctuated with a Latin note that recalled the figure of friends meeting in the Afterlife—“*Sero in caelum redeat* [may he return to Heaven late].” Volume two introduced Bartram’s favorite topic, “vegetable blood.” The conflation of plant and animal hearkened back to the frontispiece. In the *Sarracenia purpurea*, Bartram depicted the flower at three angles for the purposes of identification. Yet the sketch also possessed an affective quality: the stems curved elegantly and the blossoms practically preened, drawing the viewer into a state of wonder and quickening the desire to learn (Figure III).

Bartram’s letters to Barton at the time of this drawing more pointedly located human feelings in the natural world. Gardens conventionally offered a locus for sharing same-sex affections (suggesting a handle for scholars who seek inroads to eighteenth-century colonial erotic life), and Bartram’s expressions from the garden, whether in the form of art or letters, operated within a symbolic logic of elevation, sentimentality, and physical sensation. A short note penned in early April 1800, for example, announced the renewed friendship between the two naturalists. It marked the beginning of the collaboration that led to *Elements of Botany*. “Believe me when I tell The[e],” Bartram wrote, “My heart leap’t with Joy when I saw the Lad coming down the Avenue to the House. Thy

²⁰ On the intersection of sexuality and scientific discourse, see Golinski, *Configurations* 7; Erasmus Darwin, *The Loves of the Plants* (Oxford, Eng., 1991), 70, 165; Alan Bewell, “‘On the Banks of the South Sea’: Botany and Sexual Controversy in the Late Eighteenth Century,” in *Visions of Empire: Voyages, Botany, and Representations of Nature*, ed. David Philip Miller and Peter Hanns Reill (Cambridge, 1996), 185; James Browne, “Botany in the Boudoir and Garden: The Banksian Context,” *ibid.*, 166; Astrida Orle Tantillo, “Goethe’s Botany and His Philosophy of Gender,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 22 (May 1998): 125–27; Teute, “Loves of the Plants,” 322.

All William Bartram quotations come from the standard edition, Bartram, *The Travels of William Bartram: Naturalist’s Edition*, ed. Francis Harper (Athens, Ga., 1998), iii–iv, 264.

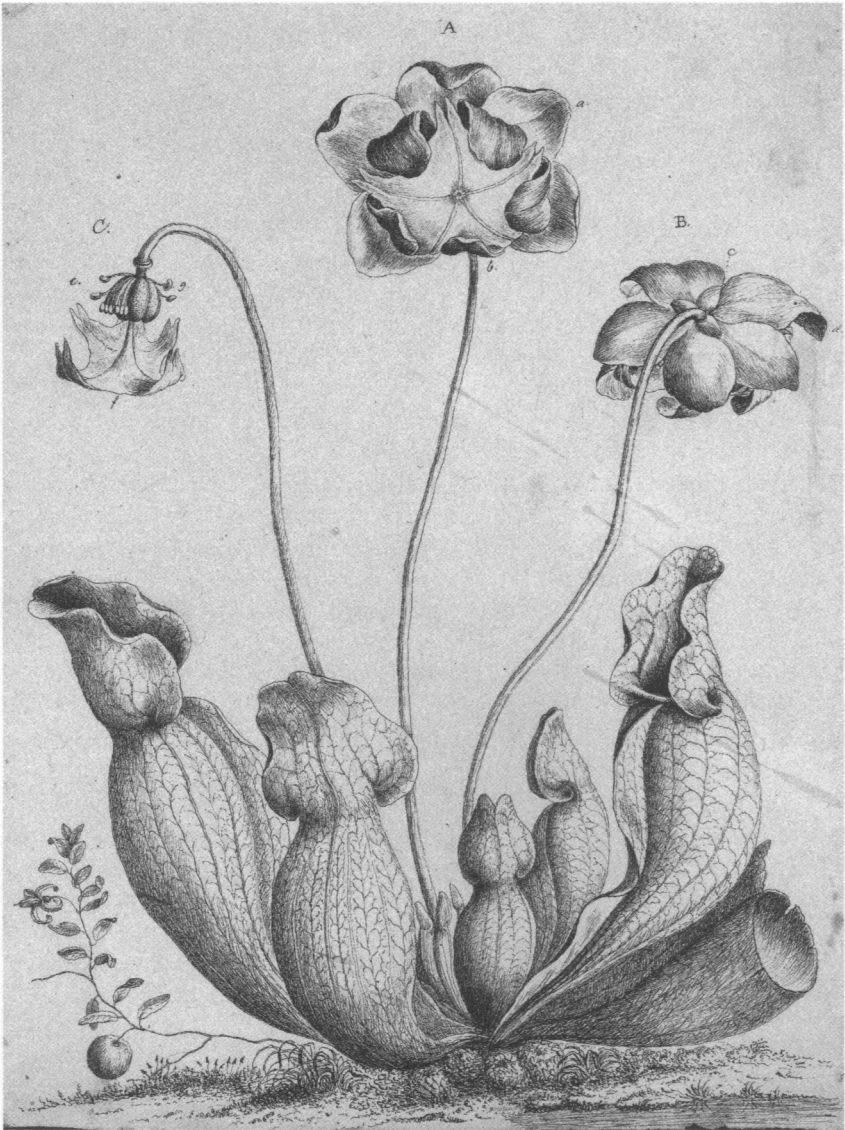


FIGURE III

William Bartram, *Sarracenia purpurea*, frontispiece to Benjamin Smith Barton, *The Elements of Botany; or, Outlines of the Natural History of Vegetables* (Philadelphia, 1803). Courtesy, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.

note reliev'd me from much anxiety, fearing sickness & misfortune, not seeing nor hearing from You so long. Sympathy is the best substitute, or representative, of an absent friend. Hope's the last resort." Human emotions found their vehicle in the signs of seasonal change. With the return of Barton to his life, Bartram happily mused over "Spring, merry smiling Spring," which he saw "ushered onward by the joyfull throng of Fragrant Flowers, & singing Birds from the South." He closed the letter with an invitation to Kingsessing, where Barton could experience this joyful throng for himself.²¹

Other correspondents in Bartram's later years hit the same touchstones of nature and human feeling, opening a window into how Bartram's contemporaries understood his one published work. In January 1810 Lutheran minister and botanist Henry Muhlenberg reread *Travels*. Renewing their remarkable correspondence from the previous decade, he prepared a list of forty-two plants that were described in *Travels* (keyed to the appropriate page numbers) and insisted that "You only can answer" these queries "to my Satisfaction." The scientific brushed against the gushier effusions of friendship. "Hardly a Day passes," Muhlenberg explained, "but I am in Spirit with You and wander with You Hand in Hand through Your Garden and on the Banks of Schulkil." Could Bartram have shaped his book to engender this kind of response? By a well-established code, the shared fascination with plants united curious minds in an ennobling, highly affective fraternity. *Travels* worked toward that end through a plot of hypermasculine isolation and transcendent community. The solitary explorer ventured into uncharted wilds, braved dangers, and returned to the metropolis, laden with exotics that further illustrated the handiwork of God.²² Textual evidence shows that Bartram consciously molded his experiences to follow this narrative line: he rearranged key passages to create an increasing isolation and deeper discovery, which then led him to the hermaphroditic state that at least one reader recognized. Hence, Muhlenberg prefaced his list of queries with the fantasy of holding hands in the garden.

²¹ For "Spring, merry smiling Spring," see William Bartram to Benjamin Smith Barton, Apr. 3, 1800, in Barton-Delafield Collection, ser. 1, American Philosophical Society. Describing the meeting in his garden with a nephew of General Lachlan McIntosh, Bartram felt free to rank himself as "yet in the d—honourable Rank of Bachelors" (see Bartram to McIntosh, May 31, 1796, in Misc. Mss. B, New-York Historical Society). On sexuality and class apropos gardens, see Lyons, *WMQ* 60: 34, 52; Crain, *American Sympathy*, 19.

²² On walking "Hand in Hand," see Henry Muhlenberg to William Bartram, Jan. 29, 1810, in Bartram Papers, 4: 91, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. On the "scientist as action hero" or "masculine identity," see Mary Terrall, "Gendered Space, Gendered Audience: Inside and Outside the Paris Academy of Sciences," *Configurations* 3, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 217, 230; see also Golinski, *Configurations* 7.

To elevate and come together, however, was also to exclude. As Clare A. Lyons observes, eroticism performed a social function. If sexuality “provided a common ground to conceptualize [the] essential sameness” between white men, then the botanic eros in *Travels* presumed a postrevolutionary hierarchy. Without question the journey located Bartram within the highest ranks of society. His pilgrimage was subsidized by one of the most prestigious doctors in London, he botanized on the fields of wealthy planters, and he carried letters of introduction from at least two colonial governors; the subscribers to *Travels*, likewise, came from some of the wealthiest and most influential families of federalist Philadelphia and New York. Though rarely addressed in the criticism, this backing may explain how the botanic adventure could serve as a parable of whiteness. On the banks of Lake George, for example, Bartram met his “old friend and benefactor, Mr. Job Wiggins.” The encounter took place in the heart of the Florida tour, the book’s narrative core, and found Bartram in full botanic rapture. He sailed amid “fragrant groves,” left specimens with Wiggins to be shipped to Fothergill in London, then set off for new adventures, losing himself in a “blessed unviolated spot of earth!” Yet a different story could be told about Wiggins. He married a Senegalese former slave named Nansi (or Ana), and in their approximately eighteen years together, had six children; when Wiggins died in 1797, Nansi inherited a house and a farm that included fourteen hundred acres.²³ Such relationships, though common in Florida, passed unmentioned in *Travels*.

Bartram instead restricted accounts of borderlands sexuality to the hierarchy that he ascribed to plants. At Spaulding’s Upper Store, a destination on Florida’s Saint Johns River, he described a white trader who took a “very handsome Seminole young woman” as his “companion.” This episode, which often sticks with first-time readers of *Travels*, is only

²³ On sexuality and sameness, see Lyons, *WMQ* 60: 154. I have drawn heavily from the roundtable in the same issue; see also Kirsten Fischer and Jennifer Morgan, “Sex, Race, and the Colonial Project,” 197–98; Ann G. Miles, “Queering the Study of Early American Sexuality,” 199–200. For a point of comparison of *Travels* and a more chronologically accurate account, see William Bartram, *Travels in Georgia and Florida, 1773–74: A Report to Dr. John Fothergill. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, ed. Francis Harper (Philadelphia, 1943), 32: 2. For Bartram’s letters of introduction, see William Wright to William Bartram, Apr. 22, 1773, in Bartram Papers 4: 115, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; James Spaulding to Charles McLatchie, Aug. 15, 1773, *ibid.*, 4: 103; John Lewis Gervais to Andrew Williamson, Apr. 8, 1775, *ibid.*, 4: 29; George Galphin to Bartram, Apr. 30, 1775, in Misc. Mss. B, New-York Historical Society. On the publication of *Travels*, see Robert Parrish to Bartram, June 20, 1790, *ibid.*

On Job Wiggins, see Bartram, *Travels*, 98–99; Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana, Ill., 1999), 153. I am indebted to Christopher Iannini for pointing out that Bartram turned a blind eye to black Florida.

one of a handful on native-white liaisons, yet it followed the work's narrative logic. Bartram laid emphasis almost entirely on elevation and decline. His "genteel" and "well-bred" trader had lost everything to the Seminole woman, who "artfully played" her "powerful graces" on the "vanquished lover [and] unhappy slave," then drained "him of all his possessions." Bartram found the trader poor and emaciated, "often threatening to shoot her," and drowning his sorrows in "deep draughts of brandy." Sensitive always to white opinions about Indians, Bartram made clear that this "harlot" did not represent the Seminoles or her race, and he assured readers that she was "detested by her own people." The nod to a universally shared virtue, however, left the tenor of this cautionary tale intact: that sexuality should uplift a civilization.²⁴

Botany once again converged with propriety. Whether the topic was frontier liaisons or scientific discovery, Bartram presumed a hierarchy in categories of the erotic. The pleasures of plant exchange, as his correspondence shows, bound like-minded gentlemen within an ennobling fraternity of science. The frontier trader suffered the opposite fate, as native-white marriage led to economic loss and dissipation. *Travels* devoted little to such relationships, focusing instead on the route to pastoral rapture. Natural history should ennoble and this unhappy couple was left to their obscurity.²⁵ His literary garden operated through a shared sensibility between white men. Bartram had new plants to discover, encounters with the sublime to record, birds to draw. He had an exotic country that awaited exploration. He had an invitation from a gentleman upriver.

Seventy years after William Bartram lost himself in Florida's paradise, poet Walt Whitman, too, let his imagination range south, to Louisiana, where he saw a "live-oak growing." The poet broke off a twig, twined it with moss, and took it home to his room, where "it remains to me a curious token"; it made him "think of manly love."²⁶ Whitman's prominence

²⁴ On the trader and seminole wife, see Bartram, *Travels*, 71–72. My experience with first-time readers comes through the use of *Travels* as a course text. For an astute reading of a second scene, involving the attempted rape of Cherokee "hamadryads," see Richard Godbeer, "Eroticizing the Middle Ground: Anglo-Indian Sexual Relations along the Eighteenth-Century Frontier," in *Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History*, ed. Martha Hodes (New York, 1999), 96. The upward reaching in this passage is rhetorical, as Bartram used classical allusions and antiquated style to elevate sexual violation (see Bartram, *Travels*, 225–26).

²⁵ Bartram's accounts of Indians commonly revolve around issues of national principle; see "Some Hints and Observations, concerning the civilization of the Indians, or Aborigines of America," in *William Bartram on the Southeastern Indians*, ed. Gregory A. Waselkov and Kathryn E. Holland Braund (Lincoln, Neb., 1995), 193–98.

²⁶ Walt Whitman, "I saw In Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing," in *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose*, ed. Justin Kaplan (New York, 1982), 279–80.

in a queer tradition remains unchallenged; his inheritance of the botanic trope, however, deserves further study. *Leaves of Grass* (like other environmental works by his contemporaries) operated within an aesthetic of same-sex feeling, in which the garden served as the site of ennobling friendship. The tradition had deep roots.

From Peter Collinson's correspondence to the *Travels* of almost a half century later, plants served as a conduit for human affections, leading writers to affix human emotion to scientific specimens. Changes in eighteenth-century identity formation made this channeling of male pleasure through natural history almost inevitable; indeed, it was one of the many ways in which sexual identities proliferated. The shared delight for a plant such as the *Dionaea* did not warrant censure, however, but operated within an acceptable language of elevation. Women, likewise, channeled their affections through the fruits of their gardens (such exchanges being perfectly normal), and elite women worked collaboratively with male peers. Yet heterosocial contexts disappeared behind the heavy rhetoric of masculine sociability. Sensual experiences, accordingly, served as exercises of power, for as natural history supplied the raw data for colonization, the joined passions over a blossoming specimen also presumed a hierarchy. Collinson's reminder of manly love for a distant friend such as Thomas Lamboll came at the expense of Elizabeth. Job Wiggins's Senagalese wife vanished from Bartram's botanic tour. The garden was yet one more area, though experienced within the most intimate realms of feeling, against which an imperial order was defined. In the exchange of plants, even across an ocean, men traded pieces of themselves.