

Nature's Spectacles:
Ornament, Performance, and Natural History in the Long Eighteenth Century

By

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To my noble parents, to my sisters, to all my Quigley and O'Sullivan kin,
and especially
To the memory of Dr. Fionnuala Quigley, Ballineen

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INTRODUCTION

SPECTACLE’S ATMOSPHERE

The history of the earth is commonly told as a series of extraordinary incidents which, like the erection of new cities over the ruins of ancient settlements, transform life while obscuring what went before. One of these stories, called the Cambrian explosion, describes an astonishing evolutionary forward leap in the complexities and capacities of oceanic animal life, which was, at the time, the only sort of animal life going. The anatomically unsophisticated Ediacarans – blind, and mostly immobile, with bodies like “thin, quilted pillows” – gave way to arthropods and chordates, which sported eyes, mineral skeletons, jaws, gills, and even primitive spinal columns. Microorganisms had entirely covered the shallow ocean floor with a kind of viscid blanket, but now new, efficient consumers exposed and colonized the sea-bottom. The consensus view has held that this “burst” occurred about five hundred and forty-one million years ago, and resulted from an “oxygenation event” which made the oceans about as hospitable to life as they are today. But this narrative is currently under revision: recent research points toward some less momentous and more nuanced array of causes and consequences, such as a very modest uptick in oxygen levels, which prompted the appearance of carnivores, leading in turn to predation, a defensive “evolutionary arms race,” and so on.¹

Nowhere is the event style of global history more common than in conversations about mass biotic catastrophe. When commentators describe our being currently involved in the early stages of “the Sixth Extinction,” they perforce invoke the tradition of the “Big Five,” a group of

¹ See Douglas Fox, “What sparked the Cambrian explosion?” *Nature* 530 (18 Feb. 2016): 268-70.

ancient cataclysms of sufficient distinction, and sufficient temporal integrity, to merit being narrated *as* cataclysms. The most disastrous occurred about two hundred and fifty million years ago, as the Permian period drew to a close; “the great dying” was very nearly earth-life’s ultimate cadence. Most of the time, this is not how species death takes place: the normal course of things produces “background extinction,” which is less an event than an ambience (or, in painterly terms, *ambiance*), to which biological enlargement (speciation) and loss contribute predictably, and sustainably, if not altogether uniformly. Under ordinary circumstances, an alteration in the tableau would be impossible for any human being to observe, without the help of technological mediation: about every seven hundred years, some species of mammal, somewhere on earth, ought to disappear; once per millennium, an amphibian should do the same.²

Observability is often central to the popular reception and comprehension of scientific stories about the world.³ This applies not only to contemporary scenes, or to those phenomena whose visible signs are sought by the persons they are said to immediately impact. It is also a key determinant of the manner – and even the success – with which stories about deep time get made, and get accessed. Why, for instance, is the end of the Cretaceous period, about sixty-five million years past, far better “remembered” than the end-Permian “great dying,” or, for that matter, the Cambrian explosion, the latter of which has recently been described as “the most profound change in the history of life on Earth”⁴? The Cretaceous extinction is of course the most recent of these, and the world it helped form is broadly identifiable with the present one. But these hazy familiarities have not exerted nearly as powerful an imaginative pull as the spectacular

² See Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 3-17.

³ This is not at all to say that invisibility lacks potency. Its power is central to Charles Darwin’s version of natural selection, which works, as it were, clandestinely – “daily and hourly scrutinising, throughout the world every variation, even the slightest; rejecting that which is bad, preserving and adding up all that is good; silently and insensibly working, whenever and wherever opportunity offers, at the improvement of each organic being.” See Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1864), p. 80.

⁴ See Fox, “What sparked the Cambrian explosion?”

perceptibility of the Cretaceous dinosaurs and other animals whose remains litter the world, or as the spectacular imaginability of a meteoric collision or of a global volcanic upwelling.⁵

Calling a bolide strike or a molten convulsion imaginable – or narratable – is, in some regards, ludicrous: firsthand testimony of mass extinction events is wanting, and it is only very recently that techniques of visualization have begun convincingly to stage the working theories. But then one need only think of the Noachian deluge to discover an obvious expression of the narrative appeal, and the generational faculty, of such seeming absurdities. In John Dryden's unfinished 1700 translation of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid martializes Neptune's aqueous minions as they wreak a similar inundation:

The floods, by nature enemies to land,
And proudly swelling with their new command,
Remove the living stones that stopp'd their way,
And, gushing from their source, augment the sea.
Then, with his mace, their monarch struck the ground,
With inward trembling breath received the wound,
And rising streams a ready passage found.
The expanded waters gather on the plain,
They float the fields, and overtop the grain;
Then rushing onwards, with a sweepy sway,
Bear blocks, and folds, and laboring hinds, away.
Nor safe their dwellings were, for, sapp'd by floods,
Their houses fell upon their household gods.
The solid piles, too strongly built to fall,
High o'er their heads behold a watery wall.
Now seas and earth were in confusion lost;
A world of waters, and without a coast.⁶

Dryden's heroic couplets adapt the *Metamorphoses*, and this rendition of a flood myth, to England at the turn of the eighteenth century – to a self-consciously English poetic form, and to the vogue

⁵ These are only two of the explanations commonly proffered, and they may be inaccurate; my point here is to underline their imaginative currency. For a brief discussion, see D. L. Dineley, "Cretaceous," in *The Oxford Companion to the Earth* (Oxford University Press, 2000)

⁶ Ovid, *Translated by Dryden, Pope, Congreve, Addison, and Others*, Vol I, Book I (London: A. J. Valpy, 1833), ll. 385-401.

for epic drama which informed it, and was informed thereby. The waters' awesome and irrepressible advance rings from insistent accentuation – “rising streams a ready passage found” – and orderly prosody. Poeticization, here, both brings a tremendous cataclysm closer to readers' awareness – confronting them, at moments, with a vengeful, home-wrecking wrath – and patterns it, so it can please and be understood.

Dryden helped align the notion of momentous global transformation with his audiences' aesthetic and dramatic sensibilities, not to say their cognitive capacities. In the present era of anthropogenic climate change, many writers and artists undertake an analogous task, as they attempt to successfully communicate an epoch-defining environmental crisis. These endeavors are widely understood as attended by fundamental, and often paradoxical, representative enigmas: Rob Nixon writes that they must enlist spectators' attention “to catastrophic acts that are low in instant spectacle but high in long-term effects.”⁷ The psychoanalyst Sally Weintrobe characterizes that attention, ideally, as “facing destructiveness,” as “undergoing a moment of shock,” while avoiding the mechanisms of impediment – “denialism, disavowal and negation” – that commonly compromise human response.⁸ And Bill McKibben poses a germane question: “We can register [climate change] with satellites and scientific instruments, but can we register it in our imaginations, the most sensitive of all our devices?” For McKibben, “we” have so far failed to do so, and so reality “hasn't registered in our gut”; this, because the stories and visions it produces tend to swing between undetectable “background,” on the one hand, and “overdramatic” spectacle, on the other.⁹

⁷ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge & London, Harvard UP, 2011), p. 10.

⁸ Sally Weintrobe, Introduction, in Weintrobe (ed.), *Engaging with Climate Change: Psychoanalytic and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Oxford & London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 11, 6.

⁹ Bill McKibben, “What the warming world needs now is art, sweet art,” *grist* (22 Apr 2005).

These examples begin to indicate a decisive difficulty in apprehending and representing certain things and processes the twenty-first century calls nature. They also underline the evident central role of spectacularity – its affective and epistemological problems and promise, its revelations and its obfuscations – for that difficulty. This preamble has, it is hoped, started to frame contemporary concerns within the long arc of culture in the West, to place spectacle’s current relationship to nature in a complex, but unexpectedly coherent, tradition. At issue in this dissertation, however, is that relationship’s contingent status in a precise period, and at a limited array of sites. That period, and those sites, have not been selected arbitrarily: as Richard Altick and others have copiously documented, spectacle was one of eighteenth-century Britain’s greatest fascinations, and greatest vexations. It proliferated, writes Altick, amidst a “broad stream of urban culture,” taking the form of “a great variety of public nontheatrical entertainments...that ministered to the same widespread impulses and interests to which print also catered—the desire to be amused or instructed, the indulgence of curiosity and the sheer sense of wonder, sometimes a rudimentary aesthetic sensibility.”¹⁰

Prominent among those entertainments were fairground performances, which did not leave a wealth of documentary or visual testimony in their pungent wakes, and so pose difficulties for scholarly treatment. And as John O’Brien has rightly observed, most of the extant testimony is satirical at best and sanctimonious at worst. But it is almost definitely true that more persons experienced shows at places like fairgrounds than witnessed performances at the officially sanctioned theaters.¹¹ One of this dissertation’s core premises is that the legacy of those shows is traceable in, among other places, certain varieties of thinking about nature. Those traces are often

¹⁰ Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 1.

¹¹ See John O’Brien, *Harlequin Britain: Pantomime and Entertainment, 1690-1760* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins UP, 2004), p. 35.

as strange as the spectacles – and spectacular lives – that formed them. As will become clear, the spectacular is at once narrative’s great inspirator and its great confounder. It prompts the appearance of copious impressions, feelings, and verbal response, but those products are frequently maligned as insubstantial, inauthentic, and absurd. Descriptors such as these are commonly understood as antonymous to “nature,” and it is from this apparent conflict that the present dissertation derives many of its energies. Spectacularity invites critics to retrain their attention, to work in the strange spaces that precede product – that mobilize literary, aesthetic, and epistemological finish, but do not necessarily leave the signs of themselves behind.

If spectacles often seemed odd and inconsistent, oddness and inconsistency were frequently interpreted in terms of the spectacular. This book’s method relies on the premise that spectacularity can be observed at work, in discourse and in action, beyond the bounds of the fairsteads and other popular manifestations that are its most brazen expressions. Spectacle’s presence can be identified not only at exhibitions and entertainment events, but in certain varieties of imaginative gesture, as well as – in a negative sense – within a forceful and broad discourse of social and cultural critique. It must be admitted that this brand of inquiry takes significant risks by taking an expansive and shifting approach to identifying its objects of study. However, it may become evident that such an approach is only suited to a nexus of material and immaterial energies that could not fully be accounted for via an enumeration of sights and shows. Spectacles – and spectacular thinking – often operated as the provision, or ore, for attempts to know and represent nature, and so a *modus operandi* that proceeds relationally, considering the manner in which forms take shape in proximity to spectacularity, seems potentially productive. And because the spectacular is so often made to vanish – or appear to have vanished – from the things and thoughts it helps perform, it would not be adequate only to attend to its most overt operations.

Spectacles are, broadly speaking, unconsolidated – which is not to say immune to consolidation – and this is among the characteristics that makes them powerful, promising, and problematic. Anne Wohlcke has urged that eighteenth-century fairs be recalled as “intermediate” elements in London life, evoking at once the medieval and the modern, the city and the countryside.¹² This is a useful figure for spectacularity in a broader sense: spectacles so often form glittery – or tawdry – bridges between things in the world and the aesthetic, literary, and scientific organs that would receive them. That those bridges are frequently burned after crossing only confirms the value of excavating their lineaments. Some of their exemplars, as exhibited in what follows, are indeed sensationally violent, and this dissertation may appear at times to exploit, for curiosity’s sake, spectacle’s capacity to shock. But by attending at the scene of violence – at, for instance, Chapter One’s awful and incendiary death of an elephant in Dublin – one might confront lives and bodies that are often disappeared from the things that follow them.

Spectacular/Sublime

Altick’s summary of the eighteenth-century scene suggests the strangeness – and the potential – of a sustained consideration of nature’s spectacles. His argument pertains to a metropolitan milieu, a context that eighteenth-century authors were often – and, with the passage of time, increasingly – keen to categorically differentiate from nature. Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Deserted Village* (1770) provides a representative example: that poem blamed the decline of an idealized pastoral setting, “where Nature has its play,” on London’s “long pomp,” and “midnight masquerade, / With all the freaks of wanton wealth array’d.”¹³ When Goldsmith establishes a

¹² See Anne Wohlcke, *The ‘Perpetual Fair’: Gender, Disorder, and Urban Amusement in Eighteenth-Century London* (Manchester & New York: Manchester UP, 2014), p. 30.

¹³ Oliver Goldsmith, *The Deserted Village* (London: J. Barker, 1784), p. 23.

dichotomy between the lightsome salutariness of the countryside and the city's gaudy grotesquery, he is also establishing a definition of nature, and is doing so through reference not only to its attributes, but to its antitheses. Those latter are, evidently, performance, exhibition, and ostentation, taken to characterize, most obviously, the dissipated, dandified nouveau riche. But by describing them as "freaks," Goldsmith also conflates urban upstarts with the sorts of public entertainments described by Altick, shows that often took place at fairgrounds, in taverns, and even on streets, and involved the intermingling of Londoners from all levels of social and economic life. So the imputation of vulgar acquisitiveness appears to involve an anxiety about the vulgarizing consequences of commonalty.

What is significant about this is that those shows, which Goldsmith wants to alienate decisively from "Nature," were obsessed by animals, anomalies, natural disasters, and far-flung habitats. This means that London became a spectacularly weird quasi-landscape, which impression motivates a number of burlesque travelogues, like Tom Brown's *Amusements Serious and Comical* (1700) and Ned Ward's *London Spy* (first published 1698). It also underlies John Gay's *Trivia: Or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London* (1716-20), a poem that ironically channels Virgil's *Georgics* (c. 29 BC). Gay knew London well, having been apprenticed to a silk-dealer there while yet in his teens, and *Trivia* is only one – if arguably the most accomplished – of the Scriblerians' attempts to see what happens to pastoral and georgic when activated by urban space. His observer remarks the power of urban spectacle to pattern time – and, in so doing, to supersede traditional temporal schemas:

Experienc'd men, inur'd to city ways,
Need not the Calendar to count their days.
When through the town with slow and solemn air,
Led by the nostril, walks the muzled bear;
Behind him moves majestically dull,

The pride of *Hockley-hole*, the surly bull;
Learn hence the periods of the week to name,
Mondays and *Thursdays* are the days of game.¹⁴

For a half-century before the publication of Gay's poem, Hockley-in-the-Hole, near Clerkenwell Green, had been known for bear- and bull-baiting, as well as dog- and cock-fights. At other sites, animal and dramatic entertainments cohabited: when the Hope Theatre opened, in 1614, at a site on the south bank of the Thames previously occupied by the Paris Garden, it showed plays on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, and devoted Tuesdays and Thursdays to "the baiting of the Beares."¹⁵ (Ben Jonson's *Bartholmew Fair* debuted during the Hope's inaugural season.) In the above lines, *Trivia* upturns its reader's expectations of how spectacles might be experienced – or be advertised. These are things to which one becomes "inur'd," as to labor, or suffering – none more so than the beasts themselves, who plod along in sad procession. This is, among other things, a bathetic revision of the Noah story, as depicted in works like Jan Brueghel the Elder's *The Entry of the Animals into Noah's Ark* (1613). As Chapter One will explain, the deluge was, a crucial, if controversial, chronological referent for writers up to the turn of the eighteenth century. But in *Trivia*, it is replaced by lumbering mundanity – these are animals evacuated of expression, and of character.

The bull and the bear, dulled and muzzled, are, in a sense, flattened out, reduced to just two more bits of the city's spectacular scenery. That scenery appears disappointingly dim, and depressingly inert. And as the creatures plod, so too does time, along with all Londoners, adapted as they have become to the tedium. There is a strong – and quietly terrifying – impression, here,

¹⁴ John Gay, *Trivia: Or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London*. In *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*. 3rd edn. Ed. David Fairer & Christine Gerrard. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015. 47-62, ll. 405-12.

¹⁵ Qtd. in John Briley, "Of Stake and Stage," in *Shakespeare Survey 8: The Comedies*, ed. Allardyce Nicoll (Cambridge: The University Press, 1955), p. 106. See also Ben Jonson, *Bartholmew Fair*, ed. G.R. Hibbard (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1977), p. 9n.

of mechanization, of human (not to say animal) alienation from any determinative control over rhythm or movement. This might remind us of another indictment of spectacularity, from another time and context: in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), Guy Debord identified “[consumable] pseudo-cyclical time” as “the time of the spectacle,” as “the time appropriate to the consumption of images, and, in the broadest sense, as the image of the consumption of time.” Debord is thinking of things like holidays, themselves commodities, which consumers mistake for opportunities to live life authentically, and which determine the temporal contours of our existences.¹⁶ Fitting, this – not because it proves the correctness, let alone transhistorical applicability, of Debord’s thesis, but because it places late twentieth-century impressions of spectacle in a lineage, for which time has long been central.

Tom Brown’s *Amusements* denounces – while being nurtured by – the spectacular city, where appearance refuses to signify: “In days of yore a man of honour was more distinguishable by his generosity and affability, than by his laced liveries,” but at the turn of the eighteenth century, “honour and arms, which used to employ all men of birth and parts [are] almost dwindled into an airy nothing.”¹⁷ This does not, of course, prevent Brown’s narrator from delineating the emptiness – *Amusements* carries on for several hundred pages. In Gay’s *Trivia*, it is as though two charismatic animals have been evacuated of their essential natures by being compelled to live – and perform – in such slavish and inauthentic surroundings. Or perhaps the poem points beyond the deleterious impact of metropolitan contrivance to some more basic falseness, one that underpins expectations of how nature’s performances ought, ostensibly, to manifest themselves. In any case, *Trivia*’s profound ambivalence is one vital species of spectacular response, regularly – but by no means

¹⁶ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone, 1995), p. 112.

¹⁷ Tom Brown, *Amusements Serious and Comical and Other Works*, ed. Arthur L. Hayward (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1927), pp. 65-6.

always – articulated by eighteenth-century onlookers, and essential for understanding how such onlookers attempted to parse the natural from its opposites.

When their performances – imagined or immediate – satisfied expectations, animals like bears could fulfill a very different, but perhaps intimately related, kind of aesthetic and affective expectation. We look not to domestic animals or to livestock, wrote Edmund Burke, for instances of the sublime: that is available, instead, “in the gloomy forest, and in the howling wilderness, in the form of the lion, the tiger, the panther, or rhinoceros.” This has something to do with the latter beasts’ “pernicious” nature, but it also results from their inaccessibility, their not – unlike cows, horses, and so on – being “continually about us.”¹⁸ There is, in other words, a quality of immediacy that, instead of compounding the experience of sublimity, can overload or short-circuit it; at close hand, a view of animals can frustrate the sort of perspective – and the sort of subjectivity – that aesthetic experience demands. “To make any thing very terrible,” Burke claims, “obscurity seems in general to be necessary.”¹⁹ This bears on language, and on representation, in ways that have considerable consequences for how form and genre participate in the establishment of nature. For with respect to “words,” Burke writes that they “have as considerable a share in exciting ideas of beauty and of the sublime as [natural objects, painting, or architecture], and sometimes a much greater than any of them.”²⁰ Literature can develop sublime potential, because it intervenes between the scene and the mind – and sensorium – of the reader. It establishes and exploits a dynamic distance, within which a capable writer can accentuate, and even invent, aesthetic encounters “productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.”²¹

¹⁸ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), p. 61.

¹⁹ Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, p. 54.

²⁰ Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, p. 149.

²¹ Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, p. 36.

More needs saying about this, because links – whether potential or actual – between spectacularity and sublimity appear to abound. As *Trivia* indicates, and as latter sections of this book will make clear, spectacles were often seen to do strange things to movement – to burlesque it, derange it, or render it machinal. For Burke, the sublime seemed to exercise a similar function: “The passion caused by the great and sublime in *nature*,” he asserts, “when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror.”²² In this account, the sublime would seem to fulfill a function widely ascribed to the spectacular – the deprivation of intellectual and emotional agency, and its forced replacement by, in this case, terror. But to recognize the key distinction at play in Burke’s theory, it is necessary to emphasize the roles of obscurity, distance, and indeed time. A crucial passage underlines the difference between attending at a spectacle and witnessing its numinous aftermath:

We delight in seeing things, which so far from doing, our heartiest wishes would be to see redressed. This noble capital, the pride of England and of Europe, I believe no man is so strangely wicked as to desire to see destroyed by a conflagration or an earthquake, though he should be removed himself to the greatest distance from the danger. But suppose such a fatal accident to have happened, what numbers from all parts would crowd to behold the ruins, and amongst them many who would have been content never to have seen London in its glory?²³

Much consists in that “to have happened,” because it establishes that “delight” becomes available not in the course of spectacular destruction, but in its wake. From the devastation emerge aesthetic objects – “ruins” – which proffer sublime pleasure, when a view of the devastating would, by implication, have produced only pain.

²² Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, p. 53.

²³ Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, pp. 43-4.

But did not Burke place pain at the throbbing heart of sublime experience? Yes, but no: “Whatever is fitted,” the theory goes, “in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*.”²⁴ This is a question of ideas, of suggestion, and of “soul,” and it is only at decimated rest that London is sublimely productive – in the course of its demolition, it is not yet fit material for subjective emotional response of an exalted sort. To venture too close to the flames would be dangerous not just to one’s health, but to one’s capacities: “it is certain, that it is absolutely necessary my life should be out of any imminent hazard before I can take a delight in the sufferings of others, real or imaginary, or indeed in any thing else from any cause whatsoever.”²⁵ Not for the first or last time, spectacle functions to produce – or simply to be – the raw material from which aesthetic information is formed. That information is perforce processed by an individual subject – “*I can take a delight*” when confronted by “the sufferings of *others*” – at the precise juncture of temporal and incidental cohesion with sufficient observational distance. There seems little room in Burke’s schema for Gay’s third-person plural – “Experienc’d men” – or for the variegated mob that was reported as swarming the streets and sights of spectacular London. The implications of this for what is taken to look like nature – and for whose looking makes the natural – are of course profound, and are among the objects this study takes pains, and pleasures, to consider.

²⁴ Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, p. 36.

²⁵ Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, p. 44.

Chaos, Chances, and Commodity Culture

William Gilpin, who was preoccupied, like Burke, by the task of defining aesthetic categories – and prescribing their production – found wildness engaging, but rather baffling. His impressions are imbued with a common sense that nature untamed could be overbearing, and actually stifling, particularly if very near. In the *Three Essays* (1792), Gilpin extolled the aesthetic and meditative virtues of picturesque recollection over those of immediate apprehension, “unalloyed” as the former is “with that fatigue, which is often a considerable abatement to the pleasures of traversing the wild, and savage parts of nature.”²⁶ Savagery could mean the uncultivated and primitive, but it could also conjure disorder more generally, which might attach itself to haphazard exhibitions, frippish fashion, incoherent science, and uncontrolled art. William Beckford’s *Vathek* (1786) describes a magnificent palace – “one entire enchantment” – called “*The Delight of the Eyes, or The Support of Memory*.” It is a space emblematic of the eighteenth century’s exhibitory ideal, one that departed from the cabinet of curiosity but improved, self-consciously thereupon. “Rarities,” *Vathek*’s reader is told, “collected from every corner of the earth were there found in such profusion as to dazzle and confound, but for the order in which they were arranged.”²⁷ Successful management of the palace’s curios has happy consequences for the observer’s ability to make sense thereof, not to mention derive pleasure therefrom. And the edifice’s secondary name, “*The Support of Memory*,” traces a clear link between good order, cognition, and something like Gilpin’s recollection.

²⁶ William Gilpin, *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; and On Sketching Landscape; to which is added a poem, on Landscape Painting* (London: R. Blamire, 1792), pp. 51-2.

²⁷ William Beckford, *Vathek with the Episodes of Vathek*, ed. Kenneth W. Graham (Peterborough: Broadview, 2001), pp. 46-7.

A rather different impression issues from Beckford's unorthodox grand tour journal, *Dreams, Waking Thoughts, and Incidents* (1783), when it describes a visit to a fair in Haarlem, in the Dutch Republic, in 1780:

You won't be surprized at the nonsense I have written, since I tell you the scene of riot and uproar from whence it bears date. At this very moment, the confused murmur of voices and music stops all regular proceedings: old women and children tattling; apes, bears, and shew-boxes under the windows; the devil to pay in the inn; French rattling, English swearing, outrageous Italians, frisking minstrels; tambours de basque at every corner; myself distracted; a confounded squabble of cooks and haranguing German couriers just arrived, their masters following open mouthed; nothing to eat, the steam of ham and flesh-pots all the while provoking their appetite; Mynheers very busy with the realities, and smoking as deliberately as if in a solitary lust-huys over the laziest canal in the Netherlands; squeaking chambermaids in the galleries above, and prudish dames below, half inclined to receive the golden solicitations of certain beauties for admittance; but positively refusing them, the moment some creditable personage appears: eleven o'clock strikes; half the lights in the fair are extinguished; scruples grow less and less delicate; mammon prevails, darkness and complaisance succeed. Good night: may you sleep better than I shall!²⁸

Nonsense, confusion, cacophony, distraction, and, in the end, a poor night's sleep: fair-going Beckford testifies that, amidst the uproar, sense stops. His account attempts – or succumbs to – a written approximation of the vertiginous chaos – “the nonsense” – he claims to have encountered there. Within the fair's sensory, spatial and temporal coordinates, time stops functioning as it ought: “At this very moment, the confused murmur of voices and music stops all regular proceedings.” What follows is Beckford's inventory of what's on view, a crowded and clamoring spectacle that incorporates linguistic and other auditory perversions, sexual improprieties, animals and peepshows, and, not least of all, the author (“myself distracted”). Like the mouths of the fairgoers, frozen grotesquely open as they traipse around after “a confounded squabble of cooks,”

²⁸ William Beckford, *Dreams, Waking Thoughts, and Incidents; In a Series of Letters, from Various Parts of Europe* (London: J. Johnson & P. Elmsly, 1783), p. 29.

the kermis scene is describable only via a kind of snapshot, one that includes the describer among the temporarily arrested moving parts.

Discordance, here and at other fairsteads, results not only from the generalized tumult, but from the absence of intelligible language, not to mention the noisemaking of things that are not musical. The displeasure this caused bears linking with wider worries regarding the consequences for literary speech of popular performance: as O'Brien has observed, pantomime's detractors decried its tendency to close off access to reasoned interpretation – spectators, on this account, would be forced to rely on brute emotional response to make sense of what they were seeing and hearing.²⁹ At May Fair, Ned Ward's *London Spy* reported "Untunable Trumpets," "Thrashing Fiddlers," and "broken Organs."³⁰ George Alexander Stevens's "Bartleme Fair," from *Songs, Comic, and Satyrical* (1772), sang of "taphouse guests swearing, and gall'ry folks squalling, / With salt-boxes, solos, and mouth-pieces bawling." When skirling replaces speech, humans and containers meet as noisemakers.

Until 1855, London's Bartholomew Fair recurred annually, over a period of three days – though it often overspilled its bounds – beginning August 24, St. Bartholomew's Day. Southwark Fair followed swiftly on, beginning its annual run on the seventh of September until it was suppressed, once and for all, in 1763. May Fair, in Hyde Park in the West End, was shut down soon thereafter.³¹ A fringe of unsanctioned gatherings, including Tottenham Court Fair, Welsh Fair, and Mile End Fair, attracted thousands of spectators.³² At Stevens's "Bartleme Fair," actions, comestibles, sounds, persons, and entertainments are so jumbled as to suggest some equivalency, or interchangeability, among them: "Here's Punch's whole play of the gunpowder-plot, Sir, / Wild

²⁹ See O'Brien, *Harlequin Britain*, p. xviii.

³⁰ Qtd. in Wohlke, *The 'Perpetual Fair'*, p. 29.

³¹ *Ibid.* pp. 25, 27.

³² *Ibid.* pp. 27-8.

beasts all alive, and pease-porridge hot, Sir: / Fine sausages fry'd, and the Black on the wire; / The whole court of France, and nice pig at the fire.” Reflection and parallelism contribute to the impression that performances, animals, savories, and even persons are linked varieties of spectacular consumable. And this by way of microcosm; in Stevens’s mordant ditty, the “world’s a wide fair, where we ramble ‘mong gay things,” seduced “By sound and by shew, by trash and by trumpery, / The fai-lals of fashion, and Frenchify’d frumpery.” What is perhaps most distinctive about Stevens’s song is its sense that this state of affairs puts the poor at particular risk – while “gentlefolks” shout “bravo, encore, and caro” at “their opperores outlandish ling-o,” this melodist is confined to “sing nothing but Bartleme Fair-o.”³³ Stevens is by turns caustic and poignant in his dressing-down of the Fair’s baubles, and its linking thereof to the insubstantial hopes of the eighteenth-century London poor.

It is worth pausing, amidst all this anti-spectacular chastisement, to example the ways that fairs and other spectacular places could proffer opportunities for advancement and subversion, opportunities available even to persons like Stevens’s destitute. In *Moll Flanders* (1722), Daniel Defoe’s titular heroine describes drifting listlessly toward Bartholomew Fair, where she “fell into one of the raffling Shops.” These were businesses whose operation at the fair had for decades been a prime target of the Lord Mayor’s reforms, and would evade abolition for decades to come.³⁴ Moll describes making the acquaintance of a charming “Gentleman extreamly well dress’d,” who stands her for a drawing and wins her “a Feather Muff.” It is only natural, she suggests, that this sort of meeting happen in *this* sort of place, “as it is frequent to talk to every Body in those Shops.” Where some met noise and nonsense, others found opportunities for expression and exchange.

³³ George Alexander Stevens, “Song XXXVI. Bartleme Fair,” in *Songs, comic, and satirical*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: George Alexander Stevens, 1782), pp. 69-71.

³⁴ Daniel Defoe, *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders, &c.*, ed. G. A. Starr (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), p. 382n.

The man chats to Moll in a frenzy of aimlessness – “talking of a thousand things cursorily without any Thing to the Purpose” – before inviting her to take a ride in his coach, and later, to accompany him to a strange bedroom. In both instances, Moll takes on a characteristic posture of reluctance before yielding “in Hopes to make something of it.” After having sex, the pair depart, and when the “Gentleman,” by this stage utterly soused, passes out in the coach, Moll robs him and makes away.

For Moll, Bartholomew Fair was unpredictable – hers, she insists, “was an Adventure indeed unlook’d for” – but fruitful of chances: “I was not so past the merry Part of Life, as to forget how to behave.” By her own account, her suitor was doubly duped into thinking Moll younger and more naïve than she was – first, “by his Appetite,” and second, by the fact that she “did not indeed look so old as [she] was by ten or twelve Years.”³⁵ Moll’s outward appearance – her surface, as it were – is a falsehood, and her “Gentleman” is seized by a lusty compulsion that, she thinks, he is powerless to control. In the raffling shop, things are exchanged for companionship, and for the possibility of bodily intimacy. Meanwhile, language is not so much drowned out as entered into the economy of the fairground – here, speech happens, and voluminously, but it is bootless, random, wild. Wohlcke has claimed that, for London’s eighteenth-century mandarins, fairs and their ilk could serve as “safety valves” for the expressions of the city’s underclass. In her reading, William Hogarth’s *Southwark Fair* (1733) puts fairground chaos on display in order to sound an alarm: unless checked, the energies depicted would undermine the moral and physical integrity of the city, and of the country.³⁶ To a meaningful extent, Defoe’s raffling shop stages Wohlcke’s thesis: Moll’s temporary triumph does not produce any fundamental change in her lot, nor, it hardly needs saying, does it correct the novel’s sense of her corrupted virtue. But the story’s denouement

³⁵ Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Adventures of the Famous Moll Flanders* (London: J. Cooke, 1765), p. 252-4.

³⁶ See Wohlcke, *The ‘Perpetual Fair’*, p. 20.

does not nullify the incident, or Moll's ingenuity, altogether, and her extemporaneous performance signifies the space afforded by spectacle for novel arrangements of language, identity, and even power. This, thanks in large part to the freedoms afforded, to the canny, by duplicity and illusion – liberties that might attach themselves, in the minds of critics, to organisms and objects that seemed to behave spectacularly.

After the encounter, Moll is richer, and – with the feather muff – more richly accoutered. And this points up another of spectacle's primary attributes, one that connects it to persons and realms that might at first appear to have very little to do with common shows: it was involved with commodities, and with dress, and some commentators saw fashion and luxury as thoroughly infected by its deceptions and superficialities. Of course, when observers linked spectacle to commodity culture, they were not simply free associating: it bears emphasizing that fairs existed, in the first place, to facilitate the exchange and sale of goods. By the turn of the eighteenth century, their status as venues for entertainment was uppermost in the minds of crowds and calumniators alike³⁷; but this regularly appeared not so much a displacement as an accommodation, as an incipient consumer culture seemed to make spectacles of purchasers and wearers. Thus emerged a pervasive troping of luxury – or at least luxury's aspect – as not only foreign, but vulgar, and spectacular. At midcentury, Henry Fielding referred, in the *Enquiry into the Cause of the late Increase of Robbers* (1751), to a “vast Torrent of Luxury which of late Years hath poured itself into this Nation,” and deleteriously transformed the behavior and outlook of especially lower-class

³⁷ See Wohlcke, *The 'Perpetual Fair'*, p. 20-1.

Britons.³⁸ Rome and its legendarily decadent decline provided rich analogies for contemporary critics, not least insofar as they referred to the fallen empire's taste for mindless spectacle.³⁹

Luxury's rapine, as bemoaned by Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* and Stevens's "Bartleme Fair," is germane to John Sekora's analysis of sumptuousness as productive of a rhetoric of horror, though a horror that bears very little resemblance to Burkean sublimity. And spectacle, as is becoming increasingly clear, could be understood as not only manifesting luxurious taste, but predisposing minds to its evacuative effects. Like Sekora's figure of luxury, the spectacular operated as "a vague and sometimes contradictory amalgam," but one that in some cases supersedes luxury, and gives us a better clue as to how certain environments, peoples, plants, and animals could fall under luxury's rubric. Because in the end, luxuriousness is about self-presentation, and self-performance, and at the scene of spectacle, performances and persons operated – and were occasionally exposed – as complex contrivances. Two related and relevant tendencies are in evidence in a critique by Bernard Mandeville: first, that luxury denotes not so much an object or a possession as a behavior or attitude, "as destructive to the wealth of the whole Body Politic, as it is to that of every individual Person who is guilty of it"; and, second, that it renders the peoples and societies it touches less masculine, less energetic – or more fatigued – and less capable of defending themselves.⁴⁰ These associations, as David Cloutier has explained, have an ancient pedigree: the Greek *truphe/tryphe* suggests "daintiness, fastidiousness, voluptuousness, licentiousness, extravagance, wantonness, and effeminacy."⁴¹ For Sekora, the middle of the

³⁸ Quoted in John Sekora, *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1977), p. 5.

³⁹ For coverage of luxury anxiety, and its particular relation to notions of Roman imperial decline, in nineteenth-century Britain, see Norman Vance, "Decadence and the subversion of empire," in Catharine Edwards, ed., *Roman Presences: Receptions of Rome in European Culture, 1789-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), pp. 110-24.

⁴⁰ See Sekora, *Luxury*, pp. 66-7.

⁴¹ See David Cloutier, *The Vice of Luxury: Economic Excess in a Consumer Age* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2015), p. 26.

eighteenth century marked the apogee of a politicized discourse of indulgent behavior that targeted the increasingly visible – and visible – lower classes. Luxury, in this story, is at the whipping-post for all manner of anxieties, anxieties we ought recognize as radiating, in substantial part, from its association with spectacle.⁴²

Regarding Cloutier's meanings, we recognize the paradoxical coexistence of apparent contraries. Fastidiousness and licentiousness, daintiness and voluptuousness: coincidences like these help us understand how the luxuriant, and the spectacular, could be located in things overblown, as well as things undersized. This begins to explain why the most delicate of objects, such as rococo porcelain and silverware, could, as Chapter Two explains, provoke the sorts of fascinations – and repudiations – that one might anticipate in connection with a fairground show, not to mention a stereotyped vulgar public. Of course, these responses were also mobilized by widespread concern for the influence of foreign – and particularly French – styles and goods upon increasingly complicated forms of public self-fashioning in England. Stevens's "Frenchify'd frumpery" should put us in mind of London's expanding middle classes, the mercantilist bourgeoisie that Richard Sennett observes enriching the shops, byways, and social exchanges of eighteenth-century London and Paris. In this view, speech and dress were becoming impersonal and exchangeable, and as urbanites interacted with – and exhibited themselves to – one another, a new public geography developed. Cities were increasingly populated by persons Sennett calls strangers, referring not so much to the alien as to the unknown, the unclassified, and the changeable.⁴³ Joan DeJean's study of the Parisian scene a century earlier shows how new opportunities for anonymity, disguise, and hence social mobility were up for sale in the clothing shops and second-hand stalls springing up throughout that city. You might have been born to one

⁴² See Sekora, *Luxury*, pp. 10-11, 48, 64-5.

⁴³ Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (London & Boston: Faber and Faber, 1977), pp. 48-65.

walk of life, but with just the right outfit – and the requisite panache – you could strut in another. This empowered not only thieves and confidence tricksters, but also previously disenfranchised persons – notably Parisian women – to navigate their milieu with newfound freedom.⁴⁴ “Disguise,” complained George Crabbe’s *The Village* (1783), had become “the city’s vice.”⁴⁵

Performing Nature

Finery’s performative aspects were given material expression, in three dimensions, in the plastic arts: ceramics factories at Chelsea and Bow crafted porcelain likenesses of Kitty Clive and Henry Woodward – the “Fine Lady” and the “Fine Gentleman,” respectively – in David Garrick’s *Lethe* (1740). Nature, too, is expected to perform, or is, fundamentally, a performance. Evidence of this is available, most obviously, at zoos, aquaria, and animal parks – Sea World Australia hosts the “Fish Detectives Sea Lion Show” – and in blockbuster nature documentaries, like the BBC’s *Life* and *Planet Earth*.⁴⁶ But nature’s aspects and dramas are observed and interpreted yet more pervasively – because more subtly – in weather reports, gardens, dinner tables, and markets. And discourses of performance draw vigorously from nature’s metaphorical well: performers are successful when they are true to life; Charles Macklin and David Garrick are fondly recalled for having revolutionized “natural acting.”⁴⁷ Thinking seriously about spectacle entails asking how popular performances might impact expectations of nature, its settings, and its players. In common

⁴⁴ See Joan DeJean, *How Paris Became Paris: The Invention of the Modern City* (New York & London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 144-67.

⁴⁵ George Crabbe, *The Village: A Poem* (London: J. Dodsley, 1783), p. 28.

⁴⁶ Nigel Rothfels has noted the persistent, if oddly undifferentiated, presence of “the simple and yet powerful idea of display,” in settings from “Roman arenas to eighteenth-century noble animal collections, to nineteenth-century temples to nature, and to our contemporary Sea Worlds and Animal Kingdoms”; Rothfels’s exemplar is the German animal dealer Carl Hagenbeck (1844-1913). See Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 43.

⁴⁷ J.O. Bartley, Introduction, in Charles Macklin, *Four Comedies by Charles Macklin*, ed. Bartley (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1968), p. 11.

parlance, to perform or posture appears precisely the sort of thing that nature – and those behaving naturally – do not do. But what this dissertation indicates is that by the end of the eighteenth century, nature was not so much defined against performance as aligned with certain performative ideals – and, it bears emphasizing, vice versa. If this is the case, then the contingencies of theatricality had far-reaching consequences for what sorts of things and lives became natural, and how they were expected to naturally behave. Toward the end of the period under discussion, an idealized version of nature had been largely cut off from the spectacular, but the performances nurtured at spectacles remained vital to nature’s operation, and to the ways it was hailed and defined.

By dressing up – in the course, perhaps, of setting out to visit some traveling exhibition, or some fairground – eighteenth-century Londoners put themselves on display, and at the mercy of whatever gaze happened to be looking on. This applied, first, to the burgeoning public practice of buying clothes, a form of spectacular consumerism some critics have seen as especially fraught for women.⁴⁸ Fashionable self-exhibition provides an exemplary instance of a pervasive phenomenon: at a show, spectatorial roles could shift and swap, excitingly and uncontrollably. A poem in the *Public Advertiser*, of anonymous authorship, made much of this: “Good People all of every Sort, / Pray come and see the Show,” urges the author of “Bartholomew Fair,” “Where Monkies play their Tricks above / While Monkies grin below.” The poet next sees, in historically precise fairground figures, apt symbols of other, and more pernicious, sorts of performance and deception. By invoking the puppeteer John Flockton, celebrated in his day, “Bartholomew Fair”

⁴⁸ For instance, Judith Walkowitz has described the “intrusive gaze of men” projected upon “women who ventured into the shopping district.” See Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 58.

taunts official duplicity: “The noted Flockton shows his Skill, / Like Ministerial Folk; / Like them he uses all his Art; / Like them he plays in Joke.”

As spectacularity implicates its onlookers, it calls attention to the fact that those onlookers are bodies, and are ultimately not imaginable as only abstracted eyes or minds. Embodiment, as Paul Semonin and others have explained, was a foundational theme of early modern exhibitory culture, preoccupied as that culture was by freaks and monsters, and by the responses they might provoke.⁴⁹ And at eighteenth-century fairgrounds, as Wohlcke has rightly underlined, actually or metaphorically metamorphosing bodies – anomalous animals, contortious performers – remained central to the show.⁵⁰ If Stéphane Mallarmé thought the appropriate response to Nietzsche’s query – “Who is speaking?” – was “the word itself,” at times the only response that seems available to “Who is spectating?” is “the body itself.”⁵¹ As with all things spectacular, this had ramifications even for those venues that were defined, at times, against sideshows and suchlike. From fairplaces, writes O’Brien, pantomime imbibed a sensitivity for the power of bodies to create meaning, a power that not only capitalized but relied on an awareness of spectators’ own embodiment.⁵² More generally, Sennett’s conception of a performative conduit between the eighteenth-century theatrical stage and the city street functions bidirectionally, as is apparent in the use of contemporarily fashionable garments to adorn the bodies of historical subjects, like Hamlet.⁵³

Disturbingly, when spectators become spectacles, they could appear not only susceptible to critical judgement, but liable to stupefaction, and even – as the “Monkies” indicate –

⁴⁹ See Paul Semonin, “Monsters in the Marketplace: The Exhibition of Human Oddities in Early Modern England,” in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York & London: New York UP, 1996), p. 80.

⁵⁰ See Wohlcke, *The ‘Perpetual Fair’*, pp. 34-5.

⁵¹ See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An archaeology of the human sciences* (London & New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), p. 333.

⁵² See O’Brien, *Harlequin Britain*, p. 62.

⁵³ See Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, pp. 64-71.

dehumanization. It was in this spirit that Joseph Addison aligned stereotyped responses to spectacle with the absence of world-wise discernment – in *The Spectator* No. 364 (1712), he deplored the ignorant gawping of too-young British youths on the grand tour, comporting themselves as “children do at Puppet Shows.”⁵⁴ In this instance, Addison’s figures resemble an unhappy manifestation of Stephen Greenblatt’s account of early modern wonder, productive of an infantile “startle reflex,” marked by “eyes widened, arms outstretched, breathing stilled, [and] the whole body momentarily convulsed.”⁵⁵ For Catharine Macaulay, Britons staring like so many stuck pigs had real and deleterious consequences for society: she writes, in the *History of England* (1763), of the political irrationality that results from tourists who “grow charmed with everything that is foreign, are caught in the gaudy tinsel of a superb court...and...are rivetted in a taste for servitude.”⁵⁶ The *Macaroni Jester* (1773) lampooned the moral and intellectual vacuity of emasculated, Continent-obsessed dandies, men only in “name,” at bottom – in a phrase Brown would have approved – “perfect nothingness.”⁵⁷

All the same, politer strands of eighteenth-century cultural life, such as those that connected the era’s most celebrated playwrights and performers – as well as its more well-to-do audiences – to the patent theaters, were by no means insensitive to the representative – and pecuniary – powers of the spectacular. In 1737, the Licensing Act decreed, first, that new plays be staged at the patent theaters, namely Covent Garden and the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane (as well as the Haymarket, in summertime); and second, that the Office of the Chamberlain would inspect all new plays. Daniel O’Quinn has argued that the Act served, rather ironically, to incentivize the production of the kinds

⁵⁴ Quoted in Michèle Cohen, “The Grand Tour: National Identity and Masculinity,” *Changing English* 8.2 (Oct 2001), p. 130.

⁵⁵ See Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 14.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Cohen, “The Grand Tour,” p. 136.

⁵⁷ Quoted in *ibid.* p. 132.

of nonverbal spectacles that might slip past the censors, and that had commentators like Richard Steele up in arms.⁵⁸ Fairground animal shows were well-established inspirators for this sort of thing: in 1701, the managers of Lincoln's-Inn-Fields courted the *Zeitgeist* by slotting "that delightful exercise of vaulting on the managed horse according to the Italian manner" to follow performances of William Wycherley's *The Country Wife*. This arrangement was precipitated, thought James Peller Malcolm, by the famous success of an entertainment at Bartholomew Fair, in which a trained tiger plucked the feathers from the body of a dead bird.⁵⁹ This may have partaken in business savvy, but it also suggests the potential for more respectable theaters to coopt popular culture. And while this sort of borrowing surely took place, to at least a limited extent, the fairs' influence upon the theaters was not limited to what the managers chose to literally bring in. Spectatorship, at Lincoln's-Inn-Fields and elsewhere, was changing, as an increasing variety of shorter shows caused theatergoers to pick and choose, as they might have done at a fair-place. And theatrical afterpieces owed a more general debt to drolls, those bits of curious, farcical, grotesque, and often animal buffoonery that attracted yawpers to Smithfield, Southwark, and so on.

Theatrical sensitivity could take various forms: recognizable, in the criticism of Charles Lamb, is a fear that playgoers, reared on spectacle and having little interest in the written word, will fail to grasp the very concept of authorship.⁶⁰ Like all linguistic complaints, Lamb's is entangled, more or less intentionally, with a desire to establish and protect an integral, national theatrical identity; it is unsurprising, then, that as they became increasingly receptive to highly spectacular French and Italian genres, the theaters became lightning rods for anti-foreign

⁵⁸ See Daniel O'Quinn, *Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London, 1770-1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), pp. 13-14.

⁵⁹ James Peller Malcolm, *Anecdotes of the Manners and Customs of London during the Eighteenth Century; including the Charities, Depravities, Dresses, and Amusements, of the Citizens of London, during that period; with a review of the state of society in 1807*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees & Orme, 1810), vol.2, p. 115.

⁶⁰ See Claudia Corti, "Poses and Pauses: The Theatrical Portrait in English Romanticism," *DQR Studies in Literature* 55 (2015), p. 115.

sentiment.⁶¹ In the era of Sarah Siddons and John Philip Kemble, a player's performance – and person, and body – were so far uppermost in audience's regard that advertisements sometimes neglected altogether to inform prospective spectators who had written the piece in question.⁶² Samuel Taylor Coleridge thought this did awful violence to Shakespeare, whose language was “usurped,” as far as contemporary audiences were concerned, “by fellows who owed their very elevation to dexterity in snuffing candles.”⁶³ (The banality of the action so accomplished conjures a vision of a mechanical theater, not to mention Pope's luminary amputator, from *Peri Bathous* (1727).⁶⁴) And on the fringes – or outside the bounds – of official dramatic culture, theaters like Sadler's Wells and the Royalty staged burlesque performances which revolved around spectacles and music, and shared a great deal in common with fairground entertainments.⁶⁵

The upshot of this is not that the theaters became indistinguishable from fairgrounds, or that spectacularity attained untrammelled preeminence and respect. It is, instead, that the theatrical main stream, like Burkean sublimity or – as will next be discussed – natural history, learned from the spectacular, and scavenged at its scenes, but did so en route to generically acceptable and tasteful ends. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, the patent theaters had made substantial investments in the apparatuses of spectacle, and oriented audiences toward them through significant renovations and reorganizations of spectatorial space. When David Garrick rearranged his audiences' view, as manager of Drury Lane in the early 1760s, visitors no longer watched a piece from the sides, or from behind, but instead accessed variations of a quasi-pictorial uniform prospect. The reduction of hanging lights contributed to the impression that the walls and ceiling

⁶¹ See Corti, “Poses and Pauses,” p. 112.

⁶² Ibid. pp. 114-15.

⁶³ Qtd. in ibid. p. 115.

⁶⁴ For the latter, see Alexander Pope, *Peri Bathous: or, Of the Art of Sinking in Poetry*, in *The Works*, Vol. 5 (London: W. Cavil, T. Martin, T. French, & J. Wren, 1795), p. 125.

⁶⁵ See Georgina Lock, “Burlesque,” *The Encyclopedia of British Literature 1660–1789*. Day, Gary and Jack Lynch (eds). Blackwell Publishing, 2015. [Blackwell Reference Online](#). 23 February 2016

of the stage enframed a picture. Exotic habitats and creatures appeared with increasing frequency – and in increasing detail – among the stage decorations for works like John O’Keefe’s *Omai* (1785). The art and literature of travel and voyaging made meaningful contributions to this vogue: in the case of *Omai*, set designer Philip de Loutherbourg plumbed the pictures of John Webber, artist on James Cook’s third voyage. For James Cobb’s comic opera *Ramah Droog* (1798), John Inigo Richards turned to Thomas Daniell’s Indian images. Hired by Drury Lane to overhaul its stage decorations, De Loutherbourg commanded total creative oversight and undertook great advances, primarily for spectacular works, but also for “legitimate drama.” He remains legendary for his experiments with perspective, and even – at the Eidophusikon – something like motion pictures. Fundamental to this achievement was his having taken picturesque scenery and involved it in the kinds of spectacular motion that the two-dimensional image refused to accommodate, motion that eighteenth-century audiences might have identified, most readily, with the sorts of popular entertainments that this dissertation – and particularly Chapter Three – detail. De Loutherbourg, like several of the other, and canonical, figures treated in what follows, recognized and adapted spectacle’s technical and affective potential, while managing its disadvantages and excesses.⁶⁶

In a study of Romanticism, visual culture, and the stage, Gillen D’Arcy Wood has observed a reinvigorated – and reoriented – taste for realism among late eighteenth-century audiences. Wood follows other critics, like Marilyn Gaull, in tracing the increasing dominance of visual spectacle on the stage, as well an inverse phenomenon: a decline in theater focused on poetic language. Romanticism, in this interpretation, articulated itself in contraposition to theatrical spectacle,

⁶⁶ For more on advances in eighteenth-century stage decoration, including its pictorial tendencies and De Loutherbourg’s innovations, see Russell Thomas, “Taste in the Stage Decorations of London Theaters, 1770-1800,” *Modern Philology* 42.2 (Nov 1944), pp. 65-74; and Gillen D’Arcy Wood, *The Shock of the Real: Romanticism and Visual Culture, 1760-1860* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 40-2.

invested as the former became in the elevation of the self, of the mind, and the poetical, imaginative vistas afforded thereby. This opposition was established with increasing vigor, Wood argues, in the early nineteenth century, when spectacularity was perceived to have fully colonized the stage, and literary language was commonly – if simplistically – thought to inhabit the printed page and nothing else besides.⁶⁷

This story might recall Burke’s sense of the sublime, which exerted such a powerful interest upon the forms and visions of English Romanticism: better than the sight of something is something idealized and exacerbated by the imagination. This conflict, and its consequences for subjectivity at the turn of the nineteenth century, are taken up to provocative effect by William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* (1794). Wrongly imprisoned, the titular protagonist realizes an ideal of contemplative individualism at precisely the moment that he exchanges “disgustful society,” the location of “the accumulated splendours of nature and art,” for “the art of withdrawing my thoughts.” Art’s meaning bifurcates, here, between a spectacular object, on the one hand, and an intensely personal craft, on the other. Caleb thus undertakes to establish himself as the “man in himself considered”; this appears necessarily to entail the radical rejection of his own body, that “cumbrous and unfortunate load for the power of thinking to drag along with it.”⁶⁸ Even at his trial, Caleb welcomes the prospect of spectacular bodily violation – “hang up this miserable carcass to writhe beneath a burning sun, inflict upon me unheard-of and lingering tortures!” – because he is convinced that his body does not signify in an ultimate sense, that his “good name” will win out in spite of it, that he “will be understood,” and that his “very prosecutors shall confess [his] innocence.”⁶⁹ Personhood consists not in embodiment, but against it, and performance is exposed

⁶⁷ See Wood, *The Shock of the Real*, pp. 19-23.

⁶⁸ William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, ed. Pamela Clemit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 178-81.

⁶⁹ Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, pp. 155-6.

as, at best, a useful diversionary tactic, and at worst – and in general – pure, repulsive falsehood. The nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries offer plentiful examples of an attitude congruent with Caleb’s, one that has given shape to nature in intricate ways.

Science and Empire

Eighteenth-century spectacles sustained a complicated interchange, between those anthropomorphic and otherwise imaginative impressions of animals which we are used to calling premodern, on the one hand; and the new science’s spirit of individuation and contemplation, on the other. Far from threatening the integrity of the scientific revolution’s advances, or keeping nature stuck in an unenlightened mire, spectacularity could accommodate multiple paths of looking, as well as of performance. And the performativity of science – of its subjects no less than its practitioners – comes distinctly into view at freak shows, animal acts, and so on. Wohlcke’s idea of spectacular amphibiousness is again apt, because spectacles so frequently appear to intervene between aesthetic, epistemological, and affective states. Spectacularity is, often, a sort of limbo, through which forms, images, experiences, and knowledge pass en route to respectable, coherent, and legible representation. Take, for example, the “Crowned Eagle,” from George Edwards’s *Gleanings of Natural History* (1758):

I saw this bird alive in Bartholomew Fair, London, in 1752, where I made a drawing of it. Its keeper told me it was brought from the coast of Guiney in Africa; which account I believe, having been since confirmed in it by Mr. Penwold, a gentleman who lives on Garlick-Hill, London, where I saw two others of this very species of bird brought from Guiney.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ George Edwards, *Gleanings of Natural History, Exhibiting Figures of Quadrupeds, Birds, Insects, Plants, &c.* (London: Royal College of Physicians, 1758), p. 31.

Edwards's eagle simultaneously represents and obscures a tableau of metropolitan spectacle, plantation slavery⁷¹, virtuosi networks, and an exploding commodity culture derived from imperial expansion and maritime exploration. *Gleanings* presents a scientifically accurate and aesthetically pleasing rendering of the bird, a composite sketch that, decontextualized, disavows its complicated provenance.

This was a distinct departure from the spectacular tradition of displaying liminal creatures: nature's strangenesses found year-round residence at Don Saltero's Coffeehouse, the earliest version of a public museum Londoners had the chance to visit. It advertised "Monsters of all sorts," "Strange things in nature as they grew so."⁷² Venues like Don Saltero's catered not only to a generalized appetite for wonder – though the importance of that appetite cannot be overstated – but to natural philosophers, professional and amateur, in search of information and inspiration, as well as to writers and artists keen to meditate not only on the contents of exhibitions, but on the fascination for those objects for spectators.

For all their noise and commotion, taverns and fairgrounds were places where one might go to learn. London's spectacular atmosphere developed in tandem, and in close relation, with the taste for heterogeneous observation manifested by Richard Steele's *Tatler* (1709-11). Importantly, though, intellectual and aesthetic polymathy needed managing, like Beckford's *Delight of the Eyes*, so as to improve and not confuse. As Addison became involved in the production of the *Tatler*, that paper became more organized, less a cabinet of curiosities than a thematic exhibition.

⁷¹ Here is Edwards on "The Little Red-headed Parrakeet, *or* Guiney Sparrow": "this bird is generally brought to us by ships whose last departure was from America ; for they who trade to Guiney rarely return directly from thence to Europe ; but, in pursuance of their abominable and unnatural traffick in the human species, sail with ship-loads of Negroes to the American colonies, where they sell the unhappy wretches, as civilized people do brute beasts ; after which they return to Europe with their ill-acquired gains : so that what comes to us by this channel is often taken for the produce of America, though it is originally from Africa ; as is the case of the bird before us, which I am certain, by all I can learn, is a native of Africa, and not bred at all in America." (56)

⁷² See Semonin, "Monsters in the Marketplace," p. 70.

As for the *Spectator* (1711-12), of whose editions Addison wrote about half, here was a concerted attempt to inject the shifting dynamics of London life, with its preponderance of meeting-spaces and spectacles, with a salutary dose of proper morals and correct learning. Its subjective multiplicity and engagement with spectacularity – through the figure of the introverted Mr. Spectator – evince a tense and generative commerce with the ambience it sought to reform.⁷³ O'Brien has explained how the *Spectator*, by analogizing the act of looking at a spectacle and the act of reading, exploited spectatorship as a productive trope while neutralizing its problematic aspects. By describing reading as similar to spectating, Addison could make positive claims for its entertainment value, and its sympathetic potential, but keep it at some remove from the noise and busyness of a fairground booth.⁷⁴

The incipient discipline of natural history benefited massively from the things spectacles made visible, but it also defined itself, increasingly, against the habits of mind that spectacularity was often seen to encourage or – to put the thing negatively – to frustrate. In a treatment of Eliza Haywood's *Female Spectator* (1744-6), Kristin Gerten argues that natural philosophy was perceptible as intellectually and personally salutary insofar as it seemed congruent with ideals of individual meditative contemplation. This involved defining the proper aims of science – the recognition of deep and thoroughgoing principles – against some dissipated attention to fascinating bits and pieces, the latter akin to what Caleb Williams's later described as the “splendours of nature and art.” Spectacular natural objects, in this view, are worth considering not in themselves, but as windows letting upon some more consolidated prospect. This is, in Gerten's argument, of crucial importance for Haywood's project of promoting natural history's educational value for women,

⁷³ See Jacob Sider Jost, "Addison, Joseph," *The Encyclopedia of British Literature 1660–1789*, ed. Gary Day & Jack Lynch (Blackwell Publishing, 2015), [Blackwell Reference Online](#). 10 February 2016.

⁷⁴ See O'Brien, *Harlequin Britain*, p. 84.

whose relationship to spectacularity was characterized by some – as noted previously, and as Chapter Two explores in greater detail – as attended by unique difficulties.⁷⁵

Bits and pieces were exactly the sorts of things the eighteenth century inherited from the previous era's virtuosi, and the cabinets of curiosity they curated and plumbed. New generations of philosopher-scientists distanced themselves from the *Wunderkammer* tradition, which came increasingly to be regarded as epistemologically compromised by a lack of taxonomic seriousness and a weird mixture of aesthetic and philosophical imperatives. Its weirdnesses – its preference for singularities and bizarreries – began to lose their luster.⁷⁶ This is not at all to say that curiosities lost their entire appeal, but their involvement in an expanding – and, by some accounts, vulgarizing – commodity culture was typified by sites like the Chelsea Bun House, near Ranelagh Gardens, where exotic timepieces mingled with *lusus naturae*, surprising foreign trinkets, and, not least, buns.⁷⁷ For Jane Goodall, this is precisely the sort of admixture that patrons of the Royal Society simultaneously exploited and disavowed: at Bartholomew Fair and elsewhere, she explains, natural philosophers looked to spectacles to form a science that would not make a spectacle of itself.⁷⁸ As animal performances continued to draw crowds – not all of them popular – their unsuitability for genuine natural-historical inquiry became a common theme. In 1780s Paris, as Louise Robbins notes, menageries were criticized for prioritizing spectacle over usefulness, and for failing to provide an atmosphere congenial to productive observation. Naturalists complained, in a spirit that

⁷⁵ See Kristin M. Girtten, "Unsexed Souls: Natural Philosophy as Transformation in Eliza Haywood's *Female Spectator*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 43.1 (2009), pp. 56-66.

⁷⁶ For more on these shifts in sensibility and science, see Barbara Maria Stafford, "The Eighteenth-Century: Towards an Interdisciplinary Model," *The Art Bulletin* 70.1 (Mar. 1988), p. 13.

⁷⁷ See Altick, *The Shows of London*, p. 19.

⁷⁸ See Jane R. Goodall, *Performance and Evolution in the Age of Darwin: Out of the natural order* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 12.

may recall Burke's regard for animal sublimity, that the creatures on display were too restive – and in fact too dangerous – to make fit objects of study.⁷⁹

This dissertation works to recuperate the spectacular underpinnings of eighteenth-century natural history, and in so doing, it contributes to an estimable scholarly tradition represented by the works of Goodall, Lorraine Daston, Katharine Park, and others. By enriching the field of correspondence between polite science and popular entertainment, the importance of performativity to ideas of (non-)nature becomes manifest. Chapter Three preoccupies itself most overtly with these themes. But the present study is as concerned with those creatures, processes, and habitats which might not seem obviously spectacular, but whose tendency to frustrate representation and access sometimes leads commentators to describe them in terms of spectacularity. So the undersea and its contents, as Chapter Two explains, can invite associations with gaudy inauthenticity, partly because they are so uncongenial to aesthetic and ontological order – or, taking a less negative view, because they are so amenable to forms and materials that express spectacular delicacy. These are not only stories of peremptory intellectual and aesthetic exclusion – they are also histories of narrative and representative opportunism, nurtured amongst natures that do not quite behave. Thus Chapter One's story of Irish bogs, which activate as much as they frustrate, enabling new configurations of historical time and even geographical space.

As those bogs imply, it is impossible to apprehend eighteenth-century science – not to mention eighteenth-century spectacle – with any degree of accuracy without considering the significance of mercantilist and imperial networks of travel and exchange. John Gascoigne, Richard Drayton, Londa Schiebinger, Claudia Swan, and Beth Tobin are only a few of the scholars whose work has illuminated pivotal intersections between the history of natural history and the

⁷⁹ See Louise E. Robbins, *Elephant Slaves and Pampered Parrots: Exotic Animals in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2002), p. 65.

history of empire.⁸⁰ Spectacles were likewise populated by sundry things – and lives – brought back to Britain from foreign parts. As figures like George Edwards – explored at length in Chapter Three – demonstrate, spectacular culture was a key mediator between exotic thing and scientific nature; it had a vital place in the constellation of constitutive elements that Daniela Bleichmar has rightly described as mobilizing natural-historical knowledge.⁸¹ But to what extent did spectacularity write itself back upon foreign and imperial space, and what have been the consequences of this inscription for ideas of nature, particularly as they apply themselves differentially to distinct places and environments?

In what follows, it will become apparent that a better understanding of eighteenth-century spectacularity yields at least a partial response to this query. Exotic and imperial nature was by no means eschewed by mainstream currents in theatrical, artistic, and literary culture; *Omai* and *Ramah Droog* are only the examples closest to hand. But the imaginative and aesthetic distance obtaining between picturesque and sublime paintings – and set decorations – and animal shows and menageries suggests a bifurcation in the idea of nature that is all the more engaging for its obviousness. At the core of modern biodiversity discourse are aesthetic and performative ideals, which conjure a world adorned variously and harmoniously by plants and animals. That worldview runs into trouble when it tends toward dazzle, or when the shock of lives lived and lost – as at the Netherlands’s “rewilded” nature reserve, the Oostvaardersplassen⁸² – comes uncomfortably close.

⁸⁰ See John Gascoigne, “The ordering of nature and the ordering of empire: a commentary,” in *Visions of Empire: Voyages, botany, and representations of nature*, ed. David Philip Miller & Peter Hanns Reill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 107-17; Richard Drayton, *Nature’s Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the ‘Improvement’ of the World* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000); Londa Schiebinger & Claudia Swan, Introduction to *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce, and Politics in the Early Modern World*, ed. Schiebinger & Swan (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Colonizing Nature: The Tropics in British Arts and Letters, 1760-1820* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

⁸¹ See Daniela Bleichmar, “Exploration in Print: Books and Botanical Travel from Spain to the Americas in the Late Eighteenth Century,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 70.1 (Mar 2007), p. 149.

⁸² See Kolbert, “Recall of the Wild,” *The New Yorker* (Dec 24/31 2012), pp. 50-60.

Conservation discourse, especially as it pertains to the Global South, is haunted by a desire for breathtaking feats of charismatic animalism that do not violate the screen, picture plane, or electrified fence. Eighteenth-century spectacularity was notorious for these sorts of transgressions, and some closer familiarity therewith might avail of opportunities to be not only more informed, but more humane.

Natures and Humanities

György Lukács wrote, in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), that Nature had come to connote that which grows spontaneously, in the absence of human artifice, as well as a kind of vestige, of something originary and pure, which persons held inside themselves and protected from artifice and its greatest agent, civilization.⁸³ Caleb Williams's inward turn has real meaning for the idea of the natural, because when nature comes to connote solitude, introspection, tranquility, and contemplation, it excludes at least as much as it incorporates. This is a key insight, particularly for environmental humanists whose work is done, to a powerful extent, in the Romantic tradition of nature and its numerous descendants.⁸⁴ To a preponderant extent, the history of modern environmental thought is the history of the inheritance and redeployment of the kind of sentiment in evidence in works like Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village*. This has commonly entailed either little consideration for, or explicit condemnation of, the spectacular. Performance and popularity have proven relevant for studies of museums, zoos, and nature films, but then these are places and products that are very rarely taken seriously as reflections of "Nature."

⁸³ See excerpt in John Berger, "Why Look at Animals?" *About Looking* (New York: Vintage International, 1991), p. 17.

⁸⁴ For a discussion of the persistence of Romanticism, and especially the ideal of the pastoral, in ecocriticism, see Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 33.

A standard narrative emerges from texts like Carolyn Merchant's path-breaking environmental history, *The Death of Nature* (1980), which ruefully observed a gulf growing, gradually but inexorably, between early modern Britons and the natural world. To believe this – and there are appealing justifications for doing so – one must take up a culturally and historically contingent sense of nature as rural and pastoral.⁸⁵ In a reading of James Grainger's *Sugar-Cane* (1764), Beth Tobin implicates spectacularity in the sort of story Merchant tells: by representing West Indian space as spectacularly, spontaneously bountiful, the poem seems to remove agricultural labor from the scene.⁸⁶ But it is not straightforwardly true that, for residents of the eighteenth century, a move to the city connoted less interaction with the natural – at exhibitions, markets, and fairs, the very opposite could be true.

Of course, as we have seen, metropolitan life then, as now, attracted relentless accusations of unnaturalness – in Raymond Williams's influential study, this was for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century contexts entangled with the expropriation of the peasantry and its displacement, actual and physical, by landed wealth and the mythology of rural idyll promoted by the same.⁸⁷ As Charles Watkins observes, the register through which tensions like these were articulated was significantly aesthetic: in “On the Bad Effects of Stripping and Cropping Trees” (1786), Uvedale Price – better known for his *Essay on the Picturesque* (1794) – reprimanded landowners for permitting their tenants, “too apt to consider them merely as furnishing him with fuel,” to manage their woods.⁸⁸ Then, as now, appeals to any definition of nature have to be examined for their derivations and ramifications, not uncritically accepted as referring to some fixed reality.

⁸⁵ See Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), pp. 77-8.

⁸⁶ Tobin, *Colonizing Nature*, p. 36.

⁸⁷ See Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 32.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Charles Watkins, *Trees, Woods and Forests: A Social and Cultural History* (London: Reaktion, 2014), p. 133.

In a provocative and influential consideration of zoos, John Berger tells a story that forms an intriguing point of comparison with the one Merchant lays forth regarding the decline of agricultural life in the early modern period: as westerners lost contact with – and sight of – animals, zoos emerged as sites of compensation. It is not entirely clear whether this is linked, for Berger – as it is for Merchant – with the decline of the husbandman. But this appears to be the case, in view of the connection he draws between animals and the peasantry, which is, in his phrase, “the only class who, throughout history, has remained familiar with animals and maintained the wisdom which accompanies that familiarity.” What is apparent is that animal performances at eighteenth-century spectacles were neither agricultural, on the one hand, nor simply incipiently zoological, on the other. And while Berger acknowledges the roles of imperialism and exoticism in the advent of the zoo, he leaves an obvious but important aspect of his own argument unexplored: if one accepts, for instance, that the eighteenth-century Britons who left the countryside for the city experienced diminished contact with livestock, one must nonetheless acknowledge that *other* animals became suddenly available to their sensoria. As some creatures were “withdrawn from daily life”⁸⁹ – Berger must not be thinking of urban service animals, like the horses that pulled drays – others began to populate it. It may be worth asking whether, for emergent and enduring sensibilities, the former category constituted nature, not to say *animal*, while the latter did not.

Debord and his interlocutors have written and rewritten the story of late modernity as the story of spectacle – of, in Dennis Kennedy’s phrase, “the spectacularization of life.”⁹⁰ This dissertation proposes two amendments to this view. First, it suggests that the sense of the current era’s especial spectacularity is a contingent formation, one that relies on pastoral and Romantic

⁸⁹ See Berger, “Why Look at Animals?” pp. 21-8.

⁹⁰ See Dennis Kennedy, *The Spectator and the Spectacle: Audiences in Modernity and Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 7.

myths of the past that sought, quite self-consciously, to reform and obscure the visual regimes to which they objected. Second, and perhaps more productive, is a claim that life – and nature – “spectacularized” might be something other than the products of a rapacious consumer culture, denuded of identity, agency, and so forth. They can, instead, signify the potential – or even the requirement – for spectacle to reflect and incorporate those processes, and indeed lives, that do not, or have not, settled comfortably within aesthetic, narrative, and epistemological structures. Spectacularity is not only a matter of producing images – it is a kind of ecosystem, involving performance, attendance, self-fashioning, and so forth. Its recurrence, as a strategy for representing that which eludes representation, is perhaps not so much a crude failure of imagination as a complex theater admitting new performances to its ambience.

Those performances, in turn, encourage and express unusual patternings of subjectivity, aesthetics, and narrative and pictorial form. For scientific, literary and otherwise artistic traditions deeply committed to marking nature’s contour lines – and to reabsorbing those lines’ formal and philosophical design – spectacles provide encounters of an unexampled kind. Several of the instances furnished by this introduction have indicated the ways that spectacularity troubles coherent subjectivity, or provokes worries that inspire the cohesion thereof. This suggests rich opportunities for conceiving nature outside the kind of “subject-object dualism” that Timothy Morton and others have critiqued.⁹¹ Furthermore, attending at gaudy shows may help enrich and diversify the landscapes of the environmental humanities, offering views of urban space – describable now, as in the eighteenth century, as “diverse and collectable spectacles”⁹² – that might complicate our understandings of human-animal relations, the naturalness of built environments,

⁹¹ Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 135.

⁹² See John Urry, “City Life and the Senses,” in Gary and Sophie Watson (ed.), *The New Blackwell Companion to the City* (Blackwell: Blackwell Reference Online, 2011).

and so on. In the twenty-first century, the spectacular remains a ready target for those who take aim at the confusions, vulgarities, and falsehoods that appear to come between human beings and a virtuous engagement with nature.⁹³ Spectacles have, of course, contributed mightily to the systems of images and stories that the West uses to access the world; but if having done so is a discreditable offense, then it is obvious that many other, and more conventionally acceptable, players merit inclusion among the rolls of the villains. This dissertation operates under the assumption that it is far more reasonable, and more productive, to ask how and why aesthetic, epistemological, and indeed moral value accrue to certain visions, while some become execrable, and others engender more ambiguous varieties of response.

Such questions may help deepen scholarly appreciation for the movements and meanings of eighteenth-century aesthetics, particularly as those aesthetics pertain to the idea of nature. They may also indicate how the places, times, and lives of spectacle create strange, significant ground for interactions between empirical practice, aesthetic sensibility, and subjective selves. It is hoped that, in addition to enlivening and refining eighteenth-century debates, this project will reinvigorate those narrative and otherwise representational debates that appear so pressing for twenty-first century nature. Spectacles can function like the “heterogeneous constellations of actants” proposed, by Robert Markley, as the proper objects of ecocritical inquiry; they offer encounters with transient, piquant, and undecidable performances.⁹⁴ Those performances are worth confronting not only on their own terms, but in terms of the manners in which they become arranged, displayed, or removed from sight. An approach like this one might help us understand

⁹³ See, for instance, Jim Igoe, “The spectacle of nature in the global economy of appearances: Anthropological engagements with the spectacular mediations of transnational conservation,” *Critique of Anthropology* 30.4 (December 2010), pp. 376; and Susan G. Davis, *Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1997).

⁹⁴ Robert Markley, “Monsoon Cultures: Climate and Acculturation in Alexander Hamilton’s *A New Account of the East Indies*,” *New Literary History* 38 (2007), p. 530.

what happens when stories like the Cambrian explosion, or climate change, are told, traduced, and otherwise transformed.

Scenes

This introduction has attempted to example the eighteenth century's preoccupation with metropolitan spectacle, the importance of nature – or at least of not-nature – to spectacularity, and the congeries of connotations that spectacles bore. Those connotations are at the core of what follows, for this book is more than a litany of shows that set out to represent dazzling natural phenomena, such as earthquakes or hurricanes. Sights like these are important, not least because they did so much to spur technological advances on the eighteenth-century stage, not to mention the affective and narrative transformations that accompanied those advances, and carried their influence to other genres. But this dissertation is at least as preoccupied by tropes of spectacularity as it is by the material apparatuses thereof. This relates to a central claim, that spectacle is recognizable, in the eighteenth century, as an alternative – or in some cases prior – category of aesthetic and affective experience, one that is irreducible to a precise set of social, ideological, or spatial coordinates. “The public,” claims Tom Brown's narrator, “is a great spectacle, always new, which presents itself to the eyes of private men, and amuses them. These private men are so many diversified spectacles that offer themselves to the public view, and divert it.”⁹⁵ As writers identified, described, and responded to spectacle, they helped establish its character, and its representative personalities; these, it goes without saying, were neither simple nor uniform, but their complexity only underscores the potential value of bringing them more clearly into view.

⁹⁵ Brown, *Amusements Serious and Comical and Other Works*, p. 76.

Chapter 1: Bogs and the Skeletons of Ireland

Nature's Spectacles is broadly preoccupied with metropolitan space, and in particular with London, but it begins with an exterior view. Two very different sorts of spectacle – a pachydermatous Dublin blaze, and a collection of odd bones and bogs – are juxtaposed, in order to demonstrate the potential for spectacular behavior to issue from unlikely things and places. Allen Mullen's awkward, intrepid handling of a gruesome incident shows how urban spectacles could function as the loci of variegated concerns, such as the vulgar tendencies of the impoverished masses. But Mullen's was also the opportunistic performance of a doctor and natural philosopher keen to elevate his profile and encourage his career. A spectacular – and violent – event helps transform a fairly primitive sort of animal act into a piece of polite and publishable knowledge.

The process, or moment, of transformation is as worthy of consideration as the act and article that preceded and followed it. Dwelling thereupon helps point to the mobility of spectacle, and of the imaginative license it appears to authorize. Chapter One's second case study concerns Mullen's colleague in the Dublin Philosophical Society, Thomas Molyneux, who was inspired by the remains of the Giant Irish Deer – and by the boggy places that produced them – to rewrite Ireland's natural and geographic history. Bogs are, in important respects, distinctly undazzling. But their metamorphic tendencies, and their strange treatments of time, space, and species – not to mention their associations with undesirable elements in seventeenth-century Ireland – render them obliquely spectacular. For Molyneux, they help furnish proof that Irish nature has been neglected by Anglocentric natural histories, and that that nature proves a vague but powerful affinity between Ireland and the New World. Such a retelling of Irish origins might resonate, in powerful ways, with attempts at political redefinition for Ireland, attempts undertaken by some of Molyneux's intimates.

Taken together, the elephant and the bog set the proceeding scene. They show how spectacularity expressed material and intellectual networks which were significantly English, but also significantly foreign, imperial, and global. They suggest some of the ways that the products of metropolitan formations, such as the brand of empirical philosophy promoted by the Royal Society, applied themselves to far-flung contexts but could find, in those contexts, stuff that threatened to destabilize their very foundations. A city – in this case, Dublin – and odd, meaning-laden features of the landscape – Ireland’s bogs – are co-conspirators in the processes at work; here, as in the rest of the dissertation, the range of participants is large and varied. Not least among them is spectacle, as incident and as tendency, a weird and weirdly empowering space where worlds shift, emerge, and disappear from view.

Chapter Two: The Porcellaneous Ocean

Off the coast of Connacht, in the west of Ireland, lie large beds of a coralline algal (*Lithothamnion*) residue called maerl. It is one of the ocean’s many actual – or apparent – oxymorons: formed, like pearls, from calcium carbonate, and most closely resembling coral, it nonetheless derives from a marine plant. It provokes a sense like the one Ed Ricketts and John Steinbeck recalled upon encountering plumularian hydroids, in the Gulf of California: those “animals” were, “in appearance at least...so like plants” that they seemed to “indicate to the imagination a bridge between flora and fauna.”⁹⁶ For Tim Robinson, maerl suggests still other, and odder, bridges: he described it as “composed of tiny twiglike bits of something like unglazed pottery, white, cream coloured, pale green or faintly violet flushed.”⁹⁷ Marine lives have long

⁹⁶ John Steinbeck, *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 194.

⁹⁷ Tim Robinson, *Connemara: The Last Pool of Darkness* (Dublin: Penguin, 2008).

challenged writers, artists, and scientists who search terrestrial epistemologies and memories for points of reference, coordinates that often fail to accommodate stony plants and ceramic animals.

Chapter Two shows how the undersea became visible, for eighteenth-century audiences, readers, and consumers, through playful and often dazzling shapes and ornaments, and the sensibilities they reflected and informed. Much of this section's materials is closely related to the Rococo, a rather loose term for the ludic, sensual, and often ostentatious continental mode that received some of its greatest expressions in porcelain and other plastic arts. Ocean life and ocean space posed imaginative problems for the pastoral, the picturesque, and the sublime, problems that appear around the margins of some of the period's most important proto-oceanographic researches, such as those of Robert Boyle, Luigi Ferdinando Marsigli, and Jean-André Peyssonnel. But in addition to its enthusiasm for shell-curved lines, and coralline forms, the Rococo manifests a sustained aqueous sensibility, and was eminently suited to domains that could be – and often still are – described as repositories of extraordinary treasure.

However, the Rococo was a pastel thorn in the flesh of much eighteenth-century aesthetic philosophy, not to mention the discipline of art history, which was then in rapid development. Associated then, and ever since, with ostentation, femininity, and superficiality, if its forms were marinal, they also provoked widespread – and remarkably efficacious – condemnation. The Rococo evoked performance, and particularly artificial posturing, as well as an unhealthy concern for fashion; these, in conjunction with its continental reputation, contributed to the emergence of a cliché of rococo spectacularity. Chapter Three calls for a reconsideration of rococo form, maintaining a special focus on its undersea obsessions; it suggests that the idea of the Rococo, and the idea of the ocean, were and remain mutually constitutive, and that their aesthetic and epistemological oddments are worth considering in tandem. When Jean-André Peyssonnel made

paradigm-busting inquiries into the nature of coral, he found himself describing a rococo sort of creature, seeming at once animal, vegetal, and rock-like. Here, by virtue of its taxonomic and aesthetic strangeness, was a zone making a spectacle of itself, a habit the eighteenth century struggled to accept but could not fail to record.

Chapter Three: Nature's Performances

Chapters One and Two depict the ways that spectacularity is significantly international, material, mobile, and rhetorical – the ways, in other words, that it attaches itself to outlying phenomena, and outlying lives. The dynamics established through these relationships are variously – and sometimes simultaneously – expedient and exclusionary. In Chapter Three, the matter of spectacle – and some of the stuffs encountered in the preceding sections – comes loudly alive in the context of Bartholomew Fair, in London. By no means the city's only fairground – let alone venue for popular entertainments – Bartholomew Fair was nonetheless its preeminent showplace, where animal acts, puppet plays, freak shows, mechanical contraptions, and high-wire dancers mingled in an ambience of extraordinary theatricality. It was subversive, anti-intellectual, and frivolous – and, at precisely the same time, it was the envy of establishment playhouses, an invaluable spur to natural philosophy, and fuel for countless poems and journals.

Natural historians like George Edwards absorbed fairground spectacle and produced text and illustrations that bore few traces of their cacophonous source materials. At places like Bartholomew Fair – places that, by some accounts, could hardly be further removed from nature – natural history was happening. Chapter Three attends closely to Edwards's *Gleanings of Natural History* (1758), partly so as to recuperate and clarify the debts those words and images – and their sundry admirers – owe to the fairstead. More specifically, however, it wonders how fairground

performances left impressions on science's countenance, impressions that persons like Edwards assiduously managed. At issue, here, are questions of attitude, gesture, and authenticity: what does it mean for a person, or another animal, to behave naturally? What sorts of affective responses does a natural performance provoke? And how to define the parameters – of sense, knowledge, spectatorship, and subjectivity – that work to establish an observer capable of distinguishing between the natural and its contrary terms?

Chapter Three testifies to the existence, by the middle of the eighteenth century, of sophisticated and increasingly widespread critiques of spectacularity. Fairground spectacles, the persons who attended them, the performances they encouraged, and the cities that hosted them, were opposed, with ever greater frequency and fervor, to an idea of nature that connoted peacefulness, solitude, and picturesqueness. Natural historians like Edwards borrowed extensively from fairgrounds, while declining to make spectacles of their own works. But what this analysis clarifies is that the *Gleanings*, beyond reflecting the lives and specimens available at a place like Bartholomew Fair, transmits its performative spirit. Comparatively little has been done to explore relations between performance and the idea of nature in eighteenth-century contexts; this segment of the dissertation aims to begin that work.

Chapter Four: Picturesque Spectacle

In the closing decades of the eighteenth century, two related aesthetic concepts – the picturesque and the sublime – received extensive and enthusiastic treatment by philosophers, poets, painters, theatrical set designers, and so forth. Early in this introduction, some nice – but consequential – distinctions were made between the spectacular and Edmund Burke's rendition of the sublime. The distance between spectacularity and picturesqueness seems, intuitively, less

deserving of measurement: allowing for some notable exceptions, it appears unlikely that many would confuse a landscape and a fairground spectacle. One of the picturesque's foremost articulators and advocates, William Gilpin, expressed just this sort of sentiment in the *Three Essays*, by way of reference to a natural history: "The *curious*, and *fantastic* forms of nature," wrote Gilpin, "are by no means the favourite objects of the lovers of landscape....The *lusus naturæ* is the naturalist's province, not the painter's."⁹⁸ An artist like George Edwards might have reasonably objected that his work worked toward a focus not on singularities, but on commonalities – on honoring and reproducing the lineaments of nature, understood as a comprehensive system of color and form. It is telling, then, that Gilpin imagined his picturesque ideal as so far removed from dazzling bizarrerie that even late-century natural history looked like a freak show by comparison.

Chapter Four identifies and considers the unexpected persistence of spectacle within Gilpin's picturesque, a sophisticated and lasting program for theorizing not only landscape and garden aesthetics, but, by extension, travel, narrative, time, and even environmental change. Gilpin was highly sensitive to, if not precociously geologically understanding of, the transformations that had gradually – or suddenly – formed the countryside he wandered and recollected. He is elaborate, and eloquent, on the need for the picturesque image-maker to effect a weird approximation of slow environmental process – or instant, remarkable violence – in the act of making a painting. Constrained by the temporal and imaginative limits that haunt the human mind and frame, such an approximation amounts to a painterly spectacle, a metaphorization of momentous violence that drives the picturesque spirit and brain. What is remarkable about this is Gilpin's understanding, only tacitly expressed but manifestly deeply felt, that the act of making landscape appear involves

⁹⁸ William Gilpin, *Three Essays*, p. 43.

a visit to spectacular space, a most “*fantastic*” zone where things happen that would be unpleasant, if not unrepresentable, by picturesque standards.

Looking for picturesque spectacle is something other than an opportunistic analytical trick. It is a sign that spectacularity could remain a powerfully productive imaginative and metaphorical resource for late-century writers and artists, many of whom had fully imbibed a sense that mere spectacle was aesthetically undesirable, or altogether incomprehensible on aesthetic terms. This has consequences for our sense of emergent Romantic subjectivities which were vigorously conversant with picturesqueness and sublimity, and which often went to great lengths to avoid making spectacles of themselves. These, of course, are consequences which bear on subsequent trajectories of selfhood, the natural world, and the many and various theorizations of each which relied upon the other. To put the thing somewhat critically, picturesque spectacle shows us that it and its influential kin are haunted by a spectacularity that they alternately draw from and disavow. More generous, perhaps, would be to say that Gilpin’s picturesque shows us how vital, and how challenging, spectacularity remained as it was pushed further and further into Nature’s hinterland.

CHAPTER ONE

BOGS AND THE SKELETONS OF IRELAND: ELEPHANTS, MOOSE, AND NEW WORLDS

Very early on June 17, 1681 – a Friday – an elephant burned alive in Dublin when “the Booth wherein [he] was kept, took fire.” His temporary enclosure had been erected by an impresario named Mr. Wilkins, “very near the Council-Chamber, and the Custom-House,” on what is now Essex Street, not far south of the River Liffey. After the conflagration, members of the gathering mob reportedly had to be prevented, by “a File of Musqueteers,” from attempting “to procure some part of” the charred remains. Allen Mullen,¹ a medical graduate of Trinity College, recognized in the ghastly spectacle an opportunity for a procuration of his own: the following day he would manage to secure the badly burnt body of the elephant for dissection. He later produced a celebrated drawing and description of its atomy, or skeleton. Between the living animal and a 1682 number of the *Philosophical Transactions*, an incendiary event intervenes: a natural spectacle of one order – an exotic exhibition – explodes, before its contents come to rest on the surface of Mullen’s manuscript. The Dublin elephant represents a chance at professional advancement for an Anglo-Irish doctor; an instance of spectacular geography, or spectacle’s potential to violate the conventional workings of geographical space by bringing far-flung entities into contact; and an instance *par excellence* of the way that spectacle effects a transition, a transformation, a becoming. The elephant’s body empties of life and metamorphoses – dismembered, then re-membered – into the signs of itself, of comparative anatomy, and, in a sense, of Ireland.

¹ Mullen’s name is a matter of some confusion. For instance, the National Library of Ireland entry for “An anatomical account of the elephant” notes no fewer than six variants, including Mullen, Moulen, Moulin, Mullin, Möline, and Molyneux.

That process was neither simple nor straightforward. The first paragraphs of Mullen's *An anatomical account of the elephant accidentally burnt in Dublin* (1682) develop a tone surprising for its reticence. Mullen is apprehensive that his essay "appear in Print" when it is so little likely to satisfy those who imagine the elephant as a special marvel, and desire an affirmation and explication of its marvelousness. He fears his audience will anticipate an anatomical description as dazzling as its subject – fears, that is, because Mullen seems sure his inquiry might have been more successful had its circumstances been more happy. He had no "Optick Glasses" – no engyscopes or microscopes – or "other helps for curious Observations." The fire happened at three o'clock in the morning, an inconvenience which did not prevent "multitudes" from gathering round. Not content with having a look – they could do so, now that the exhibitor's "great rates" no longer applied – the gawpers began, Mullen claims, trying to take the elephant's scalded parts away with them. Wilkins had a makeshift "shed" built for protecting the bits and pieces, and for the preparation of a skeleton which would serve for the animal's exhibitory afterlife.

Mullen, who then was a fellow of the College of Physicians, approached Wilkins, offering his professional services in exchange for "the whole management of the matter"; the exhibitor had scrambled to recruit some "Butchers" for the affair, but Mullen wanted them gone, so he could proceed with "a general dissection," attended by "some Painters" who would take "the *Icons* of each part." This plan proved incompatible with reality: the carcass was fast putrefying, and Wilkins became worried that the authorities would remove it (and worried, moreover, that he would himself be "punished for suffering [the carcass] to be there"). So the sordid undertaking proceeded almost immediately, with the butchers assisting – "their forwardness to cut and slash what came first in their way, and their unruliness withal" – and Mullen directing "by Candle-light." Parts of the elephant's body were "burnt," and the greater part of the rest was "more or less defac'd by being

parboiled.” Had Mullen the time to hire those painters, they would have had to render their figures from things discolored, distempered, and, in a sense, disguised. These exigencies informed an account – framed as an address to William Petty, president of the Dublin Philosophical Society – which is distinctly apologetic in its register.

Mullen was born in Ballyculter, County Down, near the mouth of Strangford Lough. His name appears in William Molyneux’s minutes for a meeting of the fledgling Dublin Philosophical Society on January 28, 1684.² He is credited, in Molyneux’s letter to his brother Thomas of June 14, as having directed the construction of “a laboratory” for the Society at a property belonging to a Dublin apothecary named Wetherel, where the group’s meetings were then newly quartered.³ In a summary of the Society’s achievements, published in the 1840s in the *Proceedings* of the Royal Irish Academy, Mullen is credited with papers on “Magnetical Experiments,” archaeological discoveries “at Dontrilegue, County Cork” (perhaps Duntryleague, in Limerick), and sundry anatomical, physiological, zoological, and chemical topics. These latter included “New Anatomical Discourses on the Eyes of Animals,” published with the report on the elephant and distinguished by its novel explication of the vascularity of the optical organ.⁴ Working conditions notwithstanding, Mullen’s pachydermatous findings remain significant for having established the curious fact that the elephantine frame lacks a pleural cavity.⁵

The elephant’s ordeal, and the doctor’s memory thereof, bear a strange and striking resemblance to an episode from William Gilpin’s *Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales, &c.*, which appeared in print one hundred years after Mullen’s essay. Gilpin,

² See W. R. Wilde & Owen Lloyd, “Memoir of the Dublin Philosophical Society of 1683,” *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy (1836-1869)* 3 (1844-1847), p. 164.

³ Wilde & Lloyd, “Memoir of the Dublin Philosophical Society of 1683,” p. 166.

⁴ Wilde & Lloyd, “Memoir of the Dublin Philosophical Society of 1683,” p. 172.

⁵ Mary Mulvihill, “Taking on a mammoth task,” *Irish Times*, Apr. 17, 2003.

in the course of a picturesque tour in 1770, was nearing the Welsh village of Pyle when he and his companions came upon a piece of commotion. The locals, he wrote, were carrying supplies to the coast, where a vessel belonging to the Dutch West India Company had just been naufraged, with some loss of life. “The populace,” he explained, “came down in large bodies to pillage the wreck; which the officers of the customs, and gentlemen of the country, assembled to protect.” In the aftermath of a fatal accident, the body of the boat has lost its integrity, and a horde has to be prevented from redistributing its fragments for good. Its defense appears to momentarily crystallize a significant chasm in the social order: between the “populace,” on the one hand, and confederated “officers” and “gentlemen,” on the other.⁶ For Gilpin, the scene may have prompted other, and arboreal, connotations: he wrote elsewhere that the best sort of oak for building a ship is commonly the most picturesque – “the crooked one, forming short turns, and elbows, which the shipwrights and carpenters commonly call *knee-timber*.”⁷ The identity of the Dutch West India ship’s timber is not recorded, but it is plausible that, for someone so attuned to the bodies of trees as was Gilpin, a shipwreck threatened not only lives and goods carried at sea, but the potential for woody re-collecting and re-membering. The time and space of catastrophe must be made productive, because if not managed, it might curiously mince a gallimaufry.

Much more will be said, later in this study, of Gilpin and his strategy for dealing with – and exploiting the potential of – spectacle, and particularly spectacular violence. A brief continuation of the current picturesque digression is worth indulging, nonetheless. Unsurprisingly, Gilpin’s shipwreck prompts him to meditate on the representational possibilities, and challenges, presented by the view. This sort of hubbub, he writes, is potentially susceptible to “the pencil,” but

⁶ William Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales, &c.* (London: R. Blamire, 1782), pp. 76-7.

⁷ William Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery, and other Woodland Views, (Relative chiefly to Picturesque Beauty) Illustrated by the Scenes of New-Forest in Hampshire*, 3 vols (London: R. Blamire, 1791), vol. I, p. 25.

“the management of it requires great artifice.” That effort relies on effecting – and, more importantly, balancing – two core imperatives: combination and contrast. Unity is required, in order to make the image sensible – to make it communicate a coherent idea. Of course, lumping everyone and everything together will not do, but nor will a hodge-podge: figures should be organized into a small number of groups, and a pleasing degree of variety should distinguish the figures within each group from one another. This, Gilpin explicitly states, is a matter of turning “a croud” into “a good assemblage,” or, in his terms, a landscape.⁸

Gilpin encounters the disordered – and discomposing – body of a boat, not to mention a scenario of generalized disarray, and brings the picturesque mind to bear on making a new arrangement for the whole. In Chapter Four, the nature of that mind – its temporal, narrative, and ideational preoccupations – will be explored in far greater detail. For now, it is perhaps enough to have acknowledged Gilpin’s assembling impulse, and to consider its relation to Mullen’s administration of the burnt elephant, the piece of natural philosophy he produced therefrom, and the way he chooses to tell his story. Fiery, public agony is no more a necessary prerequisite to the practice of comparative anatomy than are shipwrecks the logical precursors of picture-making. But these examples highlight the special status of the spectacular scene, a scene as tainted by turbulent agitation as it is fruitful of epistemological and aesthetic opportunity. They are imaginable as unconsolidated, as available to various, perhaps conflicting, outcomes; at the same time, imagining them always begins after the point that some resolution has been achieved, whether through narrative or a pictorial frame. So critical attempts to excavate spectacle from image, or from language, cannot assume the possibility of arriving, wholly unmediated, at the hurly-burly. Still, a sustained consideration of spectacle’s pulsations, and of its disappearances, may approach the

⁸ Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye*, pp. 77-9.

curious interstice between dismemberment and remembering, and render visible the worlds that hang about its fleeting atmosphere.



Figure 1. Allen Mullen's elephant

To a critical extent, Mullen's elephant – or his illustration thereof – is an emblem of late seventeenth-century empiricism. He will not bother, explains the *Account*, providing the conventional review of prior sources – potentially culled, in this instance, from Pliny, Conrad Gessner, and Jean-Baptiste Tavernier – because in the presence of flesh and bone, those reports lose their powers of appeal. This is, in a sense, an innovation in form and genre: instead of establishing a correspondence with the extant literature, Mullen provides the textual and illustrative analogue of anatomical theatricality. He guides the reader through a methodical examination of the elephant's various parts, liberally describing the appearance, smell, and even feel of each. In the previous century, Andreas Vesalius had fomented the visual turn in studies of anatomy, promoting what Sachiko Kusukawa has called “ocular belief.” When Mullen imagined hiring a squadron of artists to isolate and represent the segments of the elephant, he was engaging in a fantasy suggested, perhaps, by the stunning sumptuousness and complexity of Vesalius's *De humani corporis fabrica libri septem*, published at Basel in 1543. *De humani*'s images worked in concert not only with the work's text, but with a culture of demonstration, and of performance, as

at the Anatomisch Theater at Leiden, now housed by Museum Boerhaave. And as the human bodies Vesalius dissected at the anatomical theater in Padua – some of which belonged to prostitutes – attest, such performances were never completely insulated from the public, from commerce, and even from violence.⁹

At stake in the theater of Mullen's *Account* was membership – for himself, and for his circle – in intellectual networks that extended, first and foremost, to England, but also, and no less importantly, to the continent. There is apparent, in William Molyneux's correspondence with his brother Thomas – resident, in the early years of the Society's establishment, in Leiden – an impulse to affirm not only the Dublin group's precocious productivity, and its being equal in eminence to the new Philosophical Society at Oxford, but its being recognized on the far side of the English Channel: "Our society has been complimented in the philosophical acts," explained William, "wherein for curious subjects...I think we may vie with any Oxford ever had, and truly most of the poems and speeches therein were excellent. Thus, Tom., you see that learning begins to peep out amongst us. The tidings, that our name is in the journals of Amsterdam, was very pleasing to me, and really, without vanity, I think our city and nation may be herein something beholding to us, for I believe the name Dublin has hardly ever before been printed or heard of amongst foreigners on a learned account."¹⁰ Like the elephant, the scientific and medical knowledge that constitute Mullen's professional *métier* are in transit, available for exchange, and trans-geographical in their tendencies. As latter sections of this chapter will explore in greater detail, Molyneux's invocation of "city" and "nation" is a powerful reflection of the manners in which

⁹ See Sachiko Kusukawa, *Picturing the Book of Nature: Images, Text, and Argument in Sixteenth-Century Human Anatomy and Medical Botany* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), pp. 184-218.

¹⁰ Wilde & Lloyd, "Memoir of the Dublin Philosophical Society of 1683," pp. 168-9.

natural-philosophical inquiry, before and at the turn of the eighteenth century, might be inflected by identity, as well as contribute to the development of identities.

What this means is that the pachydermal spectacle in Dublin promised, if appropriately wrangled, to satisfy more than curious, or even careerist, pleasures. By getting hold of the elephant, and putting it back together in a particular way, Mullen could contribute to the consolidation not only of an animal skeleton, or the discipline of comparative anatomy, but of a burgeoning scientific collective (the DPS would not formally cohere until the year after the *Account's* publication), as well as the unique social and geographical formations its members believed themselves to inhabit. The Molyneux correspondence shows that these formations could take shape in relation to persons, entities, and energies beyond England, suggesting at least a modicum of intellectual and institutional independence. Meanwhile, Anglo-Ireland was eagerly asserting itself: Dublin, in the seventeenth century the British Isles' second city,¹¹ boasted amenities which were frequently compared – and, not infrequently, fared well in the comparison – with counterparts in London. It also advertised a semiotics of urban squalor, and the punishment of deviant behavior. In 1709, a wooden enclosure was built in a corner of St Stephen's Green for the imprisonment – and display – of criminals. Another public cell was built at Wood Quay in 1732 for the temporary confinement of prostitutes and their johns. There was a tension, in Mullen's day, between a drive to enlarge Dublin's common spaces and a felt need to protect those spaces from the public; Oxmantown Green, on the north side of the Liffey, was walled and regulated from 1671, as was St Stephen's Green in the decade following.¹²

¹¹ Thomas E. Jordan, "Quality of Life in Seventeenth Century Dublin," *Dublin Historical Record* 61.2 (2008), p. 136.

¹² See Vandra Costello, "Public Spaces for Recreation in Dublin, 1660-1760," *Garden History* 35.2 (Winter 2007), p. 169.

Hardly surprising, then, that Dublin hosted a thriving and variegated culture of popular spectacles. A broad swathe of its seventeenth-century denizens were entertained by bull-baiting and wrestling shows, and its virtuosi could move between those entertainments and sites of learned conversation, like Dick's Coffee House. Dublin's theatrical culture was edified, in 1637, at the theater on St. Werburgh Street, though that arrangement lasted only several years. Smock Alley opened in 1662.¹³ The elephant, its booth, and its paying visitors participated in this culture. Its ultimate incensation effected violent disarrangements – of the elephant's performance, and of its body, as well as of the structures – material and economic – of animal spectacle. The elephant's body, and the performance in which it took part, shed one set of signifiers, and existed, briefly, in lieu thereof, or within range of multiple competing sensibilities. Within that uncertainty, spectacularity established itself in rarefied form, not the representation of spectacle but spectacle itself. It reigned, temporarily, but disorder is an unsustainable sort of order, and Mullen managed – by his own lights, and by posterity's lights, at least – to tame and direct its energies.

When William Hazlitt recalled encountering Raphael's cartoons, he effused that "A skeleton is barely left of [them]: but their mighty relics, like the bones of the Mammoth, tell us what the entire and living fabric must have been!"¹⁴ William Gilpin declared that a successful depiction of the wrecked ship and its environs would be composed so as to picturesquely figure forth "life, spirit, and action."¹⁵ Life, knowledge thereof, and much more besides can reissue from bones, from the remains of things, from what is imagined to be the trace of what is thought to have been left behind. This phenomenon can be entangled, of course, with all manner of force, from formal exigency to pure fantasy. Allen Mullen and the elephant indicate the manner in which

¹³ See Jordan, "Quality of Life in Seventeenth Century Dublin," p. 142.

¹⁴ William Hazlitt, *Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England* (London: Taylor & Hessey, 1824), p. 102.

¹⁵ Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye*, p. 77.

spectacle mediates the dislocation – ever incomplete – of life and meaning from one sort of performance to another.

The remainder of this chapter attempts another sort of dislocation, from the elephant's bones to those of *Megaloceros giganteus*, for several centuries a recurring character in the stories of old Ireland. One of those tales, presented in detail in what follows, testifies to spectacularity's portable powers: to the manner in which nature's performances are conjured, and rehearsed, by those who seek – whatever their purpose – to reimagine incident, history, and identity. For Thomas Molyneux – briefly mentioned, above, in connection with his brother William – the giant Irish deer (he calls it by a different name) appears the sign of spectacular Ireland, of a charismatic, prehistorical place that is compelling because it is at once dazzling and at a significant remove. He is authorized in doing so not by simple ignorance, or by ideology, but by the freakish machinations of Ireland's bogs, the repositories and engineers of Ireland's bones. These lowliest and least picturesque of landscape features express extraordinary capacities for disruption, as well as opportunities for inscription – attributes which lead them to behave spectacularly. This, as we shall see, is more than a critical sleight of hand: as wasteland, bogs attracted to themselves many of the aesthetic, ontological, and indeed social connotations that commentators would elsewhere ascribe to metropolitan spectacles, and to vulgar spectators. If bogs host spectacles, then perhaps bogs are like fairground booths, or tavern exhibitions – perhaps their spongy processes are like impresarios, and the technologies they exploit. For Thomas Molyneux, they were keen collaborators in a revision of Ireland, and of the worlds it might be made to connect and contain.

Bone-Picking

The lattermost segment of Colum McCann's *Transatlantic* (2013) draws the novel's disparate times and histories toward a salty lough in Northern Ireland. Hannah Carson swims Strangford – next to Allen Mullen's home-place – remembering as she does her son, Tomas, shot dead while pulling his rowboat ashore in October 1978. He'd been nineteen, and a natural philosopher. His boat and his bedroom were his astronomic ateliers: "Drifting out on the water. It all came down to vectors and angles. He wondered if there was a way to chart the natural world".¹⁶ Like the "migratory orbits"¹⁷ of his and his mother's ancestors, Tomas's death refuses neatly to account for itself: he might have been murdered for his hunting rifle, but Hannah is "still not certain whether it was UVF or IRA or UFF or INLA or whatever other species of idiot." For all her defiance, Hannah appears sure imminently to lose her family home, and with it, the lough's touch, to creditors in Bangor. As she confronts the specter of displacement, she thinks a brackish stream of Troubles, kinships, and ancient Ireland: "The stolen gun never resurfaced. Who knows what history it served, or whether it was just thrown away and buried down in the bog to join the ancient elk, the bones, the butter?"¹⁸

Hannah is a recent contributor to a rich tradition of digging Ireland's earth for contact with its natural antiquities, and with the stories they might be made to tell. She is also a poet of that antiquity's mightiest symbols, bogland and the bones of the giant deer, extinct on Irish soil for over eleven thousand years¹⁹. The balance of this chapter searches the boggy theories of Thomas

¹⁶ Colum McCann, *Transatlantic* (New York: Random House, 2013), 262.

¹⁷ McCann, *Transatlantic*, 249.

¹⁸ McCann, *Transatlantic*, 262.

¹⁹ Stephen Jay Gould, *Ever Since Darwin: Reflections in Natural History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 82.

Molyneux (1661-1773), doctor and antiquarian, who published “A Discourse Concerning the Large Horns Frequently Found under Ground in Ireland” in the *Philosophical Transactions* of England’s Royal Society in 1695, thirteen years after the appearance of Allen Mullen’s *Account*. Molyneux claimed those horns for the Irish Moose Deer, and believed they proved that Ireland was powerfully unlike England, and affined, no less powerfully, to relations on the far side of the Atlantic. For Hannah and for Thomas Molyneux, Irish bogs are boneyards, repositories of fossilized Irish times, and Irish worlds; the directions and magnitude of Irishness vectored from them in the late seventeenth century, and have done so ever since.

Molyneux’s Irish Moose Deer reared its extensive horns at a changeful spot in Irish history. In the short years since the elephant’s fiery demise, the island’s demographic, political, economic, and religious formations had been shifting tectonically. William of Orange had won the River Boyne in the summer of 1690, and received the surrender of his Catholic and Jacobite adversaries at Limerick late the following year.²⁰ Irish Catholics had been expropriated of their lands, and an elite minority Protestant settler class had realized total political dominance.²¹ British adventurers and migrants continued to plant and enlarge towns and industries, often over-capping older parishes and castles.²² Schemes for improving the landscape, as by draining bogs and building canals, were under consideration, if not under way.²³ Penal (or “Popery”) Laws scoured the landscape of public or educational opportunity for most Catholics, and emigration swelled.²⁴

²⁰ Jim Smyth, “‘Like amphibious animals’: Irish protestants, ancient Britons, 1691-1707,” *The Historical Journal* 36.4 (Dec 1993): 785.

²¹ Jill Marie Bradbury and David A. Valone, Introduction, *Anglo-Irish Identities, 1571-1845*, ed. Valone & Bradbury (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2008), 21-2.

²² Bruce M. S. Campbell, “Economic progress in the canal age: A case study from Counties Armagh and Down,” in *Refiguring Ireland: essays in honour of Louis M. Cullen*, ed. David Dickson & Cormac Ó Gráda (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2003), 69.

²³ Campbell, “Economic progress in the canal age,” 65.

²⁴ J.O. Bartley, Introduction, *Four Comedies by Charles Macklin*, ed. Bartley (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1968), 3-4.

This stark silhouette is not intended to trace the displacement of one integral ethnic, religious, or national structure by another. Settlers did not simply depart England with identities bound up safely in trusses and packs²⁵. They risked falling from Englishness toward an Irishness that was neither static nor, for many, desirable. The hybrid natures of Irish settlement – the Anglicized Irish, and the Hibernicized English – were experienced diversely – as perilous, as empowering – but always undecidably.²⁶ Making the case for Ireland’s inclusion in a unified Britain, Thomas and William Molyneux’s nephew, Samuel Madden, complained in 1732 on behalf of those “subjects of Great Britain,” dwelling in Ireland, “who like amphibious animals, are envied as Englishmen, in Ireland, and maligned as Irish in England”.²⁷ Uncertain – and unpromising – was the political scope afforded British subjects in Dublin and the Pale of Settlement.²⁸

The Parliament in Ireland was not the only institution occupied with establishing its identity independent of – but in intimate contact with – an English counterpart. The Dublin Philosophical Society was founded by William Molyneux and others²⁹ in the closing months of 1683 at Allen Mullen’s alma mater, Trinity College. Mullen, as was mentioned previously, would soon appear

²⁵ Jim Smyth has powerfully rendered the identificatory quagmire that late seventeenth-century Ireland was for its contemporaries, and remains for scholars working today, in “Like amphibious animals,” 786-7. Kevin Whelan has argued persuasively that Protestant Ireland was no more monolithic in the long eighteenth century than it has been since, in “The Green Atlantic: radical reciprocities between Ireland and America in the long eighteenth century,” in *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire 1660-1840*, ed. Kathleen Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 221.

²⁶ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996), 10.

²⁷ Samuel Madden, *Reflections and Resolutions Proper for the Gentlemen of Ireland* (Dublin: R. Reilly, 1816), 95-6.

²⁸ New laws, such as the Bill of Rights of 1689, buttressed London’s power to legislate for Ireland. Developments which tended toward economic independence for Ireland, such as the Treaty of Limerick in 1697, were not warmly received by the English Parliament. English-Scottish Union in 1707, and the Declaratory Act of 1720, would continue to pour absolute parliamentary authority into a central pool. See Bradbury and Valone, Introduction, 16; Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth, “Fashioning Identity in Eighteenth-Century Politics: The Case of John Toland,” in *Anglo-Irish Identities, 1571-1845*, ed. David A. Valone & Jill Marie Bradbury (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2008), 62

²⁹ Thomas was resident, from the end of October 1683 and until at least the following spring, at Leiden, as indicated by a letter sent him by William announcing the imminent formation of the Society. Records show Thomas’s being officially “proposed” fully a decade later, on May 3 1693, and “admitted” shortly thereafter. This may reflect the Society’s attempts to reestablish and reconfigure itself after several years of practically no activity, or it may simply indicate that Thomas was at last present in person. See Wilde & Lloyd, “Memoir of the Dublin Philosophical Society of 1683,” p. 161.

in its records. Those rolls, for November 1684, designate Thomas as a “*Corresponding Member*”³⁰ – he was, for some time, in absentia in Leiden. The Society was relatively short-lived, it did not publish a journal, and its membership, even loosely defined, was modest. But it established early ties with the Royal Society (many DPS members and associates would go on to become Fellows of the Royal Society, and to publish in its *Philosophical Transactions*), and with the Philosophical Society at Oxford.³¹ And as William Molyneux demonstrated most vividly, the Dublin Philosophical Society was engaged in lively debates surrounding Ireland’s political autonomy, and its fundamental political identity. William’s *The Case of Ireland’s being Bound by Acts of Parliament in England* (1698) reimagined Ireland as a distinct kingdom, and not a colony, in order to impugn the absence of Irish representatives in the London Parliament. *The Case* is widely regarded as a tributary of home-rule theory that would run, changeful but strong, through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and up to Irish independence in 1921.³²

For all his – and his brother’s – disappointment at the state of learning in late seventeenth-century Ireland, Thomas Molyneux recasts the island from an object of curiosity, adequately considered from across the Irish Sea, to a potentially robust home for the production of original local knowledge. Like William’s *Case*, but in a manner far subtler, Thomas’s essay on an extinct deer argues that Ireland can only be responsibly accounted for in its multitudinous particularities, by correspondents on the ground, and as part of networks that include Britain but also exceed it. The Irish moose is a powerful symbol, for Thomas, of not only the spectacular natural uniqueness of the country that produced it, but of Ireland’s links with an alternative “Neighbourhood” – what we might today call a kind of transatlantic ecological circuit – and particularly with the

³⁰ See Wilde & Lloyd, “Memoir of the Dublin Philosophical Society of 1683,” p. 168.

³¹ Theodore K. Hoppen, “The Royal Society and Ireland: William Molyneux, F.R.S. (1656-1698),” *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 18.2 (Dec 1 1963): 127-9.

³² Hoppen, “The Royal Society and Ireland: William Molyneux, F.R.S. (1656-1698),” 133.

northeastern coast of what would become the United States. Digging up the moose is tantamount, here, to uprooting Ireland from the walled gardens of Britain and the Old World – or, if that takes the thing too far, of expanding the kingdom’s range of historical, and potential, relations.

Credit for these innovations must go not only to Thomas Molyneux, but to Ireland’s bogs, and to the odd things they contain. For it is precisely the inscrutability of bogs – their amphibious composition, and the challenges they pose to antiquarians keen to interpret their contents – that makes them so narratively and imaginatively productive. They are rebellious participants in the drift of geologic time, and the ambiguities they spawn enable speculations that might wither on firmer ground. For Thomas Molyneux, they are ready contributors to a pattern of analogical thinking that identifies Irish fossils with North American moose, and Ireland with a precise counterpart – what is now Mt. Desert Island, off the coast of Maine – in the New World. But they are also transgressive collaborators, responding to Protestant empiricist intervention with boggy geographies and narratives that threaten to undermine the integrity and authority of that very enterprise. Histories, cartographies, political affiliations, and identities issue from bogs in unexpected, and flexible, configurations. They enact spectacular irruptions from the soil, pushing weird detritus upon their diggers and insisting on a reckoning. This made them mesmerizing for Thomas Molyneux, and for the vast and variegated ecosystem of artists and authors who turn the earth for the places they call Ireland.

Thinking Bogs, Thinking Ireland

Like much “wild” space, Irish bogland is a privileged site for contemporary conservationists³³. In recent decades, such landscapes have been partly “reclaimed,” by artists and environmentalists, for the contact they appear to offer with older, richer, and perhaps purer pre-colonial Irish identities. Bogs, and the strange things they contain, make available a range of historical and ecological interpretations, and these interpretations have been of special significance to Irish identities and politics at moments when the knottiness of Irishness has been exceptionally apparent. The anthropologist Stuart J. McLean has described bogs as “interstitial landscapes existing between clearly differentiated states of matter,” home to “a materiality in which human cultural expressions necessarily participate but which, at the same time forever exceeds their determinations.”³⁴ By thinking with bogs, by walking over and near them, and by touching them, one can imagine Irishness as inscrutable and messy, but also ancient, productive, and unique. For Thomas Molyneux, they enable access to Irish antiquity, and, more importantly, to the interpretive and narrative license he requires to make his claims. They coauthor, in other words, Molyneux’s visions of nature, history, and geography, and cooperate in mobilizing the sundry implications thereof.

³³ These days, observes Ian G Simmons, “we find much of the ‘waste’ land prized as open space, and it is clear that some changes in the cultural valuation of heaths, moors and mountains have taken place.” See *An Environmental History of Great Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 130. Ian D. Rotherham and David McCallam have commented on the twentieth century’s “belated recognition that wetlands were to be valued and conserved as unique natural wildernesses – ironically in the same way that the late eighteenth century had aestheticized and valorized the once dreaded wastes of mountain landscapes.” This, in “Peat Bogs, Marshes and Fen as Disputed Landscapes in Late Eighteenth-Century France and England,” in *Histoires de la Terre: Earth Sciences and French Culture 1740-1940*, ed. Louise Lyle & David McCallam (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi B.V., 2008), 87.

³⁴ Stuart McLean, “Black Goo: Forceful Encounters with Matter in Europe’s Muddy Margins,” *Cultural Anthropology* 26.4 (Nov 2011): 592.

The British literary record mostly bequeaths us accounts of Irish bogs that emphasize their uselessness, their queerness, and even their evil. Seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century commentators noted that bogs prevented the expansion of agriculture, industry, and transportation; many of the most significant improvement schemes then undertaken in Ireland involved the draining, cutting, or repurposing of wetlands. A paradigmatic example, commenced in 1641 and finished just over a century later, proposed improving the Glin Bog, in Ulster, to open a coal route from Lough Neagh to the ocean at Newry.³⁵ So-called “improving” landlords, many of whom were then resident in Ireland, not only engaged in bog-draining but required their tenants to do the same.³⁶ Agriculture and “civilization,” in accounts celebrating such projects, are positively correlated. These twinned enterprises were largely unavailable to Ireland’s Catholics, whose status as majority landholders had suffered a dramatic reversal by the end of the seventeenth century³⁷. Thus, when bogs are seen as literal havens for barbarous, uncivil, and politically subversive persons³⁸, these associations take on special meaning: in Irish contexts, bog-dwellers were often identified as poor, Catholic, and revolutionary. This is neither an uncommon trope, nor specific to bog-earth; J. R. McNeill has described an analogous phenomenon in eighteenth-century Cuba, where the drive to deforest may have received a boost from sugar planters eager to unhouse maroon communities of escaped slaves from the woods.³⁹ By converting Irish bogland into arable pasture

³⁵ Campbell, “Economic progress in the canal age,” p. 65.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 73.

³⁷ Jill Marie Bradbury and David A. Valone trace the “almost complete dispossession of the Catholic population” in Ireland to the reprisals carried out, at midcentury, by Oliver Cromwell’s forces upon the actions of the Confederate Catholics. “The final blow to Catholic hopes,” they continue, “came in 1690, when William defeated James II at the Battle of the Boyne. The end of the seventeenth century saw a dramatic intensification of anti-Catholic legislation.” See Bradbury & Valone, Introduction, pp. 14-15.

³⁸ Rotherham and McCallam argue that eighteenth-century British “observers of bogs and fens often imputed the abhorrent nature of the physical environment to the moral character of its inhabitants.” See “Peat Bogs, Marshes and Fen as Disputed Landscapes in Late Eighteenth-Century France and England,” p. 76.

³⁹ J. R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2010), pp. 30-1.

– so the reasoning often went – improvers would also destroy the habitats that violent elements needed to survive.

As bogs were explored and drained with increasing alacrity, they relinquished a variety of astonishing curiosities. These generated another, related response to bogs, which meditated on their queerly unpredictable tendencies and their epistemological oddness. Then more than now, bogs were seen to be doing subversive things to matter, time, and narrative. By yielding disparate objects that often resisted ready identification, categorization, and narratization, bogs insisted that would-be interlocutors stretch their interpretive frameworks to accommodate incongruous findings. Of course, this was not strictly a negative phenomenon: bogs and their contents became increasingly exciting for antiquarian collectors, and spurred the careers of many a proto-ethnographer. Ireland appears to have been exceptionally well-fitted for making signal discoveries: in 1781, Lord and Lady Moira ordered the excavation of “a small peat bog” near their estate in County Down. Their published discovery of a small female human skeleton remains the first officially acknowledged unearthing of a bog body on record⁴⁰. Bog objects and bog bodies contributed to a long-established sense of bogs as uncanny spaces which might generate objects from unfamiliar pasts, objects too well-preserved to believe, objects that seemed to issue direct and strident challenges to extant systems of understanding.

In *Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries of England*, Hazlitt claimed that “antiquity” was only sensible in those things that bore the signs of time’s passage. Such signs did not mark bog-stuffs, or marked them ambiguously.⁴¹ These challenges intersected with broader, and pressing, currents of concern among late seventeenth-century scientists, many of whom strove to

⁴⁰ P. V. Glob, *The Bog People: Iron-Age Man Preserved*, trans. Rupert Bruce-Mitford (New York: New York Review Books, 2004), 103-4.

⁴¹ Hazlitt, *Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England*, pp. 54-5.

reconcile new information with received scripture. Landscapes throughout Britain and Ireland were responding to galloping agricultural development, natural resource extraction, and scientific exploration by yielding copious fossils; problematically, an unnerving proportion of these finds seemed to have nothing whatsoever to do with the environs that produced them. Over the course of *The Natural History of Lancashire* (1700), the English physician and scientist Charles Leigh repeatedly encounters boggy incongruity. When drained, the morasses of Leigh's home county yielded parts of fir trees, which, as Caesar himself had long since made clear, do not "grow naturally in any part of this Kingdom."⁴² This phenomenon, Leigh explains, is explicable only if we understand it in terms of the Great Flood's environmental fallout. For Leigh, things are odder still in Ireland:

To these may be added that remarkable Mountain call'd *Naphat* in the Province of *Conought* in the Kingdom of *Ireland*, which is several hundred Fathom above the surface of the Sea, yet at the top of this Mountain ten Yards within it are vast Beds of all sorts of marine Shells...which doubtless, considering the immense height of the Mountain, could not be deposited there by any means but by a Deluge, and that an universal one. Parallel to these are those vast Mountains of Oyster-shells in *Virginia*, and other parts of the *West-Indies*; likewise the vast quantities of marine Shells found several Yards deep in firm Marle in Lands remote from the Sea, in which five Yards within this Marle I saw the Skeleton of a *Buck* standing upon his Feet, and his Horns on its Head, which are yet preserv'd at *Ellel-Grange* near *Lancaster*.⁴³

Like Thomas Molyneux, Leigh was provoked by archaeological findings to ponder surprising associations between distant and obviously distinct places; for the latter, the Noachian Flood had been responsible for a great deal of global geological and ecological reshuffling. The precise nature

⁴² Charles Leigh, *The Natural History of Lancashire, Cheshire, and the Peak, in Derbyshire* (Oxford: Charles Leigh, 1700), p. 59.

⁴³ Leigh, *The Natural History of Lancashire, Cheshire, and the Peak, in Derbyshire*, p. 62.

of that flood (or floods, as the theoretical case might be⁴⁴), and of its attendant redistributions, came in for intense debate at this time.⁴⁵ Bogs were prominent instigators of diluvian speculation, proffering weirdly integral specimens of species and cultures that sometimes appeared shockingly foreign to the parts where they were discovered. They were taken, in many instances, to contain holdovers from the Flood, things that would have ordinarily passed out of evidence, were it not for the bogs' preservative powers.

Scientists based in Ireland in the late seventeenth century hardly remained silent on bogs and the questions they raised. The Antrim-born philosopher and Anglican Archbishop William King (1650-1729) published "Of the Bogs, and Loughs of Ireland" in the Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions* in 1685. This moralizing treatise commented at length on the odd properties of bogs, and on the sanctuary they afforded Ireland's dangerous undesirables. King associates bogs with barbarity, laziness, and indigeneity, and describes how "a *Turf-Bog* preserves things strangely,"⁴⁶ transforming the objects it contains and exempting them from normal processes of decay. His argument calls for mass draining of Ireland's bogs, in order to evict those "Torys, and Thieves, who can hardly live without them."⁴⁷ At the same time, King, like Molyneux, is skeptical of the diluvian theories that were often invoked to understand boggy specimens. He

⁴⁴ Exploration and imperialism complicated matters significantly, and drove many writers to a theory of universal deluge (as opposed to many, local deluges), in hopes of reconciling their theories with odd, and increasingly common, congruencies between specimens discovered in far-flung places.

⁴⁵ Don Cameron Allen explains that "[d]uring the latter half of the seventeenth century, the attempt to prove that the Flood was universal became an obsession of scientists, but reason, rather than supernatural revelation, was the great instrument of this attempt." See "Science and the Universality of the Flood," in *The Flood Myth*, ed. Alan Dundes (Berkeley, Los Angeles, & London: University of California Press, 1988), p. 358.

⁴⁶ William King, "Of the Bogs, and Loughs of Ireland," *Philosophical Transactions* 15 (Jan 1 1685), p. 954.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 952.

associates such notions with the “Natives,” whose proclivity for superstition⁴⁸ helps his reader identify them as Catholic:

Trees are found sound, and intire in them, and those Birch, or Alder that are very subject to rot. The Trees are supposed by the ignorant vulgar to have lye there ever since the Flood, but the truth is, they fell on the surface of the Earth; and the *Bog*...swelling by degrees, at last covered them.⁴⁹

In order to set the record straight, King activates the bog as primary actor in the phenomena he explores. Thus, improvement promises to not only increase cultivatable acreage but reduce the space available for popish religion⁵⁰, misdeeds⁵¹, and misinformation.

Thomas Molyneux dismisses the diluvian explanation as facile, “a ready and short way” to explain the appearance of the Moose Deer (499). The Great Flood, he believes, occurred “above Four Thousand Years” ago, and it’s clear from the integrity of his specimens that they could not have endured such a catastrophe, and at such a great temporal remove. Thus, the Irish Moose Deer must have been eradicated from Ireland more recently, perhaps “from a certain ill Constitution of Air in some of the past Seasons long since the Flood, which might occasion an *Epidemick Distemper*, if we may so call it, or *Pestilential Murren*, peculiarly to affect this sort of Creature, so as to destroy at once great Numbers of ‘em, if not quite ruine the Species” (499-500).⁵² Not unlike twenty-first century stories of momentous prehistoric population events, Molyneux

⁴⁸ Bruce Nelson describes a recurring trope of the “indolent, irrational, childlike” Irish, a perception widespread not only in the British Isles but in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century North America, in *Irish Nationalists and the Making of the Irish Race* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), 9.

⁴⁹ King, “Of the Bogs, and Loughs of Ireland,” 954.

⁵⁰ Rotherham and McCallam claim that “religion and public morality” were regularly cited, by eighteenth-century British and French improvers, to justify the drainage of wetlands. See “Peat Bogs, Marshes and Fens as Disputed Landscapes in Late Eighteenth-Century France and England,” 85.

⁵¹ I do not mean to caricature King as reactionary; as Bradbury and Valone have argued, King, like the brothers Molyneux, “provoked disdain and ire from the English” after voicing support for Irish parliamentary home rule. See Bradbury & Valone, Introduction, 16.

⁵² This explanation nods in the direction of Thomas Sydenham, the English physician whose studies of disease outbreaks in London in the 1660s and 1670s led him to develop the theory of epidemic constitution, which would retain a powerful influence over British science throughout the eighteenth century and beyond. See Dorothy Porter, *Health, Civilization and the State: A history of public health from ancient to modern times* (London: Routledge, 1999), 54-5.

conceives of a sudden disaster, one capable of transforming Irish faunal life over a brief period. And if the plague didn't annihilate the Irish Moose, Molyneux is confident that hunting must have finished the job. He is wistful as he considers an alternative denouement: "had those Barbarous Times been capable of taking Care for the Preservation of this stately Creature, our Country would not have entirely lost so singular and beautiful an Ornament" (501).

Ireland Illuminated

Thomas Molyneux's whimsy points up a powerful tension obtaining between this alternative history and the death of Mullen's elephant. An enormous quadruped housed on the banks of the Liffey seems a remarkable ornament to Dublin's self-display. But the discourse of ornamentation to which Molyneux here refers looks past cultures of metropolitan spectacle to an ideal of nature as a beautifully variegated array of forms and colors. Alexander Pope would invoke cultivate this ideal a couple of decades later, in "Windsor Forest" (1713):

Our plenteous Streams a various Race supply
The bright-ey'd Perch with Fins of *Tyrian* Dye,
The silver Eel, in shining Volumes roll'd,
The yellow Carp, in Scales bedrop'd with Gold,
Swift Trouts, diversify'd with Crimson Stains,
And Pykes, the Tyrants of the watry Plains.⁵³

Pope's inventory comes close to representing nature as primarily a kind of jewel-box, an effect alternately felicitous and problematic, and important for Chapter Two's investigation of watery dazzle. What bears emphasizing here is adornment's operation as a metaphor for the natural order, an order commonly interpreted according to two related concepts – *concordia discors* and the

⁵³ Alexander Pope, "Windsor Forest," in *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, 3rd edn, ed. David Fairer & Christine Gerrard (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 115-26, ll. 141-6.

Great Chain of Being. Pope's lyrics make for fortuitous reference, once more: in the first epistle of the *Essay on Man* (1733-4), all things "are but parts of one stupendous whole, / Whose body Nature is, and God the soul; / That, chang'd thro' all, and yet in all the same, / Great in the earth, as in th' æthereal frame."⁵⁴ Molyneux obviously antecedes Pope, but notions like these would have been familiar to him.⁵⁵ And so recuperating the Irish Moose Deer represents a matter not only of staking imposing territory for natural philosophers based in Ireland, but of contributing to the correct ordering of nature's stupendous whole.

Such a striving for accurate arrangement is made to dovetail with Molyneux's sense that Irish natural history, as discipline and as object of study, is unique in ways that extant scientists and scientific literature have not sufficiently acknowledged. We might understand him as rejecting a dominant analogy – Ireland and its nature are comprehensible in terms of England, and Northern Europe more generally – for a superior alternative. Of course, Molyneux's strain of homegrown Irish natural history is, at least, an invasive species, a graft taken from the recently institutionalized bodies of the Oxford (1683) and Royal (1660) Societies. And far from cutting the ties that bind Irish natural history and historians to their counterparts across the Irish Sea, Molyneux, Mullen, and their colleagues in the Dublin Philosophical Society looked to England for professional and practical exchange and support. (In 1686, England would also provide Mullen refuge, after he fled Dublin in the wake of a scandalous affair.⁵⁶) But for these transactions to succeed, Ireland needed to be rightly acknowledged as the home of a distinct environment, eminently worthy of focused

⁵⁴ Pope, *An Essay on Man*, Epistle I, in *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, 3rd edn, ed. David Fairer & Christine Gerrard (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), pp. 183-92, ll. 267-70.

⁵⁵ For a discussion of the Great Chain of Being in seventeenth-century thought, see Patrick Cheney, Andrew Hadfield, & Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., *Early Modern English Poetry: A Critical Companion* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 302.

⁵⁶ See Theodore K. Hoppen, "The Royal Society and Ireland. II," *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 20.1 (Jun 1 1965), p. 87.

scientific study, and of a group of learned men capable of conducting observations at first hand and productively interpreting their meanings.

Molyneux's vision of Irish illumination involves fidelity to firsthand observation, local networks of educated Protestant observers, and the positioning of Irish natural history in relation to the full and expanding spaces and times opened to view by classical, Renaissance, and contemporary sources. Like Mullen's elephant, the Irish Moose Deer, and the other natural productions Molyneux treats, are ready to hand – "I have by me some of the teeth, and one of the lower Jaw-bones of this creature" (499). In Molyneux's case, they are so thanks to the contributions of a who's-who of late seventeenth-century intellectual and political elites in Ireland. Irish science, and the correct identification of the Irish Moose, have been stymied by reasoning from "hear-say" (503), and the negligence of primary evidence. Molyneux's "Discourse" connects the testimonies and material contributions of a learned clan to the main stream of natural history. The effect is not only to bolster his taxonomic claims, but to depict Ireland as a stable and complex system of gentlemanly improvers and correspondents, cultivating an imminent efflorescence of practical and scientific knowledge of the country.

Bogs, and the Irish Moose Deer specimens they produce, are the entities in relation to which this system takes shape. They map Irish space, and populate that space with leading figures of the new Anglo-Ireland. Examining this eco-political cartography in some detail demonstrates the power of antiquarianism and natural history to conjure a kingdom. Early in the essay, Molyneux deduces from his fossils' "*Palmed Hornes*" that they exhibit "a greater affinity with the *Buck* or *Fallow Deer*, than with the *Stag* or *Red Deer*"; this he "lately observed, having an opportunity of particularly Examining a compleat Head, with both its Horns entirely perfect, not long since dug up, given to my Brother *William Molyneux*, as a Natural Curiosity, by Mr. *Henry*

Osborn, that lives at a place call'd *Dardistown*, in the County of *Meath*, about Two Miles from *Drogheda*" (490). It is notable that in the space of just five years, Drogheda has become comprehensible in terms of its proximity to archaeological findings, and not to the bloody Boyne. But we also recognize a significant character in Henry Osborne, who has offered the third of as many Irish Moose Deer heads he has "found by casual trenching" in his orchard (490). Osborne, an accomplished surveyor⁵⁷ and amateur astronomer, had settled in County Meath after a career devoted to the rationalization of Irish land for settlement.

Osborne's *métier* is a nice metonym for the cartographic work done by Molyneux's essay, plotting the palm-horned coordinates of establishment Ireland. Among his Moose Deer enthusiasts, Thomas counts Henry Capell, who served on the Irish Privy Council before becoming Lord Justice in 1693 and Lord Deputy two years thereafter (495). More horns reside near Ballymacward, chez one "Major *Folliot*" (496), presumably John Folliott, who fought on the winning side in the Jacobite-Williamite Wars and sat in the Irish House of Commons from 1692-3.⁵⁸ Similar displays impress visitors to Turvey House, near Dublin, as well as to Portumny, in County Galway, and other stately homes in Newtown Stewart, County Tyrone, and Stackallan, County Meath. Not least of all, "Two extraordinary *Beams* of these Kind of *Horns*" adorn "one side of the Common Hall" of the Dublin residence of Michael Boyle, the Archbishop of Armagh (496). The horns and heads of the Irish Moose Deer lend coherence to a religiously and politically diverse network of aristocrats, church and military men, and improvers, and betoken – "as an ancient and lasting Curiosity to future Ages" (496) – the solidity thereof.

⁵⁷ In 1654, he published a surveying manual, *A more exact way to delineate the plot of any spacious parcel of land*, from Dublin. See T. C. Barnard, "The Hartlib circle and the origins of the Dublin Philosophical Society," *Irish Historical Studies* 19 (1974): 61.

⁵⁸ Anthony Begley, "The Folliotts, Wardtown Castle and the Colleen Bawn," *Donegal Annual* 43 (1991): 67-8. It is unclear whether Folliot might be the same Follet whose name is recorded in William Molyneux's minutes for the Dublin Philosophical Society, January 1684. See Wilde & Lloyd, "Memoir of the Dublin Philosophical Society of 1683," p. 164.

This is *not* a network of professionalized scientists, nor, even, of amateur natural historians. Osborne’s story – that he happened upon the remains of yet another Irish Moose Deer while doing some light digging in his orchard – is typical of the way Molyneux narrates the moment of archaeological discovery: a gentlemanly acquaintance (or acquaintance thereof), exploring or improving his grounds, comes by chance upon some bones. “What Discoveries we make of this Creature,” he explains, “we can only have from those *loose parts* of it we find dug out of the Earth by Accident” (490). Contingency is a recurring trope in Molyneux’s retellings, and in bog-findings in general⁵⁹. It points up, in this case, a sense that Irish soil is so loaded with bits and pieces of Irish Moose Deer that any attentive observer is bound to find some. Furthermore, it confirms the claims of Molyneux and others that the professional circumstances necessary for intentional Irish Moose-seeking are sorely lacking.

At the same time, though, accident preserves an image of Molyneux’s correspondents as genteel contributors to the development of a modern, predominantly Protestant Ireland which they inhabit and improve. Their *not* being explicitly men of science, unearthing horns in the course of an expedition from elsewhere, is emphasized. Specimen-finding is the happy byproduct of other forms of rational and virtuous engagement with Irish soil, such as surveying and gardening. This impression of apparent informality is not an eccentricity, but a defining characteristic of late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century natural history. Among the most prominent popularizers of this style was the Irish-born Hans Sloane,⁶⁰ who served the Royal Society, as secretary and as

⁵⁹ Karin Sanders observes that “because bog bodies...are always accidentally discovered,” they “disrupt the conventional archaeological three-step process—*excavation, classification, and interpretation*,” in *Bodies in the bog and the archaeological imagination* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 9.

⁶⁰ Richard Drayton, *Nature’s Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the ‘Improvement’ of the World* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), 36-7.

president, and whose correspondence with William Molyneux, facilitated by John Locke, was abetted by the Moose Deer.⁶¹

The economics of the Irish Moose Deer further attest to the gentility of the enterprise: specimens move from hand to hand as gifts, the most remarkable of which land in the grasp of the most remarkable beneficiaries. In a passage which neatly synthesizes several of our themes, Thomas Molyneux relates one fossil's extraordinary ascent from muck to marvel, taken from "a sort of *Marle*" at the home of Giles Vandeleur⁶², one-time high sheriff of Clare, to James Butler, Duke of Ormond, the late Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, to King Charles the Second's Horn Gallery at Hampton Court Palace (495). Gift-giving, which would long remain fundamental to naturalists' work,⁶³ also suggests the Irish Moose Deer's potential membership in international circuits of prestige⁶⁴ and spectacular display.⁶⁵ Moreover, this example strengthens our sense that Molyneux's Ireland is inhabited by interlinked gentlemen of learning, whose awesome contributions to Britain issue from local land, and local social bonds. This and the other accounts of Moose Deer discovery represent specimens as the fruits of rationally-managed soil, the dazzling produce of the stability and integrity of Molyneux's version of Ireland.

What's more, on the walls of the Horn Gallery, we glimpse the Moose's capacity for subversion. The head and horns from Vandeleur's estate – Ralahine Castle, perhaps – in Clare

⁶¹ In a note to Locke, William expressed his relief that his and Thomas's identification of the Moose Deer – "the largest Quadruped that moves on the Earth, except the Elephant" – had provided him a curiosity worthy of a correspondence with Sloane. See William Molyneux, letter to John Locke, Dublin, March 16, 1696/7, in *Familiar Letters between Mr. John Locke, and Several of his Friends* (London: F. Noble et al., 1742), 146.

⁶² This reference to Vandeleur involves some speculation on my part – Molyneux cites "one Mr. *Van Delure* in the County of *Clare*," whom I take to be the aforementioned Dutch Protestant surveyor and sheriff. See Ronald George Garnett, *Co-operation and the Owenite socialist communities in Britain 1825-45* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1972), 103.

⁶³ Daniela Bleichmar, "A Visible and Useful Empire: Visual Culture and Colonial Natural History in the Eighteenth-Century Spanish World," in *Science in the Spanish and Portuguese Empires, 1500-1800*, ed. Bleichmar et al. (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009), 307.

⁶⁴ Louise E. Robbins, *Elephant Slaves and Pampered Parrots: Exotic Animals in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 49.

⁶⁵ Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978), 20.

may still be seen among the rest of the large Heads both of Stags and Bucks that adorn that Place, but this so vastly exceeds the largest of them, that the rest appear to lose much of their Curiosity by being viewed in Company with this. I am lately informed, these with the other Heads are since removed to the *Guard-Room* out of the *Horn-Gallery*. (495-6)

We might be tempted to read this in terms of Irish wildness, or savagery, and that interpretation may carry some truth. But it is beside the point, for bigness, in Molyneux's view, signals an animal's elevated spot in the hierarchy of Nature. Generally speaking, Nature is more scrupulous to observe "exact Symetry, and due Proportion of Parts...in the Formation of all the larger and perfecter sort of Animals" (504). As for the Irish Moose Deer, "Nature her self seems by the *Vast Magnitude* and *Stately Horns*, she has given this Creature, to have singled it out as it were, and shewed it such regard, with a design to distinguish it remarkably from the common Herd of all other smaller *Quadrupeds*" (512).

It is worth pausing, for a moment, to acknowledge that *Megaloceros giganteus* was truly marvelous: seven feet tall at its shoulder, its antlers stretched to a length of twelve feet from end to end, and weighed up to ninety pounds. That's more than twenty pounds heavier than the heftiest antlers on an *Alces alces* bull: the Irish Moose Deer is, if anything, grander than the very North American moose that Molyneux takes such pains to align with his fossils.⁶⁶ Stephen Jay Gould has put the thing in terms that Molyneux would approve: the Irish Moose Deer's antler span, Gould writes, has "never been exceeded, or even approached, in the history of life."⁶⁷ Thomas's lionizing treatment resembles a seventeenth-century instance of what contemporary conservation biologists and cultural anthropologists might call the cult of charismatic megafauna⁶⁸.

⁶⁶ Rebecca Stefoff, *Deer* (Tarrytown: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2008), 34-5.

⁶⁷ Gould, *Ever Since Darwin*, 79.

⁶⁸ For example, in her study of the Frozen Ark seed bank, anthropologist Tracey Heatherington alludes to cloning and preservation projects' habit of "[focusing] exclusively on 'charismatic megafauna,' including the South Asian guar, the Sardinian mouflon, the Banteng cow, the South African wildcat, the Chinese panda, the Asiatic cheetah, and the extinct Tasmanian tiger. As key symbols of national histories and identities, with aesthetic and emotional appeal cultivated by pre-existing discourses of wildlife protection, these mammals command the focus of the social

For a writer endeavoring to assert the uniqueness – not to say superiority – of his natural surroundings, and of the intellectual and social formations rooted thereupon, stature counts. Molyneux’s understated and indirect style – “I am lately informed” – seems proleptic of a more openly disputatious exchange between one of the most influential naturalists of the eighteenth century and the primary author of the United States’ Declaration of Independence. The Comte de Buffon notoriously observed, in his *Histoire Naturelle*, that American nature, being degenerate, produces no stately quadrupeds. Thomas Jefferson devoted part of *Notes on the State of Virginia* to disproving Buffon’s theory, and tasked Meriwether Lewis and William Clark with collecting the traces of grand American animals on their transcontinental expedition of 1804-06. When Jefferson sent material testimony of his nation’s natural majesty to Buffon and the French Cabinet du Roi, the gift he made them comprised the skin and bones of a moose.⁶⁹ Having browbeaten its punier relations from the Horn Gallery, Molyneux’s Irish Moose Deer imposes a double symbol upon its viewers: in one sense, it testifies to the vigorous presence of Ireland within Britain, and under power of its monarch. In another, it advertises the awesome exceptionalism of Irish fauna, and of the various ecosystems – soily, intellectual, and Anglo-Irish – which conspired to mount it on the wall.

imagination and incite sympathy for nature conservation.” See Heatherington, “From Ecocide to Genetic Rescue: Can Technoscience save the Wild?” in *The Anthropology of Extinction: Essays on Culture and Species Death*, ed. Genese Marie Sodikoff (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2012), 44.

⁶⁹ Matthew Wynn Sivils, “Doctor Bat’s Ass: Buffon, American Degeneracy, and Cooper’s *The Prairie*,” *Western American Literature* 44.4 (Winter 2010): 354.

Boggy Geographies: One Hoof in the New World

The “Discourse” prepares its reader for the classificatory reveal by methodically exploding the past’s ostensible errors. These are commonly committed, Molyneux explains, by those who play fast and loose with identification without making firsthand observations. Correct knowledge, for him, proceeds from comparing specimens – and, in lieu thereof, eyewitness accounts – on the basis of “*Figure and Size*” (505). By attending to form, we understand that the palm-horned Irish Moose Deer shares its kind, but not sort,⁷⁰ with “the Stag or Red Deer” (490); categorical discrepancies of scale and proportion trouble any comparison with the Scandinavian *Elche* (504). For a suitable candidate, Molyneux looks far beyond the British Isles, and even Northern Europe.

Or, to put the case more precisely, he looks immediately about himself, to books, which stretch his vision to the west, and beyond an ocean. John Josselyn, whose brother Henry became deputy governor of Maine in 1645, visited New England in the late 1630s, and again from 1663-71. His *New England’s Rarities Discovered* (1672) trumpeted the curious contents of the New World,⁷¹ and collaborated with another text to direct Thomas Molyneux’s conclusions. This was *New World or Description of the West Indies* (1625), by Johannes (John) de Laet, the prolific collector of natural curiosities and governor of the Dutch West India Company – the same outfit whose ship incited Gilpin’s meditation at Pyle. That de Laet never visited the New World⁷² does not prevent Molyneux from borrowing from a 1640 French translation of the *Description*.

⁷⁰ Thomas Molyneux’s taxonomy operates by organizing creatures into “Kind” and “sort,” which terms he generally prefers to “Genus” and “Species” (490).

⁷¹ Michael P. Branch, *Reading the Roots: American Nature Writing before Walden* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2004), 72-3.

⁷² Eric Jorink, “Noah’s Ark Restored (and Wrecked): Dutch Collectors, Natural History and the Problem of Biblical Exegesis,” in *Silent Messengers: The Circulation of Material Objects of Knowledge in the Early Modern Low Countries*, ed. Sven Dupré & Christopher Lüthy (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2011), 172-3.

In Josselyn, Molyneux discovers the moose, that “*Lofty Horned Beast*” which, though regrettably neglected by science, seems “next the Elephant, to be the most remarkable *Quadruped* for its largeness in the World” (504-5):

and if we compare the several Parts of those Descriptions, with the Beasts whose heads are found here in *Ireland*; we shall not have the least Reason to question but these vastly large *Irish Deer* and the *American Moose*, were certainly one and the same sort of Animal, being of the *Deer Kind*, carrying the same sort of *Palmed Horns*, which are of the same *Size* and *Largeness* as well as *Figure*; and the *Bulk* of their *Bodies* corresponding exactly in Proportion to the wide spreading of their *Horns*. So that we may securely assert, that *Mooses* formerly were as frequent in this Country, as they have them still in Northern Parts of the *West Indies*, *New England*, *Virginia*, *Maryland*, *Canada* or *New France*. (505-6)

And de Laet is called in to preemptively temper a possible habitative objection:

And least we may think this Animal peculiar to the *Continent*, and not to be found in *Islands*; I lately met with a remarkable passage in *John de Laet's French Description* of the *West-Indies*, that clearly shews the contrary....*There is a certain sort of Beast common in this Country, which the savage Indians call a Moose, as big as a Bull* (he had not seen I suppose those of the largest Size) *having the Head of a Buck, with broad Horns, which they cast every Year, and the Neck of a Deer: there are found also great Numbers of these Animals in an Island near the Continent call'd by the English, Mount Mansell*. (506)

It is important to contemplate these paired propositions side by side, for they emblemize the imaginative power of Molyneux's analogical thinking. As the “*Irish Deer*” is to the *American Moose*,” so is Ireland to “Mount Mansell” (known nowadays as Mount Desert Island), the largest island off the coast of Maine.⁷³ Mount Mansell's moose enable Thomas Molyneux to collapse the extraordinary variance between that island's distance from the North American shore and Ireland's separation from the same. Because Mount Mansell “must of necessity had some Communication with the Main Land of *America*, to have been thus plentifully stockt with” moose, so Ireland must have communicated with it, as well.

⁷³ The island was deeded to Robert Mansell, the former vice admiral and glass magnate, in 1622. See “Mansell-Mansfield, Sir Robert,” in *The Genesis of the United States*, ed. Alexander Brown, vol.1 (Boston & New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1890), 941-2.

Thus begins a process of imaginative affiliation – and disaffiliation – more radical than anything that has preceded it. Molyneux’s article redraws the ties that bind land masses – and whole continents – together, in ways that threaten to cut Ireland loose from its moorings.

Ireland...must in the many past Ages, long before the late Discovery of that *New World*, had some sort of Intercourse with it...(though ‘tis not easy, I acknowledge, for us at present to explain how) for otherwise I do not see, how we can conceive this Country should be supply’d with this Creature, that for ought I can yet hear, is not to be found in all our Neighbourhood round about us, nay, perhaps in any other Parts of *Europe, Asia or Africa*: And then ‘tis certain as *Ireland* is the last or most Western part of the *Old World*; so ‘tis nearest of any Country to the most Eastern Parts of the *New-Canada, New-England, Virginia, &c.* the great Tract of Land, and the only one I yet know, remarkable for plenty of the *Moose-Deer*. (506-7)

Since the 1746 discovery of fossilized remains in Yorkshire, in northern England, *Megaloceros giganteus* has been known to have resided beyond Ireland’s borders.⁷⁴ But for Thomas Molyneux and his readers, the Irish Moose Deer was a singular anomaly which provided a legitimate basis for describing Ireland as constitutionally distinct from the rest of its “Neighbourhood,” and as vaguely – but surely – linked to North America. The implications of this rearranging for Anglo-Irish settlers in search of a deep historical connection to their new home are complicated and colossal.

In fact, Molyneux’s use of the term “Neighbourhood” shifts, over the course of the “Discourse,” in ways that suggest an alternative geography, one founded not in contemporary spatial arrangements so much as in natural features, or what today we might call ecology. In the foregoing passage – “all our Neighbourhood round about us” – the former sense is clearly implied. But later, as Molyneux’s litany of Irish-American correspondences expands, he refers to Ireland’s “Neighbourhood with the *Northern America*” (509), a proximity that only makes sense if we project it backwards in time – “in the many past Ages” – or if we understand it as predicated on

⁷⁴ Gould, *Ever Since Darwin*, 80

environmental similarity. This might suggest a quasi-ecological theory of global organization that underlays – and has the potential to undermine – extant spatial and geopolitical formations. At the least, it opens the door to an appreciation of the potential for transformative change in the earth’s surface over time. And if these processes may have produced a present that differs tremendously from the past, then the current status quo cannot be regarded as immutable.

If all Ireland is drawn into sure, if ambiguous, association with “the *West-Indies*,” its Atlantic coast manifests this “Intercourse” most abundantly.

For as they on the Coast of *New-England* and the Island *Bermudas* gather considerable Quantities of *Amber-greese*; so on the Western Coast of *Ireland*, along the Counties of *Sligo*, *Mayo*, *Kerry* and the Isles of *Arran* they frequently meet with large parcels of that precious Substance, so highly valued for its Perfume. (507)

Bermuda became a Crown Colony in 1684; its parliament, established 1620, is the oldest in the New World. Six years before the publication of Molyneux’s essay on the Moose Deer, Allen Mullen departed England for the West Indies, and died, of “intoxication,” during a stop at Barbados.⁷⁵ In terms of geographical distance, the dislocation from Molyneux’s Dublin to Connacht and West Munster is not great. But by framing the west of Ireland within the Atlantic’s New World periphery, he establishes it as the western frontier of Europe, and perhaps the eastern frontier of a zone of prehistoric “Intercourse.”

The congruities do not end there. Ambergris derives from the gastrointestinal tract of the adult male sperm whale, or *Physeter macrocephalus*, and while this was not explicitly understood by seventeenth-century English writers,⁷⁶ a vague understanding of the pungent substance’s

⁷⁵ Hoppen, “The Royal Society and Ireland. II,” p. 87.

⁷⁶ See Holly Duggan, *The Ephemeral History of Perfume: Scent and Sense in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2011).

provenance registered widely.⁷⁷ So it is perhaps unsurprising that Molyneux turns from ambergris to a note about sperm whales, the “kind of *Whale-Fish*” that he names, from Walter Charleton, *Cetus Dentatus*. Common “in *New England*,” three have been “taken...in the Space of Six Years, all on the Western Coast” of Ireland. (He makes a firm point, too, of distinguishing them from the baleen whales found “stranded...on the *Eastern Coast* of this Country that regards *England*.”) One of these three, secured near Ballyshannon⁷⁸ in 1691, is reported to have been “Seventy one Foot long” (508), and thus grander than any of the *Cete, aliud admirabile* mentioned by one of Molyneux’s primary sources, the Flemish doctor and botanist Carolus Clusius, in the latter’s *Exoticorum libri decem* (1605).

In the course of describing yet more ecological parallelism, Molyneux takes special care to emphasize indigeneity:

[We] may likewise add some of our more rare *Spontaneous Plants*, because they are found growing only in those Western Parts of *Ireland*, and no where else in this whole Country, or any of the Neighbouring Kingdoms about us. (509)

Spontaneity, in this sense, refers to the quality of arising naturally, or wildly, without improvement or agriculture.⁷⁹ Molyneux calls up the “*Strawberry Tree*” (*Arbutus unedo*) and the “*London Pride*” (likely *Saxifraga spathularis*, or St. Patrick’s Cabbage), and locates them, in all their native robustness, in Kerry. Intriguingly, the former tree is seen to correspond, in its elevated stature, to specimens in Pierre Belon’s description of Mount Athos, and in an account of Arabian foliage contained in Pliny (510). These examples reinforce a globalizing view of Irish natural history, but

⁷⁷ In *Upon Appleton House* (1651), Andrew Marvell’s plotting, “subtle” nun tempts the young Isabel Thwaites with “clothes” of “sea-born amber.” See “Upon Appleton House, To My Lord Fairfax,” in *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Nigel Smith (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2007), 210-41, ll. 94, 179-80.

⁷⁸ According to Hugh Allingham, “whales were so numerous in [Donegal Bay in the eighteenth century] that a scheme was set on foot in 1736 for establishing a whale fishery” there. See *Ballyshannon: Its History and Antiquities; with Some Account of the Surrounding Neighbourhood* (Londonderry: James Montgomery, 1879), 120.

⁷⁹ It was in this spirit that the planter and politician Robert Beverley wondered about the source of the “Indian corn” he observed in Virginia, which he thought not “spontaneous in those parts.” See Robert Beverley, Jr., *The History of Virginia, In Four Parts* (Richmond: J. W. Randolph, 1855), 115.

they do not illustrate Molyneux's occidental thesis: "Whether both the foregoing *Plants* are truly *American*, I cannot at present determine," he admits (511). It makes for an odd moment, a citational spill that the author cannot quite clean up, but that does contribute, if messily, to the general distancing of Ireland from England.

It would be imprudent to understand Molyneux as detaching Ireland altogether from the "Old World." Instead, we ought to regard him as establishing the island as an environmental frontier, particularly its western, coastal reaches: it is "the last or most Western part of the *Old World*," and the "nearest of any Country to the most Eastern Parts of the *New-Canada, New-England, Virginia, &c.*" (507) Or it might be more accurate to interpret Molyneux's Ireland as the meeting of two frontiers, an island literally divided between dual geographical and temporal identities. Whether we would do better to understand Ireland as the westernmost part of Europe or the easternmost part of North America is not immediately clear. What *is* apparent in this telling is that Ireland is fundamentally, naturally distinct from England, not to mention the rest of Europe, and that is best contextualized as part of the Atlantic littoral.

In isolating Ireland, and further distinguishing its westward space – a west within a west – Molyneux lends his pen to a long and variegated mythology of the Irish occident. Connacht, Donegal, Kerry, and the rest have frequently been imagined in terms of nature,⁸⁰ a tendency not unrelated to the west's association with wildness, refractory Catholics, Irish speakers, and anti-imperial militancy. In the west as at Henry Osborne's estate in Drogheda, Molyneux's natural history obscures as it illuminates, looking past harsh realities to cast Ireland in prehistoric time and New World nature.

⁸⁰ Eamonn Wall, *Writing the Irish West: Ecologies and Traditions* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), xvii.

Staging Boggy Irishness in the Eighteenth Century

The Irish Moose Deer is imaginatively productive because it is uncontrolled by testimony, text, and tradition. It is unrecollected, uncontained by the “Memory of Man,” which Molyneux elsewhere commands to assert, for instance, “that the *Red Deer* in these our Days, is much more rare with us in *Ireland*, than it has been formerly” (502). For the story he seeks, Molyneux has recourse only to palimpsestic bog-memory, written upon a “Soil that had been formerly the *Outward Surface of the Earth*, but in process of Time, being covered by degrees with many Layers of Adventitious Earth, has by lying under Ground a certain Number of Ages, acquired a peculiar *Texture, Consistence, Richness, or Maturity*” (498). Molyneux lacks the means to narrate the lives of bogs and the things in them in terms of anaerobiosis and its effects on decomposition. Still, he is activated by a boggy logic of preservation: because the Irish Moose Deer has eluded characterization, its narrative potentialities are limitless. Molyneux makes the Irish Moose Deer speak, but he’s only capable of doing so because of Irish bogs, and of what Karin Sanders calls their “contradictory powers”: their “fuzzy morphologies,” she claims, are readily “co-opted by historical, cultural, and psychological anxieties.”⁸¹

Anxieties and enthusiasms surrounding boggy powers made Irish wetlands singularly useful for exploring and asserting “interstitial” identities and sociopolitical formations. For example, Charles Macklin’s *The True-born Irishman* (1761) advertises no contradiction in heroizing a landlord figure whom the audience could only have identified with the propertied Anglo-Irish, yet whose name is Murrough O’Dogherty, and who is given to declamations of the proceeding sort:

⁸¹ Sanders, *Bodies in the bog and the archaeological imagination*, 7.

O'Dogherty!—there's a sound for you—why they have not such a name in all England as O'Dogherty—nor as any of our fine sounding Milesian names—what are your Jones and your Stones, your Rice and your Price, your Heads and your Fooths, and Hands and your Wills, and Hills and Mills, and Sands, and a parcel of little pipping names that a man would not pick out of the street, compared to the O'Donovans, O'Callaghans, O'Sullivans, O'Brallaghans, O'Shaghnesses, O'Flahertys, O'Gallaghers, and O'Doghertys,--Ogh, they have courage in the very sound of them, for they come out of the mouth like a storm; and are as old and as stout as the oak at the bottom of the bog of Allen, which was there before the flood.⁸²

For Desmond Slowey, O'Dogherty's politics partake of “economic patriotism,” and place him within a constellation which also includes Arthur Young, Maria Edgeworth, and Jonathan Swift.⁸³ By explicitly associating this litany of venerable names with a bog oak, O'Dogherty abstracts these archetypally Irish appellations from his immediate surroundings, rendering them as antique – and as collectible, we might say – as a piece of bog oak. The names appear, here, as romantic emblems, rather than as referents through which we might imagine real Catholic peasants, who continued to suffer, in the second half of the eighteenth century, under the extraordinary strictures of Penal Laws that had subjugated them for two hundred years. Another of O'Dogherty's proclamations – a rebuke against his Anglophile wife, Mrs. Diggerty – articulates a highly specific and exigent theory of right language:

I hope I shall never have any more of your London English; none of your this here's, your that there's, your winegars, your weals, your vindors, your toastesses, and your stone postesses; but let me have our own good plain, old Irish English, which I insist upon is better than all the English English that ever coquets and coxcombs brought into the land.⁸⁴

The primary practitioner of English English is the play's effeminate villain, Count Mushroom, a lascivious upstart whose Francophilia resembles George Alexander Stevens's “Frenchify'd frumpery,” and whose comeuppance arrives when he is made into a spectacle he cannot control.

⁸² Charles Macklin, *The True-born Irishman; or, Irish fine Lady* (Dublin, 1783), 46-7.

⁸³ Desmond Slowey, *The Radicalization of Irish Drama 1600-1900: The Rise and Fall of Ascendancy Theatre* (Dublin & Portland: Irish Academic Press, 2008), 152.

⁸⁴ Macklin, *The True-born Irishman*, 46.

As defense against Mushroom's influence, "Irish English" is a deceptively innovative formulation, a grafting on of some appropriate degree of Irishness after the fact of the Anglicization of Ireland's linguistic profile⁸⁵. O'Dogherty, in other words, does not implore his audience to *speak* Irish (which language remained widespread, if under duress, at the time), but to "Irish" their English tongue in a manner commensurate with the principles of Anglo-Irish restraint and respectability. (Edgeworth would effect something similar in her Irish tales, which sometimes ennoble Irish Anglophony – even its poorer utterers – while never suggesting that the indigenous tongue was worth encouraging.⁸⁶) Macklin patches together an ideal and hybrid Irishness from a range of source materials, including bogs; his play's variegated reception history testifies to the differential suitability of this new breed in various environments. Intriguingly, *The True-born Irishman* was a catastrophic failure at Covent Garden⁸⁷ but a smash hit in New York⁸⁸. Through Irish bogland, Charles Macklin – born Cathal MacLochlainn, on the Inishowen peninsula – can narrate his home in a way that celebrates its antiquity and native nature without calling Anglo-Irish hegemony into question. He sought and found a discursive space in which Englishness and Irishness might both be remade in a progressive and outward-looking vision.

Crucially, Irish bogs provided such a space, disruptive as they were to easy comprehension, and amenable as they proved to innovative narratization. Similarly, Thomas Molyneux's analysis

⁸⁵ In Slowey's telling, Macklin's life and career represented a similar kind of process, as the long-lived actor and playwright "managed to hold simultaneously the status of insider and outsider, and kept his Irish duality permanently in the balance." See *The Radicalization of Irish Drama 1600-1900*, 151.

⁸⁶ See Marilyn Butler, Introduction to Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Reckrent and Ennui*, ed. Butler (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 20.

⁸⁷ In his curtain speech, Macklin was driven to grovel: "Ladies and Gentlemen, I am very sensible that there are several passages in this play which deserve to be reprobated and I assure you that they shall never offend your ears again." Later, he would muse: "I believe the audience are right. There's a geography in humor as well as in morals, which I had not previously considered." Quoted in William Appleton, *Charles Macklin: An Actor's Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 141-2.

⁸⁸ The entry in *American Bibliography* reporting the New York printing remarks that it followed the play's performance "at the theatre, New York, with universal applause." *TTBI* was produced at John Street a total of four times in 1787, once during each of the 1788 and 1789 seasons, and three times in 1794. See Charles Evans, *American Bibliography Volume 7 1768-89* (Chicago: Columbia Press, 1912).

cannot function without its ambiguities, which spring from Irish bogs as though they were another kind of spontaneous plant. For the “Discourse,” diverse and undecidable sources represent productive limitations, authorizing the analogical thinking that brings New World Ireland into view. They clear the way for new narratives, new chronologies, and even new cartographies. These amount to a new mythology for Ireland, a generous resource for avant-garde Irish aesthetics and identities. A Protestant Irish settler consciousness might draw its sense of history and place, not to say its basic *raison d’être*, from a mythology such as this. Molyneux’s cutting-edge intellectual and political network could ground itself in an antiquity that was Irish, Atlantic, and significantly New World.

*

They’ve taken the skeleton
Of the Great Irish Elk
Out of the peat, set it up,
An astounding crate full of air.⁸⁹

- Seamus Heaney, “Bogland”

It would be reckless to transmute Thomas Molyneux’s science directly into covert polemic, but by considering his relationship to late seventeenth century home rule discourse, we begin to recognize the potential power of the Irish Moose Deer within the amphibious ecosystem of Protestant Irish political thought. William Molyneux outlined his political inclinations more boldly, but Thomas’s posthumously published tract, “Some observations on the taxes paid by Ireland to support the Government,” suggests that we regard him as sympathetic to his brother’s views. For the Irish-Canadian writer and politician Thomas D’Arcy McGee, Thomas Molyneux

⁸⁹ Seamus Heaney, “Bogland,” in *Opened Ground: Selected Poems 1966-1996* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998), 41, ll. 9-12.

“was as national as William, though more politic in his patriotism.”⁹⁰ The brothers Molyneux, and their political sympathizers, did not pretend to represent Ireland’s population in any comprehensive way; they were advocating for the interests of a mostly non-Catholic population of educated and relatively well-to-do persons who felt they should be able to govern themselves via a parliament in Ireland, as opposed to being under the sway of a London body. Anglo-Irish commentary sometimes addressed social issues explicitly, as would Jonathan Swift in his *Drapier’s Letters* (1724-5) and *A Modest Proposal* (1729). But the main stream of Anglo-Irish nationalism in this period is better understood as a reaction to perceived exploitation under British statutes, which kept Ireland from flourishing as it ought.

Through Thomas Molyneux, an extinct animal and an Irish bog interact in ways that call established political and epistemological systems – the hierarchical relationship between England and Ireland, the distinction between the “Old” and “New World” – into question. This might have proven expedient for Molyneux; it certainly highlights bogs’ potential to answer scientific inquiry in ways that problematize the structures upon which that inquiry erects itself. In the Horn Gallery, the Irish Moose Deer exemplifies Irish ecological exceptionalism, an exceptionalism which has direct ramifications for the symbolic economy of British sovereign display. By disrupting understandings of nature, history, and time, contends Karin Sanders, bogs have the potential even to “destabilize a sense of national space.”⁹¹ Her sources operate at a great remove from late seventeenth-century Ireland, but the relevance of her thesis for Molyneux’s *Discourse* indicates a creative power belonging to bogs that transcends the vagaries of anthropogenic politics, institutions, or aesthetics. What this chapter’s boggy juxtapositions have attempted to suggest is

⁹⁰ Thomas D’Arcy M’Gee, *Gallery of Irish Writers: The Irish Writers of the Seventeenth Century* (Dublin: James Duffy, 1857), 237, 237n.

⁹¹ Sanders, *Bodies in the bog and the archaeological imagination*, 12.

that anaerobic earth produced things that, by virtue of their temporary resistance to classification, behave spectacularly, confronting observation with incongruous material that might connote the vulgar and the violent, and may leave room for uncommon interpretive ingenuities.

As we have seen, Molyneux's Ireland is distinguished, in part, by a frontier mythology distantly related to the one that broke out legendarily – and notoriously – two centuries later, in the United States, in Frederick Jackson Turner's *The Frontier in American History* (1893). Turner decreed that inside “the crucible of the frontier, the immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race, English in neither nationality nor characteristics.”⁹² Molyneux did not take the thing as far, but bog-led as he was, backwards in time and westward in space, he compounded the hybridization of his settler fellows and the kingdom they claimed. They were not simply something more or other than English. They were pioneers. Describing the long eighteenth century's “Green Atlantic,” Kevin Whelan has shown that as Britain's authority over Irish politics, peoples, and land consolidated itself, Ireland entered the flow of the British Atlantic.⁹³ What Molyneux shows us is the power of bogs to conjure alternative, “Irish” terms for this entry, and perhaps to imagine another ocean altogether.

Thomas Molyneux's essay has had significant afterlives. The awesomeness of the Irish Moose Deer, and the question of its identity, made Molyneux a perennial footnote, and his specimens recurring objects of wonder: “Among the fossils of the British Empire,” wrote the surgeon-apothecary and radical political writer James Parkinson, “none are more calculated to excite astonishment than the enormous stags' horns which have been dug up in different parts of

⁹² Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (Mineola: Dover, 2012), 22.

⁹³ Whelan, “The Green Atlantic,” 217.

Ireland.”⁹⁴ Parkinson explains, further, how Georges Cuvier, the great eighteenth-century French comparative anatomist and academic, rebutted Molyneux’s argument in order to bolster his own claims regarding extinction.⁹⁵ As recently as 1992, Stephen Jay Gould felt himself compelled to devote a chapter of his *Ever Since Darwin: Reflections in Natural History* to disentangling the real animal – “neither exclusively Irish, nor an elk,” but “the largest deer that ever lived”⁹⁶ – from its many character studies.

Twentieth century literature’s greatest encounters with *Megaloceros giganteus* – and with Irish wetlands more generally – come from Seamus Heaney, who wrote in “Bogland” (1969) that “The bogholes might be Atlantic seepage, / The wet centre is bottomless.”⁹⁷ Heaney’s bottomless center is an apt image for reevaluating the position of bogs in the Irish literary imagination, and for considering the long eighteenth century’s contributions thereto. The stories we use bogs to tell – about Ireland, nature, identities, and origins – have always been planted on mythic soil.⁹⁸ Bogs have often been seen to emblemize Irishness, and the comparison has, more often than not, been uncharitable.⁹⁹ By expanding the field of actors who dreamed Ireland through bogland, a lush and more variegated array of Irishnesses – new Irish worlds, we might say – begin to show through.

⁹⁴ James Parkinson, *Organic Remains of a Former World: An Examination of the Mineralized Remains of the Vegetables and Animals of the Antediluvian World; generally termed Extraneous Fossils* (London: Sherwood, Neely, & Jones, 1820), 314.

⁹⁵ Parkinson, *Organic Remains of a Former World*, 317.

⁹⁶ Gould, *Ever Since Darwin*, 79.

⁹⁷ Heaney, “Bogland,” ll. 27-8.

⁹⁸ “Today,” explains Dianne Meredith, “the bogs are perceived of as one of the last Irish wilderness areas but in fact, when humans first colonised Ireland, there was very little bog. The first farmers cleared woodland, not bogland. This woodland clearance is believed to be one of the chief causes for the development of bogs, along with the change in climate from drier to wetter conditions. As the bogs expanded, farming was forced to retreat. The bog had free rein to become wild, uninhabitable land.” See “Landscape or Mindscape? Seamus Heaney’s Bogs,” *Irish Geography* 32.2 (1999): 132.

⁹⁹ For but one example, we might turn to Henry David Thoreau’s description of an Irish acquaintance, in *Walden*: “Poor John Field!...thinking to live by some derivative old-country mode in this primitive new country...a poor man, born to be poor, with his inherited Irish poverty or poor life, his Adam’s grandmother and boggy ways, not to rise in this world, he nor his posterity, till their wading webbed bog-trotting feet get *talaria* to their heels.” Quoted in Helen Lojek, “Thoreau’s Bog People,” *The New England Quarterly* 67.2 (Jun 1994): 290.

We recognize a diverse field of possibilities for the stories of Enlightenment Ireland, and we credit bogs and bones with some share in their authorship.

It is hoped that this section, upon being passed, will have communicated a range of themes that will persist through coming chapters. Two are uppermost: first, that natural spectacles – even, or especially, those which occurred in circumstances that, like the elephant’s end, seem patently unnatural – transmit a potential that is legible within the ground of places, things, and processes that appear altogether unnatural, such as bogs. Secondly, this story has intended to highlight the fact that senses of nature owe their existence to sundry contingent factors, not least of which are the real strangenesses that pulse from incongruent entities in the world. This awareness will prove manifestly crucial to the proceeding chapter, on the undersea, but its relevance will not be diminished by later discussions of, for instance, urban “landscapes” of spectacularity. As a narrative of literature, visual art, and scientific discovery, this book is, perforce, a tale of spectacles whose spectacularity has been variously rejected, sublimated, and exploited by the persons and works that responded thereto. To say as much is not to abdicate the undertaking their detection.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PORCELLANEOUS OCEAN: NATURE AND FANTASY IN THE ROCOCO UNDERSEA

Toward the end of an essay called “The Temperature of the Subterranean and submarine Regions, As to Heat and Cold,” the seventeenth century Anglo-Irish natural philosopher Robert Boyle explained that water at the sea floor is remarkably tranquil. He framed this claim in terms of aesthetic disruption, or inaccessibility: “This calmness of the sea will appear strange,” he writes, “to many, who, admiring at the force of stormy winds, and the vastness of the waves they raise, do not, at the same time, consider the almost incomparably greater quantity and weight of water that must be moved, to make any great commotion at the bottom of the sea.”¹ As for the sea-ground itself, and what sort of topography it might present, Boyle consults diverse accounts but can arrive at little in the way of consensus. In certain spots, such as Mannar, in what is now Sri Lanka’s Northern Province, the bottom of the ocean seems intriguingly varied, but in the majority of cases this is true only near shore; at depth, the lie of the sea floor seems to change only gradually.²

In the first case, Boyle’s account seems to preemptively defuse the potential for sea-bottom sublimity, or at least derange its character: several decades on, Edmund Burke would argue that “the great and sublime in *nature*” produces “astonishment,” that “state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror.”³ Burke also claimed “obscurity” for one of the sublime’s central features,⁴ and the deep ocean strikes us now, as then, as offering obscurity in

¹ Robert Boyle, “The Temperature of the Subterranean and Submarine Regions, As to Heat and Cold,” in *The Philosophical Works*, ed. Peter Shaw, vol. 3 (London: Innys et al., 1725), 246.

² Ibid. 243-4.

³ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 53.

⁴ Ibid. 54, 58.

the extreme, but its apparent tranquility makes it something less than – or at least different from – sublimely terrible in the terrestrial sense. The picturesque, another robust eighteenth-century vision of the natural world, might fare even worse: the irregularities, undulations, agitations, and variety that William Gilpin idealized in picturesque landscapes – and even in the surface of the ocean⁵ – seem frustratingly absent from Boyle’s calm, and mostly flat, abyssal plain. Of course, these difficulties did not prevent the inheritors of eighteenth-century aesthetics from plumbing the sea for mood and metaphor: in Percy Shelley’s “Ode to Liberty” (1820), Rome’s incipient tyranny is tempered by art’s bathic soundings. A “multitudinous anarchy did sweep, / And burst around their walls, like idle foam, / Whilst from the human spirit’s deepest deep / Strange melody with love and awe struck dumb / Dissonant arms.”⁶ For many writers and artists living in the long eighteenth century, the ocean appears to have prompted a sort of instant metaphorization that exploited fantasies of boundlessness, vivid alternations of calm and tempestuousness, as well as the varieties of sensibility nurtured by sea-going voyages.

Alain Corbin made the important observation that the relative inaccessibility of the ocean to most residents of the eighteenth century had something to do with the fact that they generally did not bathe in it. But does this necessarily entail that the submarine’s aspects – its forms, colors, and feel – remained aesthetically and imaginatively out of reach to the era? A thoroughgoing response will involve considering that subaqueous stuff was not only fixed in place – was not, in

⁵ Gilpin offers a lapidary excursus on the picturesque potential of the sea: “Nothing gives so just an idea of the beautiful swellings of ground, as those of water; where it has sufficient room to undulate, and expand. In ground, which is composed of very refractory materials, you are presented often with harsh lines, angular insertions, and disagreeable abruptnesses. In water, whether in gentle, or in agitated motion, all is easy; all is softened into itself; and the hills and the vallies play into each other in a variety of the most beautiful forms. In agitated water abruptnesses indeed there are; but yet they are such abruptnesses, as, in some part or other, unite properly with the surface around them; and are, on the whole, perfectly harmonious. Now if the ocean, in any of these swelling, and agitations, should be arrested, and fixed, it would produce that pleasing variety, which we admire in ground.” Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales, &c.* (London: R. Blamire, 1782), 62-3.

⁶ Percy Bysshe Shelley, “Ode to Liberty,” in *Prometheus Unbound: A Lyrical Drama in Four Acts, with Other Poems* (London: C & J Ollier, 1820), p. 214.

other words, a collection of things needing reaching – but had the potential to come weirdly ashore. Bearing this in mind, the present chapter represents an attempt to establish the significance of underwater realms in the period, despite critical treatment that appears as spare as Boyle’s ocean floor. One surprising example of this tendency comes from David Clarke’s recent *Water and Art*, which leaps from a wonderful analysis of liquidity in the seventeenth-century sculptures of Gian Lorenzo Bernini to the paintings of J.M.W. Turner, in the nineteenth – Clarke writes that water played no “major role” in the history of European art in the interim.⁷ In Helen Rozwadowski’s account, the middle of the nineteenth century marked an era in which the Anglo-American world became seriously interested in the deep sea – on its own terms, we might say – for the first time.⁸ These histories jar with arguments like that of Laura Brown, who explained that eighteenth-century culture, far from neglecting the ocean, had become immersed in it.⁹ What follows will, among other things, diagnose this apparent conundrum. To do so, this segment moves beyond Boyle, the sublime, and the picturesque, and toward another aesthetic category, one that entails taking our inquiry beyond the British Isles. It proceeds, moreover, by expanding attention from the ocean as a liquid element to the ocean as a repository of variegated shapes, hues, and materials, as a decorated – if occasionally indecorous – contour.

During the first two-thirds of the eighteenth-century, there flourished a tendency – in the plastic arts, architecture, painting, music, and literature – that later eras would come to know, and often to disparage, as the Rococo. As spirit and practice, it is no more receptive to hasty summary

⁷ David Clarke, *Water and Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 36.

⁸ Helen M. Rozwadowski, *Fathoming the Ocean: The Discovery and Exploration of the Deep Sea* (Cambridge & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2005), 4.

⁹ Brown has explored an upward trend in political and rhetorical ocean-thought from the 1660s in England. For her, the late seventeenth-century sea motivated forms of metaphorical thinking that transformed the ways the English understood nation, economy, empire, and narrative. See Brown, “Oceans and Floods: Fables of Global Perspective,” in *The Global Eighteenth Century*, ed. Felicity A. Nussbaum (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 109-16.

than any other movement, and its bounds remain the subject of definitional contestation today. Vividly recognizable, however, are its enthusiasms for form, surface, delicacy, asymmetry, and extremities of *recherché* artfulness and artisanship. Insistently oriented toward materiality and sensuousness, the Rococo is perhaps most accurately – if incompletely – understood as a proclivity for ornament, or as an energy that becomes visible when ornamentation diverts significant attention from the things adorned. It has commonly connoted artificiality, theatricality, *ludisme*, and openness – characteristics that, as hardly needs saying, have attracted at least as many complaints as plaudits. A vigorously mobile and transnational sensibility, it has variously enchanted and infuriated audiences and critics in France, Germany, Britain, Italy, and elsewhere. Scholars have correctly pointed out that history would err to frame all European eighteenth-century art inside an ornate rococo cartouche¹⁰, but more concerning has been a tendency to ignore its influence altogether. It would be similarly hasty to mistake the Rococo’s widespread diffusion for proof of an undifferentiated style¹¹, but the scholarship, in particular that which treats British contexts, has been too reticent about its capacity for travel. A close focus on the Rococo – on, in this instance, its oceanic preoccupations – compels us to read, look, and think across eighteenth-century cultures and borders.

Those preoccupations are brightly manifest, but their natures and consequences have rarely been taken seriously. “Rococo” comes from the French *rocaille*, which refers originally to the pseudo-natural arrangement of shells, rocks and stones in and around garden grottos. The “arrival in art of the entire sea bed” – thus has the art critic Waldemar Januszczak described his subject, in his pastel-hued pilgrimage, *Rococo: Travel, Pleasure, Madness* (2014). This is an apt and arresting

¹⁰ Patrick Brady, review of Helmut Hatzfeld’s *The Rococo: Eroticism, Wit, and Elegance in European Literature*, *Comparative Literature* 25.4 (Autumn 1973), 365.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 366.

formulation, but while Januszczak is a refreshingly sympathetic – if at times overambitious – chronicler of the Rococo’s wide domain, he does not ponder what it might mean for that sea bed to have come so gaudily to land. Famous for shelly, florid, scrolling forms that seem to melt or flow seamlessly from one to the next, the Rococo is often described in terms of liquidity – thus Antonio Bossi’s Weisser Saal, at the Würzburg Residence, which the Bavarian stucco restorer



Figure 2. Claude-Augustin Duflos after François Boucher, *Rocaille* (1730s)

Thomas Salveter has described as aqueous, “lacking distinct forms and shapes,” “almost alive,” and expressive of “pure fantasy and imagination.” But if the Rococo’s formal aqueousness has been acknowledged, it is worth lingering over its practitioners’ clear preoccupation with the contents of the ocean, its shapes, its strange lives. Here we see François Boucher’s curious screen

design *Rocaille*, the primary effect of we might understand as a wave. The engraving is filled with some things we might expect to be cast up as jetsam by the tide, as well as many things we might not. This kind of commingling, of *naturalia* and *artificialia*, was not simply a reflection of an acquisitive decorative sensibility, or a holdover from the *Kunst-und Wunderkammer*. It was also, for the eighteenth century, a paradigm for understanding the sea. Generally, compositionally speaking, we can perhaps imagine Boucher's picture as a single wave, swelling leftward and upward across the picture. The odd and frankly nonsensical distortions visible in the temple in the background might even tempt us to wonder whether this is an undersea image. In any case, we see here – if we have the patience to distinguish them – corals, sea-sponges, and some examples of what is perhaps the Rococo's central obsession, the shell.

Water, and watery things, mediate materiality, and visuality, in unusual, exciting, and occasionally discomfiting ways. Few seem to have understood this better than Alexander Pope, who moved to Twickenham, west of London along the River Thames, in the late 1710s, to design and build an elaborate, showy domicile there. It featured, most famously, an underground grotto, which intervened, literally and imaginatively, between the Palladian-style house and its garden, which lay on the other side of the adjoining road. A tunnel provided the “subterraneous Way” over, and the grotto was its antechamber, or opening maneuver – one entered it before strolling a cockle-shelled path to the plot beyond. Pope's cavern represented something more than expedient design: compared with a conventional terrace, this was a distinctly unorthodox mode for making one's first acquaintance with a garden prospect. The poet was far from insensitive to its unique potential: one could look, Pope explained, from the riverside through the basement windows (available to view because of the grounds' Thames-facing slope), the grotto, and the tunnel, straight up to the Shell Temple at the near side of the garden. Looking in precisely the opposite direction, from the

Temple, one would see a section of the Thames enframed, “the Sails on the River passing suddenly and vanishing, as thru’ a perspective glass.”

These were only the least of the grotto’s perspectival ingenuities. Above a pebbled floor, its walls were “finished with Shells interspersed with Pieces of Looking-glass in angular Forms”; the ceiling featured the same stuff in a star-shaped design, “at which when a Lamp (of an orbicular Figure of thin Alabaster) is hung in the Middle, a thousand pointed Rays glitter and are reflected over the place.” Introducing illumination was not the only way to alter the scene: close the doors, Pope wrote, and the grotto “becomes on the instant, from a luminous Room, a *Camera Obscura*, on the walls of which all the objects of the River, Hills, Woods, and Boats, are forming a moving Picture in their visible radiations.” Pope’s *galant* sensitivity for the optical and representational capacities of architectural space was inextricable from his sense of an overweening aqueousness. Excavations had, in a moment of remarkable fortuity, uncovered a spring, the “little dripping Murmur” of which cohered, in Pope’s mind, with the rest of the decor to establish “the Aquatic Idea of the whole Place.”

Writing in *The Spectator* in 1712, Joseph Addison identified an ideal instance of art approaching nature – “the prettiest landscape I ever saw” – with his recollection of encountering a camera obscura.¹² As Sean Silver has recently observed, the space this “experiment” occupied seems a striking forecast, in Addison’s description, of Pope’s grottoed cellar at Twickenham.¹³ On one side of the “dark room,” Addison sees a river, and on the other, a park: the former proffers an intimate view of “the waves and fluctuations of the water in strong and proper colours,” while on the other wall “appeared the green shadows of trees, waving to and fro with the wind, and herds

¹² Joseph Addison, *The Spectator* 414 (Jun 25 1712).

¹³ Sean Silver, *The Mind is a Collection: Case Studies in Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), p. 88.

of deer among them in miniature, leaping about.” Addison grants that the sheer novelty of his experience “may be one occasion of its pleasantness to the imagination,” but primary, he is certain, is “its near resemblance to nature,” not only in “colour and figure” but, crucially, through “the motion of the thing it represents.” His enthusiasm for this effect arrives as a mild surprise, as prettiness little resembles nature’s primary characteristics, as Addison previously defined them: these include “vastness” and immensity,” the “august” and “magnificent.” This intriguing tension is perhaps best resolved by comprehending those characteristics within the frame of pictorial imagination – Addison claimed, after all, that nature’s productions are typified by “rough careless strokes.”¹⁴ The camera obscura is doing something technically different, achieving an effect that appears to forge a third way between Addison’s categories of nature and art, a way, in Pope’s mind, thoroughly watery.

Pope’s ambitious design inspired numerous imitators, including David Garrick, who chose a grottoed tunnel to deal with a property divided at Hampton, in 1754. Samuel Johnson chided him for poor taste, though not so acerbically as he had the author of the Twickenham original: “as some men try to be proud of their defects,” wrote Johnson, “[Pope] extracted an ornament from an inconvenience, and vanity produced a grotto where necessity enforced a passage.”¹⁵ There are a variety of significant energies at work in Johnson’s critique. By choosing not to conceal – choosing, indeed, to embrace, not to say celebrate – “their defects,” his straw men exhibit their flaws, instead of managing them out of sight. Show occurs where prudence would call for suppression. And Pope’s “vanity,” expressing a sort of independent agency, has manufactured the grotto, as though the poet himself were deprived of his senses. It is as if the solving of an

¹⁴ Addison, *The Spectator* 414.

¹⁵ This quote and the foregoing, as well as a detailed description of Pope’s plan for Twickenham, are to be found in Anthony Beckles Willson, “Alexander Pope’s Grotto in Twickenham,” *Garden History* 26.1 (Summer 1998), pp. 31-59.

architectural puzzle had tipped over into perverted excess, and “inconvenience” has been met not with the clean functionalism of a “passage,” but with a piece of ostentation, an “ornament.”

The Twickenham grotto is not presented here to establish Pope as a thoroughgoing *rococotier*. One need only have a look upstairs, at the classically symmetrical villa, to recognize that *rocaille* is operating, not atypically, as one part of an aesthetically diverse whole. But as Johnson’s comments help suggest, its indulgences – and metamorphoses – attracted a disproportionate share of opprobrium from their contemporaries. George Farquhar’s *The Recruiting Officer* (1706) seems proleptic in this regard: in a memorable scene, Justice Balance imagines what would become of his woody estate if it fell into the hands of an upstart officer, and in so doing, envisions the radical, quasi-magical renaturing of rural material:

A captain of foot worth twelve hundred pound a year! ‘Tis a prodigy in nature. Besides this, I have five or six thousand pounds in woods upon my estate. O! That would make him stark mad, for you must know that all captains have a mighty aversion to timber—they can’t endure to see trees standing. Then I should have some rogue of a builder by the help of his damned magic art transform my noble oaks and elms into cornices, portals, sashes, birds, beasts, gods and devils, to adorn some maggotty, new-fashioned bauble upon the Thames; and then you should have a dog of a gardener bring a *habeas corpus* for my *terra firma*, remove it to Chelsea or Twickenham, and clap it into grass-plots and gravel-walks.¹⁶

Adornment crystallizes a range of related anxieties. It stands for the nouveau riche, for the usurpation of landed gentility by urban military and merchant classes, and for the sundry aesthetic symptoms brought about by the same. It connotes fashionist compulsion, unnaturalness, impiety, perverted sorts of repurposing, and, not least, the literal deforestation of country estates. Balance imagines a building so “maggotty” – so whimsical, foolish, and freakish – that its own nature is subsumed within a vulgar spectacle, a “bauble.”

¹⁶ George Farquhar, *The Recruiting Officer*, in *The Recruiting Officer and Other Plays*, ed. William Myers (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 159-242, II.ii.24-35.

Vulgar because superficial, disposable, trifling – baubles are childish, showy, and, in a crucial sense, depthless. They concentrate their power on their surfaces – their shells – and have the subversive power of compelling vision to focus all its attention on the same. Hence the promise, and the problems, of Pope’s grotto, not to mention “Windsor Forest” (encountered in Chapter One) and its silver eel, purple perch, and golden-scaled carp. Those fish are worth recalling, because if ornament – as plastic practice and poetic gesture – was uniquely well-disposed to rendering oceanic things and organisms, it could also transmit its insalubrious, or at least unserious, reputation to the sea. An eighteenth-century rhetoric of adornment drew parallels between physical, sartorial, intellectual, and moral superficialities: in Charlotte Smith’s *Rambles Farther* (1796), Mrs. Woodfield recalls a repugnant encounter with someone “who, with pretensions to knowledge, was *mainly ignorant*, and with extravagant profusion in her appearance, was disgustingly sluttish”; this woman’s “knowledge,” Woodfield continues, “was like her delicacy—both were on the surface.”¹⁷ A baubling person makes a bauble of themselves. Woodfield’s critique points up widespread anxieties regarding appearance, surface, and concealment, as well as indicating the manner in which these anxieties could be bound up with moralizing accounts of appropriate and inappropriate femininity. In a manner more subtle, and more diffused, they also suggest the ways that natural form, if materialized as gaudy ornament, could perhaps be left outside Nature’s solemn bounds.

This introduction has endeavored – at some length – to prepare the reader for the argument carried through by the proceeding pages. That argument consists, first, in establishing an identification between, on the one hand, the decorative impulse typified by the eighteenth-century Rococo, and, on the other, a vehement tradition of interpreting ornamentation – or, at least, an

¹⁷ Charlotte Smith, *Rambles Farther: A Continuation of Rural Walks: In Dialogues*, (London: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1796), Vol. II, p. 85.

ornamental surfeit – in terms of spectacularity. Those terms are perhaps all the more remarkable for their transferability in view of the fact that Balance’s bauble, not to mention Pope’s grotto, seem to have very little in common with, for instance, fairground spectacles, let alone the crowds that attended them. This chapter points, subsequently, to complex connections between eighteenth-century notions of décor and some of the era’s primary encounters with subaqueous stuff. Those encounters were, not infrequently, mediated by rococo shapes, lines, colors, and matter. As early sea-going natural philosophy reveals, the rococo ocean’s ostentation and transgressive nature were not only the reflections of prejudicial criticism, or ecstatic artmaking. They were also testimonies to the productive difficulties posed by things, and approximations of things, that did not quite conform to standard narratives of, for instance, taxonomy, or of the relationship between animate and inanimate matter. It is not difficult to imagine why the Rococo was and remains accused of frivolity and artificiality – whatever their debts to nature, and however we respond to them as works of art, many of its creations are ludicrous and jarring. But it is worth taking this tendency seriously, as an effect that grows, like porcelain coral, at the point where certain strains in eighteenth-century aesthetics meet an imagined undersea. Or if that’s putting the thing too simplistically, or negatively, we must nevertheless acknowledge oceanic lives’ persistent resistance to standard, which is to say terrestrial, modes of sensory, aesthetic, and epistemological engagement.

Taxonomies of the Rococo

Like many styles in art, the Rococo takes its name from an insult. The nomenclature has multiple origin myths, but the most credible hears Maurice Quai, a student in Jacques-Louis David’s 1790s *atelier*, mashing up “*barocco*” (whence “baroque”) and “*rocaille*” to designate and

denigrate a mode from which French art had by the late eighteenth century fortunately – and, ostensibly, definitively – departed.¹⁸ Its critics have been many, and vocal. The Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt saw in the Rococo a symbol of every style’s late-stage excesses and concomitant deterioration.¹⁹ In the *Dictionnaire de musique* (1767-8), Jean-Jacques Rousseau upbraided its disharmonious confusion.²⁰ A reputation for inscrutability opened it to accusations of nihilism.²¹ The congeries of attributes commonly linked to the Rococo – profusion, lightness, femininity, artifice, unreality, luxuriance, and eroticism – have, taken individually and multiply, served as the bugbears of high art criticism since the discipline came to exist as a frame of thought. The style’s formal identity and legacy are notoriously difficult to establish, but it haunts the history of art as a synecdoche for the debauched and unserious in culture.

If it looks, as does David Clarke, only to the high arts for watery creativity, then the scholarship is perhaps bound to commit *rococote* elisions. By no means absent from sculpture and painting, the Rococo’s most superb creations are nonetheless decorative. Its curvaceous transformations of material lead the eye in what must be one of the greatest instances of William Hogarth’s wanton, graceful chase.²² Calling for more freedom of ornamentation in architecture, Hogarth pointed to “shells and flowers” as a stock “of elegant hints for this purpose.” Bear in mind, he urges the reader, that the original models for “the Corinthian capital” were some ordinary “dock-leaves growing up against a basket.”²³ Still more striking is Hogarth’s elaboration of a generalized

¹⁸ Mary Sheriff, “Disciplinary problems in the history of art, or what to do with rococo queens,” in *The Interdisciplinary century: tensions and convergences in eighteenth-century art, history and literature*, ed. Julia V. Douthwaite & Mary Vidal (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2005), 82.

¹⁹ René Wellek, “The Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 5.2 (Dec. 1946), 77.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

²¹ See discussion of Bengt A. Sörensen in Hatzfeld, *The Rococo*, 17.

²² “Intricacy in form,” explains Hogarth, “I shall define to be that peculiarity in the lines, which compose it, that leads the eye a wanton kind of chace [*sic*], and from the pleasure that gives the mind, intitles [*sic*] it to the name of beautiful.” William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty* (London: J. Reeves, 1753), 25.

²³ Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, 46.

theory of shelly looking. He suggests that objects of aesthetic contemplation be imagined as emptied of their contents, and reduced to exterior shells – this, to enable a perspectival fantasy in which the eye can examine form from within, as well as from without. This insists on a robust spatialization of aesthetic regard, not only insofar as the thing regarded is imagined to have an inside and an outside, but as the observer becomes acutely aware of the physical relation between their body – “as we walk around” – and an object.²⁴ Playful and energizing, Hogarth’s idea is also risky, in that it appears to encourage a rarefied gaze that obsesses over the surfaces and forms of things, and pays little attention to – indeed, evacuates – their interiors.

In a manner related to, but distinct from, baroque spectacularity, the Rococo invites the eye to travel serpentine lines and shell-like scrolls, in an aesthetic experience that sometimes comes close to visual touch – what Martin Jay calls a “strongly tactile or haptic quality.”²⁵ Decoration challenges the eye to do something other than scan an image for narrative, scientific, or representational information. This might give us a clue its absence from Clarke’s history, as his study proceeds from a conviction that thematic integrity, and the project of communicating intelligible “stories in space,” were the central values of Renaissance pictorial art and the traditions that inherited them.²⁶ Looking at three-dimensional forms, on the other hand, invites the eye to ecstatically expand its possible orientations and informs it – often brusquely – that it will not manage to see in all ways at once. This is perhaps the sort of ambivalence that an account of contemplative aesthetics, such as William Gilpin’s picturesque, would imagine itself as clearing

²⁴ Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, pp. 7-8.

²⁵ Martin Jay, “Scopic Regimes of Modernity,” in *Vision and Visuality* (Bay Press: 1998), p. 17

²⁶ Clarke, *Water and Art*, p. 28.



Figure 3. Louis Desplaces after Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, *Candlestick* (1728)

away. Its generative potential is exemplified by Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier's 1728 candlestick, which required three engravings by Louis Desplaces to represent it in two dimensions. In a manner related to Hogarthian looking, the Rococo calls the embodied eye into existence, as a physically specific entity attached to a human frame. Meissonnier was lambasted for refusing to let a railing or a balcony behave straightforwardly, preferring that they not only squirm but sublimate into flowers and scrolls.²⁷ He was accused, by Charles-Nicholas Cochin, of having assassinated the straight line.²⁸

²⁷ Barbara Maria Stafford, "The Eighteenth-Century: Towards an Interdisciplinary Model," *The Art Bulletin* 70.1 (Mar. 1988), 16.

²⁸ Gauvin Alexander Bailey, *The Spiritual Rococo: Decor and Divinity from the Salons of Paris to the Missions of Patagonia* (Surrey & Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 68.

When, one hundred and thirty years on, John Ruskin celebrated the singular attention wrought by the decontextualization of natural form through decorative ironwork, he seemed to retrospectively validate works like Meissonnier's. Ruskin lauded iron's unique ability to capture "the quaint beauty and character of many natural objects, as well as that of many animals plumed, spined, or bristled." This meant that things in nature could, in fact, be most accurately apprehended through elaborate ornamentation, ornamentation which perforce existed in an ambience of metropolitan materiality. "It is difficult," he wrote, "to give you an idea of the grace and interest which the simplest objects possess when their forms are thus abstracted from among the surrounding of rich circumstance which in nature disturbs the feebleness of our attention."²⁹ In a sense, the Rococo materializes a quasi-Platonic pursuit of rarefied form, an insight perhaps lost on those among its combatants who objected to its metamorphoses. Or perhaps the Rococo's sin, in this respect, was to have preempted the act of Platonic contemplation by providing a shimmering objectification – or fetish – of the ideal.³⁰

Art history, as invented by the eighteenth century, attempted the reformation of public taste. Artisanry, illusion, and sensation needed subduing under the yoke of logocentric rational philosophy.³¹ The Rococo did not suit the nascent art-historical academy's sensibilities³², partly because its methods of production were narratively unsuited to Giorgio Vasari's elevation of individual genius.³³ Johann Joachim Winckelmann's influential doctrine of clarity in art further alienated rococo ecstasy.³⁴ Neoclassicism's proponents criticized the superfluities of a "goût

²⁹ John Ruskin, "The Work of Iron," in *Selected Writings*, ed. Dinah Birch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 121-2.

³⁰ My sense of the Platonic derives in part from Roger Scruton, *Beauty: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011), 34.

³¹ Stafford, "The Eighteenth-Century," 7.

³² *Ibid.* 14.

³³ Dana Arnold, *Art History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 31

³⁴ *Ibid.* 39

modern” which preferred to enchant its viewer with irreconcilable incongruities and contradictions rather than aim at a coherent, verbalizable “work.”³⁵ The Rococo was not anti-classical – it was directly inspired by pastoralism and Roman *grotteschi* – but its visions of the ancients did not conform to the Neoclassicists’.³⁶ And rococo gods and goddesses are less invitations to meditation than pleasurable – and potentially parodiabile – citations, folded into a generalized ambience of play.³⁷

As neoclassicism strengthened its claims to the high ground of taste, the Rococo and its near relations were tidied into ontological niches like fashion, decoration, gardening, and interior design, which connoted triviality and, as Barbara Maria Stafford notes, the feminine.³⁸ The Rococo was also closely associated with music, spectacle, *trompe l’œil*, and the theater, making it a ready target for critics who regretted the eighteenth century’s appetite for sensation.³⁹ Stafford goes so far as to describe the Sonderrokoko, or South German Rococo, as “a continuous Bartholomew Fair,” in which the mechanisms of optical deception are discomfortingly advertised.⁴⁰ This kind of impudence recalls several of this book’s central themes: by arresting the observer’s gaze at the surface of the thing represented, the Rococo frustrated reassuring fantasies of submerged, transcendent meaning, not to say any hope whatsoever of suspending one’s disbelief. A Rococo show sometimes makes a spectacle of its show-ness, at best a delightful expression of skill and sensuality, and at worst one of Balance’s maggotty baubles.

Of course, neoclassical claims to direct access to the ancients were illusions in their own right, founded as often as not upon duplications and recreations, like the *Apollo Belvedere*, that

³⁵ Stafford, “The Eighteenth-Century,” 15.

³⁶ Bailey, *The Spiritual Rococo*, 60.

³⁷ Murray Roston, “Pope’s Equipoise,” in *Changing Perspectives in Literature and the Visual Arts, 1650-1820* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990), 127-9.

³⁸ Stafford, “The Eighteenth-Century,” 16.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 18.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 20-1.

violate the boundaries of the authentic.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the Italian Mannerists, as well as Francesco Borromini's baroque, were disciplined out of art history during its eighteenth-century childhood, as Italy was inscribed by critics as site of classicism and little else.⁴² Among François Boucher's Mannerist informants was Francesco Primaticcio, the painter and stuccoist who had worked alongside Giulio Romano before arriving at Fontainebleau in 1532.⁴³ Primaticcio's Grotte des Pins, at Fontainebleau, provides an early example of the influence of the Italian school on the development of French rocaille in the sixteenth century. The Rococo's debts to these legacies were seized upon by its opponents.⁴⁴

English grand tourists in midcentury Rome might have received instruction in anti-rococo temperament from the one of those opponents, the influential Scottish antiquarian and cicerone James Byres.⁴⁵ Byres arrived in Rome in the late 1750s, embarking on an academic and professional career that touched painting, architecture, art exporting, and antiquarianism. His fervent promotion of neoclassical aesthetics was the result of disciplinary formation: those among his own designs which demonstrated insufficient adherence to the ascendant mode were rejected by builders. Byres was among the English cicerones who entered the Roman market in the second half of the eighteenth century, a scene dominated by local guides like Francesco de' Ficoroni and Filippo Venuti. Samuel Powel, mayor of Philadelphia before and after the American Revolution, was among Byres's first clients; Edward Gibbon took the tour over twelve weeks in 1764, an experience he claimed to have found exhausting.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Arnold, *Art History*, 9, 20-3.

⁴² Stafford, "The Eighteenth-Century," 16.

⁴³ Hatzfeld, *The Rococo*, 23.

⁴⁴ Stafford, "The Eighteenth-Century," 16.

⁴⁵ Killian Quigley, "The Grand Tour," in *The Encyclopedia of British Literature 1660-1789*, ed. Gary Day & Jack Lynch (Oxford: Blackwell, 2015).

⁴⁶ Brinsley Ford, "James Byres: Principal Antiquarian for the English Visitors to Rome," *Apollo* 99.148 (June 1974), 448-51.

By the 1770s, when the American painter John Singleton Copley was directed to him, Byres was the most influential guide in Rome. This influence often had a precise impact on networks of taste that were genuinely international: Byres regularly acted as agent – and tastemaker – for collectors in England, North America, and elsewhere. *Rocaille* was not expunged altogether: Byres’s apartment on the Strada Paolina contained, among many other art objects, a couple of stately shells.⁴⁷ But one of Byres’s core theses was the awfulness of Bernini, whose *L’Estasi di Santa Teresa* he described “as affected and *maniéree* [*sic*] to the highest degree.”⁴⁸ This is particularly suggestive in view of the latter’s preoccupation with the formal potential of liquid. *The Triton Fountain*, in Clarke’s careful analysis, exemplifies watery playfulness, dissolution, and even sound.⁴⁹ And Bernini’s *Inundation of the Tiber*, for which he engineered a flooding theater, was one of aqueous theater’s greatest seventeenth-century spectacles.⁵⁰

As the Enlightenment gained steam, some of its proponents saw the rococo as imbalanced, privileging sensation over reason, and over empirical sight. Incongruity is not only amenable, but necessary, to the Rococo as imagined by Roger Laufer: “This style’s general trait,” he writes, “is to elegantly gather together, *by* the very force of their contrast, opposing elements.”⁵¹ What is more notable about Laufer’s description, though, is the fact that it could be lifted from a description of the Rococo and applied to many other eighteenth-century styles, not least the picturesque. And in its secular potential, and close attention to natural form, the rococo fits with some influential accounts of the Enlightenment. But it is probably more accurately understood as a style that moved in two directions at once, drawing attention to the caprices of appearance without necessarily

⁴⁷ Ibid. 452-6.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Ibid. 458.

⁴⁹ Clarke, *Water and Art*, 29-35.

⁵⁰ Kristiaan P. Aercke, *Gods of Play: Baroque Festive Performances as Rhetorical Discourse* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 92n.

⁵¹ The emphasis, and the translation, are mine. See Patrick Brady, “The Present State of Studies on The Rococo,” *Comparative Literature* 27.1 (Winter 1975), 25.

suggesting that surfaces would readily yield to probing investigation – the sort of investigation, that is, that lent the picturesque its greatest powers.⁵² In this way, Helmut Hatzfeld took Antoine Watteau for master of the rococo image, a painter of theatrical disposition who exemplifies the style’s “exquisite double effect,” in which figures appear to incline in two contrary directions at once, and through which ethereality can be imbued with substance.⁵³ Similarly, the Rococo walks, more boldly than many styles, a fine line between the charming and the bizarre. This watershed effect is inscribed in the definitions of associated terms – “*rocailleux*” signifies not only that which is covered in rocaille but also irregularity, lumpiness, jerkiness, disharmony, hoarseness, and twitchiness. And the Académie Française’s 1718 dictionary conflates caverns naturally and artificially made under the term “*grotte*.”⁵⁴

Art and its history are not reducible to the things an artist, working in a particular place at a particular time, may have had ready to hand, but any account of culture that does not take materials seriously works in a limited field. Meissonnier, who was appointed Dessinateur de la Chambre et du Cabinet du Roi under Louis XV, began his artistic career as a silversmith.⁵⁵ Besides silver, the rococo’s primary materials and manifestations are porcelain, stucco, furniture, ceramics, and *boiserie*. Emboldened and empowered by its materials, it sometimes engaged in mimicry. Stucco masquerading as colored marble renders the Wiblingen Abbey library, in the state of Baden-Württemberg in southwest Germany, a *trompe-l’œil* wonder. At the Schloss Veitschöchheim, in Würzburg, sandstone garden sculptures pretend to be porcelain. Glenn Adamson has argued that the rococo worked not to neglect reality but to sublimate it into

⁵² Rémy G. Saisselin, *The Enlightenment Against the Baroque: Economics and Aesthetics in the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1992), 5-6.

⁵³ Hatzfeld, *The Rococo*, 22.

⁵⁴ *Nouveau Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française* (Coignard, 1718), 751.

⁵⁵ Bailey, *The Spiritual Rococo*, 63.

“artificial” ornamentation, where its terms were rearranged. In this interpretation, the Rococo designates less a congeries of practitioners, media, and motifs than an ethos of conspicuous skillfulness. Its achievement – and this may give us some clue as to its marginal status within the history of art – lay not in completed works of art, traditionally conceived, but in surprise, flourish and detail.⁵⁶

Critics understand the *genre pittoresque* as the apex of the rococo, appearing in the 1730s in the works of Pineau, Lajoüe, and Meissonnier. For Gauvin Alexander Bailey, this moment saw decoration achieve a sort of lifelikeness. It also struck an elegant footing between order and asymmetry – what Edmé-François Gersaint called “harmonious irregularity” – that brings it somewhat closer, on the field of theory, to the picturesque.⁵⁷ E. C. Spary makes these shared theoretical interests clearer still by defining the French style as seeking the unity of “variety and uniformity,” and “symmetry and contrast.”⁵⁸ Manifestly divergent in their products, we might nonetheless compare the Rococo and the picturesque as motivated by a desire to hold conflicting tendencies alongside one another, as opposed to resolving them altogether. As for the sublime, rococo scale is not calculated to produce awe; but some of its primary haunts, such as caves, offered a sort of pleasurable obscurity. Its undecidability, however, appears to keep it from consolidating the sense of “interesting greatness” that Oliver Goldsmith, in a rather typical formulation, would align with sublimity.⁵⁹

The Rococo frustrates interpretation by resisting narrativization, preferring to seduce its viewer into lingering forever over and around the surfaces of things. It shares, in this sense, a

⁵⁶ Adamson, “The Real in the Rococo,” 146-9.

⁵⁷ Bailey, *The Spiritual Rococo*, 65.

⁵⁸ E. C. Spary, “Rococo readings of the book of nature,” 259-60.

⁵⁹ See Oliver Goldsmith, “On the Cultivation of Taste,” in *The Miscellaneous Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, 4 vols (London: John Murray, 1837), vol. I, p. 267.

sensitivity for description, for detail, and for surface with seventeenth-century Dutch painting, in contrast to the iconographical tendencies of the Italian Renaissance.⁶⁰ This brings to mind Jonathan Lamb's observation of a turn away from iconography in seventeenth-century still life, and of an analogous dynamic at work in Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (1712-14), which poem William Hazlitt described as a decoration.⁶¹ In these imaginative worlds, things approach vitality.⁶² Rococo decoration shared with them a blank refusal of interpretability, a discomfiting posture of self-assured triviality.⁶³ This is perhaps due, in part, to a sense of the Rococo as having been retrieved from the sea-bottom, and thus always already shorn from its ground.

Even when the Rococo does not dispense altogether with narrative information, it at least redefines what "reading" a work of visual art might involve. Exemplary of this tendency are the cartouches, splendid objects of attention in their very own right, which, at times, brazenly contain nothing whatsoever. The rococo cartouche, which radicalized the *cartoccio* of the Italian Renaissance,⁶⁴ demands an integrative view of the artwork in the fullness of its presentation, a context-sensitive way of seeing that has not necessarily been nourished by the age of Google Images. Joshua Reynolds's doctrine of "intellectual dignity" sought to countervail the Rococo's enthusiasm for minute detail⁶⁵, but when viewers encounter his *Cupid and Psyche* (1789) at the Courtauld Gallery, their experience is tinged by the painting's ornate shell-crowned frame. Some rococo cartouches radically dispense with any inside at all, compelling their viewers not only to

⁶⁰ Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," pp. 12-13.

⁶¹ Jonathan Lamb, "The Rape of the Lock as Still Life," in *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Mark Blackwell (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2007), 55.

⁶² *Ibid.* 46.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 43-4.

⁶⁴ Bailey, *The Spiritual Rococo*, 60.

⁶⁵ Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760-1800* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1989), 28.

abandon conventional modes of looking, but to indulge the fullness of their delight in the mobile circuits of decorative shape.

It is a fascinating irony that rococo decorative style, indigenous to the *ménages* of the



Figure 4. Rococo cartouche (Anonymous, French, 18th c.)

French upper classes, attracted accusations of heterogeneity, irrationalism, disorder, and dissipated taste that were elsewhere directed at the spectacle-seeking mob. The Rococo may have issued, to a crucial extent, from the exclusive preserve of aristocratic society – its first flourishing coincided with the French nobility’s return to Paris from Versailles, and with a contemporaneous renaissance in interior design and fashionable entertainments in the private home. But the portability of its style, and the theatricality of its presentation, lent it a power to actually blur social boundaries.⁶⁶ Its liberties of form and association were related, in spirit and function, to free conversation in the *salons* of early eighteenth-century France. Lightsomeness could connote covertness: as decoration,

⁶⁶ Stafford, “The Eighteenth-Century,” 20.

the Rococo does not always invite (or allow for) contemplation, and thus insinuates its forms into the materials of social life in ways that are not necessarily detectable.⁶⁷

Critics of the Rococo's ostensible femininity took aim at the style's irrationality, luxury, consumerism, and dissipation. Mary Sheriff analogizes the feminization of the Rococo with its devaluation as something other than high art. Jean Antoinette Poisson, marquise de Pompadour, was an actress, a grand patron of rococo art, and a celebrated subject of its images. Pompadour's rococo legacy includes highlighting the ways in which both women – through the application of cosmetics – and decoration were unfavorably judged by critics obsessed with transparency. Cosmetic layering enhances the multidimensionality of subjects, and stimulates the tactile imagination.⁶⁸ One of Paris's most significant rococo *salons* was organized by the patron and collector Marie-Thérèse Rodet, Mme Geoffrin.⁶⁹ Not simply objectified by rococo images, women – especially patrons and collectors – organized the presentation of the style, and were meaningfully responsible for the codes of sociability entangled therewith. These codes, Sheriff argues, entailed a specific manner in speech and conversation that foundationally underwrote the development of novelistic language in France.

Taste and sociability in the early eighteenth century did, often, dictate refinement, delicacy, and even a sort of weightlessness. One of numerous critics to recuperate the Rococo, Jennifer Milam, reorients its “ludicity” to signal fertile ground for creative experimentation⁷⁰: eighteenth-century play could expand aesthetic possibilities through immersive participation and sensory dynamism. Rococo form is an exhaustive index and engine of this culture. Milam's argument is

⁶⁷ Bailey, *The Spiritual Rococo*, 53-7.

⁶⁸ Sheriff, “Disciplinary problems in the history of art, or what to do with rococo queens,” 79-85.

⁶⁹ Sheriff, “Disciplinary problems in the history of art, or what to do with rococo queens,” 93-9.

⁷⁰ Jennifer Milam, “Play between disciplines: the problem of the ludic in rococo art and Enlightenment culture,” in *The Interdisciplinary century: tensions and convergences in eighteenth-century art, history and literature*, ed. Julia V. Douthwaite & Mary Vidal (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2005), 104.

partly an attempt to revise politically laden impressions of the Rococo as the exclusive domain of a frivolous French aristocracy, as well as critical appraisals refuse to take *légèreté* at anything but face value. To this end, Milam argues that Immanuel Kant's celebration of caprice and sensation in French art may indicate his debts to the Rococo – his ideal of “purposiveness without purpose” may have drawn inspiration from the epicenters of bodily and sensory ludicity, eighteenth-century pleasure gardens and rococo decoration. Taking play and amusement seriously leads Milam, like Sheriff, to unearth the Rococo's lingering stylistic imprint upon even works and authors – Denis Diderot perhaps foremost among them – who overtly criticized the style.⁷¹ The rococo novel, as exemplified, for instance, by John Cleland's *Fanny Hill, or, Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748-9), shares this habit of superfluous, and potentially chaotic, euphemistic play. Cleland's translations and borrowings from the French testify to the linguistic opportunities presented by the Rococo, as well as the possible grounds for its dismissal.⁷² And florid language has never shed its rococo sheen, or glare: in *Nights at the Circus* (1984), Angela Carter's Walser struggles to comprehend an ornate Siberian tongue – it expressed seventy-four varieties of cold – in its “rococo grammar.”⁷³ Barton Swaim's recent discussion of American presidential speechifying, in the *TLS*, notes a friction between adulatory recollections of John F. Kennedy's inaugural address and its true, “rococo,” substance.⁷⁴ Kennedy's memory, Swaim seems to imply, would be better apprehended as a beautiful shell.

⁷¹ Milam, “Play between disciplines,” 105-13.

⁷² Hal Gladfelder, “John Cleland,” in *The Encyclopedia of British Literature 1660-1789*, ed. Gary Day & Jack Lynch (Oxford: Blackwell, 2015).

⁷³ Angela Carter, *Nights at the Circus* (New York: Penguin, 1993), p. 260.

⁷⁴ Barton Swaim, “Meaning in America,” *TLS* (Jan 22 2016), p. 4.

The Rococo Undersea

To fully grasp the Rococo's oceanic visions, it is worth dwelling upon the style's relationship to its greatest forbear, the baroque. Both movements' historical coordinates are regularly defined, but only vaguely agreed upon. Roy Daniells situates a movement from High Renaissance to baroque in the final years of the sixteenth century⁷⁵; some use the latter term to refer to the seventeenth century in its entirety.⁷⁶ The baroque and the Rococo share reputations for theatricality, dynamism, splendor, the pursuit of technique, and the reconciliation of contrarities.⁷⁷ Many of the Rococo's harshest critics observed its debts to the "chimerical inventions" of Francesco Borromini, the boundary-smashing baroque architect and sculptor.⁷⁸ The Tuscan painter and *affreschista* Pietro da Cortona was widely understood to deserve a share of the blame.⁷⁹

The baroque is commonly characterized as a tendency the Enlightenment would squash, one which delighted in the surfaces of things and believed, as it were, in the insuperable verity of appearances.⁸⁰ Recently, however, some writers and critics have reappraised the baroque as a virtuous mode. Martin Jay has written approvingly of its obscurity, its strangeness, the challenges it posed to the forms of visibility the modern era may have taken for granted. This baroque seems to heroically speak up for multiplicity, openness, embodiment, and spectacularity. Jay encouraged late twentieth-century spectators to look for signs of a latent baroque even in an era that, he thought, actively suppressed its sensibilities. In this view, the baroque distorts in order to make

⁷⁵ Roy Daniells, "English Baroque and Deliberate Obscurity," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 5.2 (Dec. 1946), 117.

⁷⁶ Wellek, "The Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship," 78.

⁷⁷ For a discussion of these characteristics as typical of the baroque, see Daniells, "English Baroque and Deliberate Obscurity," 117.

⁷⁸ Stafford, "The Eighteenth-Century," 16.

⁷⁹ Bailey, *The Spiritual Rococo*, 59-60.

⁸⁰ Saisselin, *The Enlightenment Against the Baroque*, 5-6.

clear the contrivances that underlie conventional optics, and the material contingencies of viewing. By these lights, the baroque is marked by multiple perspectives, paradox, and vertigo, and transcends the visual to trigger tactility.⁸¹ For Roy Daniells, the baroque is imbued with melancholy, brooding psychology, and what he refers to as “a cult of significant darkness.”⁸² This reminds us of Edmund Burke’s analysis of sublime obscurity⁸³, but also prompts us to wonder what happens en route to the rococo, enigmatic and arguably obscure but manifestly not dark.

Within the motion from baroque to rococo, a number of metamorphoses occur. The eye is trained and empowered to look freely and closely at small, fine detail, where previously it served primarily to communicate the powerlessness of the spectator. In France, the exemplar of the new scale is perhaps the domestic object, intended to be perceived not only within a confined space but by persons who might linger minutely over its surfaces and contours. Relevant here is Kant’s valorization, *pace* the landscape-centric outlook of Joseph Addison and Francis Hutcheson, of the individuated, or bounded, natural aesthetic object. Circumscribed nature exists in a distinctly different aesthetic relationship to the observer than in a prospect; the former frame also brings the foundational links between natural history and rococo nature into immediate view. But if the Rococo’s *objets trouvés* might have satisfied Kant’s eye, they clearly failed to signal purposiveness without purpose in the eyes of their detractors, who maligned their lack of order or intention.⁸⁴

“Baroque” itself derives from a Portuguese term, *barocco*, which designates an irregularly-shaped pearl.⁸⁵ The baroque is literally bejeweled by animal forms, some veracious – lions, rabbits,

⁸¹ Jay, “Scopic Regimes of Modernity,” 16-20.

⁸² Daniells, “English Baroque and Deliberate Obscurity,” 119.

⁸³ Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 54-8.

⁸⁴ Scruton, *Beauty*, 50-1, 66.

⁸⁵ Jay, “Scopic Regimes of Modernity,” 16; Elizabeth Rodini, “Baroque Pearls,” *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 25.2 (2000), 68. This etymology has been disputed, but the consensus, pearling view is overwhelming. René Wellek argued unconvincingly that the term describes an illogical syllogism. See Wellek, “The Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship,” 77.

eagles, ostriches, and cranes – and others fabulous. While the baroque sometimes looked directly to nature – notably via Flemish printmakers – it often did so in search of emblems of strangeness, and of other worlds. Baroque artists who worked with pearl, such as Erasmus Hornik, took formal direction from the ocean: their works elaborated upon whatever shapes an unfinished specimen suggested. Nature’s shapes spurred not verisimilitude but fantasy, and baroque pearl-work results from a shimmering interplay between design, artisanal skill, and found form.⁸⁶ The Rococo inherited from the baroque this paradoxical impetus, to at once honor and exploit raw nature as well as explore the marvelous, monstrous, and capricious possibilities it discovered.

The Rococo sprouted from baroque arabesqueness and plenitude, but retained few of its sensibilities. If the baroque is the visual countertype of a million-organged choir, the Rococo is akin to the pianoforte. Baroque profusion is thick and weighty; rococo abundance is built from fish-bones. *Rococote* bizarrerie is a consequence not so much of the natural forms employed, but of those forms’ superabundance and uncanny juxtaposition with apparently incongruent entities. The Rococo’s aesthetic and empirical originality resides, partly, in memorializing natural forms, such as lobsters and cabbages, that had not been considered particularly beautiful.⁸⁷ This had the potential to confuse hierarchical understandings of natural order – notably the Great Chain of Being – that profoundly inflected eighteenth-century thought. Hardly monolithic, the Rococo sometimes involves itself in didacticism and moralizing, but its jumbled nature as frequently challenges any search for system or regulation⁸⁸. When form, color, surface, and material are pleasure’s primary conduits, some species of anthropocentrism fail to activate.

⁸⁶ Rodini, “Baroque Pearls,” 68-9.

⁸⁷ See Reinier J. Baarsen, *Paris 1650-1900: Decorative Arts in the Rijksmuseum* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 136-7. For further discussion of perceived continuities between the baroque and the rococo, see Hatzfeld, *The Rococo*, 18.

⁸⁸ Adamson, “The Real in the Rococo,” 145.

We can observe, in the Rococo, something more than an arresting and spectacular interest in the shapes of undersea life; we notice a generalized aqueousness, a liquid spirit. Dolphins, sea monsters, and pearls indicate the baroque's marine dreams, but the Rococo is still more enthusiastically immersed. Its worlds are, to a meaningful extent, worlds submerged, or at least worlds where the boundary between *terre* and *mer* has been recognized for the fluid that it is. The rococo undersea was replete with feature, so full of form and color that its species surged grandly ashore to decorate innumerable spaces in eighteenth-century life. Liquidity, for the Rococo, is more than a formal metaphor⁸⁹; it is a resource, and a *raison d'être*.

Were one forced to select one single motif as most exemplarily symbolic of the rococo, one would likely choose a shell. Antonio Bossi's stuccowork in the Weisser Saal (White Hall), at the Würzburg Residence on the river Main, achieve the reorganization of space's coordinates



Figure 5. Jean-Baptiste Pigalle, *Bénitier* (1745)

⁸⁹ Brady, "The Present State of Studies on The Rococo," 29.

through *rocaille*. The shell is the form from which all else – scale, shape, and narrative – flows, as though the ocean had been allowed to dictate the terms of terra firma, in an inversion of the standard procedure.⁹⁰ However, the undeniable centrality of shell-shapes to rococo form has led critics to understate the prevalence of corals, sponges, seaweeds, and other denizens of the submarine. Jean-Baptiste Pigalle’s 1745 stoups, in Saint-Sulpice, are made from the shell of giant clam. The rock-like pedestals that support each half are ornamented with mollusks, wrack, and starfish.

The Rococo is powerfully, simultaneously invested in fantasy and in careful attention to natural form. A 1741 terracotta medallion and stand by Jean-Baptiste Janelle the younger seems to exemplify this tendency. Cast “directly from nature,” the coralliform support attracts by far the



Figure 6. Jean-Baptiste Janelle (le Jeune), *Medaillonportret van een vrouw* (1741)

⁹⁰ Christiane Hertel, “Grotesques-Rocaille-Laocoöon: ‘Remembering Nature’ in Winckelmann, Erdmannsdorff, Chodowiecki, and Goethe,” *1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era* 11 (2005), 83.

greater share of the viewer's attention; the portrait medallion itself (and this is one of a pair) is, by contrast, generic. Janelle, who died in 1764, is an almost total mystery – besides this piece's mate, which is housed with it at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, only one other work, a watch-stand which lives at the Louvre, has been confidently attributed to him.⁹¹ Janelle's stand prompts us to wonder whether we can describe the rococo's undersea aesthetic as verging, in some cases, on overwhelming traditional forms and genres, or at least upsetting expected symbolic hierarchies. Instead of presenting an identifiable person for honor, glorification, or satire, Janelle commemorates coral, shells, and an elegant lobster. It is worth stressing, as well, the extent to which the successful communication of his vision relies on the material he uses: if stucco allows Antonio Bossi to adorn Würzburg with living water, the physical properties and potentialities of Janelle's terracotta seem to deserve a great deal of the credit for monumentalizing the undersea.

Through the Rococo, the ocean draws spectators away from faith in a monolithic visual mode for seeing the world truly. It is given to odd doubling effects, as in this Russian snuffbox,



Figure 7. Table snuffbox (ca. 1745-50)

⁹¹ Baarsen, *Paris 1650-1900*, 136-7.

housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, built from undersea stuff – the shells of the green turban snail – and decked in fantastic representations of the ocean. Objects like it married western European forms – in this case, Jacques de Lajoüe’s *Nauffrage*, which first appeared in a Parisian pattern-book – to Chinese artisanship.⁹² Lajoüe’s *Livre Nouveau de Douze Morceaux de Fantaisie* (1736) features designs coupled with their mirror images. They suggest the Rococo’s various nature – symmetry was not always unwelcome – as well as its interest in reflectivity and perspectival multiplicity.⁹³ At the same time, asymmetry and S-shapes assert themselves on behalf of the style’s active informers, the ocean and its lifeforms.

Some critics witness, at the opening of the eighteenth century, a decline in taste for the strangenesses that motivated the baroque.⁹⁴ However, the rococo reminds us that if the monstrous had gone out of main stream fashion, the playful could yield bizarre results. Through this ewer and basin, circa 1750, from the Capodimonte factory in Naples, porcelain enables the influx of the



Figure 8. Capodimonte Porcelain Factory, Ewer and Basin

⁹² Wolfram Koeppe, “Chinese Shells, French Prints, and Russian Goldsmithing: A Curious Group of Eighteenth-Century Russian Table Snuffboxes,” *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 32 (1997), 213.

⁹³ Koeppe, “Chinese Shells, French Prints, and Russian Goldsmithing,” 213.

⁹⁴ Stafford, “The Eighteenth-Century,” 13.

undersea into domestic display. In addition to the shells and other encrustations that cover them, both pieces have been elaborately rendered in order to appear as though they could have been found at the bottom of the sea. Perhaps the viewer is being invited to imagine them as uncannily familiar natural phenomena, requisitioned for human use. Or perhaps they're more like the hybrid results of a ewer and a basin which, having fallen to the sea floor in the course of a shipwreck, became something other and more than themselves. The status of the sea-bottom – and the things that sank there – was pondered not only by rococo designers, but by legal theorists. Lagan, explained John Exton's *Maritime Dicæologie* (1746), designates that matter "which lyeth on the Sea-ground, or is taken from the bottom of the Sea."⁹⁵ Our ewer's handle might have made its mid-eighteenth century observer think of Mediterranean pink and red coral, *Corallium rubrum*, which since the fifth century BC had been not only a prized decorative good but a touchstone for myth, medicine, and, in a basic and fascinating way, color. If Janelle's coralliform stand showed the potential for the rococo undersea to overwhelm standard form and genre, the porcelain ewer and basin indicate an even more striking – and, depending on one's sensibilities, perhaps quite garish – example of this possibility. We observe, again, the strange and arresting simultaneity of scrupulous attention to natural detail and a kind of ecstatic creativity. It isn't altogether difficult to understand why some contemporaries described this sort of thing as mad.

The rococo ocean washes both shores – the sort of illusion that invites the viewer to meditate uneasily on the experience of being deceived and the sort which makes earnest mimetic claims. Paradoxically, the Rococo is at once characterized as fantastic and as taking great care to represent natural forms. The Rococo and reason are commonly, and not always inaccurately, counter-posed. But to conclude from the Rococo's apparent irrationality that it contributed nothing

⁹⁵ John Exton, *The maritime dicæologie; or, sea-jurisdiction of England* (London: 1746), 52.

of lasting value to the natural imaginary is to indulge in a simplistic account of Enlightened reason and to accept too readily the Two Cultures cliché. And in any case, some of the Rococo's most influential practitioners, such as François Boucher, were avid collectors of natural specimens -- as E. C. Spary has shown, Boucher's *Rocaille* (see p. 5) was used as the frontispiece for a landmark work of eighteenth-century conchological science, Dezallier d'Argenville's *Histoire naturelle éclaircie*, and Boucher's natural history collection was renowned.⁹⁶ The next section of this chapter will consider whether this might indicate something other than coincidence – whether, in other words, Rococo finery might be recuperated not only for its elegance, and its liberty, but to better know the sea.

Rococo Taxonomies

In the eighteenth century and since, the Rococo has frequently been described as having a complex and often troubled relationship to the Enlightenment, which Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno influentially described as “the disenchantment of the world.”⁹⁷ In Enlightenment, Horkheimer and Adorno observe an order manufacturing validations of itself, like a species following a reproductive imperative to establish and defend a biological niche.⁹⁸ Perhaps, by these lights, the ocean was unamenable to the program because it was not perceptible in terms of “mere objectivity.”⁹⁹ But rococo worlds are other than eccentrically unnatural. The nineteenth-century German architect Gottfried Semper described the rococo through organicist metaphor: *boiserie*,

⁹⁶ Spary, “Rococo readings of the book of nature,” 262.

⁹⁷ Max Horkheimer & Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002), 1.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 27.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 6.

he wrote, elevated the frame to the status of an acting “*organism*,” which enveloped the contained as “*a plant*” might, potentially disordering its arrangement.¹⁰⁰ And pearl fishing served a real need for empirical data among proto-oceanographic researchers. When Robert Boyle sought first-hand accounts of sea-bottom topography at Mannar, he wound up drawing upon the testimony of divers.¹⁰¹ And when Boyle pondered the question of whether tidal motion affected the ocean at significant depth, his conclusion – that the abyss was basically stagnant – flowed from accounts received by way of “a famous *Eastern* pearl-fishing.”¹⁰²

The Rococo offers a modicum of nuance as we reapproach narratives of an agonistic eighteenth century in which classification spars with connoisseurship, and curiosity with science. E. C. Spary gives a relevant overview of the rococo’s significant and stubborn influence upon eighteenth-century conchological literature in France. In an era that had not yet claimed to disentangle connoisseurship from scientific inquiry, shells and the books that pictured them were at least as appealing to aesthetes as they were to natural historians. This very distinction, retrospectively applied, is undermined by Spary’s research: there is no contradiction in viewing the conchological literature of Antoine-Joseph Dézallier d’Argenville as simultaneously rococo art and scientific knowledge. D’Argenville’s contemporaries were not unanimously untroubled by this, but the decorative presentation of even such ostensibly anti-aesthetic texts as Michel Adanson’s *Histoire naturelle du Sénégal* (1757) confirm the style’s unremitting presence.¹⁰³

Rococo printed books are formal experiments in their own right, many of them assaying designs that would be impossible to enact. Many of the engravings they contain are unique in that

¹⁰⁰ Gottfried Semper, *Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts, or, Practical Aesthetics* (Los Angeles: Getty, 2004), 710.

¹⁰¹ Boyle, “The Temperature of the Subterranean and Submarine Regions, As to Heat and Cold,” 243.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 247.

¹⁰³ E. C. Spary, “Rococo readings of the book of nature,” 262-70.

their designs and forms were non-prescriptive, supplied in a spirit of interchangeability. Some, like Claude Gillot's *Nouveau livre de principes d'ornemens* (1750), were even interactive: Gillot's reader was invited to use a mirror to reflect and distort his images, toward apprehending novel and customizable forms. Many rococo books were not designed to function practically, as guides to creation: they were often intended, instead, to provide the sort of pleasure one might extract from a natural history book.¹⁰⁴ Barbara Maria Stafford analogizes the wide-ranging collecting habits of the eighteenth-century *curieux* and the Rococo, the forms of which also exist to be rearranged, or at least to be imaginatively reconfigured.¹⁰⁵ Texts like Gillot's may not have been inexpensive, but they nonetheless extended the Rococo's audience beyond the walls of the *salon*.¹⁰⁶

Among the most significant, and paradigm-shifting, developments in eighteenth-century oceanic knowledge were the contributions of the naturalist and *marseillais* Jean-André Peyssonnel. His coral studies refuted the inherited misconception that coral was a marine plant. In this, he rejected the arguments of Marsigli, Boyle, and others. Peyssonnel explains, indeed fixates upon, coral's fascinating potential for strange architectonic behavior. It grows, he reports, in ways that confuse the boundary between natural and artificial, between the built and the ground. So when Jean-Baptiste Janelle ensconces his medallions in terracotta coral, the effect is as much a representation of an undersea scene as it is a borrowing – let alone appropriation – of submarine form by terrestrial visuality. In this instance, a significant step forward in scientific understanding of the natural world results in knowledge *better* – not worse – suited to an aesthetic paradigm.

The physician William Watson promoted Peyssonnel's work to the Royal Society, for not only incorporating first-hand evidence but for heroically clearing away past misconceptions.

¹⁰⁴ Bailey, *The Spiritual Rococo*, 73-4.

¹⁰⁵ Stafford, "The Eighteenth-Century," 16.

¹⁰⁶ Bailey, *The Spiritual Rococo*, 75.

Correct regard for coral nature had become available only when cabinets of curiosity were recognized as flawed resources.¹⁰⁷ In a summary of Peyssonnel's findings, which were published in London at midcentury, Watson claims that the Frenchman, then based in Guadeloupe, had found scant purchase for his discoveries in France. While Peyssonnel was not published in England until the 1750s, his work had sufficient continental currency in the first quarter of the century that the entomologist René-Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur wrote him in 1726 to express reservations about his findings. Revising the pioneering work of Luigi Ferdinando Marsigli, and of Boyle, Peyssonnel had successfully disproven the dominant definition of coral – that it was a sort of flowering plant – by identifying the “insects of the vermicular kind” – “*urtica, purpura, or polype*” – that construct it.¹⁰⁸ Boyle had clearly imagined the undersea through reference to terrestrial vegetation, identifying marine plants as related – if oddly – to their counterparts on land. He had it, for instance, from a source in the Maldives that “a sort of cocoa-trees” grow on the sea floor there, the fruit of which is “real,” though smaller “than most other sorts of cocoa's.” Boyle's witness reckoned that marine coconut trees had grown from terrestrial fruit which fell into the sea and sprouted on submerged islands.¹⁰⁹ It is feasible, perhaps, that Boyle's sense of undersea flora fits with some more general symmetry, through which “the regions of the water and the air seem to answer one another, but in an inverted order.”¹¹⁰

Coral's vegetal nature was not its only illusion. Tactility corrected vision when the Sicilian botanist Paolo Boccone pushed out in a fisherman's boat and reached under the surface to discover coralline hardness, overturning the inherited error that coral remains soft while immersed.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Jean-André Peyssonnel, *Traduction d'un Article des Transactions sur le Corail* (London, 1756), 49.

¹⁰⁸ William Watson, “An Account of a manuscript treatise, presented to the Royal Society, intituled, *Traité du corail*,” *Philosophical Transactions* 47 (1751-2), 448-54.

¹⁰⁹ Boyle, “The Temperature of the Subterranean and Submarine Regions, As to Heat and Cold,” 249.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 243.

¹¹¹ Watson, “An Account of a manuscript treatise, presented to the Royal Society, intituled, *Traité du corail*,” 449.



Figure 9. Rubens after Romano, *Perseus Disarming and the Origin of Coral* (1592-1640)

Among Boccone's primary victims was the Ovidian vision of coral as supple underwater and rigid in air. In the *Metamorphoses*, Perseus kills Andromeda's monstrous captor and returns her safely to her parents, Cassiope and Cepheus. He is also carrying the decapitated head of Medusa, which he lays ashore, but not before preparing a kind of bed for it, using "plants from below the waves." Reacting to "the influence of the Gorgon's head," the "plants" stiffen, a transformation so marvelous that attending Nereids are inspired to reiterate it, "scattering the seeds from the plants through the waves."¹¹² In Peter Paul Rubens's drawing, after Giulio Romano, of the incident, a coral frond appears to extend directly from the Gorgon's head. This disenchantment does not suggest that coral is not metamorphic – it is, relentlessly and quite dazzlingly, as when Peyssonnel's insects (Marsigli's blooming flowers) protrude from their orifices in search of food.¹¹³ And the new paradigm expands the scope of wonder: the limits of Peyssonnel's theories

¹¹² Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Trans. A. S. Kline, Bk IV: 706-52.

¹¹³ Jean-André Peyssonnel, *Traduction d'un Article des Transactions sur le Corail*, 26.

are analogized with the awesome incomprehensibility and splendor of molluscan (*testacés*) shape and color, in the face of which one can only cry, “O altitudo.”¹¹⁴

Peyssonnel’s narrative of coral’s all-consuming growth invites us to apprehend rococo decoration as inverting the terms that would understand it as secondary or incidental to the bodies it overlays. Where Boyle suggested underwater forests and gardens, Peyssonnel presented subaqueous *rocaille*. His vermicular “insects” are seen to behave “like shell-animals,” and inhabit a “stony” sea-ground.¹¹⁵ For Peyssonnel, coral “roots” are “ligneous” and “stonish” (*pierreuses*), and can grow – thanks to insect generation – on any solid body whatever.¹¹⁶ He had discovered, in 1721, that because corals do not behave like plants, they flourish upon, and actually incorporate, diverse materials. So within coral branches, one finds such bodies as rocks, shells, and even bits of broken bottles and pots.¹¹⁷ With Peyssonnel’s findings in view, *coquillier* encrustations on buildings, stoups, and medallion-stands appear something other than ridiculous. That coral seemed to grow among sea-rocks and within sea-caves elaborates an impression of the rococo submarine.¹¹⁸ The stony materiality of the undersea was coming into focus, a prospect the Rococo was exceptionally well-prepared to exploit, refract, and perhaps inform.

Peyssonnel’s sea is an array of decorated surfaces, the sort of “garnish” that Robert Morris, author of the Palladian¹¹⁹ *Select Architecture* (1755), decried in the Rococo.

[Our] modern Architects...have made Ornament or Dress, the principle Part of their Performance, and have given Decoration to ill-proportion’d Fabricks, and indeed, Superfluity is generally the thing to attract the eye; they garnish the inelegant

¹¹⁴ Peyssonnel, *Traduction d’un Article des Transactions sur le Corail*, 41.

¹¹⁵ Watson, “An Account of a manuscript treatise, presented to the Royal Society, intituled, *Traité du corail*,” 454-60.

¹¹⁶ Jean-André Peyssonnel, “*Traité du Corail ... Pour servir a l’histoire naturelle de la mer.*” Manuscript. British Library. Add MS 4219, ff. 30-1.

¹¹⁷ Peyssonnel, “*Traité du Corail ... Pour servir a l’histoire naturelle de la mer.*” ff. 49-50.

¹¹⁸ *Idem.*, *Traduction d’un Article des Transactions sur le Corail*, 46.

¹¹⁹ Palladianism refers to a school of theory centered on the sixteenth-century Italian architect Andrea Palladio. It is distinct from neoclassicism insofar as the latter attempted direct reference to antiquity, whereas Palladianism looked to its namesake to mediate the classical age.

Design, to atone [sic] for the Disproportion of the Parts, and crowd and fill the Spaces by some gay Dress, to conceal the want of Proportion; which is only a kind of unmeaning Attempt at Elegance.¹²⁰

Morris's critique trades in a rhetoric of anti-spectacularity that is, by now, relatively familiar. He draws attention, first, to the fact that *rococoterie* connotes performance, and, far worse, that its particular mode of performance is all appearance, and, by implication, short on substance. It is all excess, and out of whack – like Balance's maggotty bauble, perhaps – and, like an unpicturesque image, or a vulgar fairground, cluttered with glaring form and color. It is becoming apparent that eighteenth-century marine science, insofar as it existed, found a congenial spirit in rococo form. What bears considering is whether the undersea, as the site of such extensive "Ornament," might as a consequence have failed to enter – or remain within – the polite natural-historical frame. Underneath the waves, deception was admittedly afoot. The ocean that Peyssonnel manages to reconceive had insolently refused to satisfy terrestrial preconceptions: the sea's productions had – and the location of agency is significant here – tricked some into thinking they were all stones and minerals, and others into believing them all to be vegetation.¹²¹ From these errors, Peyssonnel explains, terminological mistakes ensued, lumping all tree-like undersea life together as coral and the rest scattered in the ledger as madrepores, "lytophitons," and "alcionions."¹²²

If Glenn Adamson is right, and "rococo art and design implied that reality itself was manipulable through the techniques of artifice," then it is incumbent upon students of eighteenth-century culture to hail the involvement of oceanine practice. Peyssonnel's vision of coral growth finds an outstanding, far-flung correlate in the rococo practice of the American Porcelain Factory, which opened in 1770 in Philadelphia. Shells were employed to form clay molds, which were used

¹²⁰ Quoted in Adamson, "The Real in the Rococo," 153.

¹²¹ Peyssonnel, *Traduction d'un Article des Transactions sur le Corail*, 49.

¹²² Peyssonnel, *Traduction d'un Article des Transactions sur le Corail*, 50.

in turn to cast *coquilles* in porcelain. These then attached themselves to other objects, in whatever organization and quantity suited.¹²³ The *porcelainier*'s studio began to operate like a porcellaneous ocean, as the identity of the art object migrated toward lifelikeness. Jean-Baptiste Janelle's medallion and coralliform stand are the products of a similar method. Duplicative behavior was widespread among rococo things: Janelle's terracotta was likely to create copies of itself in faience, bronze, or porcelain.¹²⁴

Gifts from the Rococo Tide

Any attempt to situate the rococo in an English context must first acknowledge the style's complicated – and arguably limited – reception there. England in the middle of the eighteenth century experienced an historic uptick in the quantity and distribution of wealth. To say that this did, to a limited but meaningful extent, involve the middle classes is not to deny capital's disproportionate concentration in the coffers of a grandiose minority. The market for art expanded – and diversified – in turn. Public taste for art was informed by a rapidly expanding print culture, as well as by aspirational consumerism.¹²⁵ The Rococo's demonstrated knack for miniaturization¹²⁶ lent itself well to the media and material of burgeoning visual and consumer cultures. Shops, coffee-houses, gardens, theaters, and even private residences put taste on display as never before. Georgian London was economically dominant, thanks in large part to relative political stability. Wars between England and France bookended the Rococo's most productive

¹²³ Adamson, "The Real in the Rococo," 150.

¹²⁴ Baarsen, *Paris 1650-1900*, 136-7.

¹²⁵ Linda Colley, "The English Rococo: Historical Background," in *Rococo: Art and Design in Hogarth's England*, ed. Michael Snodin (London: Trefoil Books & Victoria and Albert Museum, 1984), 10-13.

¹²⁶ Brady, review of Hatzfeld, 366.

French period; between 1713 and 1744, rococo practitioners began establishing themselves in England.

The Rococo enjoyed a period of widespread success in this environment, in spite of official Francophobia: English taste could emulate the French while its politics reviled them. When rococo artists and decorators based in England drew criticism from anti-French elements, they could claim that they were meeting a demand that would otherwise have been supplied by continental imports.¹²⁷ Important individual contributions to the Rococo in Britain came from the engraver Hubert Gravelot, the drawing instructor Thomas Johnson, and Paul de Lamerie, silversmith. Thomas Gainsborough and Henry Raeburn have been cited as English exponents of the rococo in painting.¹²⁸ Eighteenth-century Londoners also witnessed the Rococo at Ranelagh Gardens, where Canaletto had painted the interior of a spectacular rotunda. Another important site for the production of rococo style in England was the Chelsea Porcelain Works, which crafted *chinoiserie* on Lawrence Street from 1750 to 1784.

¹²⁷ Colley, "The English Rococo," 10-16.

¹²⁸ Hatzfeld, *The Rococo*, 27.

The Rococo reached Britain via multiple routes, but important were the Huguenot silversmiths who contributed so mightily to midcentury decorative style. The Courtaulds – Augustin, but more so Samuel and John Jacob – were at the rococo epicenter of fashionable silver in London. A spice canister at the Courtauld Gallery presents a characteristic display of the bidirectional relationship between undersea nature and rococo form. Silver’s permissive attitude



Figure 10. Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, *Differentes Desseins de Salieres* (1748)

toward precise detail, and the functional scale of the canister, invite the artisan to incorporate submarine subjects. There, as in Meissonnier’s *Differentes Desseins de Salieres*, the sinuous shapes offered by the ocean direct the canister’s development as an object. The Low Countries disseminated, through silverwork centers like Utrecht, auricular expression and formal looseness, which materially informed the themes of metamorphosis that entranced the rococo and invited it underwater.¹²⁹ The Rococo’s French zenith is often located temporally in the 1730s. The

¹²⁹ Bailey, *The Spiritual Rococo*, 60.

flourishing of the Courtauld studio in subsequent decades in London suggests that we situate its English popularity somewhat later.

Philippe Minguet analyzed the rococo psychoanalytically, diagnosing shell-obsession, or “*conchyliomanie*,” resulting from the paradoxically powerful pull of tiny objects.¹³⁰ This recalls Rousseau’s description, in the *Confessions*, of an acquaintance named Mussard, a jeweler who has retired to a fine estate in Passy. Mussard had discovered, at the bottom of his garden cistern, a quantity of fossilized shells (*coquillages fossiles*) – so many of them, in fact, that all nature had become, in his eyes, so much shellwork. This reverie – this “conchyliomanie” – may have produced powerful delusions, but it was apparently not unpleasant, no more for Rousseau than for his host.¹³¹ If we were intent on psychologizing the Rococo, we might describe it as a kind of compensatory neurosis, responding to an anxiety surrounding the ocean as a sort of *horror vacui*. Under other lights, the Rococo might constitute a substantial counter-narrative to the notion that a uniform eighteenth century sense of the undersea established it as a formless vacuum.¹³²

Not only did the ocean figure in the Rococo; the style’s marine imagination expressed impressions that have never departed since. Even to accept that pre-nineteenth century impressions of the ocean were primarily imaginative does not necessarily suggest that the ocean was uninvolved in establishing the contours of those imaginings. In *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* (1951), Ed Ricketts and John Steinbeck recalled crabs called Sally Lightfoots (*Graspsus graspus*), whose “brilliant cloisonné carapaces” skittered about the foreshores of the Gulf of California. Sparky Enea, crewman on the same voyage, developed a distinct, and mostly pleasurable, conchyliomanie upon encountering murex shells.¹³³ Still, it would be rash to claim that the

¹³⁰ Hatzfeld, *The Rococo*, 19.

¹³¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Confessions de J. J. Rousseau* (Paris: Charpentier, 1869), pp. 364-5.

¹³² Rozwadowski, *Fathoming the Ocean*, 6.

¹³³ John Steinbeck, *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 53, 160.

eighteenth-century ocean was never a violent or inhospitable place. Edward Young's *Ocean* (1728) imagines a space "Where all are tost, / And most are lost, / By tides of passion, blasts of fate."¹³⁴ In trying to give an account of the sea floor, Robert Boyle described its contours as frighteningly unpredictable.¹³⁵ Jacques-Julien Labillardière, naturalist on Bruni d'Entrecasteaux's late-century voyage to track down La Pérouse, related alarming instances of marine materiality, when the bottom seemed to rear up unexpectedly – and irrationally – in hazardous shoals.¹³⁶ And of course, oceanic intelligibility could produce a terror of its own: if, as for Labillardière, one could make out the forms of fish upon a submerged surface, one might be on the brink of smashing a hole in one's ship.¹³⁷

Among the ocean's paradoxes is that it seems at once enormous and inaccessible; the co-presence of expansiveness and shallowness is also a recurring attribute of the Rococo.¹³⁸ In 1711, Addison declared in *The Spectator* that "Mermaids, that lived among the waters" were not appropriate poetic objects.¹³⁹ William Cowper's "Retirement" (1782) reprimanded the rococo's aesthetic regard for the ocean's "dangerous shore." By enumerating the pieces of pleasure-seekers' quarry – "shining pebbles," "weeds and shells" – Cowper trivializes them, in order that their finders' pretensions to wealth and greatness appear ridiculous.¹⁴⁰ One could imagine removing the figures of the errant aesthetes and replacing them with naturalists – Ricketts, Steinbeck, and Enea, for instance – keen to observe and catalogue the intertidal scene. Writing in *The Rambler* at midcentury, Samuel Johnson identified a sequence of problems inherent to oceanine poetics. It is

¹³⁴ Quoted in Brown, "Oceans and Floods," 108.

¹³⁵ Boyle, "The Temperature of the Subterranean and Submarine Regions, As to Heat and Cold," 243-5.

¹³⁶ Jacques-Julien Labillardière, *Voyage in search of La Pérouse* (London: 1800), 265.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* 265.

¹³⁸ Hatzfeld, *The Rococo*, 17.

¹³⁹ Quoted in Dirk F. Passmann & Hermann J. Real, "From 'Mossy Caves' to 'Rowling Waves': William Diaper's *Nereides: or, Sea-Eclogues*," in *The Perennial Satirist: Essays in Honour of Bernfried Nugel*, ed. Real & Peter E. Firchow (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005), 44.

¹⁴⁰ William Cowper, "Retirement," in *The Poems* (New York: Charles Wells, 1835), 147-9.

terrifying, and thus opposed to contemplative amusement; it is less various in its productions, and thus less poetically fertile; and it is too little-known, to land-lubbers, to evoke the sort of imaginative correspondence requisite in successful art.¹⁴¹

William Diaper's *Nereids: or, Sea-Eclogues* (1712) took the pastoral under water, not only to demonstrate the applicability of that mode to the submarine but to posit the superiority of aquatic eclogue. Like Robert Boyle's tranquil sea floor¹⁴², Diaper's sea is climatically equable, excused from seasonal flux. It is grander and more various in its "living Forms" than tempestuous terra firma. *Nereides* is related to the tradition of the piscatory eclogue, but its voices are those of sea-beings, not of fishermen.¹⁴³ Inspired by Oppian's *Halieutics* (2nd c.), Diaper's poem is exhaustive in its attention to detail.¹⁴⁴ Horace underlined oceanic falsity in his description of the Nereid in the *Ars poetica* (c. 20 BC): what appears divinely beautiful reveals, upon closer examination, its "fishy tail." This warning against chimeras seems to point in two, potentially contradictory, directions: toward suspicion of the undersea and toward the dangers of the overindulgent gaze.¹⁴⁵ Jacopo Sannazaro's piscatory eclogues were excoriated in the *Guardian* for aesthetic metamorphoses too unsettling ever to be justified by grace: among those things, "uncomfortable and dreadful," that he had deemed fitting were "the barren Beach and boundless Ocean," "Sea-Calves" (seals), "Sea-mews" (common gulls), and "Oysters."¹⁴⁶

The ocean's disordering potential to "blend...seas and skies" is turned by Edward Young to a reflection on tempestuous fate, but the Rococo demonstrates that confusion was not an inflexible theme.¹⁴⁷ The Rococo tames the ocean, or at least provides an odd and significant

¹⁴¹ Passmann & Real, "From 'Mossy Caves' to 'Rowling Waves'," 46-7.

¹⁴² Boyle, "The Temperature of the Subterranean and submarine Regions, As to Heat and Cold," 245.

¹⁴³ Passmann & Real, "From 'Mossy Caves' to 'Rowling Waves'," 35-6.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 36.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 39.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in Ibid. 46.

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in Brown, "Oceans and Floods," 117.

alternative to tropes of the sea as terrifying. So when Cowper's aesthetes explore the shore, their sin is something more than frivolity: it is the refusal to consider and reconcile oneself to mortality, figured in the poem as the ocean which bridles a "little isle, this life of man."¹⁴⁸ In a gesture that jars with the spirit of Hogarth's line of grace, "Retirement" decries "the man... Who studies nature with a wanton eye" and "Retires to blazon his own worthless name."¹⁴⁹ Rococo insolence is also oceanic insolence: falsehood, and deviant concealment, were descriptors commonly attached to each. Cowper's moral imperative is frustrated by a sea that – like its baroque and rococo interlocutors – is apparently profound but calculated to seize and hold attention at its myriad surfaces.

When Erasmus Darwin sought to incorporate aesthetics into his vehicle of natural knowledge, *The Botanic Garden*, the Rococo delivered the undersea. Published 1791, the poem set Linnaean taxonomy and late eighteenth-century natural history to verse. And in Canto III of "The Economy of Vegetation," Darwin poeticizes various aspects of aqueousness, including evaporation, condensation, the flooding of the Nile, firefighting, and on and on. As he explains in his "Apology" to *The Botanic Garden*, Darwin wants to reconstruct thousands of years of mythology and tale-telling – from ancient Greece, Rome, Egypt, and elsewhere – as expressive of a significant degree of pseudoscientific insight into natural systems. "Many of the important operations of Nature," he explains, "were shadowed or allegorized in the heathen mythology....Allusions to those fables," he continues, "were therefore thought proper ornaments to a philosophical poem."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Cowper, "Retirement," 147.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 149.

¹⁵⁰ Erasmus Darwin, "Apology," in *The Botanic Garden* (London: J. Johnson, 1791), vii-viii.

There are a variety of ways we might interpret Darwin's intent and effect; one of the most obvious, and least convincing, reads him as a kind of late eighteenth-century proto-Two Cultures warrior, summoning narrative in order to summarily dispatch it as a charming first attempt at rational science: here's a last look at your precious, curious fantasies, this Darwin seems to say. We would do better to understand *The Botanic Garden* as an innovatively hybrid attempt to marshal multiple modes of knowing to impress as powerful an understanding of the natural world as possible. The verse is a *mélange* of classical allusion, visual dazzle, and rococo play.

Dahlia Porter encourages us to perceive the relationship between poetry and annotation, in Darwin's *Loves of the Plants* (1789), in terms of an analogy between two linguistic modes, "science and imagination." Like the bounded beauty of objects in a rococo environment, *Loves of the Plants*, which preceded the finished *Botanic Garden* by two years, works, Porter explains, to both taxonomize and contextualize. Bearing this in mind, we might say that if Darwin's notes keep imagination, loosened in poetry, in check, he nonetheless owes to the Rococo an awareness of nature's beautiful objects, without which Darwin's empiricist poem would read as flatly didactic as James Grainger's *The Sugar Cane* (1764). As Porter provocatively indicates, Darwin's deft balancing act occasionally veers off course, as analogies multiply in a kind of ludicity that might remind us of Milam's Rococo, and which prevents the reader from penetrating the surfaces of the things described.¹⁵¹

In the following lines, the poem, which addresses itself to Nereids, is complemented, asymmetrically, by explanatory footnotes; for instance, "And drop a pearl" links to a note on the process of pearl production, in exploring which Darwin acknowledges and engages the French scientist Réaumur.

¹⁵¹ Dahlia Porter, "Scientific Analogy and Literary Taxonomy in Darwin's *Loves of the Plants*," *European Romantic Review* 18.2 (April 2007), 214-9.

YOU chase the warrior Shark, and cumberous Whale,
And guard the Mermaid in her briny vale;
Feed the live petals of her insect-flowers,
Her shell-wrack gardens, and her sea-fan bowers;
With ores and gems adorn her coral cell,
And drop a pearl in every gaping shell.¹⁵²

Several lines on, the poet gothically invokes a ship – “the flying bark” – wrecked and “conceal’d beneath, / Where living rocks of worm-built coral breathe.”¹⁵³ A footnote to “Where living rocks” explains that Darwin refers to “The immense and dangerous rocks built by the swarms of coral insects which rise almost perpendicularly in the southern ocean like walls.” James Cook is foremost among his citations, but the note ends by guiding its reader to “M. Peyssonnel” and other writers, even enumerating relevant issues of the *Philosophical Transactions*¹⁵⁴. *The Botanic Garden*’s central achievement lies not in rationalizing aesthetic or narrative accounts of nature, nor in wielding image and myth like a Trojan Horse to insinuate scientific knowledge into its readers’ heads. It consists, instead, in the poem’s weird multidimensionality, its insistence that poetry and science, taken together, operate more mightily than the sum of their parts.

This makes *The Botanic Garden* – and the function of the Rococo therein – work in a similar fashion to Pope’s estate at Twickenham, where the coexistence of grotto, garden, and villa does not necessarily entail the usurpation of one by the other. Another, more oblique, analogy comes from Robert Adam’s Kedleston Hall, an extraordinary structure which is primarily neoclassical but makes powerful use of rococo energies. Its pink-hued music room, Peter de Bolla explains, is a space that encourages “dwelling with the surface glitter,” cultivating not narrative

¹⁵² Erasmus Darwin, “The Economy of Vegetation,” in *The Botanic Garden* (London: J. Johnson, 1791), Canto III ll. 79-84.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* ll. 89-90.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* l. 90n.

comprehensibility but the sensual pleasures of “decorative surface.”¹⁵⁵ This is, it bears emphasizing, a profusion that takes pains to regulate its appearance *as* profusion; it is not tastefulness in the extreme, but in careful balance. What is sought is something akin to Addison’s idea of a Chinese garden, where the effects of artfulness are everywhere felt but the painstakingness of artifice – its spectacle – is not detectable.¹⁵⁶ The Kedleston music room encourages what De Bolla calls the “glance,” which “skids and slides off surfaces,” enforcing a pleasurable sort of perpetual optical movement – this, as opposed to the studious and excavational “gaze,” which seeks and finds depth, a depth that redounds back upon the interior reaches of the observer’s subjectivity. This appears to introduce a spirit of vital instability to the neoclassical project, opposed, for theorists like Winckelmann, to the sort of motion that would vitiate measured perception.¹⁵⁷ De Bolla’s core thesis involves the existence of a third concept, the “glance-gaze,” or “sentimental look,” which involves a dynamic, connoisseuring orientation which has the potential to alternate between looks, and issues, significantly, from the body of the looker, which comes to understand itself as one body among a society of others.¹⁵⁸ An architectural space like Kedleston, and a poetic space like *The Botanic Garden*, experiment with switching between one and another variety of looking, encouraging the development of a subject capable of – or at least intent upon – undertaking both modes of observation, of imagining, and of knowing.

Sparks fly between these modes in Charlotte Smith’s *Rambles Farther*, which takes the form of a series of fictionalized philosophical dialogues between Mrs. Woodfield, the voice of stern reason (previously encountered on p. 10 of this chapter), and a group of young girls,

¹⁵⁵ Peter de Bolla, *The Education of the Eye: Painting, Landscape, and Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 195.

¹⁵⁶ Addison, *The Spectator* 414.

¹⁵⁷ See Elizabeth Amy Liebman, “Animal Attitudes: Motion and Emotion in Eighteenth-Century Animal Representation,” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33.4 (2010), p. 669.

¹⁵⁸ On De Bolla’s impression of the glance, the gaze, and the sentimental look, see, *The Education of the Eye*, pp. 212-7.

comprised of Woodfield's daughters and permanent or temporary wards. When Woodfield's daughter Elizabeth imagines herself an author, she conjures the Rococo submerged.

I think, mamma, that were I to write a fairy tale, in which all manner of improbable fancies might be put, I would make the scene of it at the bottom of the sea, and describe a palace built of coral and agate, and wainscotted with beryl, mother pearl, and tortoise-shell.¹⁵⁹

Mrs. Woodfield admonishes Elizabeth to remember that no work of human artistry will attain to nature's perfection, and that excessive enthusiasm and possessiveness regarding shells represent – recalling Cowper – corrupted taste. For Woodfield, an aesthetic regard for nature is useful insofar as it spurs intellectual consideration of the processes and lives it attempts to represent; she lingers lengthily over various fantastic oceanic tales in order to explain them rationally. But Smith's text doesn't always operate in ways that confirm Woodfield's theses. Intriguingly, she feels surprised by her own digressions, wondering "how, Elizabeth, we have wandered from coral alcoves and arbors of shell-work to legends of goblins and fairies" (66). And this is precisely the active and subversive imaginative potential of the rococo undersea for Smith and her readers: it triggers narrative in ways that are not altogether within the orator or auditor's control. In the end, Woodfield's discourse ends ambiguously, extolling the consideration of "the wonders" of God's creation after ruminating on the pitfalls of the marvelous. But meanwhile, Henrietta and Ella, Woodfield's other and younger wards, have skidded off, bored with the conversation and drawn to explore the objects along the shore.

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¹⁵⁹ Charlotte Smith, *Rambles Farther: A Continuation of Rural Walks: In Dialogues*, (London: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1796), Vol. I, 57-8.

In pursuit of an “ocean ethic,” Peter Auster uses the language of engrossment to imagine the revelation of the ocean’s “biological treasures” to a potentially – but not yet actually – engaged public.¹⁶⁰ Rococo visions of ingenious oceanic form and dazzling undersea treasure remain available today, from the aesthetics of the fish market to BBC’s *Planet Earth* (2006). This prompts an urgent revision of David Clarke’s idea that “the modern attitude toward water” issued, to an overwhelming extent, from “certain technologies in nineteenth-century art, especially of the Romantic period.”¹⁶¹ If he is right to say that the arrival of water in art heralded a revolutionary sensibility, then we may need to push his *terminus a quo* back by at least one hundred years.¹⁶²

Subaqueous color, sound, time, space, and scale operate differently than their terrestrial analogues. Humans have difficulty establishing shape, and relative size, because of a loss of contrast and a lack of peripheral visual stimulation. Things tend to look larger and closer than they are in fact.¹⁶³ Bringing the undersea into view tends to require exceptionally aggressive imaginative and technological intervention. Standard visibility is of little use in a realm that is overwhelmingly lightless.¹⁶⁴ Signs become signals of human sensory lack, or of human sensory neglect. When photography and diving made the undersea accessible in novel ways, many discoveries looked like confirmations of rococo imagination: coral “grottoes” supported “a never-ending parade of beauty.”¹⁶⁵ To a vital extent, coral reefs *are* all surface: beneath brilliant, burgeoning extremities, their structures are skeletons.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁰ Peter J. Auster et al., “Developing an Ocean Ethic: Science, Utility, Aesthetics, Self-Interest, and Different Ways of Knowing,” *Conservation Biology* 23.1 (2009), 233-5.

¹⁶¹ Clarke, *Water and Art*, 19.

¹⁶² *Ibid.* 36.

¹⁶³ S. M. Luria, “Underwater Vision,” *Science* 167.3924 (1970), 1455-8.

¹⁶⁴ William Firebrace, “Eyes Aquatic,” *AA Files* 62 (2011), 58.

¹⁶⁵ Francis P. Shepard, *The Earth Beneath the Sea* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1959), 185.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 185.

To suggest a positive connection between underwater world and an ostensibly antirational representative system is not to say that the undersea is or ought to be beyond science's ken. But it is to ponder the forms of detection which engage those parts of the globe that natural philosophy has struggled, at specific junctures, to apprehend. It is also to imply that when such forms are underestimated or shut down, the space they leave behind is not always filled by alternative, superior schemas. An analysis like this one runs the risk of essentializing the eighteenth-century ocean as alien and unknowable, as a fundamentally fantastic site. But from a scholarly milieu that has mostly accepted that the eighteenth century was at best terrified of the ocean or at worst unaware of its existence, it is worth taking other visions seriously. Perhaps "nature" has never been adequate to the ocean.

In a simple but significant sense, we might say that one of the valuable – and potentially actionable – provocations we ought to recognize in these sources is that the undersea has proven productive and problematic even for those cultures that spent little time getting into it. More particularly, they might help us apprehend, in our own space and time as well as in others, the flourishing of language, image, and culture at the borders where human ingenuity meets material contingency and earthly incitement. Many of the stories we tell about European Enlightenment retrospectively attach themselves, limpet-like, to texts, styles, and works of art that appear to welcome dualistic accounts of the relationship between what we choose to call science and whatever we separate therefrom. This chapter contributes to the voices of those who challenge the bifurcated view. The eighteenth century rococo offers a rich and underappreciated insight into some more intertwined trajectory in the era's thinking. We ought recognize it as a species of sea-tangle; if this can be seen to be true, then underwater realms emerge, at times murkily, at times

spectacularly, as diversely nutritive for a singular moment in the histories and futures of feeling, knowing, and form.

CHAPTER THREE

NATURE'S PERFORMANCES: GEORGE EDWARDS AT BARTHOLOMEW FAIR

Porcelain animals of the terrestrial and aerial kinds issued from – and gathered at – Dresden and Meissen from the first decade of the eighteenth century. August the Strong's lively collection – the materialization of the elector's "maladie de porcelaine" – was the produce of the Staatliche Porzellan manufactory, established 1710, and of dealings with vendors at the Leipzig Fair, where the Dutch East India Company's ceramic specimens distributed themselves.¹ Meissen's formations were often characterological, and scenographic – its greatest modeler, Johann Joachim Kändler, was famous for rendering stock figures from the *commedia dell'arte* in three dimensions, creations which would inspire many English imitations.² These inanimate actors, their postures and gestures, prompt reconsideration of the mimical pathway: to what extent might these surfaces have modeled expression and bearing for human performers in the eighteenth century? Rather more eccentric, at nearly three centuries' remove, appear Kändler's designs for goats, turkeys, birds, insects, and

¹ See Emily Grosvenor, "Striking 'White Gold' in Meissen," *German Life* 13.3 (Oct-Nov 2006), pp. 30-2.

² See Robert Halsband, "Stage Drama as a Source for Pictorial and Plastic Arts," in *British Theatre and the Other Arts, 1660-1800*, ed. Shirley Strum Kenny (Washington, London & Toronto: Folger Library & Associated University Presses, 1984), p. 165.



Figure 11. Johann Joachim Kändler, *A Turkey* (c. 1733)

other creatures, many of which Augustus commissioned as part of a scheme for a life-size porcelain menagerie. After formal likeness would come natural coloration, one of several steps that proved ultimately unfeasible. But the questions raised by Kändler's turkey and its commedia dell'arte relations remain pertinent: what does the confluence of porcelain performativity and artful animality indicate about the links between performance and the idea of Nature?

Recent research has broadened our understanding of performance as it was apprehended and imagined by the eighteenth century. It is now well understood that a history of theatrical entertainment that does not look beyond patent theaters and printed plays does its work in an unnaturally impaired field. The importance and influence of a broad swathe of visual cultures has been manifest to modern scholarship for decades, thanks to such advancements as Richard Altick's *The Shows of London* (1978). As Altick's research showed, nature was, arguably, public spectacles' most consistent preoccupation: from curiosities, and so-called monsters, to peepshow landscapes to animal acts, spectators at eighteenth-century shows sought and encountered a broad

array of plant and animal performances. For environmental humanists, paying attention to the eighteenth century's canonical literary and aesthetic forms, such as the pastoral, the sublime, and the picturesque, has helped elucidate some of the period's key contributions to the history of nature. But in spite of their manifest significance for visual and affective experience in the era, spectacles have not been afforded corresponding consideration as contributors to the western natural imagination. Rarely contemplated on their own terms, spectacles are more often imagined in terms of their relation to things antiquated, or things anticipated – as the Wunderkammer's vulgar remainders, perhaps, or the half-baked forerunners of panoramas, zoos, animal theme parks, and so forth.

This section will not linger long around the contours of Kändler's porcelain animals – it moves, rather, to a decidedly more colorful, and arguably less elegant, scene, that of the eighteenth-century metropolitan fairground. The pathways between opulent animal fantasies and popular nature shows were real, and vigorously trod – as mentioned above, August and the ceramicists in his employ were indebted to the Leipzig Fair for treasures and for templates. But the Meissen menagerie, in a manner related to Chapter Two's porcellanic undersea, also made nature spectacular by expressing an exquisite care for natural form while fairly trumpeting its artificiality. It made nature theatrical by capturing its postures, and undertaking to capture its dress. As what follows will make clear, its own arrestation, after form and before color, provides a useful emblem of the imaginative and representational processes taken up by other renderers of eighteenth-century nature, of the difficulties they occasionally faced and the tactics they employed to supersede the same. This book has devoted significant space to establishing important discursive conjunctures between spectacularity and ornamentation, conjunctures that will continue to proliferate in the proceeding view. And this chapter will return, in its latter sections, to consider whether porcelain

poses come to resemble the postures of natural history, and whether both varieties of deportment bear the traces of a culture of spectacularity to which they seem, at this remove, ill suited.

It is evident that spectacles, like the ones that glared and blared from London's fairgrounds, had a vital – if increasingly uneasy – relationship to natural philosophy, and the burgeoning genre of natural history, from the latter half of the seventeenth century. As is well known, empiricists and the institutions established to support them drew enthusiastically from the sights and specimens on offer in streets and taverns. This was, as Simon Schaffer has explained, a complicated business: on the one hand, the evidentiary potential of the speciminal glut represented by public spectacles and experiments was enormous; on the other, spectacles were insistently, even predatorily, material, and natural philosophers strove to establish personal credibility without too extensively entangling their bodily persons. Experimenters' bodies were implicated in the production of knowledge, but their paramount task was to place that knowledge within an “evidential context,” as opposed to keeping it confined to, or upon, human – and perhaps animal – frames. Over the course of the eighteenth century, scientific instruments made significant gains in acquiring the kind of disembodied authority that was perforce unavailable to philosophical persons.³ And natural history secured for itself a reputation for tastefulness, meditateness, public use, and moral uplift. Increasingly, these connotations appeared to alienate the new sciences from the ground – metropolitan, mercantile, and frequently performative – that had nurtured them in the first place. But spectacles did not draw their *raison d'être* from naturalists' attention, and they have never stopped facilitating meetings between spectators, nonhuman organisms, and habitats. Even today, performance is a key, if poorly understood, concept for understanding how human beings define the natural, and characterize their experiences thereof. This fact applies extensively,

³ See Simon Schaffer, “Self Evidence,” *Critical Inquiry* 18.2 (Winter 1992), pp. 328-30.

if differentially, across the spectrum of encounters with nature, as mediated by literature, visual media, scientific narrative, and the imaginations they inform.

This chapter addresses a juncture in the history of nature that is, at once, manifestly pivotal and surprisingly little-known. It asks how the performative and scenic character of eighteenth-century spectacles, as well as the affective responses they provoked, reflect unique and contingent ways of seeing and experiencing the natural world. Under special consideration are a particular spectacular milieu – Bartholomew Fair, in London – and a specific text – George Edwards’s *Gleanings of Natural History* (1758) – but like the materials it treats, this study partakes of a spirit of assemblage, heterogeneity, and not a few uneasy juxtapositions. What it suggests is that up to about the final quarter of the eighteenth century, the idea that an authentic Nature needed to be alienated from spectacle had not yet been fully consolidated. For spectators at Bartholomew Fair, and for authors and illustrators like Edwards, it was not yet incoherent to draw upon principles of performance to register a response to natural things, and even to make judgements as to their verisimilitude. Of course, by virtue of their expense and their picturesqueness, Edwards’s *Gleanings* are opposed, to a meaningful extent, to fairground spectacularity. But they are, more fundamentally, informed by a model of spectacular encounter that involved the onlooker in the making of natural knowledge and could even rotate the observational axis, to give sight to the thing seen.

Embodiment, Movement, and the Aspects of Evidence

By the middle of the eighteenth century, more than one in five Britons lived in urban areas, and about one in ten lived in London, which at 600,000 inhabitants had become the most populous

city in Europe.⁴ Its residents and visitors navigated a geography of spectacular display which had begun to establish itself in earnest after the Restoration, as England's commercial fortunes and political stability improved. As a general phenomenon, spectacles had the potential to temporarily perforate the social and economic barriers that separated one stratum from another. In *Amusements Serious and Comical* (1700), Tom Brown identified Bartholomew Fair as exemplary in this regard: "Certainly no place," he wrote, "sets mankind more upon a level than Smithfield does."⁵ But that is not at all to say that every show was a free-for-all. Spectacular sites included – in approximate descending order of exclusivity – royal courts; the private homes of the well-to-do; inns, taverns, and coffeehouses; fairs; and, not least, streets.⁶ Of these, the first two varieties were, of course, off limits to the vast majority of the curious, but the rest, as has long been acknowledged, contributed mightily to whatever democratization of visual experience the eighteenth century enjoyed or – in the hearts and minds of aesthetic and moral conservatives – endured.⁷ If many spectators, by virtue of their lack of wealth and social standing, found it impossible to move across this spectrum, things and scenes enjoyed greater mobility. In exclusive exhibitions, and in domestic interiors, privileged onlookers shared space with animals, objects, and machines that could represent erudition, aesthetic refinement, and charming diversion, but also gaudiness, and the infiltration of incivility.

From the final decades of the seventeenth century, nature and its objects were central concerns for London's rapidly expanding visual culture. In 1673, at Hatton Garden, John Evelyn recalled laughing at a rebooted version of *Paradise Transplanted and Restored*, the original

⁴ See Anne Wohlcke, *The Perpetual Fair: Gender, Disorder, and Urban Amusement in Eighteenth-Century London* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2014), p. 30.

⁵ Tom Brown, *Amusements Serious and Comical and Other Works*, ed. Arthur L. Hayward (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1927), p. 143. See Wohlcke, p. 32, for more on the potential for social leveling at London's fairgrounds.

⁶ See Paul Semonin, "Monsters in the Marketplace: The Exhibition of Human Oddities in Early Modern England," in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York & London: New York UP, 1996), p. 70.

⁷ See Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1978), p. 17.

whereof had been shown twelve years prior, at Christopher Whitehead's Two Wreathed Posts, a tavern on Shoe Lane. The latter bye-way also lodged a cockfighting amphitheater, or "cockpit," patronized by Samuel Pepys in 1663. In 1661, six years before John Milton would publish the first edition of *Paradise Lost*, the Shoe Lane show was written up in an apparently officially sanctioned report, which described it as a mock-up of a vista: "a Model, or Representation of that Beautifull Prospect *Adam* had in *Paradice*." This is Adam as sovereign, surveying "the whole Creation of *Animals*" with "his imperious eye," and ordering the animals into their natural "subservient Offices" as he names them.⁸

By way of "Prospect," this seems to have little in common with the late eighteenth century's ideal of a picturesque landscape, which relied on a concept of harmony unfit for such heterogeneous and polychromatic clutter. *Paradise* seems to look back, to works like Jan Brueghel the Elder's *The Garden of Eden with the Fall of Man* (1613) – and forward, perhaps, to August's porcellaneous menagerie – more than it reflects contemporary breakthroughs in picturing a vista, like Claude Lorrain's *View of La Crescenza* (1648-50).

⁸ I.H., *Paradise Transplanted and Restored* (London: 1661), p. 1.



Figure 12. Bruegel the Elder, *The Garden of Eden with the Fall of Man* (1613)



Figure 13. Claude, *View of La Crescenza* (1648-50)

The 1661 précis commends *Paradise*'s artist for assiduous research after exotic animals, not to mention animals so small as to escape common notice; and, moreover, for renditions so excellent "in their natural shapes and postures to the Life...that every man may be as wise as *Adam*, and read their names and qualities in their Aspects." Thus the pivotal difference between *Paradise* and Brueghel's painting: the picture includes Adam and Eve among its objects, but the new "Representation" pretended to offer its spectator the original human outlook. From an Adam's-eye view, the animals are hierarchized, "from the greatest to the least," and "all sorts or kinds of Insects, and Creeping things," are provided as a kind of sideshow, "to please the wandering eyes of the Spectators."⁹ Evelyn details its Hatton Garden incarnation: "all sorts of animals" were "painted on boards or cloth, and so cut out and made to stand, move, fly, crawl, roare, and make their severall cries."¹⁰

It is important to consider what exactly is meant by animal "Aspects," and by the idea of reading them for identities and for characteristic traits. One of Brueghel's most important patrons, Cardinal Federico Borromeo, had written that an appreciation for "divine wisdom" was cultivable through the careful consideration of "animals' construction and formation," their "parts, and members, and characters."¹¹ *Paradise*'s spectators also inherited the potent, if diminishing, legacy of emblem books, and the poetic and visual arts they inspired. Animals were thereby imbued with transcendent moral significance, and the successful interpretation of their meaning became correspondingly urgent for readers.¹² This did not always or only amount to condescension – animals might exhibit qualities that persons found lacking in themselves, or in others, and thus

⁹ I.H., *Paradise Transplanted and Restored*, p. 2.

¹⁰ John Evelyn, *Memoirs of John Evelyn, Esq. F.R.S.*, ed. William Bray (London: Henry Colburn, 1827), p. 390.

¹¹ Arianne Faber Kolb, *Jan Brueghel the Elder: The Entry of the Animals into Noah's Ark* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005), p. 51.

¹² See Rosalie L. Colie, "My Echoing Song": *Andrew Marvell's Poetry of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970), p. 200.

could prompt critical self-examination.¹³ Diane Kelsey McColley has argued that Andrew Marvell took this sort of impulse a significant step further, by allowing for the possibility that animals might be doing the examining.¹⁴ With respect to later developments, Christopher Iannini has suggested that emblems did not simply disappear in an onrush of enlightened eighteenth-century empiricism, but played a lastingly significant role in the ways specimens were represented and apprehended.¹⁵ And the manner of interpretation they encouraged was closely linked to performance and spectatorship: in September 1702, a writer for the *Secret Mercury* described seeing the Irish actor Thomas Doggett perform, in drag, at Bartholomew Fair. Doggett's presentation, "in old woman's petticoats and red waistcoat," was "as like Progue Cock as ever man saw," his turn as a "temporary harlot" taken to signify, disturbingly, "a true emblem of a woman's tears."¹⁶

The 1661 report plays incessantly with the impulses spectators may feel, indulge, and resist when they perceive a scenario, and with the scope of imaginative play afforded them. It expresses winking surprise that so many creatures normally given to internecine squabbles – "the Dog and the Bear, the Lion and the wild Boar," cocks with one another – could be prevailed upon to stand still. This indicates spectacle's propensity for satire, for sending up – gently or jettingly – the sorts of pieties and pretensions on display in images like Brueghel's *Garden of Eden*. Were "the least Mathematical motion" at work, this serene state of affairs would surely erupt into full-on war. The fatal incident in Eden, when the Serpent places the apple into Eve's hand, is on view. So, for

¹³ See Rod Preece, *Brute Souls, Happy Beasts, and Evolution: The Historical Status of Animals* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005).

¹⁴ See Diane Kelsey McColley, *Poetry and Ecology in the Age of Milton and Marvell* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), p. 16.

¹⁵ See Christopher P. Iannini, *Fatal Revolutions: Natural History, West Indian Slavery, and the Routes of American Literature* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2012), p. 26.

¹⁶ See James Peller Malcolm, *Anecdotes of the Manners and Customs of London during the Eighteenth Century*, 2nd edn, Vol. 2 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, & Orme, 1810), p. 120.

“divertisement,” is hawking, apparently represented in a scene of arrested movement, or what seems the three-dimensional analogue of a freeze frame, which technique endures today in dioramas at science and natural history museums. This is an approach the author has some fun with, claiming not to know “by what new or ill quality, they neither come down with their Quarry, nor will they come to Lure at any hand.”¹⁷ Several inanimate spectators – “five beautifull Ladies,” a “person of quality,” and “three Blackmore Lacquees in rich blew Liveries” have lent a sort of graceful solemnity to the show.¹⁸ A representation of “the old man of the House” is so verisimilar as to fool the author himself.¹⁹

Humor expresses and mitigates the weirdness that results from transmuting the idea, or the image, of Eden into a three-dimensional, moving, and noisemaking spectacle. The appearance of lifelikeness signifies lifelessness, as well as the artificiality – the impossibility – of the Edenic prospect, at least as transferred to seventeenth-century London. “The soul was never put into the body, / Which has so many rare and curious pieces, / Of mathematical motion, to stand still.” So counsels Romelio, the Neapolitan merchant in John Webster’s *The Devil’s Law Case* (1623).²⁰ If, as Joseph Roach has observed, the eighteenth century inherited the philosophical truism that life was motion, then spectacles – and the mechanization they so often staged – served the variously helpful and dubious function of attempting to make such a theory tangible.²¹ The potential motility of bodies, and of bits of bodies, was one of *Paradise*’s most striking provocations. And movement, arrested and arresting, was consistently vital component of spectacular scenes. That puppet-shows were often known, to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century audiences, as “motions” – and their

¹⁷ I.H., *Paradise Transplanted and Restored*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁸ I.H., *Paradise Transplanted and Restored*, p. 4.

¹⁹ *Idem*, p. 5.

²⁰ John Webster, *The Dramatic Works of John Webster*, ed. Wiliam Hazlitt. 4 vols (London: John Russell Smith, 1857), vol. 4, p. 11.

²¹ Joseph Roach, *The Player’s Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Newark: University of Delaware Press & London: Associated University Presses, 1985), p. 60.

conductors, such as John Flockton, as “motion-masters” – testifies to the specifically motile character of their appeal. (Punch, the motions’ most enduring figure, was first performed in 1662, just a year after *Paradise*’s first showing.) A 1641 report on Bartholomew Fair complained that there were in Smithfield “more motions in a day, to be seene, then [sic] there are in a terme in Westminster Hall to be heard.” The punning moved onward, cautioning the spectator that “whilst you take notice of the severall motions,” care be taken “that no ones hand make a motion into your pocket, which is the next way to move you into impatience.”²²

Commentators were clearly aware – and made much – of the various ways in which fairgrounds produced and reinterpreted movement, not least via automata. Later in the eighteenth century, Parisian animal magnetizers claimed powers to control the bodily apparatuses of their subjects. Their performances seemed to appeal to the senses so effectively that reason was suffocated, and participants – as well as observers – were turned into machines. Widespread condemnation of this phenomenon drew its rhetorical power, according to Schaffer, from polite impressions of the automata and puppet shows that gathered at Paris’s fairgrounds, and in its streets.²³ Unnaturalness was potentially transmittable, as a kind of transference or contagion: the allegedly mechanical behavior of gawping spectators – the *Secret Mercury* author describes “beauish machines” – was a frequent object of criticism and drollery.²⁴ Of course, the mockery signifies matters of real philosophical concern: from the perspective of some Cartesians, the mechanical seemed to connote the natural. Critiques of fairground motions sometimes appeared to respond to such views, which appeared tacitly to suggest that physiology could explain everything.

²² See *Bartholomew Faire; or Variety of fancies, where you may find a faire of wares, and all to please your mind. With The severall Enormities and misdemeanours, which are there seene and acted* (London: Richard Harper, 1641).

²³ See Schaffer, “Self Evidence,” pp. 351-2.

²⁴ See, for example, G.R. Hibbard’s introduction to Ben Jonson, *Bartholmew Fair*, ed. Hibbard (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1977), pp. xxvi-xxvii.



Figure 14. Marcellus Laroon, *Clark the English Posture Master*

If the distinction between humans and other sorts of animals had to do with degrees of mechanical complexity, then spectacles could suggest uncanny kinships.²⁵ In any case, machines and models were not the only actors displaying challenging and exciting instances of weird mobility.

In 1698, the Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions* featured a brief comment on Joseph Clark, then recently deceased, a contortionist so accomplished as to be popularly known as "The Posture-Master." Clark, it was reported, was capable of nothing short of metamorphosis, achieving through disjuncture feats of deception that David Garrick later became famous for accomplishing by his bearing and expression.²⁶ Marcellus Laroon's print confirms Clark's

²⁵ For a discussion, see Roach, *The Player's Passion*, pp. 65-6.

²⁶ "Of the Posture-Master," *Philosophical Transactions* 20 (1 Jan 1698), p. 262. For one legendary instance of Garrick's chameleonic public performances, see Celestine Woo, "David Garrick," *The Encyclopedia of British Literature 1660-1789*, ed. Gary Day & Jack Lynch (Blackwell Reference Online: 2015).

preternatural ability by showing him at least as proficient as a monkey. But it also suggests the many directions in which spectatorship – and imitation, and identification – could move: back and forth between Clark and the monkey, and between each of them and the spectator. Mechanical theaters, as Roach has shown, provided physiological investigators with a rich store of metaphors and manners²⁷; but science could also be implicated in producing spectators that appeared both contortious and automatal. Samuel Richardson wrote that public philosophical lectures tended to attract “gay people, who, if they have white teeth, hear [the orator] with open mouths, though perhaps shut hearts”²⁸ – this is related to the gape William Beckford lampooned in his account of the fair at Haarlem and its gluttonous, “open mouthed” attendees. Laroon gives us a posture as a sort of specimen, a curiosity that, as we will see, is framed in much the same way as a theatrical study, or a natural history illustration. At a spectacle, movement became susceptible to analysis and, at the same time, to wonder, and could even prompt the strange and thrilling reorientation of lookers toward their anatomies.

These examples clarify the performative nature of metropolitan spectacles in the period, and tell us something important about how observers might have been expected to experience them. In referring to the legibility of the show’s “Aspects,” *Paradise*’s reviewer-promoter invokes an intriguing sort of tautology, or interpretive confidence, which assumes the power of the onlooker to recognize truth and interpretability on sight, and on hearing, and with regard to things never seen before, or at least not living. At the same time, the membrane separating nature in the material world and Nature as a coherent and universal system was brought into uneasy – or at least comical – view. Its appearance complicates *Paradise*’s observational ethos, whereby the subject, as spectator, is implicitly but significantly validated in trusting to their senses, and to extant

²⁷ Roach, *The Player’s Passion*, p. 61.

²⁸ Quoted in Schaffer, “Self Evidence,” p. 331.

networks of presentation, text, and testimony, for truthful knowledge of nature. This attitude is related to the monumental privileging of the senses articulated by John Locke, in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690); but the 1661 review does not accommodate the Lockean qualification that learning is strictly limited by “the weakness of our [human] Faculties in this State of *Mediocrity*, which we are in in this world.” For the *Essay*, experimentation and natural history might afford “Advantages of Ease and Health,” and other “Conveniences,” but fundamental truths were fundamentally beyond the mortal scope.²⁹

Paradise’s review registers nothing resembling Locke’s note of humility, and with good reason – its function was, to a large extent, promotional. But the fact that this tack could make for publishable propaganda suggests the extent to which spectators’ knowledge – and, indeed, their subjectivity – could be expected to be nurtured, tested, and refined through performance and attendance. At exhibitions of monsters, limit cases of human and animal corporeality were interpreted in the terms – and contributed to the development – of theatricality: hybridity, deformation, and all manner of grotesquery were apprehended in terms of comic performance, and monstrosity left a vivid formal imprint upon comedy’s countenance, through posturing and grimacing.³⁰ Thus, spectacles arranged nature in ways that simultaneously brought it tantalizingly, tangibly close, and emphasized the potential for friction between lives and their entertaining approximations.

Philosophical and protoscientific inquiry was, nonetheless, happening within this compass – Hans Sloane, who presided over the Royal College of Physicians from 1719-35 and the Royal Society from 1727-41, owned handbills touting the display of “the hand of a Sea Monster,” “a

²⁹ For a discussion of Locke, sensationalism, and Epicurus, see Sylvia Lavin, “Sacrifice and the Garden: Watelet’s *Essai sur les jardins* and the Space of the Picturesque,” *Assemblage* 28 (Dec 1995), p. 21.

³⁰ See Semonin, “Monsters in the Marketplace,” p. 78.

Man-Teger [*sic*] from the East Indies,” and other chimeras, at coffee-houses and elsewhere.³¹ What’s more, the early numbers of the *Philosophical Transactions* abound with serious inquiries into the natures of these curiosities.³² Handbills like Sloane’s were displays in their own right, and the stories they told underlined the extent to which eighteenth-century animals were interleaved with commerce, and with the energies of an expanding metropolis. Tom Brown’s narrator, in the *Amusements*, peruses two sheets, “one containing an advertisement of a red-headed monkey lost from a seed-shop in the Strand, with two guineas reward to him or her that shall bring him home again with his tail and collar on ; the other side was a large folio, filled with wet and dry nurses, and houses to be let, and parrots, canary-birds, and setting-dogs to be sold.”³³ Another of Brown’s Londoners hawks “rarities” that alternate between the mundane and the fantastical – “logwood, block-tin, spider’s-brains, philosopher’s-guts, Don Quixote’s windmills, hens-teeth, ell-broad pack-thread, and the quintessence of the blue of plumbs” – and appear sure to find purchasers among “the Greshamites” at the Royal Society.³⁴ At spectacles, performance, philosophy, spectatorship, and science manifested themselves in relation to circuits, scenes, lives, and things that informed the natures of their interlocutors, in turn. Bearing this in mind, we begin to recognize the ontological substrate of collections like Sloane’s, based in Bloomsbury until 1742 and in Chelsea thereafter³⁵, as powerfully theatrical.

³¹ Quoted in Semonin, “Monsters in the Marketplace,” p. 70.

³² *Idem*, p. 70.

³³ Brown, *Amusements Serious and Comical*, p. 26.

³⁴ Brown, *Amusements Serious and Comical*, p. 22.

³⁵ See Arthur MacGregor, “Patrons and collectors: Contributors of zoological subjects to the works of George Edwards (1692-1773),” *Journal of the History of Collections* 26.1 (2014): p. 38.

Nature, Unnaturally Close

Around the same time that *Paradise* debuted on Shoe Lane, the Royal Society made Robert Hooke its first curator of experiments. In the late 1670s, Hooke visited London's most eclectic public venue, Bartholomew Fair, where he saw an "Elephant wave colours, shoot a gun, bend and kneel, carry a castle and a man, etc."³⁶ At shows like these, a longstanding tradition of animal acts was updated for a new era by the increasing frequency of live exotic animals, and by a more pronounced appeal for natural philosophers. The Fair first assembled in the early decades of the twelfth century; 1120 is a date frequently cited for its inauguration³⁷, though others give 1133 as the year a monk named Rayer (or Rahere), previously Henry I's jester and otherwise responsible for the establishment of St. Bartholomew's Priory, received its charter.³⁸ It began each August 23, St. Bartholomew's Eve, in the ward of Farringdon Without, on a site north of St. Paul's Cathedral that is now Smithfield Market. This put it immediately outside the early city's enceinte, and in touch with the consecrated ground of said Priory – "where martyrs suffered in past time," as William Wordsworth would later take care to point out.³⁹

By the eighteenth century, the fairgrounds were environed by growing suburbs.⁴⁰ Its affairs were regulated, in theory if not always in practice, by the Master of the Revels, who issued the licenses performers and vendors needed to operate legally. (One such bureaucrat, John Charles Crowle, managed to secure a related benefice, that of Trumpet-Major, which entitled him to emoluments from "every one who blows a trumpet publicly," including "all the merry-andrews

³⁶ Quoted in John Dryden, *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. Vinton A. Dearing & Alan Roper (U of California P: Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1992), p. 406n.

³⁷ See, for instance, Jonson, *Bartholmew Fair*, p. 2n.

³⁸ See Semonin, "Monsters in the Marketplace," p. 76; see also Wohlcke, *The Perpetual Fair*, pp. 22, 24.

³⁹ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: or Growth of a Poet's Mind*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1926), l. 650.

⁴⁰ See Wohlcke, *The Perpetual Fair*, p. 25.

and jack-puddings of every Fair throughout England.”) The sundry legal entanglements inevitably resulting from these and other attempts at oversight were giving a hearing at the Court of Piepowder, an ad hoc tribunal which ran for the duration of the fair and was situated on its grounds.

Much of the Fair’s noteworthiness derived from its centripetal force, the impression that its collectiveness compounded the force of the countless spectacles it contained. Many of the things spectators went to see at Bartholomew Fair were not indigenous to it – lots of them were housed at taverns, coffee-houses, and elsewhere for the rest of the year.⁴¹ From the end of the seventeenth century and until the passage of the Licensing Act in 1737, fairground theatricals included satellite performances organized by the patent theaters’ managers and performed by their troupes.⁴² An entry in the records of the Court of Piepowder for Thursday, 5 September 1793, gives a sense of the array of (officially acknowledged) displays on hand: “Fireworks; Comedian; Gingerbread; Puppets; Show; Tippoo; Siege of Valenciennes; Wax Work; Wild Beast; View of Spithead; Curious; Wool Manufactory; Puppet Shew; Wild Beast; Camera Obscura; Wire Dancing.”⁴³ Among the animals George Edwards – naturalist, illustrator, and, thanks in great part to Sloane’s patronage,⁴⁴ librarian to the Royal College of Physicians – encountered at Bartholomew Fair were three mongooses, a southern pig-tailed macaque (*Macaca nemestrina*), and an African crowned eagle (*Stephanoaetus coronatus*).

Fairgrounds’ countless performers struck infinite postures, but their attitude in the aggregate was commonly understood as burlesque, a term Henry Fielding explicitly associated

⁴¹ See Altick, *The Shows of London*, p. 35; see also Semonin, “Monsters in the Marketplace,” p. 70.

⁴² See Wohlcke, p. 43.

⁴³ *Piepowder Court Book, Recording Names of Persons Licensed to Sell Goods and Merchandize, to Operate Swings and Roundabouts, or to Display Shows and Exhibitions; Disputes and Disturbances Brought before the Court; and other Business*, from Collection: *Bartholomew Fair*, London Metropolitan Archives, CLC/308/MS00095.

⁴⁴ T.E. James, “George Edwards, F.R.S. (1694-1773): An Eighteenth-Century Naturalist,” *Science Progress in the Twentieth Century (1919-1933)* 27.107 (Jan 1933), p. 488.

with monstrosity, and with the exhibitory impulse.⁴⁵ John Dryden had complained, along similar lines, that farce was entirely “unnatural,” its “manners” as untrue as a Horatian chimera, “parts of different species jumbled together...to cause laughter”; for a suitable metaphor, Dryden turned to “a very monster in Bartholomew Fair, for the mob to gape at for their two-pence.”⁴⁶ As a form, burlesque shared with fairgrounds a reputation for an indecent surfeit, their spaces and times filled to perverted excess. In this spirit, a satirical announcement in *The Adventurer* 3 (14 Nov. 1752) claimed to have outdone Bartholomew Fair by collating all “that is either the delight or astonishment of the present age” – this, its author explains, will mean staging a kind of mega-fair, one that features “every uncommon animal, every amazing prodigy of nature, and every surprizing performer, that has lately appeared within the bills of mortality.”⁴⁷ John O’Brien has observed the frustration felt by some at the influence of fairs (and especially pantomimes) on official theaters;⁴⁸ what is on offer in *The Adventurer*’s topsy-turvy Noah’s Ark is an exercise in tongue-in-cheek spectacular utopia – “a theatre spacious enough,” the precondition for the performance, is inconceivable.⁴⁹

The imaginary piece’s title, *Harlequin Hercules*,⁵⁰ plays with the debasement of a lofty subject, one that had received solemn and influential treatment by Anthony Ashley Cooper, William Shenstone⁵¹, and others earlier in the century. In *A Notion of the Historical Draught or*

⁴⁵ Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, ed. David Nokes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. vii.

⁴⁶ Qtd. in Semonin, “Monsters in the Marketplace,” p. 78.

⁴⁷ *The Adventurer*, 5th edn., vol. I (London: A. Millar, W. Strahan, J. Rivington, et al, 1766), p. 13.

⁴⁸ John O’Brien, *Harlequin Britain: Pantomime and Entertainment, 1690-1760* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins UP, 2004), p. xvii.

⁴⁹ *The Adventurer*, p. 14.

⁵⁰ William Godwin’s diary records his having seen a show of the same name twice at Sadler’s Wells in 1799. I cannot categorically confirm nor deny any definite relation between these performances and the description in *The Adventurer*. Whatever the case, the latter was, as of 1752, little more than a thought experiment. See entry for *Harlequin Hercules*, in *The Diary of William Godwin*, ed. Victoria Myers, David O’Shaughnessy, & Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford Digital Library, 2010), <http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/plays/unkn08.html>.

⁵¹ See, for instance, Shenstone’s poem, “The Judgment of Hercules” (1741).

Tablature of the Judgement of Hercules (1713), Shaftesbury recognized in Hercules's momentous choice – between virtue and vice – real terrestrial and political significance.⁵² Anxiety regarding the influence of harlequin and other roguish figures from the theater was widespread in the society addressed by the announcement's author, "LUN Tertius," whose satire consists, in part, in appearing to pretend that the moral seriousness of Hercules's decision is only the sideshow to a spectacular main event.⁵³ That event is kaleidoscopic in its images and its references, which obliterate the barrier between spectacle and spectator and gesture omnidirectionally.

In the original story, as a prelude to his future victories, we are told that HERCULES strangled two serpents in the cradle: I shall therefore open with this circumstance; and have prepared a couple of pasteboard serpents of an enormous length, with internal springs and movements for their contortions, which I dare say will far exceed that most astonishing one in Orpheus and Euridice. Any of the common sized particoloured gentry, that have learnt to whimper and whine after being hatched in the egg in the Rape of Proserpine, may serve for this scene: but as the Man HERCULES must be supposed to be of a preternatural bulk of body, the MODERN COLOSSUS has practised the tiptoe step and tripping air for the ensuing parts.⁵⁴

Harlequin Hercules jumbles the stuff of London's theatrical culture, including its patent theaters, together with its spectacular odds and ends, and even with spectators themselves. Lewis Theobald wrote the libretti for *The Rape of Proserpine*, a pantomime afterpiece performed at John Rich's Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1727. It was just one among numerous lavish productions – *The Necromancer* (1723), *Perseus and Andromeda* (1730) – Rich put on in an attempt to remain viable in competition with Colley Cibber at Drury Lane. Another early referent may be Elkanah Settle's *The Empress of Morocco* (1673), which featured Proserpine in hell, not to mention a shower of hail. *Morocco*'s visual impress was emphasized by the engravings that accompanied its printing,

⁵² See James Hall, *The Sinister Side: How Left-right Symbolism Shaped Western Art* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), pp. 137-141.

⁵³ See O'Brien, *Harlequin Britain*, p. xxiii.

⁵⁴ *The Adventurer*, pp. 14-15.

and helped earn Settle the opprobrium of John Dryden. As LUN Tertius notes, hell-scenes were often the climactic spectacles in pantomimes and other afterpieces.⁵⁵ John Dennis's *Orpheus and Eurydice* was printed – in *The Muses Mercury* – in 1707, but likely never performed.

One begins to understand that *The Adventurer's* treatment of the Hercules myth is a pretense for presenting sundry spectacles, and not the other way around. This sort of inversion was well-established, especially outside the patent theaters. A play-bill for “Ben Jonson's Booth” at Bartholomew Fair, dating from some time between 1707 and 1714, makes passing mention of a mimetic subject – “the famous history of Whittington, Lord Mayor of London” – en route to a list of its “several stately and surprising scenes; as a rowling sea, bearing a large ship under sayl, with Neptune, mermaids, dolphins, &c [and] concluding with a Lord Mayor's triumph, in which are presented nine several pageants, being six elephants and castles, a magnificent temple, and two triumphal chariots, one drawn by two lyons, and the other by two dolphins.” The description goes on for several more lines. As for *Harlequin Hercules*, “the FAMOUS NEGRO who swings about his arms in every direction” will be brought in to help “personate Geryon, who had three bodies”; “THE MOST AMAZING NEW ENGLISH CHIEN SAVANT” has been cast as Cerberus; and “the NOTED OX with six legs and two bellies,” as well as “the BEAUTIFUL PANTHER-MARE,” are billed in the parts of Geryon's “cannibal oxen” and Diomedes's “flesh-eating horses,” respectively.⁵⁶

LUN Tertius's use of capital lettering is an obvious, but effective, evocation of the language of advertisement. The Modern Colossus has also been called up, on loan from fairs, handbills and broadsheets. Another scheme, for Hercules's encounter with the Nemean Lion, highlights spectacle's tendency to cultivate explosive violence – Harlequin, it is promised, will

⁵⁵ *The Adventurer*, p. 19.

⁵⁶ *The Adventurer*, pp. 18-19.

“flea [*sic*] him on the spot, and cloak himself with the skin.” A “hide” of serge and worsted has been made especially for the scene.⁵⁷ For the meeting with the Amazons, “all THE WONDERFUL TALL MEN AND WOMEN, that have lately been exhibited in this town,” not least “the FEMALE SAMPSON,” are to be hired.⁵⁸ Experts have been consulted, including – for explosive hellfire – “the engineer of Cuper’s gardens,” visitors’ experience of which had been enhanced, in the middle decades of the eighteenth century by spectacular displays like “The Gorgon’s Head” fireworks in 1743. But for all their oversight, the imaginary preparations have not been unattended by faux catastrophe: the machine built to mobilize the fire-breathing bull caught fire and almost burned its human operator alive.⁵⁹

Harlequin Hercules farcifies its subject by underscoring – or literally capitalizing – the unnaturalness of the nature that London’s spectacles claimed to have made newly and wondrously available. Here emerges one of spectacle’s central paradoxes, which illuminates its vital importance for the history of nature and begins to indicate why it has often been written out of that history. As exotic specimens proliferated, at salons and public shows, spectators were confronted by a nature that was by turns dazzling and disappointing, marvelous and much less than what the mind had imagined. At Bartholomew Fair and elsewhere, pieces of nature were made newly and spectacularly accessible, but the cumulative effect of its exhibitions vacillated, for commentators, between vacuous artificiality and uncontrollable disorder. In a distinction that twenty-first century audiences might find unfamiliar, when observers characterized fairs and fairgoers in terms of wildness, they did so to highlight their distance from nature, not their approximating it. This is

⁵⁷ *The Adventurer*, p. 15.

⁵⁸ *The Adventurer*, p. 17.

⁵⁹ *The Adventurer*, pp. 17-18.

Dorothy Wordsworth's sense of the wild, from *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland*, as nonsense, and as that which barrenly refuses to generate meaning beyond its material self.⁶⁰

When Dorothy's brother, William, wrote Bartholomew Fair into one of his most well-read poems, he helped shore up the separation between spectacularity and naturalness. The seventh book of *The Prelude* (1799, 1805, 1815, 1850) plucks Bartholomew Fair from an inventory of "sights," each of which share a tendency to set Londoners surging, "Full of one passion": "executions," "a street on fire, / Mobs, riots, or rejoicings." Wordsworth's description relies heavily on the commonplace that spectacles stifle the proper workings of the imagination: "there, see / A work completed to our hands, that lays, / If any spectacle on earth can do, / The whole creative powers of man asleep!" The poet gains perspective by elevating himself "Above the press and danger of the crowd, / Upon some showman's platform." (Wordsworth did not invent this trope; nearly a century earlier, Ned Ward's narrators delivered their opinions of the scene at Bartholomew Fair from a tavern affording them an overhead view.) What he observes thence is a panorama both plenitudinous and illusory – "a phantasma" – and populated by "Dumb proclamations," at once loudly declarative and incapable of productive speech. Performers and patrons – human, animal, and inanimate alike – are implicated: "All moveables of wonder, from all parts," are "All jumbled together, to compose / A Parliament of Monsters." The whole is machinal, like "one vast mill," ingesting "Men, Women, three-years' Children, Babes in arms," before "vomiting" them out again.

For Wordsworth, this is fairground leveling, of the type described by Tom Brown, as horror, and it is a synecdoche for London entire: "true epitome / Of what the mighty City is herself, / To thousands upon thousands of her sons, / Living amid the same perpetual whirl / Of trivial

⁶⁰ See Onno Oerlemans, *Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature* (Toronto, Buffalo, & London: U of Toronto P, 2002), p. 199.

objects, melted and reduced / To one identity.” It is also anathema to productive perception, “By nature an unmanageable sight,” a crucial problem that is potentially solvable only for “him who looks / In steadiness, who hath among least things / An under-sense of greatest” and “a feeling of the whole.” So some kind of hierarchy needs imposing, and “education” in it promises to activate those things that the fair threatens to stymie: “Attention,” “comprehensiveness,” and “memory.” Good learning consists in sublime encounters with nature’s “simplicity and power,” as upon view of “everlasting streams and woods,” the desert, the sea, and the clouds. By virtue of their vastness, “order and relation,” and apparent stability, these entities seem to assure permanence; on an alternative view, the consistency Wordsworth accords them comes close to a refutation of history. A visual and metaphysical vantage resembling that offered by a landscape painting “Quickens the slumbering mind, and aids the thoughts,” culminating in the acquisition of a “Spirit of Nature” which not only insures the reader against spectacle’s depredations, but has the potential to transform the spectacle itself: “The soul of Beauty and enduring Life...diffused, / Through meagre lines and colours, and the press / Of self-destroying, transitory things, / Composure, and ennobling Harmony.”⁶¹

The Prelude set the Romantic subject the estimable task of establishing sufficient contemplative remove, and sifting spectacular chaos for harmony. Wordsworth’s oppositions help elucidate the lineage of the idea of nature cherished by the west today. These were not always so vigorously established. Between *Harlequin Hercules* and *Paradise Transplanted and Restored*, several significant differences obtain. The former is, in more than one sense, a fiction, composed with the author’s tongue in his cheek; the other not only appeared in reality, but, as Evelyn’s visit to Hatton Garden indicates, enjoyed reprises. *Paradise* clearly aspired to – and attained – some

⁶¹ Wordsworth, *The Prelude: or Growth of a Poet’s Mind*, ll. 644-740.

measure of respectability, and even of gravity (though Evelyn thought it foolish); LUN Tertius, on the other hand, adopts the posture of a ringmaster, *avant la lettre* – the trappings of dramatic narrative are useful only insofar as they can be taken to justify the transformation of a stage to a fairground. Not least, they arose at a significant temporal distance, and in non-identical contexts. The London of *Harlequin Hercules* was fuller – of people, objects, and spectacles – than it had been ninety years earlier; by 1780, its overseas trade would be double what it had been at the beginning of the century.⁶² And as commerce rose, so did the voices of those who questioned and critiqued the impact of commodities and spectacles – so often paired, in reality and in rhetoric – on citizens' minds and morals.

But *Paradise* and *Hercules* also reflect a common urge: to present the forms, colors, and even movements of nature via spectacle. At the middle of the eighteenth century, Londoners were likely to have seen in life – or preserved in death – many of the creatures on *Paradise*'s cutouts. Paradoxically, this intimacy could produce a dramatic foreshortening of the Edenic prospect: as LUN Tertius implies, *Hercules*'s spectators might have recognized its performers as members of the circuit – or the ecology – of metropolitan spectacle, as opposed (or at least prior) to seeing them as parts of universal Nature. *The Adventurer*'s subsequent number (18 Nov 1752) pondered whether, at mid-century, nature had been “exhausted”: “all her wonders have been accumulated, every recess has been explored, deserts have been traversed, Alps climbed, and the secrets of the deep disclosed.”⁶³ There is evident, here and in *Hercules*, a kind of ennui; to reinvigorate nature, different sorts of performance, including ones that disavowed their own performativity, needed undertaking.

⁶² See Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (London & Boston: Faber and Faber, 1977), p. 56.

⁶³ *The Adventurer*, p. 24.

Maintaining Humanness

To make the objects and inhabitants of fairground spectacle coherent and comprehensible for posterity, natural philosophers – as well as later eighteenth-century exhibitions – would excise a great deal of the sort of tumult typical of fairground spectacle, and sent up by *Harlequin Hercules*. The emphasis on performance required new varieties of management, but remained pivotal. Ashton Lever’s museum, the Holophusikon, opened on Leicester Square in 1775, a cabinet of taxidermal and ethnographic specimens, as well as antiquities. The Holophusikon aspired to unprecedented natural-historical comprehensiveness, to the consolidation of global nature within a metropolitan exhibition.⁶⁴ But its presentational style was attitudinal, and some visitors found it markedly eccentric: in 1780, Susan Burney saw “a room full of monkeys,” one of whom “presents the company with an Italian song—another is reading a book—another, the most horrid of all, is put in the attitude of *Venus de Medicis* [*sic*], scarce fit to be look’d at.”⁶⁵

Simian burlesque might have struck some as funny, and others as philosophically suggestive, but Burney found it repugnant. Her sister Fanny met Lever at his museum two years later, and found his appearance and behavior – having dressed up, along with his assistants, in fanciful sylvan garb, and flitting about the place pretending to bend his bow at his patrons – so “natural” as to preclude the value of recording their conversation. Benjamin Silliman – chemist, Connecticuter, and cofounder of the *American Science Journal* – viewed the monkeys some years after, following their installation at Lambeth. He wrote, with indignant awe, of the anthropomorphic postures foisted upon the remains of animals whose nature was “so much like

⁶⁴ See Denise Oleksijczuk, *The First Panoramas: Visions of British Imperialism* (Minneapolis & London: U of Minnesota P, 2011), p. 60.

⁶⁵ Qtd. in Altick, *The Shows of London*, p. 29.

men that we must acknowledge the resemblance,” yet “so much like a brute’s that we cannot but be disgusted at it.” The characters he observed included a “taylor,” “watchman,” “house carpenter,” and “ballad singer,” to name but a few. For spectators, these sights redounded, thought Richard Altick, to “more laughter than thought.”⁶⁶ But Burney’s and Silliman’s responses show that Lever’s chimerical players were something more than simply humorous: their comedy consisted in the exciting and unsettling transgressions enacted by a scene that was at once objectionably monstrous and uncannily credible.

John Berger has claimed that early modern anthropomorphism, far from signaling human failure to responsibly imagine distinct animal lives, was a productive attempt to bridge the abyss. It reflects, in his analysis, animals’ central importance for symbol and for language, a debt western societies began ignoring in the 1800s. Later objections to anthropomorphism, he argues, were expressions of a kind of popular neurosis, a discomfiting, perhaps semi-conscious awareness of the distance that obtains between animals and ourselves.⁶⁷ For residents of the eighteenth century, the status of that distinction had been addressed and adjusted by influential texts like Michel de Montaigne’s *Apology for Raymond Sebond* (1562), which blurred the human-animal divide, and René Descartes’s partly successful efforts to concretize the same. One key point of interest was the possibility for metempsychosis: another issue of the *Adventurer* (21 Nov. 1752) rejected Cartesian ideas about animal pain in the course of a harrowing sympathetic reverie, in which the scion of “a country gentleman” becomes, after a series of awful deaths, a dog, a bullfinch, a beetle, and an earthworm, as whom he experiences “the same kind of death with those who are broken upon the wheel,” “roasted alive before a slow fire,” and “scourged to death with small cords.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ See Altick, *The Shows of London*, p. 30.

⁶⁷ See John Berger, “Why Look at Animals?” *About Looking* (New York: Vintage International, 1991), p. 11.

⁶⁸ *The Adventurer*, p. 38.

Sympathy was central to eighteenth-century understandings of performers' persons, and of audience's responses thereto, and was also productive for attempting to think across segments of the Great Chain of Being. At a time when theatrical performers, like Garrick, were increasingly accruing public personae⁶⁹, it is reasonable to wonder how fairground and private performances by animals – not to mention the performances enshrined in books like George Edwards's *Gleanings* – might have contributed to a sense of their expressing personalities, as well. In 1757, Edmund Burke called sympathy “a sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another man, and affected in many respects as he is affected.”⁷⁰ Half a century later, the place of animals in the sympathetic nexus, and the consequences of that place for the proximity of persons to animals, preoccupied Richard Payne Knight, in *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* (1805). Knight seems to define “higher” animals as those better equipped for sentimental exchange, and appears – somewhat vaguely – to include quadrupeds and birds in this group. Communication across Knight's sentimental hierarchy, which places men above animals and young children, is complex and often uneven – for instance, certain lower creatures might be capable of successful sentimental reception, but not expression. For Knight, these capacities are, importantly, innate, or not learned, and they tend inexorably toward the elevation of those facial features – especially the eyes – which are “best adapted to express mild and pleasing sentiments.” (Knight's ocular emphasis is not in itself novel; Descartes had long since argued that the passions were readily discernible, for even the least discerning of observers, in the eyes of the observed.⁷¹) Knight proceeds to explain that, after countenances, humans and other higher animals interpret

⁶⁹ See Gillen D'Arcy Wood, *The Shock of the Real: Romanticism and Visual Culture, 1760-1860* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 35.

⁷⁰ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), p. 41.

⁷¹ See Roach, *The Player's Passion*, p. 64.

color in order to sentimentally understand their environs and neighbors. Chromatic sense and judgment is possible via sight alone, even in the absence of understanding, because colors work by displaying “pleasing masses of light and shadow to the eye.”⁷²

On the stage, the workings of sympathy made some commentators profoundly anxious. Considering the unremitting popularity of John Banks’s *The Unhappy Favourite* (1681) – “in which there is not one good line” – Richard Steele concluded “that the soul is not to be moved by words, but things.” Compromised though the play might be as a work of literary art, wrote Steele, by “the most dry discourses, and expressions almost ridiculous with respect to propriety,” its handling of “incidents” and “circumstance” was so conducive to sympathy that “it is impossible for one unprejudiced to see it, untouched with pity.”⁷³ By 1722, the prologue to Steele’s own *The Conscious Lovers* lamented a contemporary dramatic scene so philistinian as to resemble the “lewd dull gleanings of a Smithfield show.”⁷⁴

One of the things Steele was worried about was the potential nightmare that certain versions of sympathy could be seen to authorize: if sympathetic response is explicable in terms of bare physicality, and physiology, then any claims to exceptionalism on behalf of the human person, and of the word, come under pressing threat. In Oliver Goldsmith’s 1766 novel, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, Mr. Burchell’s lightly mocking diagnostic description of Sir William Thornhill does not altogether negate the latter’s moral uprightness: “Physicians tell us,” Burchell explains, “of a disorder in which the whole body is so exquisitely sensible, that the slightest touch gives pain: what some have thus suffered in their persons, this gentleman felt in his mind.” Thornhill’s zeal –

⁷² Richard Payne Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste*, 3rd edn (London: T. Payne & J. White, 1806), pp. 82-3.

⁷³ See John Banks. *The Unhappy Favourite; or, The Earl of Essex*, ed. Thomas Marshall Howe Blair (New York: Columbia UP, 1939), p. 33.

⁷⁴ Richard Steele, “Prologue,” ll. 23-6, *The Conscious Lovers*, in *British Dramatists from Dryden to Sheridan*, ed. George H. Nettleton & Arthur E. Case (Boston: The Riverside Press Cambridge, 1939), pp. 437-72.

not to say addiction – for “universal sympathy” leads to abnegative terror, in which the self becomes invisible altogether.⁷⁵ This paradox, issuing from the possibility that the sympathetic observer might dissolve himself in the attainment of ideal sympathy, had been stressed not long previously, in Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759).

Steele’s invocation of Smithfield is telling, for if the critics were correct, then at the fairground, and especially at animal entertainments, choice gave way to compulsion. In Ben Jonson’s anti-puritanical *Bartholmew Fair* (1614), Wasp mocks Cokes, one of the “civil savages”⁷⁶ in attendance there, by claiming that wherever “he spied a parrot or a monkey, there he was pitched with all the little long-coats about him, male and female.”⁷⁷ In an odd and striking construction, Pepys described himself, in his journals, as being “with child to see any strange thing.”⁷⁸ Wasp would approve of the corporeal flourish, complaining – again to Cokes – that “the Fair and all the drums and rattles in’t” have taken up residence in the latter’s brain: “He that had the means to travel your head, now, should meet finer sights than any are i’ the Fair, and make a finer voyage on’t, to see it all hung with cockle-shells, pebbles, fine wheat-straws, and here and there a chicken’s feather and a cobweb.”⁷⁹ The Fair has cleared Cokes’s skull of its gray matter and colonized it with tawdry bits and bobs. Goods for sale have metamorphic powers, too: “What do you lack?” asks Jonson’s Leatherhead; “what do you buy, pretty Mistris? a fine Hobby-horse, to make your Son a Tilter? a Drum, to make him a Soldier? a Fiddle, to make him a Reveller? What is’t you lack?”⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, ed. Stephen Coote (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 47.

⁷⁶ Jonson, *Bartholmew Fair*, III.iv.31.

⁷⁷ *Idem*, I.v.105-114.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Altick, *The Shows of London*, p. 43.

⁷⁹ Jonson, *Bartholmew Fair*, I.v.83-88.

⁸⁰ *Idem*, III.ii.30-3.

Performing Natural History

At the Fair, where social, economic, and theatrical codes met and blurred together, anthropomorphism could involve the elevation of certain objects, as well as certain creatures toward humanness, and the reduction of humans and animals alike to sympathetic – and sympathizing – things. The sort of posturing on display at Lever’s Holophusikon was not categorically incongruous, or objectionable, for eighteenth-century animal displays, even ostensibly scientific ones. In the third part of his *Gleanings of Natural History*, George Edwards freely admitted taking creative license in working his animal images up from sketch to copperplate. At times, he wrote, “the originals have not altogether pleased me as to their attitudes or actions; in such cases I have made three or four, sometimes six sketches, or outlines...and then fixed upon that which I judged most free and natural, to be engraven on my plate.”⁸¹ In a rapturous 1758 account of the first volume of *Gleanings*, a reviewer from *The Monthly Review* evinced the criteria by which Edwards’s volume might have been judged – and praised. Like an effective orator, the central subject of a successful history painting, or a player in a fine theatrical performance, Edwards’s “principal object is here always drawn in some natural and pleasing attitude, free from all stiffness or affectation.”

Analyzing a natural history text through concepts like attitude and affectation, Edwards’s reviewer introduces the language of sympathy, and of performance – theatrical, and more broadly social. Dramatic engagement with affectation was complex: not infrequently, fictional personalities were conjured up in order to impugn ostensibly inauthentic performances in everyday life. William Cooke, compiler and editor of the *Memoirs of Charles Macklin*, described the latter’s

⁸¹ Quoted in a review of Edwards’s *Gleanings of Natural History*, Part III, in *The Monthly Review; or, Literary Journal*, 29 (1768).

The True-born Irishman (1761) as a comic send-up of “the affectation of the Irish fine ladies of fashion on their return from England.”⁸² As Cooke’s treatment of Macklin indicates, a highly gendered sense of affectation, and of its likely perpetrators, was widespread. Such a sense becomes nothing less than the basis for functioning society near the end of Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones* (1749), when Mr. Allworthy praises Sophia Western’s having “no Pretence to Wit, much less to that Kind of Wisdom, which is the Result only of great Learning and Experience; the Affectation of which, in a young Woman, is as absurd as any of the Affectations of an Ape.” Allworthy’s misogyny is undeniable – Sophia’s complete “deference to the understandings of men” is precisely what qualifies her as “a good wife”⁸³ – but the second half of his simile bears considering, too. For it indicates a substantial cultural context for the expectation and apprehension of affectation in animal performances. And it suggests, furthermore, the constitutional importance of gender – and its reputed hangers-on – for spectacles of nature, and for the various persons and representations that relied on, and refined, them for knowledge, and for vision.

Affectation, then, introduces real performative, moral, and social nuance to *The Monthly Review*’s sense of Edwards having worked his illustrations up “with the great accuracy from Nature.”⁸⁴ The latter described making multiple drafts of each image, experimenting with “different Turns and Attitudes” in pursuit of the most natural posture.⁸⁵ Presented with dead – and sometimes desiccated – specimens, in whole or in part, Edwards “conjectured” them “into live poses,”⁸⁶ a process requiring him to consult such performances and arrangements as he could observe, through the London-bound bodies of animals, living, taxidermized and otherwise. In their

⁸² William Cooke, *Memoirs of Charles Macklin* (London: James Asperne, 1804), p. 235.

⁸³ Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, ed. Sheridan Baker (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1995), p. 574.

⁸⁴ *The Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, 18 (1758), p. 236.

⁸⁵ Qtd. in MacGregor, “Patrons and collectors,” p. 36.

⁸⁶ Qtd. in *ibid.* p. 40.

various states and methods of preservation – or of life – these exhibits did not evince a strict representative hierarchy – Edwards described having deliberately sought out diverse examples, diversely seasoned, toward a coherent and assimilative vision. Thus a kind of kinship, between *Gleanings* and Bartholomew Fair, not to say *Harlequin Hercules*: Edwards not only visited Smithfield for a look at numerous creatures, but emulated its centripetal force.

William Hazlitt lambasted French painting via natural-historical analogy, claiming that it was to its subjects as “botanical specimens, enclosed in a portfolio, flat, dry, hard, and pithless,” are “to flourishing plants and shrubs.”⁸⁷ It is tempting to point out that Hazlitt seems to come close, here, to an unusually unimaginative account of how representation works. But for present purposes, his contrarities help crystallize the work of an illustrator like Edwards: from a gallimaufry of specimens, he was to enact a re-flourishing. True, many of his animals were alive when he met them; but those instances evidently did not generate views that were true to life in Hazlitt’s sense. And as has occasionally become apparent over the course of this study – as in the case, for instance, of Gay’s bull and bear – even living creatures, by virtue of their spectacularity, and of their having been abstracted from their native habitats, might have appeared pithless, or at least perversely re-pithed, to those who observed them.

For *Gleanings*, Bartholomew Fair was one key site among many others, including the British Museum (the “Walking Leaf”), Salter’s Coffee-House, in Chelsea (“The Red-beaked Toucan”), the Old South-Sea House (the “Blue Jay, and the Summer Red-Bird”), as well as a large network of private collections and correspondents, not to mention chance acquaintances. Among the most helpful were Sidney Kennon, former midwife to the royal family; Richard Mead, Physician in Ordinary to the King; James Leman, of the College of Physicians; a bookseller named

⁸⁷ William Hazlitt, *Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England* (London: Taylor & Hesse), 1824, p. 57.

Mr. Millan; and such anonymous informants as “a person who makes it his business to catch vipers, &c.,” as well as “a young gentleman who came to London for education.” As Arthur MacGregor notes, the contours of Edwards’s intellectual and social network did a great deal to form the contours of the *Gleanings*; but if a basic randomness⁸⁸ underlies its selection of appropriate subjects, it is a randomness that is central, not incidental, to the way the text’s version of the natural world comes into view.

Edwards’s network was necessarily limited, but it was also powerfully connected to places beyond England, and especially to currents of mercantilist and imperial expansion. Richard Mead, like Hans Sloane, was the special beneficiary of curiosities arriving on East India Company ships, thanks to the intercession of the company’s secretary, Charles Dubois. Dubois’s collections were highly regarded, and he was a prominent early supporter of ornithological investigation: before helping Edwards, he had patronized Eleazar Albin’s *Natural History of Birds* (1731-8). And the EIC did not hold a monopoly on the introduction of exotic creatures to the British mainland; many of Edwards’s celebrated ornithological specimens came from South America via the Netherlands, and the Hudson’s Bay Company was responsible for a great deal more testimony from the New World. Edwards accumulated a significant collection of parrots, not only from a stall at

⁸⁸ Hazlitt, *Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England*, p. 41.



Figure 15. George Edwards, “Man of the Woods”

Bartholomew Fair – the Parrot and Cage – but from a pub on the strand whose proprietor dealt in such imports.⁸⁹ Edwards saw the “Man of the Woods,” taxidermized, at the British Museum, where, after its death, its preservers “set [it] up in the action [he had] given it.”⁹⁰

Said ape unveils its artist’s clear interest in exploring the liminality of his subject’s position in the Chain of Being: Edwards’s illustration fuses the body of a nonhuman animal (likely a young orangutan, though Edwards would have disputed such an identification) with the performance of a rustic human archetype.⁹¹ Edwards’s advocate in *The Monthly Review* not only had a credulous

⁸⁹ MacGregor, “Patrons and collectors,” pp. 38-40.

⁹⁰ Edwards, *Gleanings of Natural History*, p. 6.

⁹¹ See *idem*, pp. 6-8.

regard for this sort of apparent absurdity, but anticipated his reader's pleasure in the composition – “the plate [is] embellished in such a manner, as greatly to increase the beauty of the object itself.”⁹²

Edwards was clearly fascinated by the Man of the Woods's relatively closer proximity to humanness, lacking a tail and having “more humanlike” head, teeth, ears, and nipples.⁹³ Typically for Edwards's genre, he devotes some space to justifying his image and description by way of contrasting it with extant errors: inherited, in this case, from Edward Tyson's “Pigmy” and Hans Sloane's African “Chimp-anzee,” exhibited in London two decades before *Gleanings* went to print. The nominal question is left disappointingly unresolved – Edwards admits that, if Daniel Beekman's famous account of an extraordinarily humanoid orangutan, in *A Voyage to and from the Island of Borneo in the East-Indies* (1718) is accurate, then the British Museum's bucolic sitter is something else.⁹⁴ But this does not keep him from adopting an Anglicized version of its handle.

To recognize the Man of the Woods, we must appreciate the *Gleanings* as sitting at the interstices of aesthetics and taxonomy, of order and ornament: his works, claimed *The Monthly Review*, “are real acquisitions to Natural History, and increase our knowledge of the numberless species of objects with which the Almighty Creator has decorated our terrestrial abode.”⁹⁵ At the same time, Edwards's reviewer forthrightly acknowledges that his subject “has, indeed, made use of art in the *decorations* of his plates,” toward “forming an elegant contrast between the colours of the principal objects and those of the ornaments.” Edwards himself described having sought the advice of artist friends on how to couch his subjects on “airy Grounds.”⁹⁶ This kind of intervention

⁹² See *The Monthly Review* 1758, p. 236.

⁹³ See Edwards, *Gleanings of Natural History*, pp. 6-7.

⁹⁴ See Edwards, *Gleanings of Natural History*, pp. 7-8.

⁹⁵ *The Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, 18 (1758), p. 237.

⁹⁶ Qtd. in MacGregor, “Patrons and collectors,” p. 37.

appears to summarily disqualify the *Gleanings* from twenty-first century standards of verisimilitude. The images have, evidently, been composed in accordance with a loose kind of picturesque criteria, as well as a sensitivity for theatrical staging, as indicated by the Man of the Woods.

However, *Gleanings* was not received as a work of attractive frippery. Nor, it is true, was it entirely successful as an exercise in classification: it was published the same year as the tenth and most lastingly authoritative edition of Carolus Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae*, and did not meet the latter text's taxonomic standards. Its inaccuracies – and its importance – were pointed up by Linnaeus's publication, in 1776, of a catalogue titled the *Birds, Beasts, Fishes, Insects, Plants, &c contained in Edwards's Natural History*.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, so impressed was Linnaeus by Edwards's pictures that he claimed “nothing is wanting to the birds but their song.”⁹⁸ Like some formulations of the picturesque, the natural here signifies an aesthetic and intellectual ideal, materials arranged optimally, as opposed to objectively: Edwards “has never departed from Nature,” argues *The Monthly Review*, “such particulars being chosen, whose proper colours form the intended contrast.” Beauty in nature was attributable, in Edwards's own words, to “the lustre and variety of colours” and “the fineness of the texture of parts.”

Superseding the natural-historical project, narrowly considered in terms of the identification and presentation of individual species, is a chromatic regime, the apprehension of which goes much further in the direction of correct Nature than does taxonomy. Edwards counted color, as well as “magnitude” and “form,” among the properties that distinguished one species of animal from another. Together, they represented God-given “marks of distinction,” interpretable by naturalists but, importantly, contingent upon climatic suitability: a creature taken from its

⁹⁷ See MacGregor, “Patrons and collectors,” p. 42.

⁹⁸ Qtd. MacGregor, “Patrons and collectors,” p. 36.

“appointed climate” and installed in another would either fail to reproduce or bring forth young lacking the correct “first properties.” This explains why domesticated plants and animals differ



Figure 16. George Edwards, “The Yellow Water-wagtail, the Walking Leaf, &c”

from their “savage” ancestors, and would revert to “first forms and colours” were they reacquainted with “their native habitations.”⁹⁹ However, to view Edwards’s illustrations with said convictions in mind is to observe a complicated tension at work in the relations between aesthetics and fealty to nature.

In “The Yellow Water-wagtail, the Walking Leaf, &c,” the dictates of color and exhibition choreograph nature as simultaneously accurate, aesthetic, and idealized. Edwards’s arrangement owes debts to cabinets of curiosity, and to taxidermy, but effects appearances possible nowhere

⁹⁹ See Edwards, *Essays upon Natural History, and other Miscellaneous Subjects* (London: J. Robson, 1770), pp. 4-6.

but the page. The wagtail and walking leafs are true to scale, but “the stone, which is designed only as a decoration, is a great deal under its natural size.” Said stone is a “fossil” from the Giant’s Causeway, in Antrim; it serves as pedestal for a bird common in England, and in Europe generally; and before it appear two *Phylliidae*, originally from “the Spanish West Indies,” which have been “drawn after nature from the insects themselves, now preserved in the British Museum.”¹⁰⁰ Referring to the production of natural history images in the Spanish Empire, Daniela Bleichmar has observed the manner in which illustrations became spaces of exploration in their own right, not only representing specimens but collapsing “sequential acts of travel, transport, observation, and description into simultaneous events.”¹⁰¹ The figure of collapse appears to move in at least two directions, suggesting access to imaginative pleasure but threatening, also, to produce a sort of flattening. The wagtail and its companions also prompt a clarification, or expansion, of Bleichmar’s thesis: if this image suggests the accommodation of geographical and temporal movement within the time and space of the picture frame, that movement’s primary referents may be metropolitan, and spectacular. This is not to say that they could not spur the sorts of voyages of the mind that Bleichmar perceives; but it is to emphasize the ways that those voyages were mediated by networks of spectacularity, by the visions they encouraged.

In a description of his artistic practice, published with the fourth volume of *A Natural History of Birds* (1751), Edwards wrote that the artist’s preeminent task is to establish harmony among the objects he has arrayed; any deviation from principle is likely to derange perspective, “Sense and Meaning,” and naturalness. Contrast – “relief” – is crucial for setting objects off from one another, but so, at times, is a kind of chromatic blurring, in which adjacent colors are made to

¹⁰⁰ Edwards, *Gleanings of Natural History*, pp. 102-104.

¹⁰¹ Daniela Bleichmar, “A Visible and Useful Empire: Visual Culture and Colonial Natural History in the Eighteenth-Century Spanish World,” in *Science in the Spanish and Portuguese Empires: 1500-1800*, ed. Bleichmar, Paula de Vos, Kristine Huffine, & Kevin Sheehan (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 310.

blend with one another.¹⁰² The natural history illustration becomes a special site for apprehending nature, a utopian one where apparently incommensurable imperatives can coexist as readily as can things and lives whose origins are separated by oceans and more. Stacey Sloboda has perceptively described a similar dynamic at work in Mary Delany's *Flora Delanica* (1778), which the former has called a "museum." In Edwards's case, it is clear that the Wunderkammer deserves significant credit, but that tradition has not so much directed Edwards's imagination as served a useful precedential purpose. "Yellow Water-wagtail" derives as much of its *modus operandi* from theatrical posturing, and from the empiricism sympathetic theatergoers – and some natural historians – aligned therewith.

Edwards, like many of his contemporaries, was provoked to wonder whether observers of nature derived pleasure from physiological response, from reason, or from some interplay between these forces. If the former, then members of "the brute creation" might have the capacity to sense and "delight" in the beauties that surround them. *Gleanings* in this instance seems to indicate the potential for natural history – and the performances it relies upon, and imagines – to effect the sort of sentimental reconfiguration of human-animal relations that many consider the special preserve of poetry.¹⁰³ Ingrid Tague has seen animals appearing more frequently as individuals, as contemplative and sympathetic ends in themselves – as opposed to ciphers for satirical critique, or for moral didacticism – in late eighteenth-century verse.¹⁰⁴ Decades before the appearance of Tague's sources, Edwards recalled meeting a female green monkey (*Chlorocebus sabaues*) at the home of Charles Lennox, 2nd Duke of Richmond, also the site of a fine aviary. Edwards calls her

¹⁰² See Edwards, "A Brief and General Idea of Drawing, and Painting in Water-Colours: Intended for the Amusement of the Curious, rather than for the Instruction of Artists," in *A Natural History of Birds*, vol. IV (London: George Edwards, 1751), pp. 215-16.

¹⁰³ See, for instance, Ingrid Tague's analysis of Samuel Jackson Pratt's 1775 epitaph to a lapdog, which she takes to reflect not only the valorization of animal virtue, but of that virtue's femininity.

¹⁰⁴ See Ingrid Tague, "Dead Pets: Satire and Sentiment in British Elegies and Epitaphs for Animals," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 41.3 (Spring 2009), p. 301.

a “St. Jago Monkey,” after the island of Santiago, in the Cape Verde archipelago, where these Old World primates had been introduced. Since arriving in England, he claims, she has given birth, and her “very tender” treatment of her infant is remarkably humanoid: “her actions and manner nearly resembled a woman’s nursing her child.”¹⁰⁵ She delivers a powerfully sympathetic



Figure 17. George Edwards, “St. Jago Monkey”

performance of motherhood, one enhanced, arguably, by the very fact that she is incapable of human speech.

By virtue of her sex, and of her maternity, Edwards’s green monkey seems multiply representative of conventional associations between pet-keeping and femininity, associations often

¹⁰⁵ See Edwards, *Gleanings of Natural History*, p. 11.

made in a spirit of disparagement.¹⁰⁶ (By the second half of the eighteenth century, green – as well as New World capuchin – monkeys would become quite popular as pets, in London and in Paris.¹⁰⁷) Hers is, of course, a femininity just so stereotypically idealized, centered on her young and tending to set a positive example for spectators. And this, in turn, reflects positively on the sort of habitat and exhibitory space provided at Richmond’s: the green monkey’s is a salutary sort of captivity, for herself and for her infant, and visitors are likely to leave having learned something more than natural history.¹⁰⁸ It appears reasonable to assume that the social and cultural distance obtaining between Richmond’s collection and other spectacular sites – such as Bartholomew Fair – was vast. But the distinction between private showings – and the privileged viewership entailed thereby – and public shows was not always as enormous as it seems. Of Richmond’s noteworthy menagerie at Goodwood, polite visitors sometimes complained that it attracted a fair portion of “Rude Company.”¹⁰⁹

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After Richmond the 2nd died, in 1750, his son and heir cultivated Goodwood’s reputation for theatricality. A panoply of genteel guests, including some royals, attended a private performance of Arthur Murphy’s *The Way to Keep Him* there, in 1787. In 1826, the playwright Frederick Reynolds reported that by the late 1780s, Richmond House’s bespoke shows had become

¹⁰⁶ See Tague, “Dead Pets,” p. 293.

¹⁰⁷ See Louise E. Robbins, *Elephant Slaves and Pampered Parrots: Exotic Animals in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP), p. 130.

¹⁰⁸ See Tague, “Dead Pets,” p. 295 on the view that keeping animals might actually improve them.

¹⁰⁹ Qtd. MacGregor, “Patrons and collectors,” p. 38.

so well-known that it was felt to pose an existential threat to Drury Lane and Covent Garden.¹¹⁰ Those shows were famous for dazzle and for spectacle, but it would be senseless to conflate them entirely with fairground offerings. At the same time, the House's theatrical ambience threads a connection between aristocratic entertainments, Leverian exhibitions, Edwards's illustrations, and Bartholomew Fair. The St. Jago Monkey was, to an important extent, a character, whose performance required the balancing of aesthetic, performative, and natural-historical concerns. It would probably be inaccurate – and irresponsible – to argue that Edwards recognized her as a person, but the *Gleanings* certainly presents her as a kind of personality. Her image does not capture her “nursing her child”; it has instead been formed in accordance not only with Edwards's observations, but with the chromatic and formal guidelines previously described. Its apparent movement, bearing, and countenance recall a scene at a menagerie, or a fairground, or perhaps an exhibition of preserved specimens; its economical use of decoration and neutral background suggest the stage, or perhaps the theatrical print.

Images of animals proliferated, in texts, shows, and print shops at the same time that the likenesses of theatrical personages began to permeate London's visual culture. As Kitty Clive, Sarah Siddons, David Garrick, and Charles Macklin established celebrity, they were refigured in portrait paintings, sculptures, porcelain figurines, and, most frequently of all, inexpensive pamphlets and prints.¹¹¹ Some, such as the anonymous mezzotint *Miss Rafter in the Character of Phillida* (1729), interpreted the stage via well-established pictorial tropes – conflating, in this case, Clive's turn in Colley Cibber's *Love in a Riddle* with Gottfried Schalcken's *Couple d'amoureux*

¹¹⁰ Janine Haugen, “Private Theatricals,” *The Encyclopedia of British Literature 1660-1789*, ed. Gary Day & Jack Lynch (Blackwell: Blackwell Reference Online, 2015).

¹¹¹ See Robert Halsband, “Stage Drama as a Source for Pictorial and Plastic Arts,” in *British Theatre and the Other Arts, 1660-1800*, ed. Shirley Strum Kenny (Washington, London & Toronto: Folger Library & Associated University Presses, 1984), p. 154.

dans un forêt (c. 1695).¹¹² Through a lighthearted application of the formal demands of history painting, Johann Zoffany made the theatrical scene a fit subject in its own right, in works like



Figure 18. Sayer & Smith, “Mr. Beard in the Character of Hawthorn”

Edward Shuter, John Beard and John Dunstall in ‘Love in a Village’ (c. 1767). And other visions, like Joshua Reynolds’s *Sarah Siddons as the Tragic Muse* (1784), elevated the performer to a proto-Romantic ideal of sublime individuality. But many more partook of a simpler, and highly reproducible, structure, one ideally suited for handbills and the like. Zoffany once painted a picture of Robert Sayer, a successful London publisher of mezzotints, atlases, and myriad other prints.

¹¹² See Berta Joncus, “‘A Likeness Where None Was To Be Found’: Imagining Kitty Clive (1711-1785), *Music in Art* 34:1/2 (Spring-Fall 2009), pp. 93-4.

From 1769 to 1773, Sayer released a multi-volume collaboration with John Smith, entitled *Dramatic characters, or different portraits of the English stage*. Many of the representations collected therein were engravings of paintings: for instance, “Mr. Barry in the Character of Hotspur, in 1st part of *Henry IV*” had been modeled after a painting reportedly belonging to the Duchess of Northumberland.

The engraving visible here, *Mr. Beard in the Character of Hawthorn* (1769), refers to a performance of Isaac Bickerstaff’s *Love in a Village*, which opera had first been produced in 1762. It typifies the attitude of Sayer and Smith’s *Dramatic characters*, which operates as a collection of profiles, actions, moments, and gestures. It, like Edwards’s *Gleanings*, participates in an atmosphere of generalized theatricality, an atmosphere which permeated – and emanated from -- all corners of metropolitan social and cultural life, but which was nowhere more pervasive than at fairgrounds and other public spectacles. William Bingley’s *Theatrical Monitor* turned this – as it turned most things – to Garrick’s disesteem, criticizing him for having “introduced stage tricks and gestures, as *scientific*, which were originally the motions of mountebanks, merry-andrews, and harlequins at Bartholomew-fair, to make the people laugh.”¹¹³ Because it was at Bartholomew Fair, and at venues like it, that audiences learned to interpret bodies, machines, and movements, and to imagine them – human, animal, inanimate – as fellow-performers. And it was at such entertainments that entrepreneurs and impresarios experimented endlessly with arrangements of sign and sense, provoking excitement and unease in their clientele and revising the rules of spectatorship. At the patent theaters, and at sites like Richmond House, establishment actors absorbed and redeployed the sights, sounds, styles, and shapes of the spectacle, maximizing its

¹¹³ Quoted in Roach, *The Player’s Passion*, p. 59.

potential while managing its behavior – successfully or unsuccessfully – in whatever manner seemed expedient.

Viewed in these lights, a text like *Gleanings* looks like a sort of venue, too. It drew its materials from London's spectacular culture, and looked to that culture for its fundamentally performative mode. Of course, the chasm separating it from a Bartholomew Fair-ground booth needs acknowledging: beyond Edwards's privileged network of patrons, his institutional credentials, and the text's expense, *Gleanings* carries out the parceling and isolation of spectacle's natural things, and picturesquely enhances them. Its viewing could occur privately, or in limited company, and was probably less likely to be attended by pickpocketing. Edwards's spectator might become involved in the show, through a version of sympathetic exchange and the intellectual and existential wonderment it might well provoke, but this sort of participation was not required. However, it is the *Gleanings*' simultaneous appropriation of spectacularity and assiduous supervision of its performances that makes it something other than an easily dismissible eccentricity, or anachronism. It – and, at a modest remove, the spectacles that underwrote it – taught readers, scientists, and audiences to look to nature for performances.

As proceeding sections of this book indicate, as nature came to be understood comprehended in the terms of eighteenth-century entertainment, it also became susceptible to the vagaries of moral judgment and aesthetic taste. Fluctuations therein redounded not only upon what lives or environments – what performances – one was likely to observe, but upon the definition of nature itself. A recognition of how nature ought to look or sound is preliminary to an understanding of how it ought to gesture, move, and express. In the final decades of the eighteenth century and the early decades of the next, nature became something that closely resembles the nature we imagine today. It is vital to recognize, however, that that becoming was not simply determined by

a social or ideological program rejecting the depredations of urbanization and trumpeting the possibilities of contemplative individualism. It was also an aesthetic and formal response to the new intellectual and representational challenges posed by the world and its ways of behaving. As that world came more fully and deeply into view – thanks to experiments in imaginative art and fresh stories from natural history – these challenges became more complicated, and more generative. Spectacle’s reputation for anti-intellectualism and vulgarity was insistently contrasted, in what was later taken to constitute the nascent canon of environmental literature, with what nature was taken to mean. But spectacularity remained a productive (if problematic) resource for writers, artists, and scientists when they grappled with events, lives, and processes that defied available patterns of sensing and thinking. And the gawping – some of it genteel – at nature’s performances goes on.

CHAPTER FOUR

PICTURESQUE SPECTACLE: WILLIAM GILPIN AND THE PROCESS OF ART

As scholars, artists, and others struggle to contemplate the fact and fallout of an impending “sixth mass extinction” on planet earth, crises of representability and of narration emerge as central concerns:

Unlike the first five extinctions (the last being the Cretaceous-Tertiary event that decimated the dinosaurs and enabled the florescence of birds and mammals), the sixth extinction is neither abrupt nor spectacular. No smashing asteroids or giant volcanic eruptions. No global pandemics as yet. Only the slow, cumulative effects of greenhouse gases, rain forest depletion, and a brand of imperialism that extols the virtues of high mass consumption.¹

Later on, this chapter will return, obliquely, to the intriguing question of environmental violence’s generative possibilities. For now, consider the aesthetic and temporal parameters of the creeping sixth extinction, in contradistinction to the ostensibly “abrupt” and “spectacular” nature of the previous five. Anthropologist Genese Marie Sodikoff forecloses the kind of cataclysm that we might identify with a particular place, date, or time – the kind of *event*, in other words, that one might – like some versions of the Cambrian explosion, the end-Permian disaster, or the Cretaceous-Tertiary die-off – readily narrate. One can imagine asteroid collisions, nuclear disasters, and catastrophic weather events because they are, or seem to be, visible: one feels one can talk about the “before” and the “after”; one can watch them happen on television; one might even be able to see them in process. But how is one to *witness*, describe, or re-present, “slow, cumulative effects”?²

¹ Genese Marie Sodikoff, Introduction, in Sodikoff (ed.), *The Anthropology of Extinction: Essays on Culture and Species Death* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), pp 1-2.

² One common solution involves presenting climate change’s victims, but the choosing of these victims complicates matters further, and does not necessarily resemble a sustainable approach. Recent calls for greater protection for

This quandary may have dire consequences for the inhabitants of the global South. In a recent book, Rob Nixon introduces the concept of “slow violence,” defining it as “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all.”³ For Nixon, the working sense of violence – as an “event that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, [and] erupting into instant sensational visibility” – tends to exclude slow violence, as well as its victims, whom he identifies as the world’s poor. Like Dipesh Chakrabarty⁴, Nixon contends that climate change, nuclear contamination, and deforestation pose “representational, narrative, and strategic challenges”; this, because their drama does not conform to the stories, images, and timeframes preferred by a “digital world that threatens to ‘info-whelm’ us into a state of perpetual distraction.”⁵ “How,” Nixon asks, “do we bring home – and bring emotionally to life – threats that take time to wreak their havoc, threats that never materialize in one spectacular, explosive scene?”⁶ By describing slow violence’s habit of frustrating representation – how to “depict” biomagnification? – Nixon’s vital thesis suggests enormous opportunities for creative “rethinking” of environmentalism.

However, when critics assign blame unequivocally to media-addled twenty-first century first-worlders, they underplay slow violence’s long and complicated history of stymying visual representation. A variety of recent articles, such as Tobias Menely’s study of the climatic and meteorological contexts of William Cowper’s *The Task* (1785)⁷, indicate the value of exploring

polar bear habitats, for instance (see, e.g. Goldenberg) may reproduce hierarchies of “charismatic megafauna” (Garrett 151), substituting individual species for complex ecological systems.

³ Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, p. 2.

⁴ See Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” *Critical Inquiry* 35.2 (2009), 197-222.

⁵ Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, p. 12.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 24.

⁷ Menely describes 1784 as “a year of atmospheric disturbance, in an age of temporal acceleration,” and argues that “Cowper grappled with the insufficiency of *chromos* as a measure of crisis, as a means of apprehending the unique critical conditions of the present.” Menely’s object is importantly different from mine, in that he aims to read

crises of representability in contexts beyond the contemporary one. While it would be reckless to summarily dismiss Nixon's arguments on these grounds, they bear deepening, and contextualizing, and doing so entails considering how writers and artists working in other eras have negotiated the mind-boggling challenges attendant upon the representation of environmental change. Without paying adequate attention to these challenges, the record is unlikely to arrive at any meaningful understanding of the interpretive difficulties that have long pervaded efforts to reckon with transformations in the world through the techniques of art and culture.

This section carries these conversations to a crucial aesthetic and literary context that, despite a long history of scholarly interest, has yet to be investigated on these terms. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the Reverend William Gilpin (1724-1804) articulated a lastingly influential version of one of Europe's most important aesthetic programs for apprehending, organizing, and re-presenting the natural⁸ world. The picturesque was – and remains – a key technology for envisioning nature: it moves readily between visual art and literary text; it is deeply invested in representing environmental change; and the copious literature that accompanies it proffers rich insights into the ways that its theorists attempted to instruct their readers in the proper artistic manipulation of objects in the landscape. Furthermore, as Stephen Copley, Peter Garside, and others have demonstrated, the picturesque was not just imaginatively, but materially transformative, for environments in Britain, its colonies, and elsewhere.⁹

momentous catastrophe, and not gradual processes, in Cowper's poem. See Menely, "'The Present Obfuscation': Cowper's *Task* and the Time of Climate Change," *PMLA* 127.3 (May 2012), p. 478.

⁸ This chapter does foreground the terminological morass that surrounds "nature." Timothy Morton has famously called for the word's jettisoning, arguing that "'nature' is an arbitrary rhetorical construct, empty of independent, genuine existence behind or beyond the texts we create about it." See Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, pp. 21-2. While I am convinced of some of Morton's claims, this is not among them. I am inclined toward Greg Garrard's earlier argument that ecocritics (another hotly contested term) ought "to keep one eye on the ways in which 'nature' is always in some sense culturally constructed, and the other on the fact that nature really exists, both the object and, albeit distantly, the origin of our discourse." See Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 10.

⁹ "[W]ithin the British Isles," argue Copley and Garside, "the discourse of the Picturesque intersects with and is shaped by the discourses of colonialism at various points. In the case of the Scottish Highlands, for instance, the

Gilpin's picturesque prioritizes the representation of landscapes transformed by environmental change. By understanding how his theory narrates the "moment" of artistic creation, we stand to better comprehend the weird and fruitful processes by which the picturesque painter struggles to approximate such change. In his *Three Essays* (1792), Gilpin instructs his reader (an ideal, amateur picturesque painter) in making a violent and spectacular artistic intervention, in order to accommodate an excessively formal object within the picturesque frame. Gilpin's picturesque loves a ruin, and the imagined painter is commanded to carry out the ruination of an aesthetically incongruous edifice, in the unusual time and space of artistic process. Process's moment transpires between¹⁰ the artist's choice of aesthetic framework and the appearance of a seemingly integral, finished project. It is within this moment that the artist makes choices about the environment to be depicted, and the transformations to be effected thereupon. Of course, the parameters of choice are determined not only by intent, tradition, and ideology, but by form, medium, subject-matter, and material.

Eighteenth-century art criticism encouraged lookers to emulate the "true point of sight" – to attempt to inhabit the precise and singular orientation the artist took to the artwork.¹¹ It has since become commonplace to accept that the grasping for such a point is an impossible fantasy, or at least that if such an orientation were available, it would by no means be the only correct view. But the concept is nonetheless germane, because the proceeding analysis encourages the viewer and

combination of political repression, economic exploitation, and aesthetic sentimentalisation of the Scottish landscape in the early nineteenth century clearly renders the Picturesque 'invention' of the region a hegemonic cultural manifestation of the English colonising presence." See Copley & Garside, Introduction to *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, landscape, and aesthetics since 1770*, ed. Copley & Garside (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 6-7.

¹⁰ In an interview with Emile de Antonio, Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008) posits the existence of a "hole," which exists "between" art and "life." The hole, Rauschenberg explains, is the place the artist works, and is what "makes the adventure of painting." See De Antonio, *Painters Painting* (New Yorker Films, 1973).

¹¹ See Peter de Bolla, *The Education of the Eye: Painting, Landscape, and Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 162.

reader to enter the odd and transient moments of conception and creation. What becomes clear is that for Gilpin's picturesque, spectacle is no less necessary, but far more elusive, a phenomenon than for the culture Nixon laments. As the unrepresentable engine of process, spectacle delivers an imaginative incident that must however be stricken from the visual record of what it effects. Gilpin's account indicates the significant and complex implications of that process for understandings of environmental time, history, and narrative.

To a remarkable extent, Gilpin registers these very implications, and works to sort them through. By comparing his more properly theoretical works, such as the *Three Essays*, with his firsthand descriptions of changing landscapes and landforms¹², one recognizes that Gilpin seriously contemplated the relationship between artistic theory and environmental change. Picturesque painting becomes an appropriation or approximation of natural process, with a crucial difference: the painter, hemmed in by the mortal limits of lifetime, imagination, and artistic potential, must resort to a fantasy of creative process that bears the hallmarks of spectacle, not the picturesque. In other words, en route to picturesque product, Gilpin's imaginary artist makes a spectacle of process. "Reading" process in picturesque literature and visual art (not to mention the countless landscapes that have been organized to reflect picturesque principles) might render visible the picturesque's activation by self-effacing spectacle.

This particular argument is a contingent iteration of one of this book's core ideas: that spectacle can produce the times, motions, and stuffs that nourish other epistemologies, and other aesthetic paradigms. This was true for Allen Mullen at the scene of the elephant's awful demise, and it was true, in a related but distinct way, for George Edwards at Bartholomew Fair. The

¹² As Robert Mayhew argues, in an examination of William Gilpin's latitudinarian leanings, there exists "a substantial continuity of argument" amongst the latter's diverse works. See Mayhew, "William Gilpin and the Latitudinarian Picturesque," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33.3 (Spring 2000), p. 357.

picturesque is frequently – and not necessarily unjustly – accused of obfuscations, particularly with respect to the signs of rural labor. This study points up a different sort of vanishing, by bringing to view – or at least to awareness – the theater of picturesque process, and the spectacular ghosts that tread it. Mary Favret – of whom more later – is one among several recent scholars to have reconsidered the nimbi that hang about the limits of the picturesque frame. What follows will attempt a contribution to this reevaluation, in hopes of recognizing, at the boundaries of picturesqueness, complicated and consequential dramas of narrative, natural history, and artistic form.

It is hoped that the potential intellectual payoffs of this approach extend past William Gilpin, and even past the picturesque. What it aims to spur, among other things, is a close attention to the ways writing represents “moments” of artistic process – that knotty, chaotic “time” and “space” within which art happens – across schools, eras, and mediums. Artistic creation stories are just that – stories – which imaginatively narrate the stupendously complex interrelations between form, artist, material, and imagination. These stories may bear some relation to ekphrasis (in its original form, at least¹³), but they are surely something different, as well. By attending to Gilpin’s picturesque, it is possible to discern not only the stories artists tell about process, but the stories they tell about how landscapes struggle to come into view, and come into view along particular aesthetic lines. These stories are intimately related to the ones we tell when we attempt to interpret visual objects, to understand what has happened in order that the images – and indeed the world they purport to image – appear.

¹³ Cynthia Wall points out that “[e]kphrasis (Gr. ‘description’), which *narrowed* in meaning through history to apply later only to descriptions of works of art, was originally defined in the Greek *progymnasmata* (school exercises) as ‘an expository speech which vividly (*enargos*) brings the subject before our eyes’ (Theon, second century AD).” See Cynthia Sundberg Wall, *The Prose of Things: Transformations of Description in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 16.

William Gilpin's Mallet

Readers of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literature might recognize the picturesque as omnipresent, but it ought not be understood as monolithic. It had multiple celebrated theorists, who shared an interest in establishing appropriate parameters for visual art, and, sometimes, for travel writing and for garden design; however, they differed significantly in their approaches to the mode. Still, to a considerable extent, diverse picturesque aestheticians, such as Uvedale Price, Richard Payne Knight, and William Gilpin, were alike in their desire to establish a national fashion in landscape gardening that would represent a radical rejection of the insipid formality that had characterized earlier decades, and had characterized, by many lights, the French mode. It would balance an ambitious plan for the application of pictorial standards – themselves derived, to a theoretically significant extent, from nature – to the organization of landscape with a cultivated taste for the rugged and the overgrown – for, in other words, the appearance of naturalness. Horace Walpole conveyed the first of these ideals when he described a visit to the Earl of Halifax's estate at Stansted, where one vista "[recalled] such exact pictures of Claud Lorrain, that it is difficult to conceive that he did not paint them from this very spot."¹⁴ Premiums were placed upon the overgrown and aged, and the "smaller-scaled, less obviously designed picturesque garden, which consisted of a variety of intimate occluded views in which nature appeared in its rough, shaggy, and even humble aspects."¹⁵ Some commentators, such as Price, expressed an explicit desire to depart from the earlier innovations of the gifted and prolific garden

¹⁴ Quoted in Charles Watkins, *Trees, Woods and Forests: A Social and Cultural History* (London: Reaktion, 2014), p. 108.

¹⁵ Ann Bermingham, "System, Order, and Abstraction: The Politics of English Landscape Drawing Around 1795), in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 79-80.

designer Lancelot “Capability” Brown, who had fallen from grace by the latter part of the eighteenth century.¹⁶

Before submitting to garden-going developments and debates, the picturesque connoted broader concerns: derived from the French *pittoresque* and the Italian *pittoresco*, it originally denoted the appropriate contents and composition of pictures in general.¹⁷ It was a component of polite taste, which those with sufficient means might cultivate over the course of a Grand Tour¹⁸ in France, Italy, and elsewhere. For Gilpin, as for many writers, the picturesque was intimately connected both with the practice of genteel travel, and with correct consideration of the masterworks of western European art. So a prospect, as perceived on the course of a tour, afforded opportunities to reflect on the extraordinary achievement of God’s creation, to enumerate and imitate particularly picturesque parts¹⁹ of the landscape, and to better understand universal principles of painting.²⁰ Likewise the careful study of masterpieces, which might reciprocally train

¹⁶ Ann Bermingham reads Price’s dislike for Brown’s approach in explicitly political terms: “systematic forms of gardening or government were [for Price] distasteful, and the connection in Price’s mind between the two is a good example of the way in which landscape design functioned as a political metaphor. The practice of Brown and his followers to clear prospects so as to open views and vistas within the garden to the landscape outside it was seen by Price as equivalent to the leveling tendencies of democratic governments and revolutions.” See Bermingham, “System, Order, and Abstraction,” p. 83.

¹⁷ See Copley & Garside, Introduction, p. 3.

¹⁸ For instance, James Baker’s *A Picturesque Guide through Wales and the Marches* is a sort of guidebook for the well-to-do English traveler (see, for instance, the 2nd edn., Vol. 1 (Worcester: J. Tymbbs, 1795), pp. 25-6).

¹⁹ Richard Payne Knight asserts that art actually lends value to objects in nature, by focusing on and embellishing the beauties already present there. He states unequivocally that painting is especially suited to particular objects in nature, and so persons exposed to painting will be attracted to those objects in nature. See Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste*, pp. 153-4.

²⁰ Hermione de Almeida and George Gilpin argue that the picturesque “was more than a theory of composition: it was a philosophy for the observation and selection of artistic subjects that would slowly supplant the influential aesthetic of the beautiful and the sublime that had been established by Burke and others by the middle of the eighteenth century.” The latter half of this claim is an overstatement, but its founding premise nicely encapsulates the picturesque’s capacity for exceeding the boundaries of the picture frame. See De Almeida & Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance: British Romantic Art and the Prospect of India* (Aldershot & Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), p. 189.

their viewers in strategies for making aesthetic sense of the views encountered in the course of travel.²¹

So theories of the picturesque, as they concerned landscape painting, inevitably incorporated pointed arguments about wider aesthetic concerns. Malcolm Andrews has described a direct correlation between the ascendance of the picturesque “naturalism” (and its corresponding practices, such as travel and gardening) and the decline of neoclassicism in England.²² As this section will make clear, Andrews’s account is rather simplistic; more often than not, aesthetic paradigms cohabited, more or less happily – as on country estates, where grand neoclassical homes lorded over picturesque grounds. And while neoclassicism was sometimes – and significantly – contraposed to picturesqueness, various theorists and commentators gave correspondingly varied accounts of the relationship. While Gilpin expressed dissatisfaction²³ with the presence of classical mythological figures in the landscapes of Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) and Claude (c. 1600-1682), others insisted on the presence of Greek and Roman referents in a picturesque landscape. William Beckford’s remarkable Romantic travelogue, *Dreams, Waking Thoughts, and Incidents* (1783), complained that between Utrecht and Bois le Duc, there existed “no inspiration, no whispering foliage, not even a grasshopper, to put one in mind of Eclogues and Theocritus.”²⁴

Gilpin, on the other hand, sought a departure from the neoclassical taste that figured so prominently among his predecessors and, to a lesser but nonetheless significant extent, his contemporaries. For him, the picturesque is characterized by the accommodation within a prospect or image of potentially conflicting elements: the viewer ought to perceive variety and unity; light

²¹ William Hazlitt indicates the possibility of congruity between the way one ought to appraise an improved landscape, on the one hand, and the space of a gallery, on the other. See Hazlitt, *Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England*, pp. 3-4.

²² See Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, p. 12.

²³ For a fuller analysis of this aspect of Gilpin’s thinking, see Carl Paul Barbier, *William Gilpin: His Drawings, Teaching, and Theory of the Picturesque* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), p. 145.

²⁴ See Beckford, *Dreams, Waking Thoughts, and Incidents*, p. 33.

and dark; artificial objects (such as ruins) and natural ones. Rendered pleasingly coherent by a common theme, a picturesque view ought to communicate a sensible *idea* to its viewer; when fabricating a garden or an image, it is therefore appropriate to introduce objects that amplify this idea, and alter or remove those that interfere with it. This could be read – at the risk of opportunism – as an attempt to avoid committing the sins of the Rococo, which was so often interpreted as signifying no idea whatever beyond itself. But by lingering over weird junctures in painterly process, junctures that lay beyond the bounds of picturesque representability but were nevertheless crucial for the practices thereof, Gilpin installed a spectacular visitant whose movements and meanings were rococo-esque in their potential profusion.

Discomfiting for some of Gilpin's peers was his treatment of a classical building in the *Three Essays*. Early on, that text instructs its aspiring painter in an operation for transforming “a piece of Palladian architecture” into a picturesque object appropriate for a picture:

The proportion of it's parts—the propriety of it's ornaments—and the symmetry of the whole, may be highly pleasing. But if we introduce it in a picture, it immediately becomes a formal object, and ceases to please. Should we wish to give it picturesque beauty, we must use the mallet, instead of the chissel: we must beat down one half of it, deface the other, and throw the mutilated members around in heaps. In short, from a *smooth* building we must turn it into a *rough* ruin. No painter, who had the choice of the two objects, would hesitate a moment.²⁵

Kent and Burlington's adoption and promotion of the Palladian style of architecture in the early eighteenth century set a significant precedent for neoclassicism's ascendance.²⁶ For this edifice to fit the picturesque frame, it must actually *lose* its identity as a “building,” and transform into a “ruin.” The passage's gratuitous violence recalls the grisly pachydermal spectacle described in Chapter One: in order for the building to make the transition from beautiful form to picturesque image, a scene of spectacular destruction and dismemberment must intervene. Gilpin's “heaps”

²⁵ Gilpin, *Three Essays*, pp. 7-8.

²⁶ De Bolla, *The Education of the Eye*, p. 177

beg the question of whether any trace of the mutilated members' provenance persists, and to what extent these members become, through ruination, interchangeable with other pieces of the picturesque landscape.

Gilpin's mallet recalls Edmund Burke's London conflagration (or earthquake), an unpleasant, and perhaps unthinkable, but nonetheless necessary stage on the route to aesthetic satisfaction. The implication is not that picturesqueness and sublimity are the same – they are distinguished by their treatment of contemplation, among other things. As an imminent discussion of cogitation will explain, the picturesque conjures a viewer deliberately, meditatively involved in the interpretation of a prospect. The sublime, on the other hand, suggests a subject who experiences an awesome arrestation of intention – “that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended” – and a compulsory sort of attention. This has not left the scene of sublimity altogether lacking contemplative provision. In *Travels in India* (1793), William Hodges sketched a globe-encompassing origin myth for various forms in architecture. From the aftermath of “the horrid crush and downfall of mountains” came, by fortuitous chance, the contours of human habitation: “the granite blocks and strata in their rude unwieldy immensity, wildly piled upon each other, so as to form, accidentally, huts and caverns beneath.” In their wildness and rudeness, these remains evoke sublime sight, but of course this does not prevent Hodges from coming sufficiently to his senses to fold them into his broader theory, which assumes a mimetic process, from huts and caverns spontaneously created to those made by human hands. As will be made clear, Gilpin's particular affection for ruins places him further along the sublime spectrum than some of his picturesque correspondents, and competitors. And Hodges and he share a pronounced impulse to read the backward-ramifying possibilities of geological change upon the fragments it leaves behind: in *Travels in India*, those fragments are the residue of mountains “shattered or broken by

the irresistible shock of earthquakes, the impetuosity of torrents...the current of rivers, or corroded or mouldered by the slower action of frost, wind, and weather.”²⁷ On the painterly view (for Hodges is better remembered for his pictures than his theorizing), environmental metamorphoses, sudden or sustained, are conflated within picturesque and sublime prehistory.

All this malleting bothered Uvedale Price (1747-1829), whose response to Gilpin’s directive underscores a crucial distinction between these two picturesque theorists, as well as the importance of the neoclassical question. A lengthy footnote in Price’s *Essay on the Picturesque* (1794) responds directly to Gilpin’s destruction of the Palladian building: “placed (as it frequently is in reality) in a street with other buildings, or at the top of a lawn, naked and unaccompanied, [it] is a formal object, and excites only a cold admiration of the architect’s ability; but, when introduced in a picture, becomes a highly interesting object, and universally pleases.” Price insists, further, that those “best masters” – for whom Gilpin has little patience – “have introduced and accompanied such buildings” to “great effect” (48n). Most significantly, Price defangs the picturesque by relegating it to a middling position between the sublime and the beautiful.²⁸

There exists a critical link between Gilpin’s position on neoclassicism and the prioritization of environmental “unity” in his writings and paintings. In his earlier *An Essay on Prints* (1768)²⁹, Gilpin had explicitly criticized the fad for neoclassicism that then remained prominent, and that

²⁷ William Hodges, *Travels in India, during the Years 1780, 1781, 1782, & 1783* (London: William Hodges, 1793), pp. 72-5.

²⁸ By describing Price’s picturesque theory in this way, I don’t mean to suggest that he was out to devalue the picturesque. Nigel Leask has asserted that Price’s picturesque “marks the *stabilization* of bourgeois European subjectivity in the discourse of travel, as it represented (in Price’s formulation) a *via media* between the lassitude of the beautiful and the violence of the sublime.” To a meaningful extent, my and Leask’s analyses are the same; however, I have chosen to stress the *negative* connotations of Price’s formulation, to stress what is lost, as it were, in the course of what Leask sees as a stabilization of subjectivity. See Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing, 1770-1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 175.

²⁹ William Templeman explains that *An Essay upon Prints* was “practically completed” some fifteen years earlier, in 1753. See Templeman, *The Life and Work of William Gilpin (1724-1804)* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1939), p. 37.

Price would later invoke in running to the Palladian building's defense. *Prints* repeatedly gives Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) pride of place over the kind of classicism exemplified by the work of Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506); describing the latter, Gilpin claims that

We see in [Mantegna's prints] the chaste, correct out-line, and noble simplicity of the Roman school; but we are to expect nothing more; not the least attempt towards an agreeable *whole*.—And indeed, we shall perhaps find in general, that the masters of the Roman school were more studious of those essentials of painting, which regard the *parts*; and the Flemish masters, of those, which regard the *whole*. The former therefore drew better *figures*; the latter made better *pictures*.³⁰

The Flemish, then, were more picturesque than the Romans, because they better achieve Gilpin's cardinal virtue:

It is an obvious principle, that one object at a time is enough to engage either the senses, or the intellect. Hence the necessity of *unity*, or a *whole*, in painting. The eye, on a complex view, must still be able to comprehend the picture as *one object*, or it cannot be satisfied. It may be pleased indeed by feeding on the parts separately: but a picture, which can please no otherwise, is as poor a production as a machine, whose springs and wheels are finished with nicety, but are unable to act in concert, and effect the intended movement.³¹

This passage, perhaps most remarkable for its machine metaphor, is a rich, early attempt to establish the picturesque as the visual technology best suited to the human eye, and thus to painterly representation. Greatness in painting is achieved *not* by the representation of beautiful objects, but by the representation of a unified whole, to which the former are unequivocally subordinated. As vehicle for untrammelled, naturalistic coherence, the unified whole – and the environmental processes it shadows forth – is the picturesque painter's topmost priority.

Achieving this whole might well mean diverging from a strictly realistic imitation of nature, and Gilpin's painter is vigorously encouraged to exercise artistic license whenever necessary. As we have already seen, this might involve artistically rearranging, subtracting,

³⁰ William Gilpin, *An Essay on Prints*, 5th ed. (London: Cadell & Davies, 1802), pp. 47-8.

³¹ *Ibid.* p. 6.

adding, or even destroying the parts of a vista, in order to arrive at picturesque unity. Gilpin's ideal artist must strive not to re-present nature as exactly as possible, but to make all necessary adjustments: "the painter, who adheres strictly to the *composition* of nature, will rarely make a good picture. His picture must contain a *whole*: his archetype is but a *part*."³² This should not be misunderstood as an elevation of human beings' creative potential above nature's; it is, on the contrary, in keeping with Gilpin's general view that people are aesthetically and imaginatively limited,³³ and must therefore constrain perspectives and images within the bounds dictated by these limitations. Nature, in other words, is the ultimate aesthetic ideal, but ought not be expected to organize itself in the most convenient – or cognitively accessible – manner for the purposes of a painting. Gilpin marks a "*correctly picturesque*" firsthand view of Goodrich Castle, in Herefordshire, as the exception rather than the rule: this "is seldom the character of a purely natural scene."³⁴

Responsibility for this reorganization thus redounds upon the painter: examples of "*parts*", which the successful picturesque painter unifies in an image, abound in nature, and Gilpin's domestic travel narratives are largely attempts to record them. Here is a characteristic example, of "the *New-Weir*," from *Observations on the River Wye* (1782):

The river is wider, than usual, in this part; and takes a sweep round a towering promontory of rock; which forms the side-screen on the left; and is the grand feature of the view. It is not a broad, fractured face of rock; but rather a woody hill, from which large projections, in two or three places, burst out; rudely hung with twisting branches, and shaggy furniture; which, like mane round the lion's head, gives a more savage air to these wild exhibitions of nature. Near the top a pointed fragment of solitary rock, rising above the rest, has rather a fantastic appearance: but it is not without its effect in marking the scene.³⁵

³² Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye*, p. 19.

³³ As Robert Mayhew claims, "Gilpin's picturesque art is only designed to recompose nature to show its true design on a scale that humans can comprehend." See Mayhew, "William Gilpin and the Latitudinarian Picturesque," p. 361.

³⁴ Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye*, p. 18.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 24.

As the invocation of side-screens – those elements of a prospect which help create perspective and guide the observer’s eye toward the principal subject – and features makes clear, Gilpin’s verbalization of the promontory view is explicitly pictorial, and perhaps scenographic. This does not make it aesthetically uniform: the scene is noteworthy not because it is perfectly picturesque, but because it (and Gilpin’s corresponding drawing) provide a number of usefully picturesque parts that the aspiring painter ought to recognize, and understand the usefulness – or unsuitability – of. *Wye* and the other travels feature a narrator who is, surely, constantly in search of ideal picturesque prospects in nature, but is also taking a kind of picturesque inventory. In this case, the “pointed fragment of solitary rock” introduces an excessive measure of the “fantastic,” but the “twisting branches, and shaggy furniture” are possible examples of the “*roughness*” and “*ruggedness*” Gilpin constantly admires.³⁶ It bears mentioning, however, that in this case, these qualities appear to approach sublime rudeness, savagery, and wildness, which must be carefully managed to fit the Gilpinian scheme. More problematic is the solitary fragment, which fails to point toward an obvious connotation, or aesthetic value. It is a spectacle unto itself, and this leads its observer to suggest that it is some species of unreality. For the picturesque cadre, this is a rock that might as well not exist.

Sensing Spectacle

Elizabeth. I love to draw pieces of rocks and old trees better than cottages, for it is not often one finds one that is not too formal.

Mrs. Woodfield. On paper, however, we may *destroy* as well as *raise* structures to our taste; and it is not difficult to dismantle one of the most comfortable cottages, till we render it tolerably *picturesque*, to use the phrase adopted on the occasion; then we can add

³⁶ Gilpin, *Three Essays*, pp. 6-7.

the haystack, or a few hop-poles leaning on its roof,
shadow it with the pendent boughs of the beach [*sic*] or
chestnut, or contrive to hide half the small casement
in the thatch, with the grotesque branches of an old fruit tree.

—Charlotte Smith, *Rambles Farther* (1796)³⁷

“[W]hy,” the *Three Essays* wonders, “does an elegant piece of garden-ground make no figure on canvas?” The question reflects one of Gilpin’s key preoccupations: the relationship between that which will appear “pleasing” in nature, and that which will please in a picture. What slippage occurs between these two contexts results from the differing effects of “*smoothness*,” a welcome impression at firsthand but a detriment in an image. As the value of smoothness shifts, so must the painter’s representative strategy:

Turn the lawn...into a piece of broken ground: plant rugged oaks instead of flowering shrubs: break the edges of the walk: give it the rudeness of a road: mark it with wheel-tracks; and scatter around a few stones, and brushwood; in a word, instead of making the whole *smooth*, make it *rough*; and you make it also *picturesque*.³⁸

Gilpin’s weird idea that the painter “plant rugged oaks” signals the fascinating and troubled metaphorical kinship between painterly practice and landscape management. The picturesque famously took tangible form in the landscapes,³⁹ gardens, and stately homes in Britain and its colonies; however, rendered too literal, the picturesque could fail disturbingly.⁴⁰

³⁷ See Smith, *Rambles Farther*, p. 116.

³⁸ Gilpin, *Three Essays*, p. 8.

³⁹ Raymond Williams’s definitive study of the evolution of cultural understandings of the English landscape sees the eighteenth century in terms of a “tradition of house-building and landscape-gardening, in which, as the outward sign new morality of improvement, the country was reshaped and redesigned.” See Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 59.

⁴⁰ Thus the architect, landscape architect, and designer William Kent (1685-1748), whom Gilpin describes as having taken things to an unfortunate extreme. In *Remarks on Forest Scenery*, the latter had defended the representation of arboreal disease, or “maladies,” as well as damage and decay, against utilitarian and botanical objections. This, before citing Kent as having been “hardy enough even to plant a withered tree; but the error was too glaring for imitation.” See Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery*, p. 10. In *Rambles Farther*, Charlotte Smith’s Mrs. Woodfield also criticizes Kent for having too readily collapsed the distance between nature and its representation: his illustrations for a 1751 edition of Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* are impugned for their distorting localism. Woodfield argues that the omnipresence of “young elm trees” in Kent’s images of “all the personages of the various allegory” is due to his having been “an improver of lands, parks, and gardens, and in that occupation had occasion to contrive and to observe continual plantations of that tree, to which his eye seemed to have been so familiarised that

From mortality's significant and insurmountable remove, the painter nevertheless strives to approximate the effects of "nature's hands"⁴¹, as well as the hands of time and history. These latter have produced a variety of admirable aesthetic results:

By the *curtailed trunk* I suppose Mr. Lawson means a tree, whose principal stem has been shattered by winds, or some other accident; while the lower part of it is left in vigour. This is also a beautiful circumstance; and it's application equally useful in landscape.⁴²

It is through age, that the oak acquires it's greatest beauty; which often continues increasing even into decay, if any proportion exists between the stem, and the branches.⁴³

Ragland-castle owes its present picturesque form to Cromwell; who laid his iron hands upon it, and shattered it into ruin.⁴⁴

These diverse phenomena share an aesthetic payoff in common: they generate the ruins – of trees and of buildings – that Gilpin's picturesque admires and emulates. Of course, the aged tree is a kind of phenomenological odd-object-out, in that its picturesque character has been established not by a sudden event, but by a slow process of decay. However, as we have already seen in Gilpin's instructions for landscape painters, not to mention Hodges's *Travels in India*, the picturesque artist produces aesthetic results in a way that flattens these distinctions. For intuitive – but important – reasons, the painter does not effect picturesque ruination by materially and temporally emulating, in the physical act of painting, slow mechanisms of age, death, and decay; this would be radically impractical, not to say impossible. Anyway it is not clear what would

he forgot there were any others in nature." See Smith, *Rambles Farther*, p. 115. Kent's alleged guffaws are notable, because they exemplify the risks involved in too readily carrying the principles of picturesque painting out from the canvas to the countryside, or hewing too closely to the appearances of objects close at hand when composing pictures of landscape. Indeed, Gilpin's entire corpus might be productively read as an exploration – variously anxious and exulting – of the dialectic between aesthetic theory, picturesque practice, and the world outside.

⁴¹ Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery*, p. 81.

⁴² *Ibid.* p. 8.

⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 30.

⁴⁴ Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye*, p. 49.

possess one to do so, when the same effect can be achieved by breaking the Palladian building to bits, of a sudden, and tossing them here and there.

Hence, the *Three Essays* recreates slow process metaphorically, in the “moment” of artistic creation, as a sudden, spectacular, and violent event. This, because attempting to do otherwise would be beyond the limits of representability. Scenes of storms and warfare, on the other hand, are potentially representable in picturesque painting, assuming that they conform to standard guidelines for unity of theme and composition. Some even achieve the sublime, which is, for Gilpin, a sort of cousin of the picturesque, one that can challenge the capacities of the painter’s brush.

Beautiful, however, as this scene is, and under a serene sky, mild and tranquil, he who stood on this eminence on the 8th of July 1667, would have been appalled. On that day he might have seen the Dutch fleet, under De Ruiter, entering the Medway, —bursting the chain thrown across the river, —storming Upmore castle, —and burning six large ships of the line, which lay unfurnished and unrigged in different parts of the river; while volumes of smoke from an immense magazine which he left burning at Sheerness, filled all the distant parts of the picture with a dreadful and melancholy gloom. A grander and more picturesque scene was never exhibited.⁴⁵

This picturesque outpouring of Gilpin’s historical imagination is spurred by a vista observed at Frimbury, in Kent. At first reading, it seems an odd, not to say politically daring, artistic statement of the Second Anglo-Dutch War, but Gilpin justifies it by ascribing responsibility to Charles II — “a prince of the most detestable character” — and his selfishness.⁴⁶

This is relevant for Mary Favret’s sense of the relationship between Romanticism and war, the latter of which poses a threat not only to “sentience” but to the energies that sentience, as a

⁴⁵ William Gilpin, *Observations on the Coasts of Hampshire, Sussex, and Kent* (London: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1804), p. 111.

⁴⁶ Aestheticized in this way, a pivotal episode in the Second Anglo-Dutch War resembles a crucial and challenging moment in Edmund Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry* (1757). In a vivid thought experiment, Burke imagines the crowds that would assemble “from all parts” to wonder, with pleasure, at the sight of London “destroyed by a conflagration or an earthquake.” See Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, p. 27.

process, might produce.⁴⁷ Treating Thomas and William Daniell’s subcontinental images, Favret argues perceptively that right understanding of picturesque “indifference” – commonly cited by critics troubled by what the picturesque appears to gloss over, or simply ignore – involves acknowledging its “disturbed, anxious, uneasy” character.⁴⁸ As the disappearing motor of picturesque imagining – and image-making – violent spectacle, and its times and movements, present a possible source of this discomfiture. And by including spectacle in the things sensed in a picture, as Gilpin does at the prospect of Frimbury, a critic might recognize a field of events, persons, and histories that an image implies but does not necessarily depict. If picturesque obfuscations are seen to reflect not so much an ideological sin as a technological limitation, then so much more provocative appear its enduring consequences for the possibilities of representing changes in landscape to view.

Elsewhere, Gilpin imagines a tempest in order to distinguish representable from unrepresentable arboreal motion:

[I]n a painting I know not, that I should represent any kind of motion in a tree, except that of a violent storm. When the blast continues for some time, when the black heavens are in unison with it, and help to tell the story, an oak straining against the wind, is an object of picturesque beauty.⁴⁹

The Frimbury passage exemplifies the historical and narrative importance of Gilpin’s picturesque. Scenes like it are not only aesthetically unified, but narratively sound: they are accessible repositories of historical argument, and epoch-defining markers of temporal distance. This is by no means less true of the stormy conjuration, which explicitly invokes the narrative function of

⁴⁷ Mary A. Favret, *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton UP, 2010), p. 18.

⁴⁸ Favret, *War at a Distance*, p. 228.

⁴⁹ Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery*, p. 54.

compositional unity. The contrapositive of this stance is worth spelling out: if an image lacks unity of composition – if it does not adhere to picturesque principles – it will *fail* to tell a story.

Thus, if slow environmental processes do not satisfy compositional unity, how are their stories to be told? Perhaps, as certain spectacular events in nature are representable, they dictate not only the imaginative, but the narrative guidelines for the painterly approximation of slow process. In the course of considering a painting by the 17th century Italian master Salvator Rosa, Gilpin instructs his student in extracting narrative information from a ruined tree:

A young tree, or a bush, might probably have served [Salvator's] purpose with regard to *composition*; but such dwarfs, and striplings could not have preserved the dignity of his subject, like the ruins of a noble tree. These splendid remnants of decaying grandeur speak to the imagination in a stile of eloquence, which the stripling cannot reach: they record the history of some storm, some blast of lightening [*sic*], or other great event, which transfers it's grand ideas to the landscape; and in the representation of elevated subjects assists the sublime.⁵⁰

For Gilpin, because the tree is positioned in an exemplary picturesque scene, it must be interpreted as complying with (or dictating) “some *principal commanding theme*” (“On Landscape Painting” l. 183). Grandness and sublimity drive the analysis toward a corresponding explication of the tree's narrative testimony: it must signal some “great event,” like a storm, battle, or similarly violent catastrophe, in order for the image to make coherent sense. However, elsewhere in the same text, Gilpin's description of an oak “by the gate of the water-walk, at Magdalen college in Oxford” indicates the ambiguity that necessarily pervades such analyses:

The age of a castle, or abbey is the object of history. Even a common house is recorded by the family, that built it. All these objects arrive at maturity in their youth, if I may so speak. But the tree gradually compleating it's growth, is not worth recording in the early part of it's existence. It is then only a common tree; and afterwards when it becomes remarkable for it's age, all memory of it's youth is lost.

⁵⁰ Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery*, p. 9.

This tree however can almost produce historical evidence for the age assigned to it.⁵¹

In this passage, Gilpin underscores the problematic status of trees in the human historical imagination. The histories of castles, abbeys, and even ordinary homes are susceptible of a type of narration that does not typically lend itself well to the histories of trees, and vice versa. Put another way, trees and human edifices operate within distinct dialectical relationships between age and historical significance. Like the ruined tree in Rosa's painting, the Magdalen oak possesses remarkable active potential: where the "remnants" of the former can "speak" and "record," the other narrates history from a vantage – spatial and temporal – unavailable to humans.

Like architectural ruins, ruined trees thus offer opportunities for creative historical interpretation and meaning-making; the picturesque, for Gilpin, is an aesthetic technology for rendering historical narrative thematically sensible. However, to appreciate the complexity of this position, we must recall the instructions for the picturesque painter, who fabricates an image through a process that is metaphorically reproduced as an episode of spectacular violence. In the space and time of the picturesque painting, how does one differentiate between the Magdalen oak, allegedly saturated with "historical evidence," and the remains of an integral, imaginary tree, smashed to imaginary bits for painterly purposes? There is more at stake in this than a playful exploration of philosophical and rhetorical niceties; if aesthetic forms like the picturesque provoke narrative interpretation in their viewers, we ought to strive to understand the ambiguity that is central to this aesthetic-narrative dynamic. What is clear is that spectacularity has, to an extraordinary extent, enabled this generative ambiguity, and the opportunities for history-, narrative-, and meaning-making thus entailed.

⁵¹ The "evidence" that Gilpin proceeds to draw out touches the histories of Alfred the Great (849-99), William of Waynflete (c. 1398-1486), Cardinal Wolsey (1473-1530), James I, and Charles II. See Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery*, p. 136.

Keeping Picturesque Time, Thinking Picturesque Thoughts

William Hazlitt wrote that ruins communicated the very “perspective of time,” as though they were the signals of a godlike spectator, or panoramist. In *Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England*, Hazlitt argued that ruins were aesthetically, and even morally, necessary, because the unruined, or indestructible, indicated a kind of hubristic freakishness. Without ruination, he claimed, legibility was impossible – “the marks of the progress and lapse of time” were the signs that made “the noble idea of antiquity” readable. The temporal and imaginative limbo to which Hazlitt consigns the excessively intact is called, amusingly, “yesterday” – a place cluttered with the unsorted and the unprocessed.⁵² For Peter de Bolla, structures like Lord Scarsdale and Robert Adam’s Kedleston Hall, in Derbyshire, express a strange temporal frisson: sometimes they are history’s most eloquent testimonials, making visible and tangible the passage of time and the changes it works; but an edifice can also seem to contain a “moment,” to have secured a bit of material and fixed it in place.⁵³ Writers like Gilpin and Smith conceived of landscapes in explicitly architectural terms, and a picturesque ruin invites an analogously ambivalent attitude toward time.

Gilpin’s metaphors of spectacular violence introduce compelling ambiguity into the field of picturesque meaning: an image might be interpreted as communicating historical or narrative information, when that image is, in fact, the product of a creative process that usurps conventional historical and narrative modes. By examining this process in greater detail, we can appreciate it as meaningfully distinct from theory or product, and recognize the dynamic and complicated role

⁵² Hazlitt, *Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England*, pp. 54-5.

⁵³ De Bolla, *The Education of the Eye*, pp. 153-4.

played by spectacularity in picturesque process. The “moment” of process is a unique aesthetic “space” and “time” that bears exploring as such, and serious engagements with this moment significantly complicate the aesthetic status of the art object *and* understandings of the “nature” thus represented.

Time, thought, and narrative: these elements, crucial to the picturesque project, participate in challenging – and generative – relationships with picturesque process. Gilpin was himself keenly aware of his program’s necessarily cavalier regard for temporality. Needless to say, the painter, short on time and long on mortal limitations, cannot fully approximate the processes Gilpin describes in the physical world and in history:

The case is, the immensity of nature is beyond human comprehension. She works on a *vast scale*; and, no doubt, harmoniously, if her schemes could be comprehended. The artist, in the mean time, is confined to a *span*. He lays down his little rules therefore, which he calls the *principles of picturesque beauty*, merely to adapt such diminutive parts of nature’s surfaces to his own eye, as come within its scope.⁵⁴

The artist’s span is delineated temporally, spatially, and intellectually: the picturesque project, Gilpin implies, is less an assertion of aesthetic mastery over nature than a best attempt at exploiting what limited “scope” humans have at their disposal. While cognizant of these limitations, Gilpin is equally sensitive to the need to manage or circumvent them. Because the painter cannot possibly play by nature’s rules, a new set of *analogous* rules bears inventing:

But whether I represent an object, or a scene, I hold myself at perfect liberty, in the first place, to dispose the foreground as I please...In short, I do not so much mean to exact a liberty of introducing what does not exist; as of making a few of those simple variations, of which all ground is easily susceptible, and which time itself indeed is continually making.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye*, p. 18.

⁵⁵ Gilpin, *Three Essays*, p. 68.

Here, Gilpin makes a couple of fascinating moves: first, he explicitly invokes his artistic license to take up – not to say usurp – time’s authority and turn it to his own devices. This quietly triumphant assertion of picturesque prerogative takes the form of a qualifying apology: suspend your disbelief, Gilpin seems to say, for time is always doing this sort of thing. In a single sentence, Gilpin responds to (or anticipates) allegations of reckless fabrication – of engineering the fantastic – by invoking the same vast and incomprehensible workings of time and nature that his picturesque attempts to negotiate. What Gilpin’s artist is after might, ultimately, be something like transcendence.

More challenging, and more subtle, is Gilpin’s slippery reference to the “ground” which the artist (as time) manipulates. Like the ruination of the Palladian building, the painter can only approximate time’s “simple variations” via momentous intervention; the phrase’s rhetorical power lies in its understatement. It is crucial, too, that Gilpin does not imagine himself tracing the contours of time’s extant variations, but as *effecting* similar variations himself; it is as though before time’s first advance, and before the “moment” of picturesque process, there existed two analogous, unworked “grounds,” fated for the hands of two distinct, analogous artists. Thus the destabilizing – and perhaps even subversive – potentialities of Gilpin’s picturesque process, which represents landscape in a way that invents or artificially reconstructs the aesthetic evidence of time, warfare, ecological change, and history.⁵⁶ These potentialities establish picturesque process as analogous with spectacularity, that congeries of semiotic features that preoccupied Gilpin’s

⁵⁶ In a recent analysis of post-WWI photographs of Reims, in northern France, Simon Baker observes that the “implications of the representation of ruins – in visual (and related literary) forms – extend beyond the practicalities of recording destruction and reconstruction or of accepting the transience of cultural achievements. This raises the possibility of seeing time and memory themselves as in some sense ruined in the wake of such a devastating war.” See Baker, “‘Ruins: The Ruin of Ruins’ – Photography in the ‘Red Zone’ and the Aftermath of the Great War,” in *Fighting Words and Images: Representing War Across the Disciplines*, ed. Elena V. Baraban, Stephan Jaeger, & Adam Muller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), p. 286. My treatment of Gilpin invites us to explore the generative potentialities of the ruination of time.

contemporaries and has featured no less prominently in recent cultural theory. This is not only to say that picturesque process can be identified as a spectacle, though the destruction of the Palladian building is a strikingly spectacular episode. Rather, what this section seeks to establish are the resemblances that exist between Gilpin's account of process and influential accounts of spectacularity. Having done so, we can return to Gilpin's travels, and recognize the challenge – and generative potential – of invoking spectacularity to represent slow environmental change.

Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) produced an original and resilient account of the pervasive and pernicious spectacularity of a society allegedly in thrall to images and their consumption. Like Nixon, Debord is a recent thinker whose perceptions of spectacularity are worth considering in eighteenth-century contexts: this, because of both writers' contemporary influence, and because of our need to recognize their arguments as novel engagements with centuries-old debates⁵⁷. Central to Debord's thesis is a consideration of spectacle's effects on history, time, and thought. "The spectacle," he argues, "being the reigning social organization of a paralyzed history, of a paralyzed memory, of an abandonment of any history founded in historical time, is in effect a *false consciousness of time*."⁵⁸ Rendered paralytic by "the time of the

⁵⁷ Vis-à-vis Debord, consider an example from Henry Fielding's *A History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749), which describes the assaults of dissipating consumerism on measured taste, and indicates the complex relationship between motion, thought, temporality, and observing landscape:

The Woods, the Rivers, the Lawns of *Devon*, attract the Eye of the ingenious Traveller, and retard his Pace, which Delay he afterwards compensates by swiftly scouring over the gloomy Heath of *Bagshot*....Not so the Money-meditating Tradesman, the sagacious Justice, the dignified Doctor, the warm-clad Grazier, with all the numerous offspring of Wealth and Dulness. On they jogg, with equal Pace, through the verdant Meadows, or over the barren Heath, their Horses measuring four Miles and a half *per* Hour with the utmost Exactness.

Where Fielding's "Tradesman" and his ilk are only preoccupied by money, the "ingenious Traveller" engages with and modulates movement and time, in accordance with the perceived value of a given prospect. This resonates forcefully with Debord's description of "modern society's obsession with *saving time*, whether by means of faster transport or by means of powdered soup." See Fielding, *Tom Jones*, p. 397; Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p. 112.

⁵⁸ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p. 114.

spectacle,”⁵⁹ history and memory – and, by extension, narrative – look dumbly on as “totalitarian bureaucratic society” establishes a tyranny of the “perpetual present.”⁶⁰ In this present, Debord explains, all access to time and history is seized and redeployed to serve the purposes of the spectacle. These purposes dictate that society’s experience of time and history be defined by consumption and false consciousness: history is consumed in order to justify the status quo, and time becomes understood as something to be saved up, spent, and exchanged, but not experienced directly.

William Gilpin’s picturesque process⁶¹ can be interpreted as establishing “a *false consciousness of time*” all its own. Among the painter’s capacities – not to say duties – is to falsify an object’s relationship to time in order to achieve compositional unity in a painting. Ironically, this falsification is necessary to ensure an image’s historical, temporal, and narrative coherence. Behind Gilpin’s picturesque image lie not only a spectacle of Palladian ruination, but a distinctly spectacular relationship to time and history. Of course, with respect to Gilpin’s picturesque, this is no negative phenomenon: spectacularity enables picturesque practice, despite the fact that its theory and products, as we shall see, eschew any such connection. Provocatively, when Uvedale Price moves to moderate the picturesque, by positioning it between the sublime and the beautiful, he remarks upon its troubling temporality: the picturesque, he claims, is potentially useful as a kind of psychological corrective to “the languor of beauty, or the horror of sublimity,” but is, considered in itself, a bit shallow, “sudden,” and “abrupt.”⁶² In this way, Price’s analysis of the

⁵⁹ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p. 112.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 76.

⁶¹ I am not unique in considering the relationship between landscape and Debordian spectacularity; for Jim Igoe, twenty-first century “landscapes...have been rendered into commodified objects of contemplation and consumption by tourists.” Igoe, extrapolating from Debord’s idea of spectacle as “a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (12), sees “relationships between people and the environment” constructed via a general trend toward “spectacular accumulation” (Igoe 376-8)

⁶² Uvedale Price, *An Essay on the Picturesque* (London: J. Robson, 1794), pp. 76, 86.

picturesque tends quite close to polite eighteenth-century characterizations of spectacle as, paradoxically, materially abundant but morally and intellectually vacuous.

One encounters a striking, and characteristic, account of spectacular abruptness in Oliver Goldsmith's *The Citizen of the World* (1760-2):

[V]ery different [are the streets] of London: in the midst of their pavement a great lazy puddle moves muddily along; heavily-laden machines, with wheels of unwieldy thickness, crowd up every passage: so that a stranger, instead of finding time for observation, is often happy if he has time to escape from being crushed to pieces."⁶³

Here, we see Goldsmith invoking two primary spectacular tropes: the city has a flattening effect upon vision, reducing its constituent parts to “a great lazy puddle.” There is unity in this, but it is – prefiguring Wordsworth – a horrifying, rapacious unity, which threatens to consume the individual spectator in its creeping advance. And Goldsmith's “heavily-laden machines” effect a radically inhuman and threatening temporality: their movement, and the sheer materiality of the whole scene, disempower the spectator from performing an aesthetic consideration of the city, or from doing anything but take what steps are necessary for self-preservation.

Goldsmith's narrator, Lien Chi Altangi, has been violently reduced by the engorged city to little more than a vulnerable body – barely a mind. His appearance may recall certain eighteenth-century voices whose enthusiasm for Chinese aesthetics, in particular as applied to nature, was a recurring, if rather stereotyping, theme. In *The Spectator* no. 414, Joseph Addison laments English garden designs for their clumsy, cluttering overreliance on “cones, globes, and pyramids” – the signs, for Addison, of a style that advertised its interventions too loudly. Matters were preferable on the continent, but altogether ideal in China, where geometric forms were, ostensibly, dispensed with altogether, and subtlety produced an effect not only instantly agreeable but impossible to

⁶³ Oliver Goldsmith, *The Citizen of the World*, ed. G. S. Dickson (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1937), p. 10.

unravel. (It is curious, at a twenty-first century remove, to observe Addison associating a pleasing degree of “rudeness” with French practitioners, whose legacy is commonly understood today as so much *topiaire*.) Addison’s lesson is for the benefit of English gardeners who leave the marks of art in such high relief upon their creations that the imagination has little opportunity for exercise. Many of those gardeners, he writes, are in fact profiteering tree merchants, keen to rationalize space in the manner most conducive “to their own profit,” and lending the countryside “a mathematical figure” that undermines its potential for beauty.⁶⁴

The crush of Goldsmith’s London and the overloud artifice of Addison’s English garden suggest the manner in which the picturesque could promote itself as a salutary antidote to both tendencies. This is particularly significant with respect to spectacularity’s pernicious effects on a subject’s capacity for thought: Debord’s theory of spectacle carries this into the late twentieth century, where he apprehends “the material assaults of the spectacle’s mechanisms of contemplation.”⁶⁵ For Debord, “urbanism” comes in for particular criticism, in light of its having “refashion[ed] the totality of space into *its own peculiar decor*”;⁶⁶ Addison suggests the manner in which the refashioning might be less offensive in itself than the obvious appearance thereof. For Debord, spectacle is immediate *and* alienating, collapsing “geographical distance only to reap distance internally in the form of spectacular separation.”⁶⁷ Each of these authors establishes distancing, measuring thought as spectacularity’s⁶⁸ opposite and, often, its victim.

⁶⁴ Addison, *The Spectator* 414 (Jun 25 1712), pp. 83-4.

⁶⁵ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p. 14.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 121.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 120. In his work on experimental theater, Debord aimed to counteract these dynamics by achieving “a negation of theatre by an *excess of realism*”; he would present a “*permanent*, empty spectacle, like life...with brief glimpses of what could be.” Quoted in Jean-Marie Apostolides, “The Big and Small Theatres of Guy Debord,” trans. Marie Pecorari, *TDR: The Drama Review* 55.1 (Spring 2011), p. 91.

⁶⁸ Timothy Morton has orchestrated an intriguing reversal of this very logic: “Capitalism modernizes agricultural space. The way the land appears unoccupied is *not* a relic of an ancient prehistoric past, but a function of modernity....The lawn expresses the disappearing of the worker that resulted in picturesque landscape, the

A trope of spectacular materiality and visuality as inimical to productive thought and contemplation is rampant in the eighteenth century, and undergirds the ambivalence that spectators so frequently express in recounting their experiences. Spectacle represents an overwhelming and incoherent materiality, one that dazzles its spectators not into sublime awareness but vacant thoughtlessness. It tends to withhold the kind of perspective⁶⁹ that would enable educated viewers to make sense of their surroundings, and its links with commercial culture raise the specter of dissipated imperial⁷⁰ luxury. Sophie von la Roche experienced “museum fatigue” at Sir Ashton Lever’s, where “All the wonders of nature, and all the incredible artistic conceptions of form and colour, pleasant and unpleasant, are so tightly packed, that the mind and eye are quite dazzled by them, and in the end both are overwhelmed and retain nothing at all.”⁷¹ This reminds us of Goldsmith’s “great lazy puddle,” which terrorizes its viewer through its resistance to meaningful differentiation. Or consider Tom Brown, whose *Amusements Serious and Comical* (1700) imagines London and its inhabitants as a series of spectacles: “How come they to abandon themselves thus to a passion that discomposes their minds, their health, their beauty; that ruins— What was I going to say?”⁷² Brown’s em dash punctuates a contemplative failure, brought on by the sardonic narrator’s effort to take in and describe his surroundings.

production of distance, of simulated fusions of tameness and wildness, and fascinating points of view.” See Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 89.

⁶⁹ This perspective is crucial for John Crowley’s assessment of British aestheticizations of landscape, which “made it possible for Britons to reassure themselves that they understood distant and / or previously unfamiliar lands of the British Empire by visiting them in their visual imaginations.” See Crowley, *Imperial Landscapes* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 8.

⁷⁰ We might, with De Almeida and Gilpin, see the picturesque as explicitly mobilized to manage this anxiety: they argue that Alexander Allan, topographer and soldier, “cast [Indian droogs] as a full series representing the picturesque order and tranquil lifestyle that were the concomitant result of established British rule.” See De Almeida & Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance*, p. 178.

⁷¹ Quoted in Altick, *The Shows of London*, p. 33.

⁷² Brown, *Amusements Serious and Comical*, p. 54.

As we have already seen, William Gilpin's picturesque theory is committed to right narrative,⁷³ to an image's having a coherent message and that message being readily understood. It is fundamentally preoccupied, too, with the status and value of contemplation. Thinking is central to the picturesque project; however, that project's creative deployment of spectacularity introduces a fascinating and meaningful paradox. Toward recognizing and understanding this paradox, it is worth exploring, first, Gilpin's concept of the sublime, which distinguishes itself by virtue of its effects on cognition. He argues that the sublime occurs

when some grand scene, tho perhaps of incorrect composition, rising before the eye, strikes us beyond the power of thought...and every mental operation is suspended. [...] The general idea of the scene makes an impression, before any appeal is made to judgment. We rather *feel*, than *survey* it.⁷⁴

There exists an intriguing and complicated congruence between this account of the sublime and the descriptions of spectacularity we've already examined. Gilpin's sublime scene takes all active potential unto itself: it rises, strikes, suspends, and makes an impression, instead of offering itself up to aesthetic or contemplative intervention on the part of the observer. It hardly needs stating that this recalls the characteristic disempowerment we encountered in Goldsmith. Far from stating that Gilpin's sublime is thus equivalent to the spectacular, this similarity nonetheless prods us to ponder the potential for slippage between sublimity and spectacularity. After all, as we have seen, sublime scenes in paintings might be understood, for Gilpin, as spectacles felicitously ordered; put another way, we might recognize the spectacular as a potentially sublime image, or element, that, like the fantastic fragment, fails to achieve the requisite degree of affective, narrative, or subjective

⁷³ According to Sylvia Lavin, narrative concerns have been central to the picturesque since Alexander Pope "first used the term in relation to issues revolving around the iconographic and narrative structure of history painting." See Lavin, "Sacrifice and the Garden," p. 18. Nigel Leask has provocatively described the slippage between the sort of narrative effected by an image and the sort sought by text in the late eighteenth century: "in the literary travelogue it was unclear how picturesque description might be translated from visual synchronicity into sustained narrative." See Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing*, p. 189.

⁷⁴ Gilpin, *Three Essays*, pp. 49-50.

coherence. Or, more positively, for Burke's spectators, and for Gilpin's picture-maker, spectacle is the precondition for sublime or picturesque consolidation.

It bears stressing that Gilpin is not out to invoke spectacularity and its coconspirators when he pulls the Palladian building down and throws it all about; if Gilpin's sublime arrests thought, his conception of picturesque process *is* thought. In a flourish that reminds us of Sophie von la Roche at the Leverian Museum, Gilpin complains of the "fatigue" that often attends the observation of "the wild, and savage parts of nature." The key to counteracting this is, ostensibly, "recollecting, and recording, from a few transient lines, the scenes we have admired"; superior to "the present enjoyment" one feels when apprehending scenes, "this secondary pleasure cannot be attended with those enthusiastic feelings, which accompanied the real exhibition." While "a calmer species of pleasure," Gilpin claims, the picturesque "is more uniform, and uninterrupted."⁷⁵ This isn't just more pleasurable, but more true, for "a *hasty transcript* from nature" will reflect "the lines of the country just as you find them," while in an "*adorned sketch*" one "must grace them a little, where they run false."⁷⁶ Truth and pleasure are not always apprehended immediately, in the moment of perception, but via contemplation and the passage of time, in what one might call an act of picturesque cogitation. Thus the picturesque's associations with time, and with the productive passage thereof: time produces picturesque effects, and the picturesque, in theory, rewards taking time to record aesthetic experience. Startling immediacy, of the kind produced by spectacle, is precisely not what the picturesque enjoys.

And yet, if the picturesque would seem to abhor a spectacle, its process is remarkably spectacular. The "moment" of painterly practice entails an engagement with immediacy, no matter how obscured this engagement might be by the finished picturesque product. When a painter

⁷⁵ Gilpin, *Three Essays*, pp. 51-2.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 70.

arrives, via process, at a completed canvas, the lineaments of process fall away, like the scaffolding around a building. Paradoxically, spectacle is not representable within the picturesque frame, and yet picturesque process, for Gilpin, draws upon spectacularity in order to actualize that frame. This paradox moves in at least two directions: on the one hand, spectacularity empowers the picturesque artist to represent environmental change and act upon the world; on the other, the picturesque image is exposed as an unreliable, if enthusiastic, narrator. Most challenging of all, the paradox raises basic questions about the extent to which environmental change can be imagined, painted, or written. Even within one, ostensibly describable aesthetic mode – Gilpin’s picturesque – the foggy interstices between theory, object, process, and product totally problematize representational integrity.

This line of thinking may benefit from a brief – and somewhat tangential – examination of Gilpin’s anxiety regarding the representability of motion in images, not to mention the effects of motion on the apprehension of images. *An Essay on Prints* features an extended, and largely critical, discussion of the legendary eighteenth-century satirist and printmaker William Hogarth (1697-1764); Gilpin takes special exception to Hogarth’s depiction of “quick motion,” in *A Rake’s Progress* (1732-5).⁷⁷ The fourth of that series of eight prints depicts Tom Rakewell’s close escape from apprehension by the Welsh authorities; Tom is aided by Sarah Young, whose bandbox is let fall amidst the confusion. Somewhat surprisingly, but suggestively for our purposes, Gilpin lingers over the matter of the bandbox in order to articulate a pointed objection to Hogarth’s execution:

The *perspective* is good, and makes an agreeable shape.—I cannot leave this print without remarking *the falling band-box*. Such representations of quick motion are absurd; and every moment, the absurdity grows stronger. Objects of this kind are beyond the power of representation.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ This is not the only instance of Gilpin’s having objected to Hogarth’s imaging of motion; as Barbier explains, when “a young man [Gilpin] criticized Hogarth for showing a scroll falling from the hands of Felix in the painting of ‘Paul before Felix’, at Lincoln’s Inn.” See Barbier, *William Gilpin*, p. 128.

⁷⁸ Gilpin, *An Essay on Prints*, pp. 158-9.

Some years on, *Remarks on Forest Scenery* would testify to the resilience of these views:

From the motion of the tree, we have also the pleasing circumstance of the *chequered shade*, formed under it by the dancing of the sun-beams along it's playing leaves. This circumstance, tho not so much calculated for picturesque use, (as it's beauty arises chiefly from it's motion) is yet very amusing in nature; and may also be introduced in painting, when the tree is at rest. But it is one of those circumstances, which requires a very artful pencil.⁷⁹ (21)

We ought to read these passages not simply in terms of some rigid adherence to picturesque taste, but in terms of Gilpin's serious and sustained consideration of what falls within and outside of the painter's purview. Furthermore, they provide some potential answers to the question of why such a disconnect persists between the literary description of picturesque process and the aesthetic character of the product thereof.

De Bolla has rightly observed the presence of certain kinds of movement within picturesque images, not to mention the buildings and gardens that they inspired: the eye might ideally take great delight in being gently but definitely led around the view.⁸⁰ So when Gilpin



Figure 19. Gilpin, from *Observations on the River Wye*

contends that other varieties of movement, such as Sarah's bandbox, are anathema to

⁷⁹ Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery*, p. 21.

⁸⁰ De Bolla, *The Education of the Eye*, p. 182.

picturesqueness, he might be complaining that the motile potential of the viewer-image relationship has been absorbed entirely by the picture, leaving the viewer uncomfortably, and self-consciously, fixed in space. We might reasonably ask, further: Considering its manifest motion and action, what would the scene of spectacular ruination, meted out upon the Palladian building, “look like” in a painting? It seems likely that, for Gilpin, the question is either impossible to answer, or answerable only via recourse to a necessary *détour*: as response, he might offer this scene, from *Observations on the River Wye*. The question refers to a time, space, and scene that do not exist in the world of the picturesque image, and thus its interpolation in an image necessitates a series of shifts which produce a distant relative. In the image, the ruin is “at rest,” and the twists and turns on its road to ruination are left to the observer to interpret. No doubt, its contents bear some relation to the travel narrative with which it was published; however, it is equally certain that, if a visual document of the trip, it is also the site of creative transformation. If it tells a coherent story, it does so by virtue of painterly intervention. It removes the traces of process, and of “quick motion,” that might be evident in an (impossible) image of another scene from the text:

Many of the objects, which had floated so rapidly past us, if we had had time to examine them, would have given us sublime, and beautiful hints in landscape: some of them seemed even well combined, and ready prepared for the pencil: but, in so quick a succession, one blotted out another.—The country at length giving way on both sides, a view opened, which suffered the eye to rest upon it.⁸¹ (*Wye* 72)

Like the view which, Gilpin writes, finally “opened” to his “picturesque eye,”⁸² the picturesque image is the aesthetically, narratively, and cognitively accessible end of a process that is anything but teleological. In order to represent the effects of those processes – some unthinkably slow – that render picturesque change in nature, Gilpin resorts to a spectacularity which is, in turn,

⁸¹ Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye*, p. 72.

⁸² Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery*, p. 13.

unrepresentable in an image. Thus the foundational tensions at bottom of, on the one hand, the picturesque attempt to represent gradual environmental change, and the observer's attempt to analyze a picturesque image "backwards" as depicting anything but a falsified narrative on the other. It would be trite to argue that these complicating factors render the picturesque dismissible as an inauthentic or incoherent visual technology, as though "realer" alternatives were necessarily available. Rather, it is important that we recognize these factors, in order to better approach problems like slow violence, and in order to evaluate and theorize novel approaches to contemporary representational challenges. In this chapter's final section, we will turn in detail to Gilpin's remarkable description of slow violence, and contemplate its significance for contemporary debates in environmental aesthetics.

Ludicrous Time

"The transmutations of time," Gilpin opines, "are often ludicrous."⁸³ We should pay close attention here, as always, to the specific import of his language: like the absurdity of the falling bandbox in Hogarth's print, time's alterations throw art's representational limits into relief. The picturesque artist ought, thus, be understood as behaving ludicrously in the "moment" of picturesque process, a process that must subsequently be effaced from the finished product. If the artist is time's analogue, then the artist not only generates spectacularity, but is spectacular; what is the artist's ambit, after all, if not a hearkening to transformative power, a power no person will succeed in rendering personally coherent?

⁸³ Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye*, p. 27.

In a lengthy description of Winchelsea, East Sussex, from *Observations on the Coasts of Hampshire, Sussex, and Kent* (1804/1774), Gilpin strives to make sense of nature's hand. From "a town of greater splendor than any town in England, except the capital," Winchelsea has been reduced to a "skeleton of its former splendor" by "the calamity of a retiring sea." The skeletal metaphor is a deeply suggestive one,⁸⁴ and Gilpin seems tentatively keen to explore it: in mentioning that one might "trace" its streets and examine its "curious crypts and vaults," he invokes anatomical description. So depicted, the town gives the impression of having been an integral organism, which died around "the end of Elizabeth" and has slowly deteriorated since.

In this way, the town is describable as an object, one of the "parts" that Gilpin's addressee might learn to notice and consider as potential pieces of future picturesque scenes. Winchelsea's subsidiary parts bear examining, too, for in the wake of the city's physical and economic ruination, the "painter...gains from what the merchant has lost." The remains of former splendor include, for instance, "several pieces of Gothic ruin," and particularly "the chapel of an ancient priory":

Its walls are nearly entire—its proportions just—its architecture elegant; and its situation among lofty trees, on a projecting knoll, sets it off to advantage. The parish church too is a fine old remnant of a Gothic priory; and the grey stone, of which it is constructed, is beautifully tinted with all the stains, that an incrustated vegetation can give.⁸⁵

Here we see the theorist taking aesthetic inventory: the chapel is admirable as an object, and its position is instructive for best practices in painterly composition. Like the mosses, and other

⁸⁴ Of "the ruined village of Craonne," in northeast France, Simon Baker describes "one of a number of so-called heroic villages so utterly destroyed by shelling that it was left to moss-over completely with the new village rebuilt nearby." Like Gilpin, he resorts to skeletal description: "Present-day visitors to the original site find only wooded parkland with a strangely uneven surface, which on closer inspection turns out to consist of the barely remnant skeletons of absent buildings: mossy foundations that imply the spectral trajectories of what once were walls." See Baker, "Ruins: The Ruin of Ruins," p. 290.

⁸⁵ Gilpin, *Observations on the Coasts of Hampshire, Sussex, and Kent*, pp. 61-2.

“excrescences,”⁸⁶ which Gilpin so admires upon trees, the stone’s “incrusted vegetation” add “richness” and harmony to the scene.⁸⁷

At Winchelsea, Gilpin offers a stronger-than-usual sense that he is attempting an analysis of another artist. Nature – more precisely, the sea – has achieved a most exemplary ruin: “We hardly find in history,” Gilpin muses, “an instance of so flourishing a town reduced to such a state of intire insignificance.” This feat has been carried off, first, by the sea’s retreat, “by insensible degrees,” from the town. Elsewhere along the shore, the sea acts by “the continual beating of waves,” which “make an impression by degrees” upon the ground they assail. Oceanic artistry resists not only immediate apprehension, but even a grander, broader view: “All this flat coast, now so rich in pasture, was formerly covered with the sea, which retreats still farther from it every year; but its retreat is so low, that it is scarce perceptible in an age.”⁸⁸

This raises serious interpretive problems for the picturesque viewer; the ocean’s vicissitudes would seem to defy even the most capacious historical imagination. Narrative confusion ensues, as commentators struggle to make these slow – and sometimes salutary – calamities sensible for themselves and their readers: this “operation of the sea upon coasts,” Gilpin observes, “sometimes in deserting them, and sometimes in gaining upon them, appears to be among the most surprizing phenomena in nature.”⁸⁹ “Surprizing” seems an infelicitous adjective for a process that seems anything but sudden; however, Gilpin’s turn of phrase is typically

⁸⁶ Gilpin’s imprecision is not coincidental; he is professedly, and deliberately, “an observer only of outward characters; unlike a botanist. See Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery*, p. 84. The picturesque, for Gilpin, expressly promotes the kind of relationship to natural history that John Aikin would have deplored; the latter impugned to poetry “a too cursory and general survey of objects, without exploring their minuter distinctions and mutual relations; and [this] is only to be rectified by accurate and attentive observation, conducted upon somewhat of a scientific plan.” Aikin thought poetry particularly well-suited to the task. See Aikin, *An Essay on the Application of Natural History to Poetry* (London: J. Johnson, 1777), pp. 9-11.

⁸⁷ Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery*, pp. 12-13.

⁸⁸ Gilpin, *Observations on the Coasts of Hampshire, Sussex, and Kent*, pp. 63, 67.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p. 63.

suggestive. By virtue of a profound paradox, the ocean's effects *do* take one unawares, *because of* their imperceptibility and extreme slowness. Spectacles, by most accounts, strike their viewers suddenly and immediately; they deprive spectators of the necessary luxuries of time and productive contemplation. Despite seeming to take all the time in the world, tidal flux exerts a kind of spectacularity, because its progress frustrates human attempts to grasp it, historically or temporally, and so it pulls off a strange kind of surprise. Hence Gilpin's need to describe coastal change in terms of "calamity," as though it were an *event* that could be narrated and understood as such.

At this point in our discussion, such a representational strategy seems of a part with what we have observed thus far. We can fairly guess, after all, how Gilpin would instruct his painter in transforming a too-formal town into a pleasing picturesque feature. He would not suggest that his artist emulate the ocean literally, by making changes to a canvas slowly and gradually; this would take countless artists' lifetimes. Instead, he would urge his artist to dissemble Winchelsea violently, to maximize the brief "span" at hand. Like the tide's "surprising" movements, the artist's depredations occur in a nigh-unrepresentable space, and metamorphose their objects into aesthetically and narratively interpretable entities. These spaces are not equivalent, but parallel: in them, agents work toward similar goals via necessarily different means.

Indeed, what occurs in the "time" of environmental or artistic process, whether impossibly grand or spectacularly immediate, is reflected upon with difficulty, not to say pain. The sea's "agency is so sportive, that it has all the appearance of caprice"; how to narrate the maddeningly imperceptible impact of an agent whose behavior cannot be reliably predicted? For Gilpin, a partial solution consists in asserting the existence of "certain, and regular causes" which regulate the sea's actions.

On the coast of Hampshire, a little to the west of the Isle of Wight, the sea gains considerably on the land. In a few miles farther, on the east of Arundel, the land is deserted. A little farther to the east on the same coast, at Brighthelmstone, the sea gains again. And here at Winchelsea, only a few miles farther, it loses. Many eccentric deviations it probably makes on other coasts: these few contrarieties we marked in the space of a few leagues.—If however all these operations be attended to, it will be found that the sea is very regular both in its depredations, and desertions.⁹⁰

Gilpin's coastal morphology recalls William Hogarth's serpentine line, or "*line of grace*," which "by its waving and winding at the same time different ways, leads the eye in a pleasing manner along the continuity of its variety."⁹¹ It also provides a reassuring story of Winchelsea's demise, insofar as it reassures by virtue of being a story, which can be vaguely understood. It is the kind of narrative that could be extracted from a compositionally coherent picturesque image, regardless of that image's relation to direct representation of the natural scene. It is, therefore, the kind of narrative that could be introduced by picturesque process, despite that process's spectacularity, and spectacle's ostensible tendency to sabotage the narrative enterprise.

Put another way, Gilpin is able to write an admirable history of alterations in the littoral over time; what he is unable to actually describe at firsthand he is well able to credit to the ocean's regular movements. However, he is not able to show us what the processes of alteration look like, except, as we saw earlier, via reference to their "finished" products. The picturesque scene, then, represents a point, real or imagined, at which environmental and painterly practice have constellated the parts of a vista or image in a pleasing, unified, and narratively legible arrangement, an arrangement recognizable because of a particular perspective or frame. Needless to say, this "point" barely exists at all, except in its giving way to the moment that follows. The frame and perspective are powerful tools, but they cannot of themselves suffice to represent nature; they may

⁹⁰ Gilpin, *Observations on the Coasts of Hampshire, Sussex, and Kent*, p. 63.

⁹¹ Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, pp. 38-9.

be spectacularly creative synecdoches, but they are empty signifiers without their referents. Anyway, to identify their creative potentialities is to identify their limits; they are never doing more than making the most of a severely partial vision.

The picturesque traveler and the aspiring painter seek out and attempt to represent the elusive moment at which perspective and landscape combine in compositional unity. As we have repeatedly seen, this moment is largely defined by processes of real or imaginary ruination. These processes are recognized as active and ongoing, and can progress further than is useful for the artist; of the oak, Gilpin explains that

When the branches rot away, and the forlorn trunk is left alone, the tree is in his decrepitude—the last stage of life; and all beauty is gone.⁹²

This description reminds us of a point that ought be made explicit: for Gilpin, ruination is an appropriate designation for processes that affect “natural” and “artificial” forms alike.

[The oak] refuses no subject either in natural, or in artificial landscape. It is suited to the grandest; and may with propriety be introduced into the most pastoral. It adds new dignity to the ruined tower, and Gothic arch: by stretching it's wild, moss-grown branches athwart their ivyed walls it gives them a kind of majesty coeval with itself.⁹³

Like picturesque process, which works through seemingly contradictory elements to attempt a beautiful and legible scene, ruination transgresses the boundaries of the natural and the artificial toward something that is more than the sum of its parts. The ruin is a kind of metonym for the wholeness and unity that Gilpin identifies as defining the successful picturesque project.

As theories of ruination, Gilpin's works converse fluently with those of Georg Simmel (1858-1918), the German sociologist and philosopher who dedicated an essay to the subject in 1911. Intriguingly, “The Ruin” might be understood as a playful effort to capture and represent

⁹² Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery*, p. 30.

⁹³ *Ibid.* p. 31.

the “moment” of ruination, and the opportunities for novel forms of unification afforded thereby.

Simmel invokes these terms explicitly, and suggestively:

The moment [a building’s] decay destroys the unity of the form, nature and spirit separate again and reveal their world-pervading original enmity—as if the artistic formation had only been an act of violence committed by the spirit to which the stone unwillingly submitted; as if it now gradually shook off this yoke and returned once more into the independent lawfulness of its own forces. [...] The ruin of a building, however, means that where the work of art is dying, other forces and forms, those of nature, have grown; and that out of what of art still lives in the ruin and what of nature already lives in it, there has emerged *a new whole, a characteristic unity*.⁹⁴

The apparent paradox of the unified ruin recalls another characteristic Gilpinian phrase, from his description of Winchelsea: that town’s “intire insignificance” suggests the end result of a process that has unified even as it has destroyed. Balance and timing are crucial for this formulation. Were the process of ruination to proceed too far, one would not be able to “speak of a ruin at all,” but “of a mere heap of stones,” or “the formlessness of mere matter.” Assuming things have not reached that stage, though, then Simmel can describe “a new form which, from the standpoint of nature, is entirely meaningful, comprehensible, differentiated.”⁹⁵ The ruin, in other words, is understandable not simply as a building reduced, or foliage ascendant; it incorporates both of these definitions, but exceeds them, attaining a new singularity. However, each of these singularities – each ruin – has a half-life, one that will carry it, eventually, beyond the bounds of representability.

Simmel’s most compelling thesis may be that which concerns patina, the surface encrustation or film resulting from weathering or oxidation:

That the product becomes more beautiful by chemical and physical means; that what is willed becomes, unintentionally and unenforceably, something obviously new, often more beautiful, and once more self-consistent: this mysterious harmony is the fantastic fascination of patina which cannot be wholly accounted for by analyzing our perception of it.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Emphases mine. Georg Simmel, “Two Essays,” *The Hudson Review* 11.3 (Autumn 1958), pp. 379-80.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 381.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 382.

Obviously, Simmel here trades in the language and explanatory power of a chemistry unavailable (at least in this form) in the eighteenth century. Still, what patina achieves for Simmel, the picturesque ought, ideally, to effect for Gilpin. That is, it should depict a unified image, one almost impossible to encounter in nature or in art. Nature's compositional perfection is assumed, but inaccessible: the picturesque is a mechanism for arriving at a scene that does not so much depict nature as analogize it. It is in an analogy, in other words, of that "mysterious harmony" which, Gilpin insists, governs the sea's advance and retreat at Winchelsea, but eludes human recognition or representation.

For Simmel, the aesthetic stakes of ruination are outstripped by metaphysical ones. He exults in the "peace" expressed by the ruin, as a site where "two world potencies—the striving upward and the striving downward—are working serenely together." The ruin is "a picture of purely natural existence," depicting "the obscure antagonism which determines the form of all existence." As visual metaphor for "the ethical-psychical process" which tends to be subjugated by an overemphasis on aesthetic experience, the ruin takes on profound moral meaning, as sign of process, restlessness, and unending change. Like Gilpin's picturesque image, Simmel's ruin empowers contemplation, and rewards it with insight. It is interpreted for an overriding theme – a theme which, for Simmel, proves metaphysically nourishing.

Surely, Gilpin regards the picturesque in similar terms; it maximizes the interpretability and representability of nature, thus widening human access to an understanding of the world's unity and harmony. This has moral (and imperial) consequences, too: applied to "A scene in Indostan; where gold, and pearl / Barbaric, flam'd on many a broider'd vest / Profusely splendid," the picturesque's "chaste art" moderates the scene, "that all with sweet accord produc'd / A bright,

yet modest whole.” (“On Landscape Painting” ll. 397-402).⁹⁷ But in the very need for *application*, the picturesque project’s deep ambivalence consists. For Simmel, patina is “unenforceable,” a result of human intention in only the most indirect sense. The picturesque, however, is a visual and creative practice, and enforcement is central to its endeavors. Where Simmel is content to narrow his contemplative view to an extant ruined building, the picturesque attempts a wider – but still limited – prospect, one that the artist is at pains to create.

Thus, the prospect of Winchelsea presents not simply a remarkable and thought-provoking picturesque scene. It poses a profound representational challenge, one that can be “solved” only via an act of artistic circumlocution. Any painterly representation of Winchelsea would inevitably prove partial, if not actually false. The resulting picturesque image would strive for a unity redolent, like Simmel’s ruin, of newness and distinction. This unity, unique to the picturesque form, activates the scene’s thematic and narrative potentialities; it is an integral power that transcends its constituent parts and processes, and so is not analyzable via recourse to them.

Gilpin maintains that the picturesque carefully arranges theme and narrative in the most accessible possible fashion; however, the picturesque “moment” is the (temporary) endpoint of processes that are not comfortably representable, in language or in image. Visually, the difficulties are extreme: as we have repeatedly observed, the picturesque does not operate on size- or time-scales that would allow for the sensible depiction of environmental processes except, in some cases, for sudden, spectacular ones, like storms. Linguistically, picturesque materials are

⁹⁷ Nigel Leask sees two simultaneous, but compellingly “antithetical visual discourse[s]” at work in “Indian travel writing in the romantic period and thereafter”; parallel to “the ‘survey modality’” ran “the picturesque aesthetic,” which “already represented the British landscape in an exotic, Italianate idiom,” and was thus “particularly suitable for blending the aesthetic qualities of tropical with temperate landscapes in the Indian context.” See Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing*, p. 166. This sense, of the picturesque acting upon the British landscape as well as foreign landscapes – or, put another way, the picturesque *rendering* the British landscape foreign – anticipates John Crowley’s argument that the “British landscape was being created *simultaneously* on a global scale, in the British Isles and overseas: it was not just a process of eventual, and inevitable, diffusion from the metropole to the periphery.” See Crowley, *Imperial Landscapes*, p.13.

somewhat more cooperative, but not extraordinarily so. Whether identifying the causes of environmental change or prescribing its artistic approximation, Gilpin constantly resorts to metaphors which narrate and temporalize even slow change in spectacular terms. Picturesque images thus signify, by their presence, infinite absence: for every successfully-represented picturesque moment, there are countless, constituent, unrepresentable others. Gilpin's picturesque – and the spectacular process that attends it – ought be understood as imagined, written, and painted in these others' haunting environs.

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A recent *National Geographic* article asserts and laments the slow – but stupefying – impact of climate change on global sea levels, and on coastal communities. Journalist Tim Folger recounts a meeting with the coastal and environmental geologist Harold Wanless, at which the pair discussed the likely fate of southeast Florida, and Miami:

We're sitting in [Wanless's] basement office, looking at maps of Florida on his computer. At each click of the mouse, the years pass, the ocean rises, and the peninsula shrinks. Freshwater wetlands and mangrove swamps collapse—a death spiral that has already started on the southern tip of the peninsula. With seas four feet higher than they are today—a distinct possibility by 2100—about two-thirds of southeastern Florida is inundated. The Florida Keys have almost vanished. Miami is an island.⁹⁸

Wanless's computer simulation signifies the persistent challenges facing aspiring representations of climate change, as well the representational opportunities afforded by computer technology. Through his mouse, he renders spectacular a process that, if fleetingly brief in the grand scheme of things, is likely too slow to lend itself to ready depiction. Bill McKibben has called for a radically innovative art of climate change, one that will find some third way between the relegation of climate change to “backdrop, context, instead of event,” and that breed of global warming

⁹⁸ Tim Folger, “Rising Seas,” *National Geographic* (Sep. 2013).

“immediate event [that] is usually overdramatic, so vast that the event itself grabs all the attention, leaving none behind for the motive cause.”

Rising ocean temperatures, and the thermal expansion they entail, appear to be major causes of rising sea levels and coastal erosion, but it isn't at all clear how to make *them* appear to the public consciousness. “To confront slow violence,” argues Rob Nixon, we must “plot and give figurative shape to formless threats whose fatal repercussions are dispersed across time and space.” This formlessness derives from the “representational challenges” posed by “catastrophic acts that are low in instant spectacle but high in long-term effects” and a deleterious “media bias toward spectacular violence.”⁹⁹ For Nixon, hope springs from a specific representational medium: literature, he argues, “can challenge perceptual habits that downplay the damage slow violence inflicts and bring into imaginative focus apprehensions that elude sensory corroboration.”¹⁰⁰ Nixon's postcolonial orientation leads him to works of literary resistance by Jamaica Kincaid, June Jordan, Njabulo Ndebele, Nadine Gordimer, and others. One can imagine his thesis extending further, to touch, for instance, Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013), which incorporates into its imaginative ecology the North Pacific Subtropical Gyre, otherwise known as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.

Compellingly, William Gilpin shared this sense that certain natural phenomena were representable only through literature. As we have already noted (see p. 31), Gilpin describes the visual depiction of “chequered shade,” produced by a moving tree, as difficult in the extreme. However, this does not suggest its irredeemable unrepresentability: “whatever becomes of this

⁹⁹ See Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, pp. 10, 4.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p. 15.

circumstance in painting,” Gilpin assures us, “it is very capable of being pleasingly wrought up in poetry.”¹⁰¹ By way of example, he quotes from William Cowper’s *The Task* (1785):

The chequered earth seems restless as a flood
Brushed by the winds. So sportive is the light
Shot through the boughs; it dances, as they dance,
Shadow, and sun-shine intermingling quick,
And dark’ning, and enlightening, (as the leaves
Play wanton,) every part————

The choice of poet and poem is fortuitous. In these lines, Gilpin would have us recognize poetic language’s unique representative potential, potential that may be related to, but is substantially distinct from, the picturesque’s. We might productively push the comparison further, however, and recognize a more fundamental divergence between these two projects: *The Task* adopts movement – specifically, the rural walk – as organizing principle (e.g., ll. 266-77), and unlike Gilpin’s travels, the poem’s telos is not a stationary perspective. Cowper is writing his own synecdoche of natural process, which establishes and adheres to a basic principle: “By ceaseless action, all that is, subsists” (l. 367). As I have argued, Gilpin attempts something similar, but arrives, necessarily, at a different end.

But we ought not recognize, in the literary, a simple exit strategy from the morass of nature-vision. Nor do I intend to mischaracterize either Nixon’s or Gilpin’s thesis as postulating any easy solution. We can and should acknowledge, in *Slow Violence*, constant and intriguing tension between the literary, on the one hand, and the enhanced awareness it might achieve, on the other. For the latter, Nixon’s metaphors are relentlessly visual: he would have us “see” things “unseen,” lend slow violence greater “visibility,” and bring the obscure within the reach of our “perceptual habits.” Because, according to Nixon’s argument, visibility is determined, to an extraordinary

¹⁰¹ Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery*, pp. 21-2.

sense, by a spectacle-obsessed media, we can identify a crucial problem: how can one write things into visibility without kowtowing to the established parameters of that visibility?

Thus the possibility for seemingly intractable conflict, even within a single medium, when metaphors of representability interact. William Gilpin encountered great difficulty when he attempted to augment his prose with poetic language and its attendant representational power. A dedicatory letter to William Lock (1732-1810) from the *Three Essays* recounts – and excerpts – an exchange with William Mason (1724-97), who had been consulted regarding the inclusion of a poem, “On Landscape Painting,” in Gilpin’s otherwise theoretical, didactic prose work. Unfortunately, Gilpin’s “technical terms,” necessary for correct description, fail to “glide into verse” (vi). Mason complains: “to own the truth, had I thought you would have expected such almost mathematical *exactitude of terms*, as I find you do; and in consequence turned lines tolerably poetical, into prosaic, for the sake of precision, I should never have ventured to give you my assistance” (vii n). Gilpin wonders, confusedly, that “when I wrote verse, one friend called it prose; and when I wrote prose, another friend called it verse” (vi). Gilpin’s poem stands, but awkwardly, and he is temporarily contrite about its insuperable flaws.

Thus, the literary turn may hold out as many challenges as it does opportunities; both are real, and both can prove revelatory. By placing William Gilpin’s picturesque process in conversation with slow violence, we have begun to understand the resilience – and potential – of spectacularity in representations of environmental change. My metaphors will prove partial, but we might say that Nixon’s and Gilpin’s theses, for all their differences, are both haunted by a spectacularity that they would eschew¹⁰², and that other forms, like the following image, might desire:

¹⁰² This is not intended as a statement of ideological equivalence between our two authors.



Figure 20. Miriam Goldstein, “The real Great Pacific Garbage Patch”

This photograph, “of” the North Pacific Subtropical Gyre, is uncannily beautiful, but does not appear to conform to William Gilpin’s picturesque principles. All the same, it can be interpreted in terms of a shaky inversion of the picturesque’s relationship to spectacle. Where Gilpinian process employs spectacularity before discarding it, the photo cries out for its reader to imagine a spectacular island of waste, breaking the serene waves. Or does it? It is, as much, a call for the kind of re-vision¹⁰³ Nixon propounds, a training of perception to think and look *past*, to unfamiliar and unspectacular times, stories, and processes. Whichever interpretation one adopts, spectacle is present, an unsteady, uneasy, and undeniably fruitful fulcrum for natural vision.

¹⁰³ Timothy Morton calls for “a radical de-aestheticization, since...the aesthetic is the ultimate form of justification and victory.” I am not optimistic about the prospect or promise of de-aestheticization, but I am sanguine about the potential of deep aestheticization, or the act of exposing the hybridity and multi-directionality of extant aesthetic categories. In so doing, we might move toward Morton’s ideal of “subvert[ing] fixating images of ‘world’.” See Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, pp. 119, 141.

CODA:

SPECTACULAR ENHANCEMENT AND THE EAST

When William Gilpin imagined an Indian prospect, he conjured a cliché, the better to stand as antithesis to the picturesqueness he strove to promote. As the foregoing section of this book records, he summoned a vulgarly ostentatious glittering, “where gold, and pearl / Barbaric, flam’d on many a broider’d vest / Profusely splendid.” Picturesque organization might bring this business under “chaste” control, redirecting the scene’s attention away from piquant surfaces and toward mildness, and a sense of the whole. Gilpin was not a poet of distinction, but the enjambment in these lines – “pearl / Barbaric” – is modestly artful, delivering a minor shock as it presents a delicate image only to malign it as uncivil. The stuff of luxury here connotes not cultivation, but wildness, and eruptions of vainglory. This is not to say that Gilpin was communicating an unprecedented critique: eighteenth-century readers were prepared, by well-established convention, to associate “Indostan” with gaudiness, as well as with primitive despotism. These connotations could attach themselves not only to subcontinental space, but to Britons who had traveled and lived there, particularly those who managed to extract significant wealth from their Indian affairs.¹ In late-century popular culture and public discourse, the prodigal nabob was inducted into the coterie of characters – the festivalgoer, the scientist, the Francophile and many others had had their turns – who seemed always to be making spectacles of themselves.

This short and somewhat speculative conclusion turns our themes and questions toward the context of India, as it began to emerge with greater vividness in late-century British lives and imaginations. Doing so might serve, in a simple sense, as a reminder that while visions of London

¹ For a discussion of the figure of the nabob, see Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 70.

and of England, as well as ways of looking cultivated by British institutions, were disproportionately influential, they always existed within material, intellectual, and aesthetic networks, networks that received formative inputs from geographically and politically peripheral sites, such as Ireland and India. For this dissertation's precise purposes, considering India also has the potential to illuminate one – by no means the only – example of what happens when foreign and imperial spaces are represented to a public conversant with spectacularity and its opposing terms. What makes this phenomenon particularly worthy of consideration is the fact that things taken to represent exotic places – geological, faunal, and botanical specimens, examples of Eastern craftsmanship, as well as “Oriental” tales – had long been central to spectacles' form and appeal, and to the threats they ostensibly posed. Furthermore, the place of the exotic in the idea of Nature, and in post-eighteenth century discourses of conservation and wildness, remains a vital – and altogether unresolved – concern today.

The following pages will attempt to figure the fashion in which a novel of the late 1780s, Phebe Gibbes's *Hartly House, Calcutta* (1789), calls upon a version of India that is far more complicated than Gilpin's, and that goes some distance toward reorganizing the terms of the aesthetic debates this book has explored heretofore. Gibbes's protagonist, Sophia Goldborne, is Calcutta's (Kolkata's) interlocutor, as well as its great enthusiast. By her account, Bengal's glories are not so much impossible to put into words as beyond the capacities of her correspondents in England to understand. In her own mind, Sophia's familiarity with the Indian scene lends her a superiority that is not only intellectual but aesthetic, and even optical, as though she were physiologically enhanced by her residence in the subcontinent. British-borne aesthetic structures, such as the picturesque, appear stunted and insipid in comparison with the sublimity that is achievable through fusion with Indian sights, and Indian materials. That matter includes, explicitly,

opulent finery, which not only accommodates itself to sophisticated aesthetic experience but enhances it. In Calcutta, Sophia discovers and helps articulate a hybrid sensibility that marshals spectacularity toward heights of visual and imaginative pleasure that British sentiment alone could not achieve.

Sophia delivers this vision, and challenges the imaginative modes she feels she has inherited, at a pivotal juncture in the history of British India. To a great extent, *Hartly House* is an apology for the administration – and character – of Warren Hastings, the precocious East India Company administrator whose impeachment in the House of Commons began in 1788.² (He would be acquitted of all charges in 1795.) Hastings’s tenure in Bengal, first as governor and subsequently as governor-general, had stretched from 1772 to 1785; *Hartly House*’s action is set against the twilight of Hastings’s governorship, and was published in the second year of his trial.³ From Mughal processions on London stages to Edmund Burke and Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s legendary theatrics at the Hastings proceedings, spectacle pervaded late-century Britons’ impressions of India, and of the machinations of their compatriots there. Burke’s comments on India are heterogeneous, but they frequently rely for their rhetorical effect on an image of the subcontinent as garishly corrupted – as a “gorgeous eastern harlot”⁴ – in need of enlightened rescue. His Indian scene is horrible, but in no way pleasurable, a tawdry spectacle that threatens to pervert British morality in the East as well as at home. Gibbes’s fiction presents a radical alternative: Sophia experiences a range of pleasures, and accesses a variety of sensual and

² As Nicole Reynolds has observed, the novel is an overt declaration of admiration and support for Hastings’s tenure, and his legacy, but that is not to say that it is a blind endorsement of the East India Company in general. Sophia’s inclusion of the story of an Indian girl raped by an EIC officer underscores Gibbes’s willingness to indict that institution. See Nicole Reynolds, “Phebe Gibbes,” *The Encyclopedia of British Literature 1660-1789*, ed. Gary Day 7 Jack Lynch (Blackwell, 2015), [Blackwell Reference Online](#), 24 May 2016; also Michael J. Franklin, “Radically feminizing India,” in *Romantic Representations of British India*, ed. Franklin (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 164.

³ See Franklin, “Radically feminizing India,” p. 154.

⁴ Quoted in Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire*, p. 79.

intellectual experiences, that she is sure she would never have encountered had she remained in Europe. Through *Hartly House*, sublimity – which concept owed so much to Burke’s thinking – expands to admit spectacle’s glare; in the process, it variegates its prospects, as well as its players. In Sophia’s Bengal, and in her own person, femininity, ornament, and the East combine to produce an epistemology of decoration, nurtured through curious travel and aspiring to make a virtue of dazzle.

Imagining India

As the British East India Company expanded its activities and holdings in the subcontinent in the late eighteenth century, so India broadened its presence in Britain’s cultural imagination. The EIC was established as a joint-stock company in 1600, in London, receiving a royal charter which gave it exclusive rights to Asian trade. It was militarized in the eighteenth century, and controlled most of eastern India by 1756. In 1767, Governor Robert Clive secured a signal victory on its behalf by channeling Bengal’s tax revenue (Diwani) to the EIC’s treasury. By the time *Hartly House, Calcutta* was published in 1789, Warren Hastings’s stewardship had come and gone, and popular opinion was as divided over his legacy as it was over Britain’s future prospects in India. To a significant extent, the anxieties provoked by the Hastings era set in motion a transformation in public and official outlook that would culminate in the following century, when the East India Company was folded into what Nicholas Dirks has called Britain’s “formal empire.”⁵ In 1813, the EIC lost its monopoly, and it stopped trading twenty years later. By 1858, it was finished altogether.

⁵ Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire*, p. 140.

Indian nature was always a central concern for its European observers. British natural historians – amateur and professional – cultivated this enthusiasm, but before the nineteenth century, subcontinental nature was perhaps more likely to appear in images commissioned by British patrons but executed by Indian illustrators. Calcutta, the seat of EIC authority in Bengal, was especially fruitful of these relationships; one of the most distinguished collections of eighteenth-century Indian natural history images belonged to Elijah Impey, the Supreme Court Chief Justice and associate of Hastings. Among the artists in Impey’s employ were the Patnaite artists Shaykh Zayn-al-Din and Ram and Bhawani Das.⁶ Also vital to the EIC’s efforts were interests in agriculture, and in economically promising plants, and the Company lent financial, material, and political support to the inquiries of British scientists, support that often exceeded the opportunities afforded by the British government proper.⁷ Science, and scientific approaches to landscape, would long prosper on Indian terrain: later in the nineteenth century, and after the EIC’s dissolution, India would become a testing ground for novel approaches to woodland management, approaches which, if proven successful, might be applied in Britain. Two of the best-known figures in the history of forest management in British India, Dietrich Brandis and William Schlich, were German, and experimented with the hyperrational doctrine of *Schlagwaldwirtschaft* while posted to the subcontinent. This practice, which involved the sectioning and felling of trees in rotation, would subsequently “return,” from the East, not only to Europe, but to the United States as well.⁸ The pathbreaking orientalist William Jones, who founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal, was himself an avid collector of plants, corresponding with – and contributing to the collections of –

⁶ See Mildred Archer, “Indian Paintings for British Naturalists,” *The Geographical Magazine* 28 (1955), p. 229.

⁷ See Drayton, *Nature’s Government*, pp. 115-9.

⁸ See Watkins, *Trees, Woods and Forests*, pp. 209-14.

Joseph Banks and others. Jones was a prime mover behind the institutionalization of science in Calcutta via the formation of a botanic garden there.⁹

Gilpin's poem indicates the extent to which Indian prospects – and, by association, Indian landscapes, and Indian nature – could appear to pose aesthetic problems for British forms, forms which could validate themselves in the successful management of those prospects. But for others, such problems could seem productive ends in themselves, blank spots on the map of British vision that homegrown aesthetic and epistemological modes had no hope of filling in. Those spots could appear receptive not only to alternative ways of seeing, but to alternative forms of intellectual genealogy, social energy, and even erotics. Sophia Goldborne's self-fashioning in *Hartly House* has much in common with the experiences of some agents of the East India Company, who frequently experimented with associating themselves with the subcontinent, its religions, and its visual cultures. William Jones, an exceptionally – but influentially – unabashed promoter of such experiments, had an artist paint his portrait alongside a statue of Ganesha, or Ganapati, the elephant-headed Hindu god of learning and origins.¹⁰ Of course, as the first paragraphs of this coda indicate, Indian novelties could appear to transform the morals, tastes, and even bodies of those that encountered them in dramatically deleterious ways. Powerfully divergent understandings of the consequences – and potential – of subcontinental curiosity coursed through late-century British culture.

Sophia Goldborne's arguments for Indian eminence derive much of their power from – and contribute their powers to – that brand of Orientalism which operated in the writings and works of

⁹ See David Mackay, "Agents of empire: the Banksian collectors and evaluation of new lands," in *Visions of Empire: Voyages, botany, and representations of nature*, ed. David Philip Miller & Peter Hanns Reill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 43.

¹⁰ See Tillman W. Nechtman, *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 72.

Jones, Hastings, William Hodges, and others. Hodges's *Travels in India* (1793) made a remarkable case for architectural revisionism, going so far as to suggest that Indian archetypes had predated, if not inspired, Greek and Roman forms.¹¹ Here was the East as origin, not only of life in general but of many of the particular patterns that would populate the West, even those that appeared, on a superficial view, to indicate no connection with their oriental forebears. The ethical and ideological consequences of the syncretic view are, needless to say, complex. But what is clear is that this is not the West writing the East, at least not in spirit. In *Hartly House*, Sophia suggests that, to catch a whiff of "the sublime ideas and discoveries perpetually opening themselves upon my mind," her correspondent Arabella peruse "the sacred and prophane [*sic*] writers of antiquity."¹² In view of Sophia's broader sense of India, this would seem necessarily to entail enlarging the view of antiquity far beyond the borders of Greek or Roman civilizations, and involving Persian and Hindu writers in classicism's remit.

Hastings became Governor-General of India in 1773.¹³ He and his collaborators, including Jones, invited Indian luminaries, from Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist traditions, to Bengal to share those traditions. Some of these informants became teachers, and their contributions – as well as those of their European interlocutors – were institutionalized at the Fort William College for Indian studies, founded 1783, and in Jones's Asiatic Society. These entities promoted a view of India as a practically depthless resource of wonder, origins, and indeed models for aesthetic and intellectual emulation.¹⁴ Jones's comments on his Society's inauguration, in 1784, open with an invocation of theatricality. "It gave me inexpressible pleasure," he said, "to find myself in the midst of so noble an amphitheatre, almost encircled by the vast regions of *Asia*." Jones's Asia is so much variegated

¹¹ See De Almeida & Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance*, p. 122.

¹² Phebe Gibbes, *Hartly House, Calcutta*, ed. Michael J. Franklin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 17.

¹³ See Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire*, p. 59.

¹⁴ See De Almeida & Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance*, pp. 57-8.

splendor, the home of science, art, “glorious actions,” “natural wonders,” and an infinite variety of religions, governments, cultures, and languages, not to mention “features and complexions, of men.”¹⁵

Jones’s “Discourse on the Institution of a Society” reminds that this ambitious organization was conceived, at least in theory, with much more than the subcontinent in mind. As though describing a panorama, Jones gestures outward – from “*Hindustan* as a centre” – to take in an extraordinary swathe of potential domains, from Japan to Yemen and on to Egypt and North Africa. These latter territories reflect the extent to which Jones is interested in tracing Asia’s cultural influence beyond its geographical boundaries, an impulse to situate perspective firmly in the East that coincides with a terminological directive:

if it be necessary or convenient, that a short name or epithet be given to our society, in order to distinguish it in the world, that of *Asiatick* appears both classical and proper, whether we consider the place or the object of the institution, and preferable to *Oriental*, which is in truth a word merely relative, and, though commonly used in *Europe*, conveys no very distinct idea.

Jones’s *mot juste* appears to reflect an impulse akin to Sophia Goldborne’s, to insinuate that a narrowly Anglocentric frame for understanding geographical space, and aesthetic culture, will fail to successfully apprehend its objects. By understanding India as a center, one not only capable but prolific of centrifugal influence – by tracking “the streams of *Asiatick* learning” – the linguistic, literary, military, and political histories of not only the East but of Africa and the Mediterranean begin to take on refreshed aspects. A Jonesian reorientation had the potential to discomfit the geographies and taxonomies that, Ros Ballaster has argued, Western readerships derived from

¹⁵ William Jones, “A Discourse on the Institution of a Society, for Inquiring into the History, Civil, and Natural, the Antiquities, Arts, Sciences, and Literature, of Asia.” *The Works of Sir William Jones*, 13 vols. (London: John Stockdale & John Walker, 1807), vol. 3, p. 2.

popular eighteenth-century “oriental” fictions.¹⁶ It is true that Jones’s habit of analogizing seems at times premised on the notion that Eastern texts and traditions *need* validating via comparison with Western works, but his “streams of *Asiatick* learning” express the potential for subtler, and ineluctable, patterns of influence that undermine the categorizing impulse.

Jones’s arguments for the dignity of Asian imagination drew some of their force from interweaving Eastern strains with classical texts from the European tradition. Hence Jones’s poetic adaptations, such as the “Hymn to Náráyena” (1785), which emphasized perceived similarities between Hindu and Greek philosophy.¹⁷ In the “Second Anniversary Discourse” (1785), Jones attempted a comparison of Europe and Asia, a comparison which appears, at first glance, conventional, associating the former with “reason.” Asia, Jones claims, has “soared to loftier heights in the sphere of imagination,” a reputation that would help secure its interest for a generation of Romantic poets and thinkers; Jones’s own linguistic researches directly inspired Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Percy Bysshe Shelley.¹⁸ In an intriguing construction, “Second Anniversary” also claims that Europe is the seat of taste, a connection that appears, at first, to jar with Jones’s general outlook, which hardly perceives Asia as insipid. There seems, here – and perhaps in *Hartly House* – a positive regard for taste’s opposite, or alternate, term, as though India and its neighbors were unaffected by European aesthetic pieties without thus failing to produce artworks of merit.¹⁹

For Jones as for Sophia, the sublime resides in India, particularly in Hindu and Mogul ruins, the configurations of which Jones thought needed tracing and distributing, for the benefit of

¹⁶ See Ros Ballaster, *Fabulous Orient: Fictions of the East in England, 1662-1785* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 8.

¹⁷ See William Jones, “A Hymn to Náráyena (1785),” in *Selected Poetical and Prose Works*, ed. Michael J. Franklin (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), pp. 104-5.

¹⁸ See De Almeida & Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance*, p. 57.

¹⁹ William Jones, “The Second Anniversary Discourse, Delivered 24 February, 1785, by the President,” *The Works of Sir William Jones*, 13 vols. (London: John Stockdale & John Walker, 1807), vol. 3, p. 11.

the British architectural imagination.²⁰ Here and elsewhere, he was guided by an idiosyncratic Romantic sensibility, one concerned not only with architecture but with poetry. This attitude entailed a valorization of the lyric as perhaps the fittest poetic form, on account of its compatibility with the expression of passion. Lyric verse, in this account, expresses a sort of constitutional sublimity, in that it attempts to channel the voice of nature directly through the poet, as opposed to providing an approximation of the world through literary artifice.²¹ In “An Essay on the Arts, Commonly Called Imitative” (1772), Jones argues that nearly all imitative poetry, European traditions included, derives, originally, from devotional verse – that which “consisted in *praising the Deity*” – and that this proves that mimesis derives from the spontaneous expression of the “natural emotion of the mind.”²² Original” and “native” poetry, claimed Jones, was “*the language of the violent passions, expressed in exact measure, with strong accents and significant words.*”²³ Those passions are art’s motive force, and the degree to which they are enabled to speak vigorously is art’s measure: “for the *passions*, which were given by nature, never spoke in an unnatural form.”²⁴

Jones’s ideal is art that delivers something like unmediated access to the expression of the passions; the delivering thereof, of course, involves artifice, achieved via measure, accent, diction, and so forth. The closer an artwork comes to delivering an untrammelled encounter with the passions, the more acutely will its respondent engage sympathetically with it.²⁵ Jones’s understanding of what is involved in emulating – not to say embodying – nature, in “assuming her power, and causing the same effect upon the imagination,” reflects a complex and contradictory

²⁰ Jones, “The Second Anniversary Discourse,” p. 15.

²¹ See William Jones, “An Essay on the Arts, Commonly Called Imitative (1772),” in *Selected Poetical and Prose Works*, ed. Michael J. Franklin (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), p. 337n.

²² Jones, “An Essay on the Arts, Commonly Called Imitative,” p. 339.

²³ Jones, “An Essay on the Arts, Commonly Called Imitative,” pp. 342-3.

²⁴ Jones, “An Essay on the Arts, Commonly Called Imitative,” p. 344.

²⁵ Jones, “An Essay on the Arts, Commonly Called Imitative,” p. 345.

tension between wonder and something closer to Gilpin's chastened scene. Art's greatest achievements are picturesquely wrought, prioritizing "*the general spirit of the whole piece*" over those "*minute details*" which characterize "*a gaudy composition.*" Dazzle "*may strike the mind for a short time,*" but "*the beauties of simplicity are both more delightful, and more permanent.*"²⁶ These judgments iterate the linkages between finery, ostentation, brevity, and something akin to distractedness, or absence of mind, connections which have recurred throughout this book. As latter segments of this coda will suggest, Sophia Goldborne may deserve credit for recognizing subcontinental splendor as taking pressing Jones's project beyond the limits of inherited convention.

In proximity to Indian objects, scenes, and subjects, dazzle seems inevitably to evoke nabobery, which was by the end of the eighteenth century a favorite target of critics and satirists. Its destructiveness, for India as well as for a Britain increasingly involved in Indian affairs, was sculpted in high relief by Edmund Burke, who saw Hastings as the corrupted and corrupting head of the East India Company's pestilential body. Burke's address at the initiation of Hastings's impeachment proceedings, in 1788, trades prodigiously in tropes of corporeality. For the speech, Hastings is "the head, the chief, the captain-general in iniquity; one in whom all the frauds, all the peculations, all the violence, all the tyranny in India are embodied." His crimes are "everything that manifests a heart blackened to the very blackest, a heart dyed deep in blackness, a heart corrupted, vitiated and gangrened to the very core."²⁷ The EIC and its agents are, Burke continues, "responsible, their body as a corporate body, themselves as individuals, and the whole body and train of their servants are responsible, to the high justice of this kingdom."²⁸ Burke's rhetoric

²⁶ Jones, "An Essay on the Arts, Commonly Called Imitative," p. 346.

²⁷ Edmund Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, ed. P. J. Marshall (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), vol. 6, p. 275.

²⁸ Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, p. 281.

appears to engage directly with the notion of the nabob as a glittering carapace concealing a corrupted, or perhaps vacuous, interior, and to stretch this image over British dealings in the subcontinent.

Embroidered Knowledge

Perspective, then, was central to the stories the eighteenth century told about India. In a review of Phebe Gibbes's *Hartly House, Calcutta* for the *Analytical Review*, Mary Wollstonecraft stressed the opticality of Sophia's descriptions, claiming they were "written with a degree of vivacity which renders them very amusing, even when they are merely descriptive, and the young reader will see, rather than listen to the instruction they contain."²⁹ This idea – that reading is seeing – runs in exactly the opposite direction to the picturesque attitude of Thomas and William Daniell, famed for their Indian images: "the pencil," they wrote, "is narrative to the eye."³⁰ Furthermore, there is a paradox quietly at work in Wollstonecraft's analysis, because in *Hartly House*, Gibbes's narrator repeatedly insists that England is so very visually inferior to India that her correspondent – and, by extension, Gibbes's reader – have no hope of comprehending her descriptions. "[In] your soft climate, Arabella," writes Sophia in a letter to England, "such are your humble tables and humble pleasures, that all the transports of animation and of magnificence are unknown to you, and you creep through one dull track from infancy to age."³¹ Gilpinian placidity seems, here, to represent less an intentional moderation than an inability to cope. Gustatory mediocrity partakes of sensual mediocrity in general, and temperance of this kind produces lifelessness in its practitioners.

²⁹ Quoted in Franklin, "Radically feminizing India," p. 157.

³⁰ Quoted in Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing*, p. 189.

³¹ Gibbes, *Hartly House, Calcutta*, p. 52.

This is an inversion of the terms of metropolitan spectacularity: dazzle does not engender insipid homogeneity, but guards against it. Sophia's opening reference to Arabella's "soft climate" predicates some natural cause for English ignorance; the implication seems to be that climate determines sensory understanding, which opens – or forecloses – the sublime "transports" Sophia implies she enjoys in Calcutta. She understands her position as imaginatively elevated, and declares her rather condescending intention to attempt "lowering" herself to Arabella's "narrow conceptions" – "so as to temper, though I cannot, like Mr Apollo, lay aside my rays, that your optics shall be enabled to contemplate, however brilliant, the dazzling objects I gradually open on your view."³² On the one hand, epistolary prose – and prose fiction in general – offer opportunities to arrange the exhibition of India in such a way that it can be apprehended and reflected upon. This points up verbal language's potential power to picturesquely manage spectacular sight. At the same time, however, Sophia constantly iterates that such management always indicates a sort of lack, an uncontrollable dazzle that the author does not know how to render, or feels reluctant to wrangle. Sophia's India is, literally and metaphorically, too brightly illuminated, a surfeit of vital light that Arabella is intellectually and physiologically unprepared to engage.

It might not be impertinent to thread a loose connection between what Sophia Goldborne makes of India and what Thomas Molyneux attempted on behalf of Ireland. "Nature," writes the former in a missive to Arabella, "is here lavish of her most beautiful productions; and so peculiarly attentive to gratify the eye and the scent, that it is impossible to bring the island of your existence into the smallest competition with the air I now breathe, or the objects I behold—a great denial, you will perceive, to the unceasing remembrance of you, I have so repeatedly assured you of."³³ Gibbes ought not be blankly identified with her protagonist, and Sophia's credulity, here and

³² Gibbes, *Hartly House, Calcutta*, p. 6.

³³ Gibbes, *Hartly House, Calcutta*, p. 35.

elsewhere, is at least lightly ironized. All the same, *Hartly House* makes an earnest argument for the uniqueness of Indian atmosphere and terrain, which is taken to comprise an ambience beyond the capacities of Britain, and even of the imaginations it nurtures. Where Molyneux argued, justly if self-interestedly, that Irish nature was sufficiently singular as to merit robust local inquiry, Sophia seems to be making analogous, aesthetic claims for the need to alter, expand, or discard English visions if any right regard for the subcontinent is to be achieved. And Sophia acknowledges and tests the sentimental opportunities and risks that her experience of India entails: her relationship with her Hindu tutor introduces worlds of unconventional intimacy and eroticism, while her connections to home, through persons like Arabella, are under explicit threat.

For Sophia, India's climate – and the ornaments thereof – refract British forms in ways that not only enhance those forms, but trigger raptures so powerful as to erase the remembrance of things and obligations past. Sophia attends a production of Bickerstaff's *Love in a Village*, previously encountered in Chapter Three, at a Calcutta theater:

The scenery was beautiful, and the dresses superb. Here Golconda's wealth in all its genuine lustre astonished the beholder, and a profusion of ornamental pearls were disposed with good taste; in a word, whether it was the poet, or the performers, or the diamonds, or the air of enchantment they all together certainly wore, I know not; but so pleasing an effect had the whole upon my mind, that I forgot Doyly, my native country, my Arabella, and my mother, and, for the only period of my residence in Bengal, was completely happy.³⁴

Golconda refers to a legendary hill fort in Andhra Pradesh, famous for its stores of precious stones, which thrived in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries before being effectively over-capped by Hyderabad. It would be dishonest to interpret Sophia's description as indicating that this *Love in a Village* was presented as so much gaudy spillage – its profusion has been tastefully disposed, its surroundings' wealth judiciously arranged. But it nonetheless bears considering that gone from

³⁴ Gibbes, *Hartly House, Calcutta*, p. 118.

Sophia's description is a sense that profuseness and tastefulness are necessarily at odds. Bejeweled spectacle has enabled an experience of the theater that appears to totally transcend the work on offer. Spectacular splendor works in concert with its surroundings to produce a "whole" so seamless as to preclude analytic segmentation. William Jones had speculated that the combination of local "brilliant *dyes*" and the powers of the "sublime science of Chymistry" might produce examples of Asian color that do not fade, in apparent violation of Hazlitt's strictures against unnatural continuation.³⁵ What Sophia experiences at the playhouse is the picturesque terminus attained through the power of dazzle, the implication being that picturesqueness alone would not have sufficed in these environs. What is perhaps most compelling about her description is the performance's happy amnesic effects: her intended, her homeland, her confidant, and her family disappear from her consciousness, the result of which is exquisite pleasure. Contemplation and remembering commonly serve eighteenth-century aesthetics and epistemology as key auxiliaries. At the theater in Calcutta, their absence is not only registered, but celebrated.

Later in the novel, Doyly endures a different, but related, variety of obfuscation, when Sophia attends a stunning cavalcade – a "grand raree-show" – announcing a nabob's visit to an EIC official. The Indian dignitary's "sparkling" eyes fix on Sophia, provoking "ambitious throbs" in her chest:

Doyly turned pale, and the procession advanced—yet were my charms unforgotten by [the nabob]; for he twice or thrice looked back, and constituted me the envy of the women, and the torture of the men; in a word, my conquest was as evident as the noon-day sun: and who could dream of a mortal female's refusing an enthroned adorer, with the wealth of the Indies at his feet?³⁶

³⁵ Jones, "The Second Anniversary Discourse," p. 13.

³⁶ Gibbes, *Hartly House, Calcutta*, p. 154.

By likening the caravan to a raree-show, Sophia invites her reader to associate it with a peepshow prospect, as though her letter would undertake a verbal analogue of that popular – and commonly portable – entertainment. Peepshows were among the fairground’s great standbys. Their greatest designers were German artists, like Martin Engelbrecht, Jeremias Wachsmuht, and Johann David Nessenthaler. Housed in show-boxes of varying dimensions, many small enough to be taken in hand, they displayed theatrical set-pieces comprised of illustrated cut-outs, lent perspective and scale by their being set at appropriate degrees of depth.

But the comparison also contains the potential for more general, and more damning, connotations. A note to Thomas Dutton’s 1799 translation of August von Kotzebue’s *Die Spanier in Peru* complained that late-century theatricals appeared “expressly constructed upon a plan which renders the Author’s part a mere vehicle for the introduction of raree-shows and sing-song.”³⁷ Dutton’s version, titled *Pizarro in Peru*, is to a meaningful extent an attempt to correct the apparent excesses of Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s *Pizarro*, a liberal interpretation of Kotzebue’s original which had debuted to great effect at Drury Lane the same year. Michael Kelly supervised *Pizarro*’s music, and De Louthembourg probably oversaw its stunning sets, which included a working drawbridge. Sheridan’s is an ideologically complex tragedy, mingling Francophobic patriotism with anti-colonial skepticism. Its reliance on the aesthetics and machinery of spectacle drove some critics to reject it in terms like Dutton’s, which suggest lurid exhibitionism. Processions like the nabob’s were recurring features of late eighteenth-century stage spectacle, lending Sophia’s description thereof acute imaginative and rhetorical power.

But part of thrill Sophia’s spectacle purports to deliver, of course, derives from an intensely intimate fantasy of spectacularity, one that exemplifies its potential for bilateral exchange.

³⁷ Augustus von Kotzebue, *Pizarro in Peru, or the Death of Rolla*, trans. Thomas Dutton (London: W. West, 1799), p. 65n.

Sophia's persona is expressly "constituted" by the nabob's glances, and in terms that are as exciting as they are potentially problematic. She describes taking pleasure in being the object of her fellow spectators' regard, a regard that signifies a range of responses that appear to entail a great deal of social risk, but also implicitly emblemize the power Sophia feels has accrued to her. Like the prism of Golconda's wealth in the Calcutta theater, the spectacle of Indian luxury brings about the subjugation of Western forms, and Western affections: the nabob's "conquest" of Sophia seems to represent a reversal of the standard relationship between London and India, and Doyly's pallor underscores his inefficacy. Sophia finds fittest contrast for his timid character in the "alligators" (really crocodiles) she observes in the Ganges.³⁸

Sophia's second name is of course an onomastic advertisement for her fascination with all things opulent. For late eighteenth-century readers, a female character in unabashed awe of glitter invites a range of conventional moral and aesthetic judgments. This dissertation's discussion of luxury in the period, and many of its spectacular instances, have sketched the contours of some such criticisms. What distinguishes *Hartly House* is its – and its heroine's – anticipation of these forms of critique. Gibbes's reader falls into a kind of rhetorical snare, whereby she is made aware of her own tendency to formulate censorious clichés. Sophia suggests that Arabella come to Calcutta and become the nabob's "wife of wives," a proposition characteristically ambiguous in its mixture of playfulness and sincerity. Only a few lines later, Sophia invents and preempts Arabella's reluctance and refusal:

But you are so sentimental, there is no dealing with you; and I expect, in the lines
of your beloved Young, I shall be asked, by way of answer to my wild question,

Can wealth give happiness? – look round and see
What gay distress, what splendid misery!

³⁸ Gibbes, *Hartly House, Calcutta*, p. 99.

which is so truly English, there is no standing : I therefore hasten to conclude myself.³⁹

Delivered by a novel so invested in sensibility, these lines produce ironies that extend in multiple directions. Sophia rejects as intransigent a tendency that underlies all her own interactions with her Hindu tutor. But what Sophia appears most keen to critique, in sentimentality as in aesthetics, is a condition of underdevelopment, an imaginative stuntedness that leaves Arabella incapable of considering the promise of a sensibility that incorporates dazzle within its frame. “Indostan,” she writes elsewhere, “is the land of vivacity, not of sentiment.”⁴⁰ There is of course a fantasy of cooptation at work here, a hubristic presumption that Sophia is capable of mediating the forms of her home-places, originary and adopted, in her mind and her life. But her argument is compellingly, if opportunistically, framed in the contrast it strikes with the censorious excerpt from Edward Young’s *Love of Fame* (1741).

When Sophia describes how she intends to carry this kind of mediation off, Gibbes’s reader occasionally strains to understand whether Miss Goldborne is better understood as naïve, radically courageous, or some combination thereof. When she returns to England, transformed by her time in Calcutta, she intends “to visit all places of polite resort in such magnificent apparel, as may bespeak the splendor and the dignity of my Eastern connections, and obtain me first-rate consequence in my native country.” It bears emphasizing that when Sophia imagines presenting herself in this way, she makes a virtue of what Gilpin derided as fiery embroidery, remarking no contradiction in pairing “splendor” and “dignity.” Yet more radically, she claims that her “magnificent apparel” will be taken to signify “the marks of travelled knowledge,” as though by

³⁹ Gibbes, *Hartly House, Calcutta*, p. 39.

⁴⁰ Gibbes, *Hartly House, Calcutta*, p. 34.

making a spectacle of herself, she could best attract the kind of regard that she is sure she is entitled to.⁴¹

Sophia's idea of traveled knowledge, one that declares its potency outwardly through profuse finery, bears an intriguing resemblance to William Hodges's sense of the traveler's mind, which he sets forth in the preface to the *Travels in India* (1793). Through lengthy residence in the subcontinent, Hodges writes, westerners "lose the idea of the first impression which that very curious country makes upon an entire stranger." The impression of "novelty" is rubbed out – "effaced" – in a process all the more unfortunate for its naturalness, whereby "the mind...soon directs its views to more abstract speculation; reasoning assumes the place of observation, and the traveller is lost in the philosopher." Hodges does not exactly lament this state of affairs, but he does emphasize its character as a loss; for India's "face," "arts," and "natural productions" remain unfamiliar to his contemporaries because of the supersession of the traveling mind by its philosophical replacement.⁴² The traveler's habitual – and perhaps natural – predilection for the curious and the unknown is epistemologically productive, and in a sense technologically unique: it possesses capacities and sensitivities, for Hodges, that reasoned abstraction lacks. And for Sophia, who exists in India under the assumption that she will eventually return to England, and so understands herself as a traveler, these capacities and sensitivities might be reproduced – and even reproductive – in the splendid Eastern accoutrements she fancies she will exhibit on her person.

Caught up in the excitement of the nabob's procession, Sophia had declared that she "would have given the world on the instant to have been a Nabobess, and entitled to so magnificent

⁴¹ Gibbes, *Hartly House, Calcutta*, p. 130.

⁴² William Hodges, *Travels in India, during the Years 1780, 1781, 1782, & 1783* (London: William Hodges, 1793), pp. iii-iv.

a train.” She turned to Doyly, and inquired, sardonically, “what he thought of the London sights” in comparison with the present view.⁴³ As Michael Franklin argues, one of the central dynamics at work in this scene involves the tacit contrast made between salutary restraint, associated with Hinduism, and ostentation, allegedly typical of Mughal rule and ritual. A critique of opulence is, indeed, evident elsewhere, as in Sophia’s own description of Warren Hastings, who appears in Gibbes’s fiction in “dress [that] gives you his character at once – unostentatious and sensible.”⁴⁴ But it seems specious to accept Sophia’s philosophical admiration for Hinduism’s apparent humility as effecting a negation of all India’s splendors, even its Muslim ones. *Hartly House*’s denouement sees Sophia reenter conventional, domestic structures of Englishness, though she claims to carry her lately deceased tutor’s influence along with her. Still, for all its comforts, Gibbes’s reader is at least aware that the ending does not accrue all the narrative’s possible pleasures to itself, and the “Nabobess” fantasy does not simply disappear. Franklin is clearly right to say that Sophia’s Hindu tutelage points up the superficialities and fripperies that had typified her prior regard for her surroundings. However, her enthusiasm for goods and gaudiness never disappears entirely, and twenty-first century critics ought be careful not to reproduce the sorts of moralizing judgments of Sophia’s character that Gibbes seems to have cannily invited, but not altogether indulged.⁴⁵

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Sophia Goldborne’s Calcutta is not comprehensively estranged from its British relations; whatever she might think of it, the cult of the picturesque is in manifest evidence in Bengal:

Landscapes, ruins, and every rural, every interesting *et cætera*, are much admired at Calcutta, as garden decorations; and I visit a lady who is a mistress of a spot, that

⁴³ Quoted in Franklin, “Radically feminizing India,” p. 163.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Franklin, “Radically feminizing India,” p. 165.

⁴⁵ See Franklin, “Radically feminizing India,” pp. 157-60.

is a close copy of Mrs Southgate's beautiful lawns, parterres, and displays of agriculture, which meet the eye at her villa in the neighbourhood of Chertsey."⁴⁶

Hermione de Almeida and George Gilpin might associate Sophia's aesthetic preferences with an admirable and fleeting efflorescence of receptive and ingenuous regard for Indian wonder, a practice of looking that they associate with a certain form of Romanticism, and which they see disappearing as Britain consolidated its imperial project in the East. In this telling, the picturesque – especially that of the aforementioned Daniells, who treated India many times during their travels there between 1786 and 1794 – is the aesthetic analogue of this project.⁴⁷

Such a history must aptly describe the practice and impact of some representations of India in the late eighteenth century, but it is a partial view. It is undeniably true that, for some late eighteenth-century commentators, and not a few recent ones, India, its nature, and its fauna have been taken to signify violence, heathenism, and barbarism, meanings that may have justified the urges of acquisitive imperialists. The picturesque could indeed serve as a technology for subduing the subcontinent's "terrifyingly beautiful landscapes" into versions of English aesthetic ideals.⁴⁸ But what is refreshing about *Hartly House* is that in Sophia's rendition, the picturesque looks less like an aesthetic yoke than a rather weak and unsuccessful attempt at making sense of exotic difference. In De Almeida and Gilpin's account, the properly Romantic view of India values "aesthetic experience of the unknown for its own sake, for its novelty and for the expansion of perception and heightened awareness that this could produce."⁴⁹ This recalls, of course, Sophia's and Hodges's ideas of traveled knowledge and the traveling mind, and it makes some sense to slot Gibbes's fiction into the camp of progressive Romanticism.

⁴⁶ Gibbes, *Hartly House, Calcutta*, p. 129.

⁴⁷ See De Almeida & Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance*, pp. 183-90.

⁴⁸ See Hermione de Almeida & George H. Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance: British Romantic Art and the Prospect of India*, pp. 38-9.

⁴⁹ See De Almeida & Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance*, p. 179.

But it is probably more accurate, and ultimately more interesting, to recognize in *Hartly House* a shifting and intricate record of the negotiations undertaken by certain seeing selves in the context of travel and of contact with the unfamiliar. If rendered with any degree of nuance, that record is unlikely to form a complete tissue of ideological consistency. Thus, for example, Sophia's professed conservatism with regard to theatrical practice, which informs her assessment of the Calcutta stage – where no women perform – as a kind of preferable throwback to the pre-Restoration status quo. This makes for an odd and not uncharacteristic instance of apparent contradiction: in the course of convincing Arabella (not to say herself) of the moral downturn brought about by the appearance of women on English stages, Sophia denigrates the practice as a “foreign” custom. London's playhouses have become “so many nurseries of vice, or public seraglios,” likening them to the stereotyped Orient and at the same time condemning the English scene as “far more censurable and licentious than any the Eastern world contains.”⁵⁰

Spectacle is the polymorphous energy that drives Sophia's dispute with British performance at the end of the eighteenth century; that makes India appear, in *Hartly House*, so resplendent as to exceed its readers' powers of detection; and that imbues Gibbes's novel with a Romantic sensibility altogether different from that of William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794), where the subject rejects superficiality and artifice in search of self-realization. Sophia believes she has successfully immersed herself in a visual and aesthetic milieu that has fundamentally altered – and improved – her ability to see, and the manner in which she wishes to be seen. At Indian spectacles, she discovers powers and fantasies she had not previously recognized or imagined, and does so in response to glitter and dazzle. Spectacular sights put pressure on the social ties that connect her to Britain, and to British residents of the subcontinent. They multiply

⁵⁰ Gibbes, *Hartly House, Calcutta*, pp. 51-2.

the ties that might join her to persons beyond her conventional social environment. They organize a nexus of views, viewers, and sentiments that encourage her to recognize her self relationally, and tend toward the refashioning of that self.

By donning traveled knowledge, Sophia makes a spectacle of herself, as though she would reproduce, on and through her person, the visual impress India worked on her senses, and on her sympathy. A startle, and perhaps a curious species of pleasure, may be the hoped-for consequences. Sophia is capable of imagining a world in which spectacle's continuance does not signify insipidity, sensationalism, or mindlessness. It seems, instead, a proliferation of curiosity, meaning not only the signs of curious things, persons, and places, but the affect and ontology of curious regard. Instead of the replacement of spectacle by an ordered arrangement of its potencies, Sophia suggests that those potencies be transferred, or reinterpreted, to new spectacular forms, forms that trigger feelings and passions, and so knowledge.

It is by no means clear that such knowledge is preferable to, or more thoroughgoing than, its alternatives. Spectacles of exoticness have contributed, on innumerable occasions, to inhumane obfuscations, and damaging misinformation. Still, it is worth reiterating *Hartly House's* sense that the spectacle adjusts its spectator at least as much as it satisfies the spectator's expectations. The West's idea of Nature is dominated by the figure of a contemplative subject, one who as often as not meditates from behind the photographic lens, or some other variety of frame or screen. Perspective and representation are integral to the process of looking at nature, and thus to what counts as nature. Paying attention to spectacle, and inhabiting – to the extent that it is possible, or ethical – spectacular time and space can challenge one's senses, and render visible one's self, in novel, if discomfiting, ways. The eighteenth century swirled its currents through and around

spectacle, inspired by its stuff but intent on smoothing over its seams. It should be in our nature to hail their potencies anew.

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