

Introduction

Science's Brightest Ornament

Died, suddenly, at Philadelphia, on July 22d, by a rupture of a blood vessel, Mr. WILLIAM BARTRAM, senior, in the 85th year of his age. By his death, science has lost one of her brightest ornaments.

—*Washington Quarterly Magazine of Arts,
Science and Literature* (Apr. 1, 1824)

This succinct summary of William Bartram, printed nearly nine months after his death, points to his crucial role in what we now understand as modern science. Born in rural Philadelphia County in 1739, he contributed to many fields of study over the course of his long life. He collected plant and animal specimens as far north as New York and as far south as East and West Florida, colonies that encompassed parts of modern-day Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. He provided some of the first published accounts of Native communities in the Southeast, wrote on the migratory patterns of swallows and other birds of passage, described the hybridization of grape vines in North America, and was an important interlocutor for many of the most noted naturalists of his day. His interests and abilities were manifold and his network of colleagues vast.

Today he is perhaps best known as the author of a travelogue describing a botanizing journey he made through the American South between March 1773 and January 1777. Published in 1791, his *Travels Through North & South Carolina, Georgia, East & West Florida, the Cherokee Country, the Extensive Territories of the Muscogulges, or Creek Confederacy, and the Country of the Chactaws;*

Containing An Account of the Soil and Natural Productions of Those Regions, Together with Observations on the Manners of the Indians has almost come to stand in for Bartram himself. The book—part natural history, part religious allegory—has been the primary lens through which we now view Bartram's contributions to science and is the starting point for biographical studies of the naturalist. In some ways, this emphasis is not surprising: soon after the book's publication in Philadelphia, it was reprinted in London and Dublin and was translated and published in Amsterdam, Berlin, and Paris. Bartram's *Travels* became an especially influential text to the Romantic poets, who were drawn to the splash and flow of his language.¹

Writing was not, however, Bartram's only or even preferred method of recording the world around him. Drawing was by all accounts his "darling delight," even though most of his illustrations remained unpublished.² Because they were circulated as bespoke, semi-private renderings among a coterie of fellow naturalists, his drawings have attracted less scholarly attention than his written work. And yet, drawing was central for Bartram: it was at once a means of discovery, a form of cognition, and an act of imaginative collaboration and memory. He viewed drawing as a series of reciprocal interactions and interdependencies among the natural world, the artist naturalist, and the observer, and this understanding deeply influenced his view of a dynamic and mutable cosmos. With this book, I trace the roots of Bartram's natural history to his drawing practice.

William was raised from a young age to attend to the natural world. He was the fourth son of John Bartram, a Pennsylvania farmer, self-educated naturalist, and the most important purveyor of North American botanicals to Britain in the eighteenth century. John made numerous botanizing trips through the countryside near his home located in Kingsessing, just west of Philadelphia, and traveled throughout Britain's American colonies, collecting plants and seeds. These he sent to colleagues abroad, who distributed them among British nurseries and gardens. By his early teens William had become his father's preferred companion on such collecting expeditions, and he began making natural history drawings to accompany these shipments.³ An early example of his work is a plan of the Bartram family's botanic garden, which identifies John's study, the garden's various plots and walkways, as well as its central pond.⁴ The drawing, informative as it is, also incorporates elements of William's

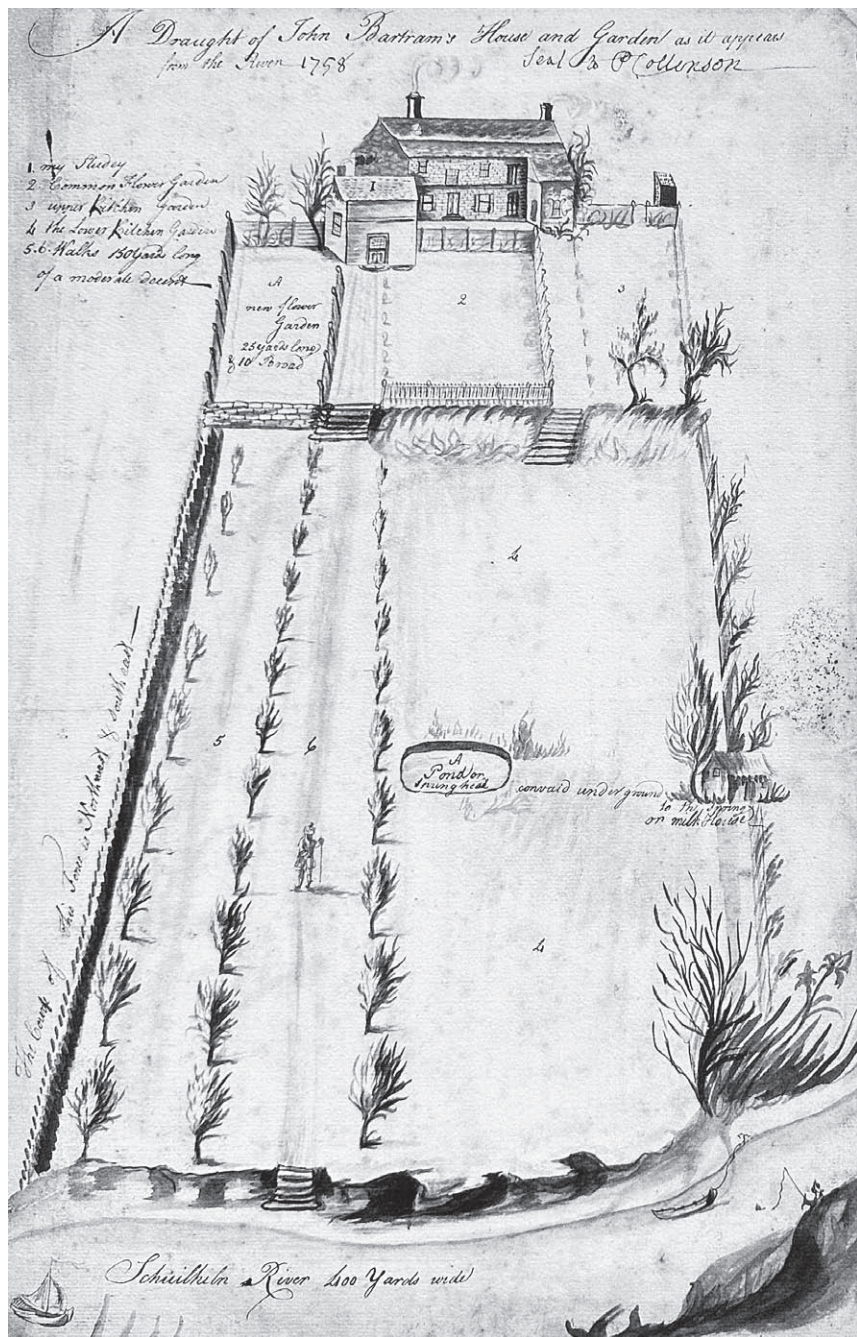


FIG. I. I. William Bartram, *A Draught of John Bartram's House and Garden as It Appears from the River, 1758*. Courtesy of Arader Galleries, New York.

telltale whimsy. The Schuylkill River, which borders the eastern edge of the garden, shown at the bottom of the drawing, is dotted with two small vessels and a fisherman. A man with a walking stick—possibly John—looks out at the riverway (fig. I.1).

John Bartram recognized his son's aptitude in botany and drawing, but he saw it as a pastime, not a profession. In 1755 he wrote of his concerns to his most important patron, the London mercer Peter Collinson, who served as a hub for the vast international exchange of natural history materials in the eighteenth century. "My son William is just turned of sixteen, [and] . . . it is now time to propose some way for him to get his living by," he observed. Although the younger Bartram had already been admitted to the Academy of Philadelphia, John was not keen on him becoming a "gentleman." Rather, he explained to Collinson, "I want to put him to some business by which he may with care & industry get A temperate reasonable living I am afraid Botany & drawing will not afford him one."⁵ After considering a number of steady and respectable vocations for his son, including printer and engraver, John apprenticed William to the Philadelphia merchant Captain James Child in January 1756.⁶

By all accounts, William was industrious in his apprenticeship with Captain Child, but he struggled in his subsequent attempt to establish himself as a merchant at Ashwood, North Carolina, where he lived with his uncle Colonel William Bartram and his family. Letters from that time speak to the difficulty he experienced. "I am unfortunate in arriving to a bad Market, a wrong Season of the year, and the excessive rains has almost destroyed the Country," he informed his father in May 1761.⁷ Although John often inquired after William's "success in merchandise," he also wrote with many requests for seeds, plants, and other observations of the natural world.⁸ From the smattering of letters that remain it seems William devoted as much of his time to botanizing as he did to his business endeavors. He struggled to turn a profit and was plagued with debts. In 1764 he explained to his older half brother Isaac, "I would write to Father but I am afraid my Letters gives him Uneasiness." He was clearly more comfortable reflecting instead on the natural world. "When I view the eternal necessary actions and movements of the Visible Universe," he wrote in the same letter, and "the amazing exactness and truth in the effects of every cause in the progress of Nature, I see an absolute necessity for the constant activity in every Object & part of the creation."⁹ In his mature graphic work William seemed intent on forging a

connection between the operations of his pencil and the operations he observed in nature.

In 1765 John Bartram was recognized with a royal pension to explore East Florida, which had recently become part of the British imperium. Styling himself the “King’s Botanist,” he invited William to join him on an expedition along the St. Johns River.¹⁰ Likely relieved to put aside his merchant business, William asked his uncle to settle his outstanding debts, and he accompanied his father in search of flora and fauna. During this trip he became so taken with the region’s dramatic landscape that, much to his father’s chagrin, he decided to establish an indigo and rice plantation near St. Augustine. Despite misgivings, John purchased tools, seed, and six slaves for William’s plantation, which met an even more ignoble end than his merchant business. The acres William acquired were swampy and stagnant, the weather was unbearably hot, and he was plagued by illness, despair, and most likely, profound guilt for a speculation premised on slave labor. Henry Laurens, a South Carolina plantation owner and slave trader who had advised the Bartrams, visited William in the summer of 1766 and wrote to John of William’s “forlorn state.” Laurens suggested John send additional provisions, but John demurred, instead encouraging William to return home.¹¹

Bartram’s years as a merchant and planter interfered with his drawing, but by 1767 he was wholly recommitted to the practice, and he remained so until age and failing eyesight forbade it. He again made figures of biota for Collinson and also began sending drawings to the London physician John Fothergill, who agreed to underwrite a nearly four-year botanizing journey through the Carolinas, Georgia, and East and West Florida. During this 1773–1777 excursion, Bartram sent Fothergill seeds and specimens of subtropical plants, along with numerous drawings and field notes, which would later form the basis of *Travels*.¹² Yet even as Bartram dedicated himself to this writing project, one that took nearly fifteen years to complete, he continued to make visual records of the natural world for himself and for others. In 1788, for instance, he prepared a sheaf of watercolors for the London-based brewer and amateur botanist Robert Barclay, and in the 1790s he designed the illustrations for Benjamin Smith Barton’s 1803 *Elements of Botany*, the first American botany textbook. From his early teenage years until deep into his sixties, Bartram turned to drawing first and foremost to understand and interpret the bewildering beauty of the organic world. The very act of drawing,

of figuring a surface, has always lain at the heart of William Bartram's understanding of nature.

TO FÍGURE. v.a. [*figuro*, Latin.]

But what does it mean—or what did it mean—for William Bartram to figure the natural world? What were the historical valences of the verb *to figure*, and how might they have informed his practice? To gain a sense of how it was conceived and understood, Samuel Johnson's 1755 dictionary offers some guidance. *To figure* could mean to form something into a definitive shape, to approximate a visual or physical resemblance, to ornament, to diversify, to imagine, or to represent by metaphor or visual symbol. This semantic range seems so bewilderingly broad as to encompass opposing meanings. In its most basic, primary sense, *to figure* could mean simply to manipulate matter, to engage in some sort of direct intervention in the physical world. In a secondary, representational sense, it followed two diverging trajectories: on the one hand, it could mean the creation of an uncomplicated correspondence between a thing and its textual or visual representation, the forging of a likeness, an immediate and obvious concordance. On the other hand, it could also suggest a misalignment, a sideways step toward the object one intended to describe. Johnson cited John Locke's "On the Conduct of the Understanding" to explain this type of representation: "Figured and metaphorical expressions do well to illustrate more abstruse and unfamiliar ideas, which the mind is not yet thoroughly accustomed to."¹³ In this sense, figuring is allusive or even ornamental; a figure gestures toward an object or an idea, while at the same time underscoring the fact that it remains separate and distinct from that idea, a type of representation that calls attention to its own mediation. The various definitions of figuring move by degrees away from matter toward thought and imagination.

The semantic range of *to figure* makes it an inherently unstable term. In his graphic work Bartram seemed to embrace its multiple meanings, drawing together its material, literal, and figurative connotations. He did not pit direct empirical observation against fancy, ornament, or allusion but, instead, knit them closely together. His visual representations of the natural world function as a graphic intermediary between material manipulation, sensory experience, and mental construct, delineating nature as he experienced and came to understand it.¹⁴

Bartram's collapse of the various meanings of *to figure* may be unusual, but it was not without precedent in the eighteenth century. The most likely influence on his conception of figuring comes from the artist and engraver William Hogarth, then one of the most celebrated artists in the English-speaking world. In his well-known treatise, *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753), Hogarth worked to dissolve the inherent opposition between the literal and the allusive by joining them together in his Lines of Beauty and Grace, which he framed as the very basis of his theory of representation. Hogarth found these serpentine and coiling lines best suited to representing the living world because of their fluidity and flexibility; such qualities, he believed, allowed them to express the greatest diversity of forms. At the same time, Hogarth also considered them to be the most beautiful and aesthetically pleasing marks because of their ornamental qualities. The way they spool across the surface of the paper leads the eye in pleasurable pursuit and suggests ongoing, unfolding transformation over time. The Lines of Beauty and Grace served in Hogarth's representational model as the bass figures for both truth and beauty, essence and ornament. Hogarth's *Analysis* was circulating in Philadelphia by the 1760s, and it seems from Bartram's compositions that he came to share the older artist's view of figuring as a process that was at once manual and intellectual, literal and allusive.

Naturalists who have engaged with Bartram's natural history, both in his day and ours, have often attempted to tease apart the literal from the metaphorical, hoping to pierce through the veil of poesis to access the truth of his observations. The title of Berta Grattan Lee's 1972 essay, "William Bartram: Naturalist or 'Poet?'" highlights how profoundly this question has animated the study of Bartram and his work. As early as 1767, Bartram's future patron John Fothergill noted his skill in drawing but lamented his tendency to include "Imaginary Plants" in his compositions.¹⁵ Notably, the biota Fothergill was referring to was not, in fact, imaginary; he took issue with Bartram's portrayal of a Venus flytrap (*Dionaea muscipula*), a species then little known in Europe. Although Fothergill was one of the first to question the veracity of Bartram's observations, it was not the last. Naturalists and nurserymen followed his footsteps through the American South, endeavoring to ascertain what was fact and what was fancy in Bartram's work. The urgency to parse the accurate from the imaginative is pervasive throughout the Bartram scholarship. Francis Harper—the enterprising scholar who laid the foundation for Bartram research in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—was largely motivated by this desire. Trained as a biologist,

Harper devoted much of his career to retracing Bartram's steps and determining the chronology of his travels. His copiously annotated naturalist's edition of Bartram's *Travels*, published in 1958, represents the summa of these efforts.¹⁶

Yet for Bartram the literal and metaphorical, ground and figure, were always inseparable, interpenetrating fully in his work. The way he negotiated and ultimately collapsed notions of figuring reinforces the importance of drawing to his understanding of nature. As the creation of marks on a surface, drawing provided a direct manipulation of the world (figuring in its primary sense) as well as a literal and metaphorical representation of it (figuring in its secondary senses). Even so, the majority of Bartram scholars in the humanities have focused on his writings, rather than his graphic enterprise. Literary historians were the first to engage with Bartram's work, as we see in John Livingston Lowes's 1927 *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination*. In his analysis of Samuel Coleridge's poetry, Lowes argues that Coleridge pulled from Bartram's descriptions of the Florida landscape to create the heady, disorienting atmosphere in *Kubla Khan*. N. Bryllion Fagin, turning from *Travels* as a source of literary inspiration to a piece of literature in its own right, published *William Bartram: Interpreter of the American Landscape* in 1933. He argues that Bartram entwined accurate observation with subjective interpretation to offer a rich, multisensorial experience of nature.

Many more in-depth examinations of Bartram's writings were to follow: Thomas Hallock, Nancy Hoffmann, Christopher Looby, Pamela Regis, and others have all ably explored the literary origins and influences, style, and expressive affect of Bartram's *Travels* as a text. Scholars in other fields have used Bartram's *Travels*, correspondence, and commonplace books to examine his engagement with different social, political, and cultural questions, including the American Revolution, Native American policy in the colonial period and the early Republic, and the practice of slavery. These projects reveal the critical role he plays in different disciplines, yet they derive almost exclusively from what Bartram wrote, not from what he drew. If, as John Bartram declared, drawing and botany were William's primary interest and pleasure, then it seems apt to turn our attention to his graphic work and to what it can teach us about his approach to and understanding of the natural world.

There exists a small but important body of scholarship dedicated to his drawings, developed by historians of science Joseph Ewan and Judith Magee, as well as art historians Amy Meyers and Michael Gaudio.¹⁷ In particular, Meyers's

1985 doctoral dissertation, “Sketches from the Wilderness: Changing Conceptions of Nature in American Natural History Illustration, 1680–1880,” established the terms by which Bartram’s drawings are now considered. She reads his work as part of a centuries-long shift in which nature is increasingly viewed as mutable and interdependent as opposed to hierarchically ordered. This shift, she argues, is more clearly articulated in Bartram’s graphic work than in his *Travels*; through formal repetition and the use of an animated, agitated line, his images reinforce the interdependencies and dynamic relationships among organisms, even when his text adheres to a more categorical view of the cosmos.¹⁸

Building on Meyers’s scholarship, Gaudio examines how a mutable natural world forces organisms into a continual “struggle for self-evidence.” Bartram understood the new republic to work by principles similar to those in nature, Gaudio observes, and Bartram’s drawings are as much about the social order of the new nation as they are about the structure of the natural world.¹⁹ Like Gaudio, I build on Meyers’s analyses, but rather than expand her discussion of Bartram’s view of the cosmos into the social realm, I instead trace it back to its origins in his mental and manual acts of figuring.

This emphasis on drawing as a means of coming to know and understand nature is, I argue, what distinguishes Bartram from his colleagues. Even though other naturalists at the end of the eighteenth century had also begun to see the natural world as mutable and interdependent, this conception of nature did not necessarily align with their graphic practices. Both Erasmus Darwin and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck developed early theories of evolution, proposing the idea that all organisms were not wholly separate and distinct but, rather, emerged from a single common ancestor. Lamarck in particular identified this evolution as a response to environmental conditions, though unlike Charles Darwin (the grandson of Erasmus), he thought evolution happened within an organism’s lifetime rather than over generations through natural selection. Lamarck’s views regarding environmental influence were taken up in part by the enterprising explorer and naturalist Alexander von Humboldt, who introduced the concept of plant geography; that is, the natural distribution of plants according to latitude and altitude. Humboldt did make sketches during his botanizing expeditions and encouraged other artists to delineate the complexity of the material universe, yet much of his graphic work lacks the dynamic, vivifying quality of Bartram’s most curious compositions.

Although my approach to Bartram's graphic practice underscores the absolute centrality of drawing to his natural history, this is not to say that *Travels* goes unaddressed in this study. The drawings serve as the main source of evidence and point of departure, but I occasionally pivot to his text to corroborate interpretations. It is essential to remain cognizant that *Travels* is a work of revision and rewriting and that Bartram's voice is at least partly shaped by editorial intervention, as Nancy Hoffmann has shown.²⁰ Still, it is an important component of Bartram's natural history and, more specifically, his legacy as an artist naturalist. The book has been important in shaping ideas about Bartram and his work since its publication, when it was quickly put to use as a field guide for botanizing expeditions in the American South. *Travels* ultimately aided in the process of remembering and "re-figuring" Bartram's natural history, as later generations of naturalists and nurserymen retraced his mazy path. But far before this text—before its drafting, its revisions, publication, translations, and new editions—there were Bartram's drawings.

Chapter Overview

I begin this study with an examination of how John Bartram, a farmer with no formal training, became a key figure in the transatlantic trade in plants, introducing his son to the study of nature and to the ocean-spanning coterie of virtuosi who would underwrite that study. More specifically, in chapter 1 I consider the asymmetry of access between Europeans and Americans (access to European scholarly infrastructure on one hand and the American wilderness on the other) and the role it played in the development of William's natural history. As Susan Scott Parrish points out, the relationship he and his father enjoyed with their patrons abroad was never fully equal. The Bartrams provided keenly sought specimens of an unfamiliar and otherwise inaccessible natural world, and their patrons offered access to resources and scientific communities absent in the colonies. Yet European naturalists often viewed their American correspondents as unsophisticated countryfolk, incapable of making sense of the wilderness they inhabited. Only in Europe could the natural fragments provided by colonials—roots packed in muck and moss, dried fish, bird skins preserved in tobacco or spirits, fragmented descriptions, and field sketches—be synthesized and rendered intelligible.

Both father and son bristled at the mantle of preeminence their European colleagues assumed, and they worked to establish themselves as intellectual

equals. John's most concerted effort in shifting this imbalance was to craft his own taxonomy of North American trees between 1753 and 1756, which he supplemented with drawings by William. Both his system and William's illustrations were made, he claimed, "not according to science or art, but nature," offering the truest and most accurate representation of the natural world they inhabited.²¹ He sent these materials to Peter Collinson in London but became defensive when Collinson suggested that John failed to "distinguish things aright."²² Unmoved, John asked Collinson to submit to him any errors for correction and pressed him to find an engraver and printer for his classification system.²³ Collinson pursued various avenues, but by 1756 the project had stalled. Collinson was comfortable with the Bartrams' collection and preparation of American flora and fauna but clearly balked at their attempts to articulate a system for understanding and interpreting them.

Although the whereabouts of much of John's arboreal taxonomy and his son's associated drawings are today unknown, a 1767 drawing of an American lotus (*Nelumbo lutea*) by William Bartram (the subject of chapter 2) offers a clear sense of his mature notion of figuring. This was the drawing that Collinson used to convince Fothergill to support William's botanizing, and the one that elicited Fothergill's perplexity as well as his admiration. Not only did Bartram feature a Venus flytrap, which Fothergill assumed to be invention, but he failed to hew closely to period standards of natural history representation. Although Bartram delineated the lotus's leaf, flower, and seed as was standard for the time, he also depicted the blossoms towering overhead, dwarfing the great blue heron in the foreground, and he flattened one of the lotus leaves, as though it were a pressed specimen. The inconsistent scale and multiple perspectives, along with the drawing's inclusion of a nondescript species, are strange and unruly, suggesting the idiosyncratic work of an untrained novice. In this chapter I argue that, far from amateurish, Bartram's graphic output pointedly responds to the power dynamic in eighteenth-century transatlantic natural knowledge in an incredibly sophisticated way. In providing his disruptive renderings to European virtuosi, Bartram called attention to his own processes of exploration, discovery, and knowledge formation.

In this work, Bartram visually quoted the illustrations of the noted ornithologist George Edwards, pulled from recent publications on plant systematics, and structured the drawing in accordance with William Hogarth's edicts on proper composition. The citations reference epistolary exchanges and published

textual and visual sources that would have been known to the drawing's viewers, conveying to them Bartram's understanding of empirical science, his study of natural history, and his mastery of descriptive botany. These and other references are connected through a series of formal rhymes that lead viewers through the drawing's different stations, allowing them to reexperience Bartram's own educational process. Bartram's drawing is a visual manifesto that articulates his notion of figuring. The drawing does not fail to accord with established conventions so much as it registers the failure of the conventions themselves.

Not surprisingly, Bartram's drawings often resist not only the representational conventions of eighteenth-century natural history but also its taxonomic imperatives. By the 1730s Carl Linnaeus, the most celebrated systematist of the period, had established a rigid organizational scheme that arranged nature into kingdoms, classes, orders, genera, and species according to their ostensibly immutable essences. Such a system, however, offered little space for ambiguity and no sense of the natural world's lived relationships. In chapter 3, I consider how Bartram—influenced by his empirical observations as well as by his engagement with microscopy and his appreciation of the emerging theory of vital materialism—subtly challenged Linnaeus's taxonomic model.²⁴ The shifts in his graphic work between the massive and the minute along with his focus on hybrid forms draw on the defamiliarizing effects of the magnified view and the leveling perspective of vitalistic thought.

The practice of microscopy and the theory of vital materialism were closely intertwined. Microscopy dramatically unhinged both scale and perspective and subverted the sense that the natural world was visually self-evident. In one of the texts owned by the Bartram family, the author queried with awe, "Who, a thousand Years ago, would have imagined it possible, to distinguish Myriads of living Creatures in a single Drop of Water? . . . Or, that numberless Species of Creatures should be made visible, tho' so minute, that a Million of them are less than a Grain of Sand?"²⁵ Others claimed that such studies revealed how all organic matter, even when separated from the organism, possessed a vital, living force.²⁶ This view challenged the basis of Linnaeus's taxonomic project by suggesting a radical underlying sameness among living beings, a sameness that made the boundaries between species, genera, and even kingdoms porous. These ambiguities made many naturalists uneasy, but they seem to be precisely what drove Bartram's investigations. In this chapter I focus on drawings he made for Fothergill, in which he presented unexpected shifts in scale, as well as jittering,

agitated forms and hybrid creatures. By conveying the instability and complexity of the natural world in drawings such as these, Bartram interrogated artificial categorization as the basis of natural knowledge and instead proposed a different kind of knowing, one that embraced the disruptiveness of living nature and its metamorphic processes.

In his drawings Bartram aimed to reveal his processes of exploration and discovery as well as the rich complexity of the living world, yet these aims presented a representational and ideological challenge. In a mutable natural world, there exists no essential appearance of a specimen, which means that representation is always in danger of denervating the portrayed organism in a manner that runs counter to lived experience. In chapter 4, I examine how Bartram offset the potential petrifying effects of representation through a variety of means, most markedly through his reliance on drawing. According to David Rosand, drawing possesses an especially “open” graphic structure in which figure and ground retain their autonomy, revealing the conditions and gestures of the composition’s construction. The representational ambivalence of drawing—its ability to refer back to the artist and out toward the world—allows for a more dynamic image. Such instability in meaning demands the viewers’ participation and imaginative engagement, and it is through this collaboration—in effect, the artist’s and the viewers’ joint re-creation of the world—that Bartram’s graphic work gathers a sense of liveliness and vitality.

Caroline van Eck calls this effect the “living presence response,” which she examines in the context of eighteenth-century sculpture. Although her research is centered on traditional “high” art, her study of a form of representation so vivid that it appears either to possess agency or to transmute into the object it portrays applies equally to Bartram’s drawings. Van Eck traces the origins of living presence response to classical rhetoric and its theorization of *figura*, which she understands as the modification of text or image from its standard representational use. *Figura*, she observes, “can refer to all expressions that have ‘received a new aspect.’” This type of figuring prompts the viewers’ experiential memory and affective response, enlivening the representation.²⁷ As a student of classics at the Academy of Philadelphia, Bartram would have been familiar with Quintillian, Cicero, and the other rhetoricians whom van Eck cites. Taking as a central focus a number of drawings Bartram produced for Fothergill during his expedition, in chapter 4 I examine how Bartram endeavored to create images of flora and fauna that were as lively and dynamic as nature itself.

The years between 1767 and 1777 marked the most original period of William Bartram's work as an artist naturalist, as he actively *figured out* his understanding of the natural world. In January 1777 after he returned to Pennsylvania from his southern travels, he actively set out to shore up his and his father's legacy. He reviewed travel journals, specimens, and drawings, recombining them in ways that he hoped might introduce his investigations and insights to a broader public. Despite his robust correspondence with naturalists at home and abroad, he had yet to be identified for any of his botanical discoveries. In chapter 5 I examine his efforts to establish his name in the growing field of international botany. I consider a suite of four watercolor drawings, purged of most of the idiosyncrasies typical to his oeuvre, that he made in 1788 for Robert Barclay. I also consider the importance of his role as mentor to a younger generation of naturalists, especially as his waning eyesight made drawing impracticable.

In 1788 Barclay was a member of the newly founded Linnean Society, which, along with the Royal Society, had taken on the responsibility of identifying and naming new plants following the death of Carl Linnaeus. He was also much involved in the development of the *Botanical Magazine*, a popular illustrated periodical featuring exotic ornamentals, and in the compiling of the *Hortus Kewensis* (1789), a catalogue of the flora grown at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Bartram likely saw Barclay as an advocate for his family, ensuring that their service to botany received institutional acknowledgment. In their correspondence, Bartram asked only that he and his father be recognized as the discoverers of these American plants featured in the watercolors. In particular, he desired that a "very elegant flowering Tree" he found in Georgia and East Florida be named *Bartramia* in honor of his father, John, whose work so richly contributed to botanical knowledge.²⁸ The plant's current scientific name, *Pinckneya bracteata* (Georgia fevertree), reveals that this wish would not be realized. John Bartram had only a handful of mentions in the first edition of the *Hortus Kewensis*, and William none at all.

Although the method of establishing his legacy through institutions was disappointingly unproductive in some respects, Bartram's acts of mentorship and the shared experience of place proved more effective. Even as he was failing to gain recognition in British circles for his botanical discoveries, he was also shepherding a new generation of American naturalists along in their studies. Benjamin Smith Barton, the professor of botany and materia medica at the University of Pennsylvania was among them. He used the Bartram family garden as a classroom and collaborated with William on the development of the first

American botany textbook. Other naturalists took to the field, retracing William's path through the American South and collecting specimens of plants he had previously discovered. I conclude this chapter with an examination of the botanizing travels undertaken by André Michaux, author of the *Flora boreali-americana* (1803); Moses Marshall, of the Marshallton botanic garden in Chester County, Pennsylvania; and John Lyon, plant collector for The Woodlands estate outside of Philadelphia, all of whom retraced in part Bartram's southern expedition, engaging in literal recollections of his journeys. These more personal and affective modes of legacy production helped in establishing a history of Bartram's botanical contributions that was as rich and dynamic as his own understanding of the natural world.

The compound nature of figuring, a process at once corporeal, intellectual, and imaginative, inherently yields both overlaps and fissures. We see this process play out in Bartram's oeuvre: some themes or subjects he revisited regularly in his drawings and writings, retracing and reworking them almost compulsively, while to others he barely gave passing notice. His work often balances uneasily between over-description and under-description, contrasting detailed and thickly rendered passages with ones that are sparse and only faintly sketched. In this book I follow a similar pattern, with areas of concentrated focus juxtaposed against voids and absences. By looking so intently at Bartram's drawing practice and how it informed his view of nature, I admittedly give less attention to other important aspects of his work.

Bartram's understanding of nature, for instance, was shaped in part by his Quakerism. John had been read out of the Darby Meeting in 1758 for questioning the divinity of Christ, and Kerry Walters has pointed out that the Bartram family's Quakerism was hardly doctrinaire. Still, both father and son retained a Quaker belief in an experiential relationship and knowledge of God, a relationship that could be made manifest in and through the natural world. Moreover, the Bartrams' most important patrons—Peter Collinson, John Fothergill, Robert Barclay—were noted members of the Society of Friends. Quakerism provided both a spiritual impetus and a social context for Bartram's study of nature, a topic that has been investigated by Amy Meyers, William Cahill, Larry Clarke, and Kerry Walters, but which goes unexamined here.²⁹

Likewise, Bartram's knowledge of and writings on the Cherokee, Creek, Seminole, and other Native communities he encountered have long served as an

important historical reference in anthropology and ethnography. Perhaps even more important is the role that American Indian guides played in his research. As he traveled through the Southeast, he often relied on the assistance of American Indians, gaining permission to botanize on their territories, relying on them for direction through the local topography, and gaining information on the properties and uses of different plants and animals. His natural history would not have been possible without their aid, and his *Travels* is struck through with an openness toward and admiration for the communities he encountered. Key figures such as Ahaya—the Oconee chief who gave Bartram the name “Flower Hunter” and allowed him to botanize in the Alachua Savanna—are given voice in the *Travels*, and the book’s frontispiece of the Seminole warrior Mico-Chluccho is perhaps his only attempt at a human portrait. And yet, because this book focuses on Bartram’s visual rhetoric and descriptions of nature, his connections to Native communities are addressed only tangentially. Kathryn H. Braund’s and Gregory Waselkov’s coedited volume, *William Bartram on the Southeastern Indians*, is an essential resource in this regard.

Also absent in this work is a deep investigation of Bartram’s relationships with free and enslaved people of African descent. This area has been less studied than Bartram’s engagement with American Indians of the Southeast, though it has received the attention of Sharece Blakney, Joel Fry, Kerry Walters, Christopher Iannini, and Monique Allewaert, among others.³⁰ Bartram surely knew the family of George Hilton, a free Black gardener working at William Hamilton’s nearby estate, The Woodlands, though there is no mention of them in Bartram’s extant letters. Bartram’s relationship with enslaved Blacks is more clearly documented. When he attempted to establish his plantation in East Florida in 1766, his father purchased Jack, Siby, Jacob, Sam, Flora, and Flora’s unnamed son to labor there.³¹ Bartram was also given title to a woman named Jenny in 1772 by his cousin Mary Bartram Robeson (daughter of Colonel Bartram) and her husband, Thomas Robeson. It appears Jenny was brought from North Carolina to Pennsylvania, but what her role was while there is not clear: she may have worked at the Garden or been sent out to labor elsewhere. We know only that Bartram asked his brother-in-law to sell her on his behalf when he set off on his botanizing journey for Fothergill.³²

Just as Bartram was aided by Native communities in his southern travels, so too was he assisted by enslaved people laboring on local plantations, who were often “lent” to him as he made his way through difficult terrain. Unlike

the American Indians he encountered, Bartram gave them no voice in his text, except when he described them as praising “the virtues and beneficence of their master in songs of their own composition.”³³ Despite his framing of slavery as quite literally harmonious, we also know that Bartram was patently aware of the institution’s deep cruelty and degradation, as both an observer of the practice and as a slaveholder himself. The nearly four years between 1761 and 1765 he spent with his uncle in North Carolina would have been especially instructive. Twenty-nine enslaved people, of whom at least eleven were children, were enumerated in Colonel Bartram’s probate inventory—as well as “a percil of Slaves the number Not known,” “1 Mouth piece to put on Negros,” and “1 pair Iron hoppels for Negros.”³⁴ Slavery’s brutality, apparent even in this dry list, did not keep Bartram from relying on forced labor or from using humans such as Jenny as capital.

In the second half of his life, however, we see Bartram struggle to come to terms with his participation in slavery. By 1783 he had drafted an antislavery treatise, expostulating at length about the inhumanity of the institution. He accused “those cruel Beings who purchase the life & person [of] their fellow creature”—of whom he was one—of being “guilty of the highest ingratitude,” since they depended on the forced labor of others for their wealth and well-being. His treatise concluded with a dire warning about this practice: “sooner or later, ye must render full retribution [for this sin], Whether Voluntarily by your own free Act, Or by a Mighty hand.”³⁵ If the 1783 treatise suggests an attempt to make himself right with God, a letter from 1788 speaks to Bartram’s desire to reconcile with those he had wronged. He wrote to Mary Bartram Robeson asking her to “please present my Regard to all the Families of the *Black People*; They were kind and very serviceable to me; I wish it were in my power to Reward their fidelity & benevolence to me. I often Remember them; These acknowledgement[s] at least are due from me to them,” suggesting both deep shame and earnest apology.³⁶ The progression of Bartram’s views on slavery seems to align with his increasing recognition of the interconnectedness of all life. If his understanding of the natural world disrupted or dissolved boundaries between species, genera, and even kingdoms, how much more profound its effects on his understanding of humanity?

Although I cannot address every important facet of Bartram’s long and productive life and career in this book, I do endeavor to plumb a particular notion of figuring in eighteenth-century colonial science, thereby filling an important gap in art history, the history of science, and American studies. In taking

seriously the peculiarities of Bartram's graphic enterprise, I attempt to tease out his theory of visual representation and consider its formative role in his engagement with and understanding of nature. I rely on close attention to the images themselves, pressing on their points of visual and cognitive rupture, which mark the myriad influences that shape his project: his empirical experience of nature, his integration into eighteenth-century epistolary culture, and his intellectual and social milieu. While signaling his influences through such fissures, Bartram also adapted these sources to his own process of coming to know—and, indeed, of figuring—the natural world. Ultimately, in this book I present Bartram's drawings as palimpsests of both the corporeal and the conceptual, spaces in which he consciously interleaved embodied and abstract knowledge, world and representation. By using such an approach I hope fundamentally to alter our understanding of his drawings and their strangeness, while also highlighting the contested terrain of scientific visualization in the eighteenth century.