

Telling A Wonder: Dialectic in the Writings of John Bartram

A FARMER IN COLONIAL PENNSYLVANIA, John Bartram was one of America's pioneer botanists. As he remarked in a letter (1764), he had "in thirty years' travels, acquired a perfect knowledge of most, if not all the vegetables between New England and Georgia, and from the sea-coast to Lake Ontario and Erie."¹ He not only identified closely with the European scientific community of the eighteenth century, developed a popular botanical garden on his estate, and played a prominent role in the propagation of New World plants abroad and Old World plants at home, but also authored numerous reports, letters and journals pertaining to the American wilderness. Although only a few samples of Bartram's writings survive, they apparently represent his work generally. Read only in the context of other eighteenth-century nature reportage, the extant Bartram documents may not seem particularly unique or impressive, and they hardly intimate why Benjamin Franklin urged Bartram to write a natural history of the New World. Read, however, with an awareness of Bartram's dialectical manner of thought and his implicit emphasis on process—a pattern and emphasis intrinsic to his colonial culture as well—these writings evince a fascinating mode of perception crucial to any interest in an intellectual biography of Bartram.

Bartram's weak formal education left him ill-equipped for written expression, and in fact he never did learn to spell, to compose well-structured sentences, to range in vocabulary, or to devise a conscious stylistic manner. Even several of his friends and correspondents who highly regarded his knowledge—Peter Collinson and Peter Kalm, for example—explicitly criticized Bartram's apparent limitations as a writer. Sensitive to such complaints, Bartram told Collinson in 1754 that he preferred to write "not according to grammar rules, or science,

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¹ *Memorials of John Bartram and Humphry Marshall*, ed. William Darlington (Philadelphia, 1849), 433. Subsequent citations identify this work as *Memorials*.

but nature": "Good grammar and good spelling, may please those that are more taken with a fine superficial flourish than real truth; but my chief aim was to inform my readers of the true, real, distinguishing characters of each genus, and where, and how, each species differed from one another, of the same genus."²

Bartram's evident emphasis, in this reply, falls on a language of precision. This language of "objective" natural description surfaces in Bartram's letters from the 1730's to the 1760's, in his "An Essay for the Improvement of Estates, by Raising a Durable Timber for Fencing and Other Uses" (a fugitive item apparently inserted in some copies of Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard Improved*, 1749), and in his introduction, appendix and notes to Thomas Short's *Medicine Britannica* (1751). This language certainly characterizes his observations printed in the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society of London.³

The language of these reports appears as well in *Observations* (1751), the journal Bartram kept while accompanying Conrad Weiser on a trip, in 1743, through Pennsylvania and New York to Fort Oswego on Lake Ontario, in Canada. Weiser was appointed to make peace between the English colonists and the Iroquois, and Bartram traveled with him to observe the "great variety of plants and other curiosities there."⁴ Although Bartram made at least three copies of the journal he kept during this trip, he had difficulty getting one to Collinson. Bartram sent Collinson a copy in 1744, but it miscarried as a result of the capture of the British transporting vessel by a French ship. This copy, however, was preserved by the captain of the pirated ship and delivered to Collinson in 1750. Collinson was disappointed by the reticence and the illiteracy of Bartram's manuscript, but he had it published, noting in his prefatory remarks that the work appears "without the author's knowledge" and that he (Collinson) "thought himself not at liberty to make any material alteration, though as it now appears, many who seek only amusement in what they read, will in those places be disappointed where only are treated of the several plants with which nature has bountifully covered the hills and valleys he travers'd, with the various

² *Memorials*, 196-197.

³ These reports include journal or letter excerpts on rattlesnake teeth, salt-marsh mussels, wasps, dragon flies, and aurora borealis, in *Philosophical Transactions* (Royal Society of London), 41 (1742), 358-359; 43 (1745), 157-159, 363-366; 46 (1750), 278-279, 323-325, 400-402; 52 (1762), 474; 53 (1763), 37-38.

⁴ *Memorials*, 162.

qualities of the soil and climate."⁵ In many places, then, in Collinson's opinion, *Observations* is a text for eighteenth-century botanic specialists, whereas in other instances it is a text of interest to the general public.

In fact *Observations* (from which Thoreau in 1857 or so copied long extracts)⁶ is Bartram's most publicly accessible work, evincing not only the manner of "objective" natural description typical of his earlier reports printed in *Philosophical Transactions* but also the voice of intrusive polemic. *Observations* exhibits an uneasy tension between attenuated specialized notations pertaining to nature and several *obiter dicta* concerning race, religion and politics. Remarks about nature comprise the background content of Bartram's book; that is, these observations constitute the genre-implied and reader-anticipated subject matter of the work: information about climate, soil, rivers, plants and animals. This background matter includes such memorable episodes in the narrative as an encounter with a rattlesnake, which "while provoked. . . contracted the muscles of his scales so as to appear very bright and shining, but after the mortal stroke, his splendor became much diminished," and the discovery of an unusual landscape "principally composed of rotten trees, roots, and moss, perpetually shaded, and for the most part wet [;] what falls is constantly rotting and rending the earth loose and spungy,. . . tempt[ing] abundance of yellow wasps to breed in it."⁷

In dialectic with such background matter are Bartram's polemical comments, which comprise the *foreground* of the book; that is, these comments draw attention to themselves as apparently aberrant, disruptive of mood, destructive of generic mode, or antagonistic to reader expectations of a text devoted to observations about nature. This foregrounded matter concerns the inhabitants of the wilderness. As an English colonist, Bartram typically defames the French, whom he accuses of supplying Native Americans with weapons, of claiming territorial rights on the basis of a few forts staffed by mercenaries, and of proselytizing on behalf of Roman Catholicism, "what they call the christian religion."⁸ Sometimes he also criticises the shortcomings of English colonists: "It were to be wished, that the *English* government in

⁵ *Observations on the Inhabitants, Climate, Soil, Rivers, Productions, Animals, and other Matters Worthy of Notice* (London, 1751). Subsequent citations identify this work as *Observations*.

⁶ I am indebted to Joseph Moldenhauer for this information about Thoreau.

⁷ *Observations*, 12, 28.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 23, 51, 24.

these parts had been more diligent in searching and surveying the heads of their own rivers"; similarly, "this is surely an excellent regulation for preventing traders from imposing on the *Indians*, a practice they have been formerly too much guilty of, and which has frequently involved the *English* colonies in difficulties, and constantly tended to depreciate us in the esteem of the natives."⁹

Observations, speculations and complaints about Native Americans contribute to the foregrounded matter of Bartram's book.¹⁰ Interest in their preparation of squash, rituals pertaining to bears, propagation and drying of huckleberries vie with nature reportage in *Observations*. Conjectures concerning the origins of Native Americans particularly interest Bartram, who considers the theories that they descended from the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, that they "were originally placed here by the. . . creator. . . as soon as. . . [the New World] became habitable," or that (as José de Acosta had speculated in 1590) they migrated from the Old to the New World over a land bridge or a small stretch of sea between the two continents. Summarizing his experience with north-eastern Native Americans, Bartram writes: "they are a subtle, prudent, and judicious people in their councils, indefatigable, crafty, and revengeful in their wars, the men lazy and indolent at home, the women continual slaves, modest, very loving, and obedient to their husbands."¹¹ Bartram's attitude here is more subdued than is the general tenor of his epistolary comments on Native Americans, whose "savage cruelty" was symbolized for him in the ominous incident when his hat was chewed.¹² If Native Americans fare somewhat better in *Observations* than in Bartram's letters, their presentation benefits from the unadorned, understated language of the book, even of its polemical matter.

Native Americans particularly figure in the dialectical interaction between foregrounded polemic and backgrounded nature in *Observations* whenever Bartram raises the subjects of agriculture and superstition. Reflecting a belief prevalent among eighteenth-century colonial

⁹ *Ibid.*, 15, 49, cf., 57.

¹⁰ David Scofield Wilson's *In the Presence of Nature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1978, 115) remarks Bartram's emotional distinction between Native Americans and nature. See also Wayne Franklin, *Discoverers, Explorers, Settlers: The Diligent Writers of Early America* (Chicago, 1979), 53-55.

¹¹ *Observations*, 77.

¹² *Memorials*, 254.

Americans of English origin, Bartram asserts that cultivation of land determines ownership.¹³ Consequently, Bartram argues, Native Americans possess no actual claim to the New World, for "whatever nature has done for them (and she is no where more bountiful) they are too lazy by any trouble of their own to improve."¹⁴ In his persistent notations about topography and soil Bartram implicitly celebrates this ideal of potential settlement of the wilderness transformed, through cultivation, into productive farmland.¹⁵ In this version of progressive change, Bartram the "objective" botanist and Bartram the "subjective" polemicist intersect, giving rise in *Observations* to a textual contest between backgrounded nature and foregrounded social critique.

This dialectic informs as well Bartram's reflections on Native American superstitions. "They have strange notions of spirits, conjuration, and witchcraft: these are agreeable to their blindness, and want of proper education among them," Bartram writes.¹⁶ One or another "silly story is religiously held for truth among them," Bartram complains,¹⁷ recounting later in the book an illustrative episode involving his attempt to move some rocks out of his way:

I took a fancy to ascend 2 thirds of the height of a neighbouring hill, in the way I came to abundance of loose stones, and very craggy rocks, which seemed to threaten impending ruin, the soil was black and very rich, full of great wild stinging nettles, as far as I went I rolled down several loose stones to make a path for my more expeditious return. This I found the *Indians* much disturbed at, for they said it would infallibly produce rain the next day, I told them I had sufficient experience, it signified nothing, for it was my common practice to roll down stones from the top of every steep hill, and could not recollect that it ever rained the next day, and that I was almost sure tomorrow would be a very fair day. . . . Before day break it began to rain, it lasted about an hour and then ceased. The *Indians* insisted that was caused by the stones I rolled down 2 days ago, I told the *Antecoque Indians* if their observations had any truth it should have been the day before, which was remarkably fair. To this he cunningly replied, that our Almanacks often prognosticated on a day, and yet the rain did not come within two days.¹⁸

¹³ *Observations*, 51.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁵ See Franklin, 45, 50-51.

¹⁶ *Observations*, 79.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 68, 70.

Bartram's irritation at superstitious notions similarly surfaces in a letter to Collinson (June 11, 1743), in which he repudiates the claims "of astrology, magic, and mystic divinity."¹⁹ This antagonism towards superstition contributes to the foregrounded matter of *Observations*, to the "subjective" polemical voice vying with the backgrounded matter of the text conveyed through the "objective" scientific language of measurement.

This antithetical interplay between superstition and science, agriculture and wilderness, humanity (English, French, Native American) and nature—in short, between foregrounded and backgrounded textual matter—might not be the product of Bartram's conscious design, but nevertheless, even as an unconscious effect of his narrative manner it defines an intrinsic aesthetic feature of *Observations*. In fact, a dialectical mode seems generally to characterize Bartram's pattern of thought. It certainly informs his perception of nature, as exemplified in a letter (March 25, 1762) he wrote to Alexander Garden, a South Carolinian amateur Linnaean botanist and (later) Loyalist:

A similar pattern of thought doubtless also characterized the numerous, now-lost journals Bartram wrote over the years. It certainly informs the journal he, as King George III's botanist, kept during his journey through the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida in 1765-1766. Two excerpts from this account were printed during Bartram's lifetime, albeit not under his supervision. Silently edited by someone—a common practice during the eighteenth century, when anonymous collaborations were legion—the entries for September 5 to 25, 1765, appeared (mistakenly attributed to Bartram's son) as "An Extract of Mr. Wm. Bartram's Observations in a Journey Up the River Savannah in Georgia with His Son, on Discoveries," in *Gentleman's Magazine* (1767). The entries dated December 19, 1765 to February 12, 1766, which Bartram seems to have separated from the main journal, were edited by someone for literacy and were appended to William Stork's *An Account of East-Florida, with a Journal, Kept by John Bartram of Philadelphia, Botanist to His Majesty for the Floridas; upon a Journey from St. Augustine up the River St. John's* (1767). The complete journal from which these excerpts were drawn evinces an interesting contrast to *Observations*, written twenty-three years earlier; for the later journal modifies the dialectical manner of the antecedent work by displacing

¹⁹ *Memorials*, 164.

polemic with silence.

What charming colours appear in the various tribes, in the regular succession of the vernal and autumnal flowers—these so nobly bold—those so delicately languid! What a glow is enkindled in some, what a gloss shines in others! With what a masterly skill is every one of the varying tints disposed! Here, they seem to be thrown on with an easy dash of security and freedom; there, they are adjusted by the nicest touches. The verdure of the empalement, or the shadings of the petals, impart new liveliness to the whole, whether they are blended or arranged. Some are intersected with elegant stripes, or studded with radiant spots; others affect to be genteelly powdered, or neatly fringed; others are plain in their aspect, and please with their naked simplicity. Some are arrayed in purple; some charm with the virgin's white; others are dashed with crimson; while others are robed in scarlet. Some glitter like silver lace; others shine as if embroidered with gold. Some rise with curious cups, or pendulous bells; some are disposed in spreading umbels; others crowd in spiked clusters; some are dispersed on spreading branches of lofty trees, on dangling catkins; others sit contented on the humble shrub; some seated on high on the twining vine, and wafted to and fro; others garnished the prostrate, creeping plant. All these have their particular excellencies; some for the beauty of their flowers; others their sweet scent; many the elegance of foliage, or the goodness of their fruit: some of the nourishment that their roots afford us; others please the fancy with their regular growth: some are admired for their odd appearance, and many that offend the taste, smell, and sight, too, are of virtue in physic.²⁰

Not only exceptional for Bartram in its display of sustained exuberance and prevalence of adjectives, this long paragraph also discloses the extensive degree to which he revels in nature's manifestation of multiple antitheses, in nature's manifestation of an essential dialectic: plants are vernal/autumnal, languid/bold, glowing/glossy, secure/free, arranged/blended, simple/elegant, white/scarlet, humble/lofty, excellent/offensive.

Narrative silence emerges as the most striking feature of Bartram's Floridian journal. This silence is apparent whenever Bartram touches on the same subjects which led him in *Observations* to engage in polemic. In the Floridian account, for example, Native Americans barely capture his attention and never provoke his ire. In a notable instance Bartram's interest in a Native American artifact is expressed principally

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 398.

in terms of measurements and in relation to the processes of nature:

Fine pleasant morning, although a little frost in the pine-lands; saw several flocks of pigeons about both yesterday and to-day: About noon we landed at Mount-Royall, and went to an Indian tumulus, which was about 100 yards in diameter, nearly round, and near 20 foot high, found some bones scattered on it, it must be very ancient, as live-oaks are growing upon it three foot in diameter.²¹

Bartram wonders how many Native Americans labored to raise this funeral mound and he takes various measurements. But his report is imbedded with references not only to the "live-oaks" thriving on the mound but to "grass grow[ing] all over it" and to "a very large rattle-snake sunning himself" on its southern side. Bartram speculates that the snake uses the mound for its winter quarters and shortly thereafter permits himself one brief query about the builders of the mound that is quickly broken off without further comment: "Whether the Florida Indians buried the bones after the flesh was rotted off them, as the present southern Indians do, I can't say: We then rowed down the river."²²

Narrative silence occurs as well in Bartram's reports of discoveries he makes in nature itself. Consider these typical entries for 1765: (July 9) ". . . observed numerous species of curious plants & found one new genus"; (July 11) "A strange new tree"; (July 17) "I found several curious species of plants in [the] savanas. . . . Saw several curious plants"; (August 7) ". . . A great variety of curious plants"; (August 18) ". . . found several curious plants"; (September 5) ". . . found A very curious evergreen shrub & A very odd large plant"; (October 1) "this day we found severall very curious shrubs."²³ These observations, like so many others in the journal, are repetitively modified by the adjectives *odd*, *strange* and *curious* as well as by the adverbs *nice* and *very*. Evasively non-emotional, these understated observations are punctuated by a narrative silence, a punctuation implicitly more dramatic than that required by the rules of English grammar that Bartram never learned. This narrative silence occurs precisely when the reader, whose

²¹ "Diary of a Journey through the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida from July 1, 1765, to April 10, 1766," ed., Francis Harper, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, n. s. 33 (1942), 45. Subsequent citations to this work are identified as *Diary*.

²² *Diary*, 45.

²³ *Ibid.*, 14, 18, 20, 24, 31.

expectations have been aroused by the evocative (if evasive) words *odd*, *strange*, and *curious*, anticipates subsequent details, description or information but in the process of reading further discovers no forthcoming elucidating commentary.

Narrative silence is particularly prevalent, to an enigmatical degree, in the part of this journal treating the Floridian wilderness. Nearly three years before the trip, however, Bartram had remarked with emotion in a letter: "Oh! if I could but spend six months. . . in Florida;"²⁴ and about a year later on at least two occasions he anxiously sought to facilitate the financing of such a journey before he, now in his sixty-sixth year, became too old to withstand the rigors of such a venture.²⁵ This very emotion is precisely what is absent from the journal, a fact all the more vexing since the landscape of Florida must have been as spectacular as Bartram had anticipated; certainly it was potentially more evocative of emotion than were the topographic features and the flora he encountered during his journey to the Great Lakes in 1743. Yet, in comparison to the voices of *Observations*, the Floridian journal "resounds" with silence.

Reasons behind Bartram's silence in this later work might include the fact that while traveling he collected whole or parts of plants. Mere references in his journal to a "curious" plant could then sometimes be supplemented later by a labeled and dated collected specimen, thereby eliminating any need for a fuller verbal description. Possibly, too, his silence might in part have derived from his advanced age or from the fact that during the expedition he was ill, and he reported to Collinson in June, 1766:

I hope what specimens I sent for thyself will give thee great pleasure, as many of them are entirely new; the collecting of which hath cost thy friend many score pounds, pains, and sickness, which held me constantly near for quite two months; in Florida, the fever and jaundice; and a looseness through North and South Carolina, and Georgia; yet, some how or other, I lost not an hour's time of travelling through those provinces; and when at Augustine, with the fever and jaundice, I travelled both by water and land all round the town for many miles, and to Picolata, to the Congress, although so weak as hard set to get up to bed; and during the meeting of the Governor and Indians, in the Pavilion, I was forced to sit or lie down upon the ground, close by its side, that I might observe what passed.²⁶

²⁴ *Memorials*, 256.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 266, 267.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 281.

The burden of sickness and age, and the habit of collecting might have contributed to the taciturnity of Bartram's journal of 1765-66.

Another cause, as critics have for some time suggested in general terms,²⁷ might be attributed to Bartram's Quaker heritage, eschewing emotion and advocating plain language. This heritage doubtlessly influenced Bartram's manner of expression in the Floridian journal, even though by 1758 he had been disowned by the Quakers of the Darby Meeting because he refused to believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ and even though by 1765 he was in some respects more a Deist than a Quaker.²⁸ As early as 1758, in fact, he remarked to Philip Miller: "Strange it is, but very true, that many seeds of plants we take little care of, as not being of general use, will keep good in the ground for seven years or more, before they all come up, and perhaps the ground tilled every year, too; but the nutritious grains, pulse, and other esculents, that are adapted for our general support, generally come up the first year they are sown. Oh! the wisdom of Divine Providence! The more we search into it, the more wonderful we discover its powerful influence to be."²⁹ This observation became more pronounced in 1762, when in letters to Alexander Garden and Peter Collinson, Bartram noted respectively: "The more we search and accurately examine [God's] works in nature, the more wisdom we discover"; "My head runs all upon the works of God, in nature. It is through this telescope I see God in his glory."³⁰ In short, by the time Bartram traveled to Florida in 1765-66, his attribution of a religious dimension to nature was far more intense than at the time of his trip to the Great Lakes in 1743. Bartram's devotional wonder, in response to this revelation of divinity in nature, likely informs the silence of his Floridian journal, a taciturnity also reminiscent of the Quaker tradition of meetings spent in silent receptivity.

Besides collected specimens, advanced age, personal illness, Quaker tradition and the perception of divine revelation in nature, a sixth factor influencing the narrative silence of the journal of 1765-66 might be

²⁷ For example Frederick B. Tolles, in *Literary History of the United States*, ed. Robert E. Spiller et al. (New York, 1953), 91. A revision of this reading appears in Wilson, 97-99.

²⁸ See Ernest Earnest, *John and William Bartram: Botanists and Explorers* (Philadelphia, 1940), 22-33, 60-67.

²⁹ *Memorials*, 383.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 398, 243.

found in Bartram's sense of his readers; for however devout his view of creation, Bartram by his own admission (in 1741) did not "naturally delight in such solitudes" as were characteristic of his exploratory forays.³¹ Nor did he become more private by 1765; he still kept a journal for himself *and* for his friends. His friends tended to be fellow specialists, a fact leading some contemporary critics to conclude, with reason, that the reticence of Bartram's journal derives from this audience, which required no elaborative detail.³² But, we should note, Bartram is most silent concerning "odd," "strange" and "curious" plants, the ones unknown to him and his friends.

If the fact that Bartram's silences occur in places where even his anticipated audience cannot elaborate reduces the claim that his specialist readers account for the taciturnity of his text, it does not diminish the important role of his sense of audience. Bartram's readers were not only fellow specialists but also—and for him, more significantly—they were friends. In an early letter to Collinson, Bartram revealed his conception of how friends "read" each other: "according to our friend Doctor [Christopher] Witt, we friends that love one another sincerely, may, by an extraordinary spirit of sympathy, not only know each other's desires, but may have a spiritual conversation at great distances one from another. Now, if this be truly so,—if I love thee sincerely—and thy love and friendship be so to me—thee must have a spiritual feeling and sense of what particular sorts of things will give satisfaction; and doth not thy actions make it manifest?"³³ The element of social decorum in this remark can be discounted; for the playful politeness of manner here actually permits Bartram to make a sincere observation (in an unembarrassing fashion and with an occult undertone) about "sympathy" between friends. Bartram apparently conceived of his readers as friends whose "sympathy" enabled them—as if they were fellow Quakers engaged in a meeting of silent receptivity—to intuit and share his silent devotional wonder at nature's splendor. Perhaps by means of this "sympathetic" devotional silence, Bartram's imagined friendly readers were at once to enter and to complete the text of the Floridian journal; being drawn into the text in its places of narrative absence, or silence, the "sympathetic" reader necessarily participates in the account,

³¹ *Ibid.*, 321.

³² For example, Wilson, 96.

³³ *Memorials*, 174.

even in a sense personally filling in the gaps of inexpressiveness and reducing the impression of narrative fragmentation given by the terse and elliptical manner of the text's language.

This silence can be described as the foreground of the Floridian journal; that is, given the expected context of nature reportage generally typical of such a document, this silence seems aberrant to the reader. Like the polemical voice of *Observations*, it functions in dialectic with the titularly declared primary concern of the work: observations about nature (the backgrounded matter) expressed in a language of precise measurement, a language emphasizing date, time, temperature, weight, size, texture, depth, distance, direction and color.³⁴ This contrast between a language of exact measurement and silence imparts to the Floridian journal—in a way reminiscent of the antithesis between nature reportage and social polemic in *Observations*—a sense of improvisation, of lack of finish, of fragmentation. Indeed, in spite of their record of precise scientific information and Bartram's attempts at "regulating" them, both journals lack proportion or symmetry of external form.

What symmetry inheres in these works, in fact, lies in this very manifestation of dialectic distorting their external form—a symmetry reflective of process in nature, progress in civilization, and permanent revisionism in the human mind. Bartram's belief in such an ongoing revisionism (also characteristic of the philosophical, political and religious milieu of eighteenth-century colonial America) surfaces most notably in his scientific commentary. A memorable instance occurs in a letter he wrote in 1755, in which he reported that, considering his (Bartram's) floral discoveries in the New World, "Linnaeus must make many alterations" in his famous taxonomic system. This appreciation of the need for progressive revisionism (in conjunction with the other causes noted above) informs Bartram's pattern of thought as reflected in his manner of writing. It underlies the dialectical modality of his journals, how their parts contrast and interact as foregrounded and backgrounded matter. It explains, concerning external form, the tendency of these texts to appear improvised (in spite of later revisions by Bartram), incomplete and fragmented. This appearance mirrors the processes of nature, so incompletely fathomed by the human intellect, in

³⁴ This latter feature of Bartram's language receives attention in Josephine Herbst's *New Green World* (New York, 1954).

Bartram's opinion; it reflects (especially in *Observations*) the progressive development of European civilization in the American wilderness; it exemplifies the ongoing advancement of the human mind interacting with both civilization and nature. Nature, civilization and the human mind are, in Bartram's works, processive; they are comprised of mere fragments of time, even as every trip into the wilderness represents a mere fragment of time. The improvisational attitude, the asymmetrical external form, and the contest between the foregrounded and backgrounded matter of his journals of 1743 and 1765-66 convey an aesthetic impression of this perception of process.³⁵ Principally it is embodied in the inherent dialectical structure of these narratives. If the antithesis between nature and civilization in *Observations* emerges awkwardly and produces an uneven aesthetic effect, its transformation into a contrast between nature reportage and silence in the Floridian journal achieves a satisfying aesthetic dimension, into which the "sympathetic" reader enters in order to participate in the *process* of the text.

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Bartram had a wonder to relate. This wonder over the revelation of Divinity in nature ranged finally beyond the scientific language of precise measurement. It could be evoked only in verbal motions between scientific language and some other mode of expression. This wonder is overshadowed by the dialectical interplay of backgrounded nature reportage and foregrounded polemic in *Observations*, a somewhat didactic work. This same wonder is highlighted by the dialectical interplay of backgrounded nature reportage and foregrounded narrative silence in the Floridian journal, which includes (rather than instructs) the "sympathetic" reader in the process of its disclosures. In some remarks later appended to, but separate from, this journal Bartram notes, "many people love to tell wonders."³⁶ Between *Observa-*

³⁵ Wilson captures well the sense of process in Bartram's work by remarking the importance to the naturalist of "travelling itself, the movement toward a distant goal" (121). This very motion counterpoints the noteworthy observation by Franklin that "Bartram reveals in his writing (even his botanizing) a curiously strong impulse toward ordermaking" (47). Both authors have identified poles within the dialectical modality of Bartram's work. The range of other comments on Bartram can be assessed by a look at Rose Marie Cutting's *John and William Bartram, William Byrd II and St. John de Crèvecoeur: A Reference Guide* (Boston, 1976), 1-35.

³⁶ *Diary*, p. 51.

tions and the Floridian account Bartram instinctively discovered that the best way to tell a wonder is to make the reader participate in the text, make the reader re-create the moment of the wonderful "curious" find. Such reader-text interaction occurs in the Floridian narrative whenever the reader's "sympathy" is evoked by the author's "silence." In this journal Bartram told his friends about the curiosities of the plants and landscape of Florida less through the scientific language of exact measurement than through a silence they had to enter, a devotional silence similar to that of Quaker meetings spent in silent receptivity and to that of Bartram's experience of solitude in the wilderness. The silence full of wonders Bartram encountered in nature became, in his Floridian narrative and for his reader-friends, a silence which "told" wonders.

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