

The World in a Book: Robert John Thornton's *Temple of Flora* (1797-1812)

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Abstract

I argue in my dissertation that Robert John Thornton's (1768?-1837) *Temple of Flora* (folio 1799-1807, quarto 1812), also entitled "The Universal Empire of Love," represents personified botanical flowers of the British Empire in a colonial microcosm where anthropomorphic plants are allegorized as Europe's others. This book was a collectible item with plates issued in a series of subscriptions, which were always bound in different combinations so that no two copies were ever the same—a book that depicts a metamorphic view of nature through a series of alterations made to the individual plates, which reflects the diversity of exotic and familiar territories in the world and the mysteries within it. Thornton chose plants, flower symbolism, and landscape backgrounds "with scenery appropriated to their subject," to encapsulate the universe as a series of botanical scenes of exotic and familiar territories of Britain's past and present, and this botanical world includes four continents of the world symbolically represented as women through the relationship between image and text, the diversity of people and naturalia within these territories, and the passage of historical and chronological time. The *Temple of Flora* is a textual space that involves strategies of possessing and knowing nature through the collection and conquest of plants that represent the colonial inhabitants of the British Empire ensconced in their territories and collected by wealthy Britons as a miniature colonial and exotic world bound between two covers.

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INTRODUCTION

A World in a Book

In 1797, the patriotic British physician and lecturer on medical botany Robert John Thornton (1768?-1837) announced the forthcoming publication of his collectible, three volume folio book with color plates, *The New Illustration of The Sexual System of Linnaeus*.¹ “The object of my work,” Thornton stated in his prospectus, “is to trace in as perspicacious a manner as possible the philosophical principles of botany from the earliest times up to the present period” to “add to the glory of the nation.”² Thornton’s interdisciplinary passions for the classics, theology, fine arts, colonial botanical medicine, natural history, and collecting are condensed into his book, and no two copies are identical, emphasizing its originality and diversity. He commissioned work from “the most eminent British artists” and poets of diverse nationalities,³ and he chose plants, flower symbolism, and landscape

¹ Robert John Thornton, *Prospectus of The New Illustration of the Sexual System of Linnaeus* (London, 1798 [1797]), 1. The folio edition, *A New Illustration of the Sexual System v.1-3* (London: T. Bensley, 1799-1810), was a project that involved at least 28 poets, at least 28 painters, and 43 engravers. I therefore call Thornton the author out of convenience rather than granting him sole authorship, even though he is the one who directed the plates. The quarto edition is entitled *The Temple of Flora: Garden of the Botanist, Poet, Painter, and Philosopher (Picturesque Botanical Plates Illustrative of the Sexual System of Carolus von Linnaeus)* (London: Dr. Thornton, 1812).

² Thornton (1798) 1-2.

³ Geoffrey Grigson and Handasyde Buchanan, *Thornton’s Temple of Flora With Plates Faithfully Reproduced From the Original Engravings* (London, Collins: 1972), 8; Anonymous, “Memorial for Robert John Thornton,” *Gentleman’s Magazine* 162 (1837): 94; a list of the artists can be found in W. Botting Hemsley and W. Frank Perkins, “Robert John Thornton M.D.,” *Gardeners’ Chronicle* v.2 (London: 41 Wellington Street, Convent Garden W.C., 1894): 89-90, 276; a full list of the 28 poets involved in this project is available online, courtesy of a curator of the Lindley

backgrounds “with scenery appropriated to their subject,” to encapsulate the universe as a series of botanical scenes of exotic and familiar territories of Britain’s past and present.⁴ Thornton intended to surpass previous illustrated botanical publications in his three-volume production, and aspired to create at least seventy collectible plates of exotic plants with landscape backgrounds in the third and final part of his book, entitled *The Temple of Flora*. This third volume, which was published with only thirty-one finished plates, is the main focus of my dissertation.⁵

I focus on the *Temple of Flora* because I am interested in botanical imagery and its relationship to literary texts. These connections are the strongest in the *Temple of Flora*, and this volume also makes explicit points about flowers as exotic commodities in a global colonial network. In Thornton’s own words, his *Temple of Flora* was a diverse botanical world. He described the *Temple of Flora* as “a Universal Empire of Love” with the “choicest flowers of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America,” which he referred to as “children of the goddess Flora.”⁶ My dissertation

Library: “Poems included in the texts of Robert Thornton’s *New Illustration of the Sexual System of Linnaeus* (1799-1807) and *Temple of Flora* (1812) with identification of the poets,” (London, Royal Horticultural Society: 2007): http://www.lindleylibrary.org.uk/docs/Thornton_poems.pdf.

⁴ F.M.G. Cardew, “Dr. Thornton and the *New Illustration*, 1799-1807,” *Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society* 72 (1942): 281-284.

⁵ George Simonds Boulger, “Robert John Thornton,” *Dictionary of National Biography* vol. 56 (1885-1900): 304; Hemsley and Perkins 89-90, 276.

⁶ Thornton (1807) unpaginated. Whenever I cite the *Temple of Flora*, the third volume of the *New Illustration*, I say that it is unpaginated. This is convention among scholars of the *Temple of Flora* because every single copy is different. I am unable to promise my reader that he or she will find the same information that I found on the same page, but in a different copy of this book.

therefore argues that the majority of flowers in his text are “personified” as “portraits” of Europe’s others.⁷ The personification of flowers in the *Temple of Flora* manifests in the relationship between regularly reworked, variable color plates of flowers that seem to lack human traits and the lively poetry and prose that consistently accompany them. The poems describe the humanity of these flowers. I will argue that Thornton’s botanical volume includes four continents of the world symbolically personified as women, the diversity of people and naturalia within these territories, and the passage of historical and chronological time.

While several authors have explored the ways in which Thornton represents each nation in the backgrounds to the plants, I wish to explore this trait more extensively and critically to propose that Thornton presents his plates and text in a sequence and form that is deliberately intended to portray a microcosm. The *Temple of Flora* is a textual space that involves strategies of possessing and knowing nature through the visual and textual collection and conquest of plants that represent a global community. The plants in Thornton’s book can be seen as synecdoches of the colonial inhabitants of the British Empire. They are represented with their native landscapes, ensconced in their territories, and collected by wealthy Britons as a miniature colonial and exotic world bound between two covers.

There is more than meets the eye in the symbolic exchange that takes place between women and flowers and landscape and territory in the *Temple of Flora*. My main point that draws this multi-themed dissertation together is that this type of visual collecting as metaphorical colonizing on a microcosmic scale can be every bit

⁷ Thornton (1807) unpaginated.

as powerful as the act of macrocosmic colonizing. Perhaps it is even more powerful in some ways, because Thornton's text is a form of beautiful, popular visual propaganda for empire building that was accessible to many audiences. Men and women from the middle to upper echelons of society, and many rulers throughout Europe read his text. Several public institutions and florist's shops also purchased copies of the *Temple of Flora*.⁸ It was a text that appealed to people of all genders and social levels.

The sweet, soft, pastel beauty of Thornton's images often sugarcoats the concepts that lie beneath their beauty, and they would hardly seem to express racial and gendered assumptions about exotic places without the text. I will investigate the specific internal tensions in images that relate to race and gender by looking at the relationships and tensions between the image and text. The racial and gendered undertones of Thornton's images only become immediately apparent through the image-text relationship, and can therefore be placed in W.J.T. Mitchell's theoretical concept of "imagetexts," in which an image is inseparable from the text and depends upon it to make meaning.⁹

⁸ Thornton (1798) 2. For a full list of specific names, see p.2 of Thornton's prospectus, and also Robert John Thornton, *March 1st, 1799, will be published, The new illustration of the sexual system of Linnaeus. By Robert John Thornton, M.D.* (London, 1799), 6-7.

⁹ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 89. To Mitchell, Image/text denotes "a rupture in representation," while an imagetext signifies a composite between image and text, an inextricable relationship, and an image-text designates "relations between the verbal and the visual."

Beyond the image/text hybrid, Thornton's book involves so many other types of epistemological hybridity beyond the sort that Mitchell describes—the woman/plant hybrid, the British/colonial landscape hybrid, the past/present hybrid, and also the “art/science” hybrid, which are the primary historiographical and methodological lenses through which I interpret the making of his microcosmic text.

The word “hybrid,” of course, has a great deal of interpretive flexibility and extremely suggestive connotations in the fields of botany, race, and gender. “Hybridity” is associated with the fields of natural history, especially botany and zoology, and literally refers to the outcome of a cross between two separate species of a plant or animal. It was also associated with taxonomies of race and the colonial subject in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁰ Some of Thornton's flowers are literally botanical hybrids, such as the China rose (*rosa chinensis*) that appears in his illustrated plate of roses.¹¹ The *rosa chinensis* was considered native to India and was known as a “Bengal rose” before it was naturalized into Europe in the early eighteenth century. It was introduced into Holland at least as early as 1704, into France by the early eighteenth century, and into England by Joseph Banks in 1789.¹² Beyond specific botanical examples of hybrids, all of the flowers in the *Temple of Flora* are also interspecific hybrids, combining traits of humans and

¹⁰ Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (N.Y.: Routledge, 1995), 1-27; Shuang Shen, *Cosmopolitan Publics: Anglophone Print Culture in Semi-Colonial Shanghai* (N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 44.

¹¹ Thanks to Mark Laird for informing me about the types of roses found in this plate and the connections to hybridity.

¹² Ernest H. Wilson, *Aristocrats of the Garden* (N.Y.: Doubleday, 1817), 4-5.

plants. Although Thornton assigns his flowers feminine genders in almost every case, in reality, many flowering plants are actually ambiguously sexed and “hermaphroditic.” This is so because they make pollen and seeds at the same time.¹³ Along with gendering these flowers, Thornton also assigns them specific cultural and racial identities in his text, even though they grow in many different locations in reality. Considering the hybridity of Thornton’s flowers ultimately led me to ask and answer questions about the often essentialist choices that Thornton made regarding race and gender. Why did Thornton frequently have the impulse to turn hybrid difference into generic sameness?¹⁴ If flowers can be “intersexual” at times, why gender most of them as women? If these flowers grow in multiple locations, why represent certain flowers with European conventions and other flowers as Asian, African, or American?

In addition to Thornton’s images being hybrid in nature, they were also collectible and variable. As a collectible subscription publication, Thornton’s *Temple of Flora* was a malleable world that could be taken apart or put together according to the reader’s whims, although Thornton’s table of contents gave the reader guidelines about how to fashion their textual world. I therefore argue that Thornton’s microcosm is indeed a “miniature counterpart” of the world around him, but also, as it is presented in volume form, one that reflects his and his readers’

¹³ Joan Roughgarden, *Evolution’s Rainbow* (Berkeley: UCLA Press, 2004), 30. Roughgarden’s definition of “hermaphroditism” is “any individual body that makes both large and small gametes at some point in life.”

¹⁴ Young 24.

desires and subjective world-view, rather than a literal one-to-one correspondence with any “real, objective world.”

Of course, one also has to examine one’s own subjective role as an author in analyzing and re-creating historical worlds. Similar to Patricia Fara’s method in her study of Erasmus Darwin and his texts on plant personification, I also challenge the assumption that the “detached, objective historian of science” can write an unbiased biography of a human being or of the texts that they produce. Fara and I also question the notion that historians can tell a linear, self-contained tale that effaces flaws, assumptions, and errors. This is not to say that we are embellishing history, or telling an insubstantial fairytale, but rather that we as historians are intent on exploring and challenging preconceived expectations.¹⁵

I therefore think it is worth mentioning that this project is an outgrowth of my own training as an art historian who transferred to the history of science. The first history of science class that I ever took at as a Ph.D. student at Harvard was entitled “Knowing the World: An Introduction to the History of Science.” This ambitiously titled class explored the idea of representing different types of world-views from the Middle Ages to the present. We compared and contrasted representations of globes and maps from the twelfth to twenty-first centuries as a reminder of how much the world and its structures of scientific knowledge changed over time. Throughout this class, it occurred to me that there was no such thing as “the world,” but that there were indeed many worlds for us to know.

¹⁵ Patricia Fara, *Erasmus Darwin: Sex, Science, and Serendipity* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1-2.

As a student with an art history background, I started to ask questions about how the power of images profoundly shape conceptions of various worlds rather than looking at images as literal, causal reflections of these changes in worldviews. Can an image shape a world, along with a world shaping an image? I also wondered about the format of microcosms. Does a microcosm have to assume the form of a map, globe, or other geographical phenomena? Could it instead be a text with microcosmic ambitions—a text that reflects and produces scientific knowledge about the world in a less literal format? Can a text become a world, rather than a world being fashioned from texts? I also wondered more about how gender and race featured in these narratives, which were mostly told from the vantage point of Caucasian male historical figures. What role does the visual have in shaping scientific and sociological attitudes about race and gender within these multifaceted worlds with a plurality of inhabitants? These are the questions that drove my research in the early stages of writing about Thornton’s microcosm, and that still inspire my work today.

Two scholars have written about the “microcosmic” aspects of Thornton’s work in passing, and I hope to build upon their keen observations to write about what it means to gather a collection of flowers into a book that represents the universe and its inhabitants. Meghan Doherty briefly refers to Thornton’s book as a “microcosm” in the introduction of her article, but she ultimately argues that the “seemingly disparate parts [of the book] present the reader with an optimistic view of the ability of the English landscape garden, and the nation of which it is a microcosm, to control the overwhelming array of products entering the metropole

as a result of imperial travel.”¹⁶ She seldom looks into the microcosmic aspects of the book itself, focusing more on English gardening and the influx of foreign plants into the British Empire. The biographer and historian Ray Desmond states that Thornton’s aspirations were similar to those of William Curtis, and that Thornton praised Curtis’ *Flora Londinensis* (1777-1778) as being “not upon a neat, diminutive, inadequate scale, but on one that was equally just, magnificent, and noble, like our Empire—one truly worthy of the British nation.”¹⁷ Desmond mentions briefly that Curtis’ statement was consistent with Thornton’s own aims, and I aim to place quotations like these in the context of Thornton’s book production.¹⁸

As I expand upon these quotes and observations about the microcosmic nature of Thornton’s work, I hope to incorporate Anke te Heesen’s theories about material objects serving as “historical sources” into my work, the idea that objects both reflect and produce cultural values and ways of knowing, ordering, and containing the world.¹⁹ As an historian of science, material culture, and of the book, Te Heesen writes about *The Picture Academy for the Young*, invented by the preacher-turned publisher Johann Sigismund Stoy in eighteenth-century Germany

¹⁶ Meghan Doherty, “Robert John Thornton’s A New Illustration: Imaging and Imagining Nation and Empire,” In *Visualizing Nature, Imagining the Unknown, Perfecting the Natural*, edited by Andrew Graciano (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 49.

¹⁷ Robert John Thornton, *Sketch of the Life and Writings of the Late William Curtis* v.3 (London, 1805), 16.

¹⁸ Ray Desmond, *Great Natural History Books and their Creators* (London: The British Library, 2003), 114.

¹⁹ Anke te Heesen, *The World in a Box: The Story of an Eighteenth-Century Picture Encyclopedia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 8-9.

as “a box that contained the world.” Stoy, unlike Thornton, never explicitly referred to his box in microcosmic terms, but he attempted to collect and organize “everything” into its organizational contours.²⁰ Te Heesen’s “box,” unlike my “book,” was an educational experience for children involving stories about myth, religion, and nature, rather than a botanical book engaging with the topic with plant sexuality for adult readers. Her concept of “the world” as an inclusive collection of diverse educational topics also differs from mine, since I examine this concept more literally (but perhaps more precisely) in Thornton’s own words to refer to the four continents of the world, the diversity of people and naturalia within these territories, and the passage of historical and chronological time.

Colonial imagery in connection with global natural history has been investigated extensively by Daniela Bleichmar, Dian Kriz, Bernard Smith, Claudia Swan, Londa Schiebinger, Barbara Stafford, Patricia Fara, Beth Tobin, Tim Fulford and Peter Kitson.²¹ James Delbourgo is currently writing a book about Sir Hans

²⁰ Te Heesen begins her explanation of Stoy’s work by stating that he wanted to depict and compartmentalize “everything,” and that “everything was the world.” The last phrase (everything was the world) is Te Heesen’s interpretation rather than Stoy’s own words. She also mentions that Stoy never used the word Weltkasten (world box) to describe his book, which seems more like an encyclopedia in box-form to me. Te Heesen 3-5.

²¹ Daniela Bleichmar, “Painting as Exploration: Visualizing Nature in 18th-Century Colonial Science,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 15 (2006): 81-104; Kriz (2000); Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific: A Study in the History of Art and Ideas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960); Claudia Swan and Londa Schiebinger (editors), *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce, and Politics in the Early Modern World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Schiebinger (2004); Barbara Stafford, *Voyage into Substance: Art, Science, Nature, and the Illustrated Travel Account, 1760-1840* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984); Fara (2004); Tobin (1996), Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Colonizing Nature: The Tropics in British Art and Letters* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Tobin, *Picturing*

Sloane, which explores early modern collecting as a function of global travel and cross-cultural exchange in the British Museum. In Delbourgo's forthcoming account, the collecting is almost always museum-based.

I hope to add the significance of the visual to this narrative, and to make the question of collecting empires less literal and more metaphorical. My interests are literary rather than literal. I take questions of collection and colonialism out of expected, conventional spaces such as museums and I bring it instead into the unexpected realms of books. Is the collection of realistically rendered, exotic or colonial flora and fauna specimens in a book the same thing as collecting flora and fauna in a museum? Does collecting in museums follow the same logic as collecting pages of a book? I argue that while there is a great deal of similarity in the logic of collecting images for a book and objects for a museum, the text is a more private space for erotic longing and imperial fantasies with greater opportunities for interplay between image and text.

Although many of the aforementioned authors investigate the representation of colonial plants, the collection of colonial plants in a global context, and sometimes even personified plants, I will add the allegory of the four continents to this story, an early modern concept that is associated with the history of collecting and colonialism, but seldom with personified plants. Patricia Fara begins to look at ways of classifying colonial subjects according to four sets of properties, which in the

Imperial Power: Colonial Subjects in Eighteenth-Century British Painting (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Tim Fulford and Peter Kitson, *Literature, Science and Exploration in the Romantic Era: Bodies of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

eighteenth century involved subsistence or climactic theories that were largely Hippocratic or Aristotelian in nature—involving the four elements, four humors, and four continents. These properties frequently governed the collection and arrangement of objects in museums, and also play a role in Thornton’s text.²² Still, Fara’s analysis involves people much more than plants, and I hope to unite the two fields using both colonial theories of images and visual culture. I build on texts about the visual culture of early modern colonial subjects especially by Dian Kriz, Michael Jacobs, and Linda Nochlin to explore issues of the ownership and possession of women’s bodies in art collecting.²³ In many ways, collecting allegorical figures of women became a way to possess parts of the world, frequently gendered as a feminine and irrational space ripe for conquest as compared to the masculine, rational, domineering “West.”²⁴ Colonialism and “Orientalism” were often discussed in terms of discovery and exploring new and fertile territory through rape, destruction, domination, and possession.

I am building on postcolonial sources such as Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, and offshoots of his text. Many scholars have greatly expanded upon this classic text, but

²² Fara 96-126.

²³ Kriz (2000); Dian Kriz, *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement: Picturing the British West Indies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Dian Kriz (editor), *An Economy of Color: Visual Culture and the Atlantic World* (N.Y.: Manchester University Press, 2003); Michael Jacobs, *The Painted Voyage: Art, Travel, and Exploration* (London: British Museum Press, 1995); Linda Nochlin (editor), “The Imaginary Orient,” in *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1989), 33-59.

²⁴ Claire Le Corbellier, “Miss America and her Sisters: Personifications of the Four Parts of the World,” *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 19 (1961): 209-223.

Said first gave the term “Orientalism” a distinctly critical edge. Thornton’s book is never considered in connection with postcolonial literature. I will use it to interrogate the way that colonial powers operated, maintained their legitimacy, and rationalized contradictions through printed images of flowers personified as colonial or exotic territories, which embody the relationships that Britain had with colonized people and resources. As a tenuous boundary between collectible exotic flowers and Europe’s objectified others becomes increasingly blurry, the stance of imperial Britain sharpens and comes into clear focus.

Said investigated the historical and rational circumstances surrounding the fabrication of the Near East as an anti-rationalist, anti-modern, anti-humanist, and semi-barbaric antithesis of European modernity as Europe’s other and anterior.²⁵ He presents Orientalism as a product of unchanging racial or cultural essences, which are constructed by the West as their polar opposite (feminine vs. masculine, passive vs. active, static vs. mobile, emotional vs. rational) and the Oriental other is defined by this series of absences. Essentialism, otherness, and absence allow the colonial world to be mastered, and this mastery in turn reinforces these defining features. As with terms such as “Primitivism,” or “Romanticism,” which are ahistorical categories seldom used by historical actors, it is important not to essentialize the concept of Orientalism itself, but to stress that it is a colonizing European construction.²⁶

²⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1978), “Introduction,” 1-29.

²⁶ Said 25-27.

Still, Said rejects the notion that Orientalism and the Orient are a collection of lies or myths that would collapse in the face of some grand “Truth,” because they are very real bodies of theory and practice explicitly or implicitly accepted by the “West.” Said detests the pretension to this sort of impartial truth in an historical sense, and the idea that a scholar can detach himself or herself from the preconceptions of the present world to become an objective historian of the colonies. We must be acutely aware of the preconceptions that we bring to the table and actively challenge our assumptions.²⁷ This is especially so because everyone who writes about the Orient must situate himself or herself relative to it in the “citationary” aspects of Orientalism, in which texts and images continuously refer to one another in a web of authority. As I situate Thornton’s prints in their visual and cultural contexts, it is important to establish the individual aspects of materials and viewpoints within this tangled mass of sources, to look at what he calls the author’s strategic location (the author’s position in a text with regard to the Orientalist material he or she writes about) and the strategic formulation (the way of analyzing relationships between texts and the way that these texts acquire mass, density, and referential power among themselves and in the culture at large).²⁸ His concern with authorship and authority relies on the exteriority of the text, just as prejudicial concepts of Orientalism are all too often premised on exteriority, the notion that an artist or writer can make the mysteries of the Orient plain and visible to a Western audience, using techniques that purport to make the “Orient” clear, visible, and

²⁷ Said 21-22.

²⁸ Said 19-20.

transparent. Said suggests that we examine the conventions utilized in creating such “authentic works” rather than accepting their purported authenticity at face value.

Beyond interrogating the authenticity of Orientalism, I shall also explore Homi Bhabha’s work on hybridity in “Signs Taken for Wonders,” to explore the ambivalence of colonialism in the history of the English book as an emblem of colonial rule, desire and discipline, but also one that has the potential to subvert the dominant hierarchy, if only unintentionally. Bhabha argues that the colonial subject mimics the form of the dominant culture, yet there are slippages and excesses of meaning.²⁹ That is to say, telling differences arise between their product and that of the dominant culture that subversively weakens and deforms the dominant cultural authority. Hybridity itself encourages many readings and is quite interpretive by its very nature. It discourages a unilateral reading, exemplifying the notion of culture as a collective identity, always in flux.

As mentioned before, a great deal of my methodology involves the rich hybridity of “art and science,” in broad and specific contexts. In the specific context of the *Temple of Flora*, several historians of science use parts of this book as part of a larger argument about Linnaeus and Erasmus Darwin, colonial botany, or plant personification, and therefore de-emphasize the visual aspects of Thornton’s work, although they do not ignore them altogether.³⁰ The literary scholar Clive Bush also

²⁹ Homi Bhabha, “Signs Taken For Wonders,” In *The Location of Culture* (N.Y.: Routledge, 1994), 155-156.

³⁰ Browne (1989); Schiebinger (2004, 1996, and 1991); Tobin (2005).

discusses the images, but is much more interested in the sexual poetry.³¹ Three art historians have examined the art and science relationships in the *Temple of Flora* in book chapters and articles: Martin Kemp, Charlotte Klonk, and Meghan Doherty.³² Kemp and Klonk focus mainly on art and science, and Doherty on empire.

Klonk situates Thornton's work within "the eighteenth century rather than the nineteenth, favoring muted colors and generalising approaches."³³ She also places the *Temple of Flora* within the categories of the sublime, the picturesque, and the beautiful in landscape painting, which originated in the eighteenth century, focusing primarily on aesthetics of British landscape and the arraying of nature. Using Adrian Johns' work about textual instability in *The Nature of the Book* and Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* as inspiration, I continue Klonk's work on the epistemic underpinnings of Thornton's images apart from aesthetic categories. I further explore their variable arrangement, the ways that variable images produce natural knowledge, and to further integrate the theoretical and historical topographies of voyaging and Linnaean botany into Klonk's much more visually oriented botanical topographies.³⁴ I also hope to enlarge the scope of her analysis of *Temple of Flora* by comparing and contrasting numerous portraits of male botanists,

³¹ Clive Bush, "Erasmus Darwin, Robert John Thornton, and Linnaeus's Sexual System." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 7 (1974): 295-320.

³² Klonk; Doherty 49-81; Kemp (1996 and 2000).

³³ Klonk 49.

³⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: The Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (N.Y.: Pantheon Books, 1971); Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

including Linnaeus in his Lapland garb, with feminized images of flowers and the goddess Flora.

Martin Kemp touches upon gender, although he focuses on antique sources in botany, both in terms of aesthetics and issues of floral allegory and personification. Kemp discusses the role of women in botany, stating that before the eighteenth century, “one of the conspicuous subplots shared by such stories of art and books on botany is the regular association of the cult of plants with the role of women,” including examples such as Flora, Pomona, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and enclosed gardens as symbols of the Virgin Mary, gardening as an outlet for women’s creativity in which pleasure and utility coalesce, and expeditions undertaken by women such as Maria Sibylla Merian and her daughters.³⁵ I would like to expand upon Kemp’s work on gender to critically explore and focus on the concept of personified flowers as women rather than women as authors, readers, or mythological figures. While exploring botany as a feminine pursuit, Kemp also insists that the Temple of Flora is ultimately a masculine expression of colonial botany, a “call into the wild” that became “a national work.”³⁶ I would like to explore the feminine side of this masculine endeavor, making space for female readers and subjects of botanical inquiry in the *Temple of Flora* itself.

In this project, I would also like to problematize beauty and aesthetics to a greater extent than Doherty and Kemp do, especially in light of gender and race.

³⁵ Martin Kemp, “Implanted in our Natures: Humans, Plants, and the Stories of Art,” In *Visions of Empire: Voyages, Botany, and Representations of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 212-214.

³⁶ Kemp 214.

Thornton's botanical imagery can be blindingly beautiful. Doherty states outright in her introduction that: "The lasting impression upon viewing this book is how beautiful it is. Its beauty acts as a unifier and brings together seemingly opposed modes of representation and ways of encountering nature."³⁷ I will argue instead that beauty often masks rather than makes meaning in issues of race and gender in the *Temple of Flora*, and is a tense rather than "unifying" aesthetic property that is inconsistently rather than "generally" applied in images and texts.

Although I strive for an in-depth analysis of images, it will be impossible to attain this without analysis of their surface. Many art historians focus on surfaces in a way that lacks superficiality, and they have also engaged in work that integrates art history and the history of science.³⁸ In fact, surface often contains great depth

³⁷ Doherty 50.

³⁸ Although there are too many historians of science who do this to name them all, a few excellent examples of this trend are Michael Lynch and Steve Woolgar, Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, Norton Wise, Pamela Smith, Iwan Rhys Morus, Martin Rudwick, Ludmilla Jordanova, Jonathan Smith, Jimena Canales, and Janet Browne's work on visual culture pertaining to Darwin. Michael Lynch and Steve Woolgar, *Representation in Scientific Practice* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988); Peter Galison, *Image and Logic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Galison, *Picturing Science, Producing Art* (N.Y.: Routledge, 1998); Galison and Daston, *Things That Talk: Object Lessons From Art and Science* (N.Y: Zone Books, 2004); Norton Wise, "Making Visible," Special Focus Section on Science and Visual Culture in *Isis* 97 (2006): 75-82; Martin J.S. Rudwick, "The Emergence of a Visual Language for Geological Science 1760-1840," *History of Science* 14 (1976): 149-195; Rudwick; "Cuvier's Paper Museum of Fossil Bones;" *Archives of Natural History* 27 (2000): 51-68; Janet Browne. "Darwin and the face of Madness" in W.F. Bynum and Roy Porter, eds., *The Anatomy of Madness* (2 vols. London: Tavistock, 1985), vol. 1, pp. 151-165; Browne, "Darwin in Caricature: A Study in the Popularization and Dissemination of Evolution," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 145 (2001): 496-509; Jimena Canales, "Criminal Skins: Tattoos and Modern Architecture in the Work of Adolf Loos," *Architectural History* 48 (2005): 235-256; Jonathan Smith, *Charles Darwin and Victorian Visual Culture* (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2006);

and meaning, and it can be inscribed with profound sociocultural connotations. To use an anatomical metaphor, an image can be intellectually dissected to find the inner structures and strategies of knowledge production within. Barbara Maria Stafford is the best example of an art historian who critically explores the tensions between surface and depth, presenting the Enlightenment as a time period with a type of Platonic aesthetic—there was a desire to see beneath the surface of things into depth, with metaphor mediating between the layers of surface and depth to describe what was being experienced. At the same time, there was a vogue for putting things thought to be invisible on conspicuous display.³⁹ My dissertation addresses similar issues of surface and depth and continues to implicitly ask the following questions: What distinguishes the way that historians of science have looked at and employed images relative to art historians? What is currently the place of historians of science in the field of images?

In continuing to ask these questions, there are many lessons for us to remember in the art and science relationship. A recent focus section about the dynamic between art and science in *Isis* (2006) with contributions from Norton Wise, Pamela Smith, Iwan Rhys Morus, Jennifer Tucker, and Hannah Landecker best sums up the accomplishments and problems found in art/science relationships as it

Ludmilla Jordanova, *Nature Displayed: Gender, Science, and Medicine 1760-1820* (N.Y.: Longman, 1999).

³⁹ Barbara Maria Stafford, *Body Criticism* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1991), 1-40, especially pages 38-40.

pertains to my topic.⁴⁰ Wise argues that art and science have been overly polarized and separated, and that we must continue to look at the intersections of art and science to understand them, stressing that images must be understood as visual arguments rather than superficial decorations, and the necessity of uniting the senses and intellect. He uses Alexander von Humboldt and the way that he used exploration and scientific instruments to extend his perception and cognition as an example of how we ourselves should explore art and science relationships. While describing the vast array of objects in art and science, he identifies some important issues. The first issue involves trust and depth, and the unfortunate idea that images are only granted value insofar as they are associated with text or “making knowledge.” Images on their own have been perceived as deceiving the senses or as weak or superficial ways to illuminate the surface of things as opposed to looking at deeper epistemic structures. Second, the idea of making images involves the concept of making them “real.” This process involves rendering pictures of things thought to be invisible in order to bring them into being, such as physical sensations, or the unseen aspects of the body.⁴¹ These are extremely problematic issues that I will continue to explore as I engage with the intersections of art and science—two fields that can be perceived as discrete but overlapping entities. Hopefully, I will be able to use my double training in art history and the history of science to focus on the best aspects of both disciplines.

⁴⁰ Norton Wise, “Making Visible,” Special Focus Section on Science and Visual Culture in *Isis* 97 (2006): 75-82.

⁴¹ Wise 75-82.

I have organized this dissertation into four chapters, with themes that have intrigued the authors of microcosms at least since C.S. Lewis' *The Discarded Image*.⁴² Lewis frequently asks questions about the identities and roles of authors, rulers, and inhabitants of each microcosm, and to what extent to the types of inhabitants differ. Lewis also questions if animal, human, and vegetable souls ever overlap and exchange form. He answers this question in the affirmative, just as I do.

Along with the primary theme of the interchange of human and botanical bodies in a global, imperial, commercial context, time is a recurrent theme. I frequently ask how time is strategically deployed by Thornton to create the history of his miniature world. Each chapter deals with a different sense of time that creates a chronological space in this book, from the ancient world to the present. This book also plays with temporality in a fanciful way, however. Chapter one deals with historical time, and describes Thornton's sociocultural world—his life and work, his classical, botanical, medical, and artistic knowledge, and I will also give a synopsis of the plates and publishing history, as well as setting out my historiography and methodology. While Thornton's biography and the history of his book's production have been discussed as a series of factual details, few critical interpretations of his life and work exist. First, I will place Thornton within an intellectual network of friends and colleagues who influenced his book (including famous figures such as Erasmus Darwin and William and Samuel Curtis).⁴³ I will especially discuss aspects of his biography that emphasize his interdisciplinarity—his fascination with the

⁴² C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

⁴³ Desmond (2003) 114; Blunt and Stearn (1994) 242.

classics, the fine arts, his collection of diverse naturalia at a very young age, as well as his engagement with botanical medicine as an adolescent and adult. Second, I describe the production and reception of his book, which is interconnected with the history of collection and display of nature, since Thornton advertised his prints in galleries surrounded by real naturalia.⁴⁴ Third, I briefly discuss the mutability of his botanical plates and their collectible nature against this biographical and historical framework, since many aspects of Thornton's lavish folio text are inseparable from his historical context and biography and are best viewed through these lenses.

The second chapter investigates transhistorical time and Thornton's simultaneous use of ancient sources and role models alongside modern botanical authority figures. The revitalization of ancient sources was commonplace in the eighteenth century, but has never been thoroughly investigated in Thornton's work.⁴⁵ As mentioned, Thornton frequently included ancient sources, such as Ovid, Theophrastus, Pliny, and especially Dioscorides.⁴⁶ In analyzing Thornton's use of contemporary and ancient sources, I explore the way that he conflates historical

⁴⁴ Richard Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 109.

⁴⁵ The literature on "the ancients and the moderns" in the eighteenth century is immense, but virtually non-existent as it pertains to Thornton's work, although Martin Kemp briefly discusses the use of ancient sources in botany and includes Thornton. Martin Kemp, "Implanted in our Natures: Humans, Plants, and the Stories of Art," In *Visions of Empire: Voyages, Botany, and Representations of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 212-214. To assist with writing this chapter, I am especially interested in reading more of the recent literature on the relationship between empire and antiquity, such as Mark Bradley, *Classics and Imperialism in the British Empire* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁴⁶ Thornton (1807) unpaginated.

time periods, as he depicts famous botanical figures from the past and present harmoniously co-existing, and introduces Linnaeus into this canon of botanical Olympians to immortalize him as a god.⁴⁷

Chapter three investigates the production of Thornton's textual empire of flowers, in which no two copies are identical and are subject to variation between various states of the plates. I will argue that the collectible and ever-changing nature of Thornton's book, in which plates were frequently altered, sold individually, and bound together in numerous combinations, also suggests the incredible natural diversity, originality, and textual instability embedded in this enterprise of depicting an ever-evolving, metamorphic world, if not the instability felt around the contested colonies. These flowers were subject to alteration between various editions of prints, the metamorphic changes found in the natural world, the natural cycle of the seasons through changes to landscape, animal or floral companions that appear and disappear between different copies of plates, and flowers blossoming between editions of prints. I will trace these alterations, exploring the natural diversity in Thornton's imperial world of flowers by examining the various additions of details that depict the cycles of nature over time.⁴⁸

Chapter four deals with geographical and ethnographic time. I look at the

⁴⁷ Thornton (1807) unpaginated.

⁴⁸ My research on these additions is based on two different lists of the changes made to the plates over time, as well as my own experiences with this book. Two sources that are especially useful in tracing the changes between plates are Buchanan 61-66 and Gordon Dunthorne, *Flower and Fruit Prints of the 18th and Early 19th Centuries: Their History, Makers, and Uses, with a Catalogue Raisonne of the Works in which they are Found* (1938; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1970), 243-256.

elision between the plants depicted in the *Temple of Flora* and the countries that they came from, similar to the woman-continent overlap in allegorical figures of Asia, America, and Africa, in which depictions of symbolic female figures refer to the four continents, which both reflect and produce the social order. I will compare and contrast Thornton's portraits of plants with images that allegorically represent the four continents, as well as prints and oil paintings from European colonial voyages. The unrestrained sexuality of Africa and America in these representations signified fertile abundance in the service of Europe, providing her with goods that remained uncultivated on their own territory, but that would flourish through Europe's intervention, ideas that are also prevalent in the *Temple of Flora*.⁴⁹ In assessing Thornton's imagery, I address issues of placement and displacement in many ways. One strand that weaves its way throughout this chapter involves the strategic positioning of colonial plants in European landscapes rendered in European pictorial styles, a convention that is consistently adopted in the *Temple of Flora*.⁵⁰ The other strand is concerned with the selective placement and displacement of sexuality in the book itself, in terms of the way in which it renders the colonial specimens from Africa, America, and the Caribbean as hypersexual, fertile, and abundant plants that are openly available and ripe for European cultivation.

In this narrative, I explore the reception as well as the production of Thornton's book whenever possible. This has barely been accomplished because his

⁴⁹ Le Corbellier 209-223; Elisabeth Neumann, "Imagining European Community on the Title Page of Ortelius's *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* 1570," *Word and Image* 25 (2009): 427-442.

⁵⁰ Klonk 37.

book is all too often perceived as a “failure.” This is so because Thornton spent his entire family fortune on the production of this book, and it never turned a profit. He died a pauper.⁵¹ Without glorifying this book as a success story, it is still important to note that this failure was financial and not cultural, since Thornton’s *Temple of Flora* directly impacted several authors, who fashioned their own botanical microcosms in response to his.⁵² *The Temple of Flora* therefore flourished culturally beyond the year 1812 despite the financial ruin of its author. The cultural afterlife of this book, in which foreign people, their countries, and resources are continually translated into collectible plates of flowers consumed by wealthy Britons, suggests the unfortunate success of botanical objectification. Objectification assumes hybrid forms in the *Temple of Flora* and many of its followers, achieved through the combined aesthetics of image and text. The rich hybridity of Thornton’s imagery, with its permeable boundaries between past and present, as well as women, plants, and their native territories, extends past scholarship about art/science and image/text hybrids. Thornton’s mixture of botany and art, word and image becomes a vehicle to convey the aforementioned varieties of epistemic hybridity, which have been understudied in favor of large, anachronistic categories like “art and science” to understand Thornton’s aims. The peripheral varieties of epistemological hybridity as they pertain to Europe’s others become central to my study of visual

⁵¹ Desmond 119.

⁵² One example of this (among many) is a book written by Thornton’s friend, Samuel Curtis, *Beauties of Flora* (London: Samuel Curtis, Gamston, Notts: 1820). This book and its connection to *Thornton’s Temple of Flora* are mentioned in James Britten, “Samuel Curtis’s *Beauties of Flora*,” *Journal of Botany, Both British and Foreign* 37 (1899): 183-184.

and textual manifestations of alterity as I trace their production and reception alongside the *Temple of Flora*.

CHAPTER 1

The World of Robert John Thornton

This chapter provides the historical and biographical context for Robert John Thornton and his *Temple of Flora*. My biographical history of Thornton and his book is primarily thematic, but I try to maintain a sense of chronological order whenever possible. I describe Thornton's sociocultural world—his life and work, and his classical, botanical, medical, and artistic knowledge, and I will also give a synopsis of the plates and publishing history, as well as setting out my historiography and methodology. After describing my methodology, I briefly discuss the political context that surrounded Thornton. Then, I discuss aspects of Thornton's biography that emphasize his interdisciplinarity—his fascination with the classics, the fine arts, his collection of diverse naturalia at a very young age, as well as his engagement with botanical medicine as an adolescent and adult. Next, I discuss the production of Thornton's *Temple of Flora*. I situate Thornton within traditions established by Erasmus Darwin and William and Samuel Curtis, his main influences besides Linnaeus, who will be discussed extensively in Chapter two. I also describe locations where Thornton worked, such as Guy's Hospital and Kew Gardens. When investigating these sites of knowledge and botanical authority figures, I simultaneously give a biographical history of the *Temple of Flora*, exploring the idea that objects have biographical as well as material histories.

My work is premised on the concept that sites of scientific knowledge can have a biographical history that informs their inhabitants. This is an offshoot of Janet Browne's work on Charles Darwin and the way that his sites of knowledge

shaped his biography.¹ I also explore the possibility that objects have biographies along with their creators, a concept explored by Lorraine Daston.² I consider Thornton's *Flora* as an object that has its own history and life. I also entertain the notion of Thornton and his colleagues as the subjects of portraiture who are reified—and in some cases even deified—as objects of botanical reverence in a series of prints in the *Temple of Flora*. These figures are consistently depicted in a sculptural, bust-length format, with locations and objects associated with each individual placed below the portrait. This iconographic strategy firmly links each botanical figure with objects and places of scientific inquiry.

In this way, I am also inspired by those who work on portraiture and other illustrative records as a form of visual biography that traces and records the life of figures such as Charles Darwin. Browne specifically looks at the relationship between Darwin's private life and public caricature. Darwin's outward persona drew upon the subtle tension between public and private, and these boundaries were blurred by the ritual of Darwin "showing himself in the flesh" at home to visitors or even on more public occasions. The idea of celebrities displaying their bodies becomes important, in order to confirm the reality of a mythical or star-like persona. While Darwin clearly had some degree of control over the public display of his body as a celebrity (in terms of when and where he chose to present himself in

¹ Janet Browne, *Charles Darwin, A Biography; v.2. The Power of Place* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

² Lorraine Daston (ed.), *Biographies of Scientific Objects* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

person), representations of his body as an ape in caricatures created an alternative public persona that was out of his control.³

Recent work on scientific portraiture has also been inspirational, especially ideas about what made scientists—and portraits of them— unique and special as their own social and cultural category. Scientific specialization in fields could be perceived in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries in portraits with props or settings that indicate a certain degree of expertise.⁴ This is certainly the case in Thornton's *Flora*, which spans the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Therefore, my biographical historiography involving the intertwined histories of objects and people is hardly innovative, but applying these well-established frameworks to illustrate Thornton's life still involves a certain degree of originality. This is so because Thornton's biography and the material history of his book's production have previously been discussed as a timeline of sequential events. The facts of his life are dispersed in various primary and secondary sources and it has been somewhat difficult to collect and interpret them. There has been an unfortunate lack of interpretation in brief accounts of Thornton's life. No critical interpretations of his life and work exist, and those that do largely disregard the visual as a significant form of biographical inquiry.⁵

³ Janet Browne, "Charles Darwin as a Celebrity," *Science in Context* 16 (2003), 175-194.

⁴ Ludmilla Jordanova, *Defining Features: Scientific and Medical Portraits 1660-2000* (London: Reaktion, 2000).

⁵ There are three major secondary sources specifically devoted to a factual discussion of Thornton's life and work. They are mostly descriptions of his life that read like a straightforward timeline with little interpretation. They are all brief

Botanical Microcosms: The Political Context of *The Temple of Flora*

In order to connect Thornton's biography with the wider world in which he lived, I turn to an apologetically brief discussion of the reign of King George III and Queen Charlotte, the effects of the French Revolution in Britain, especially the Burke-Paine Controversy and the Suppression of the Press. Although it is impossible to give a thorough, comprehensive account of every war and political trend, I hope to narrow the field to direct the reader's attention towards a few major political trends that are relevant to botany, book history, and the *Temple of Flora*. Throughout these discussions, I intend to focus on how and why historical details of Britain's political landscape impacted the growing and increasingly global field of botany and Thornton's *Flora*.

'Farmer George and the Queen Flower': The Reign of King George III and Queen Charlotte

Thornton dedicated his book to Queen Charlotte, whom he described as a "gracious majesty, bright example of conjugal fidelity and maternal tenderness, patroness of Botany and the Fine Arts," and the "best of Queens." The dedication page also calls attention to King George III as "an august King," and he describes the

introductory essays followed by an aesthetic description of the plates. In some ways this connects his life and work, but not critically. They are as follows: Werner Dressendorfer, *The Temple of Flora: An Essay and Descriptions of Plates* (Koln: Taschen, 2008); Ronald King, *The Temple of Flora, With an Introduction by Ronald King* (Boston: N.Y. Graphic Society, 1981); Grigson and Buchanan. There is another valuable secondary source that describes his early life in greater detail in places. This is Temma Berg's *Life and Letters of an Eighteenth-Century Circle of Acquaintance* (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2006). Of course, there are also many primary sources, such as articles in periodicals and obituaries that provide us with evidence about Thornton's life, which I cite throughout this chapter.

royal couple as offering “unbounded protection” to Britain.⁶ George III (1738-1820) ascended to the throne in 1760 and he reigned for fifty-nine years. In 1761, he married the Duchess Sophia Charlotte of Mecklenberg-Strelitz in North Germany, who became Queen Charlotte (1744-1818). They had fifteen children, and thirteen survived.

King George III was known for his beauty and politeness, and also as a patron of the arts, sciences, music, and literature, supporting the Royal Academy of Art and the Royal Society.⁷ He was immensely interested in agriculture and improving the British landscape, as well as expanding Kew Gardens, which earned him the nickname of “Farmer George.” This nickname was somewhat derisive, however, because it indicated mundane interests in the face of political turmoil.⁸

Nevertheless, George III greatly expanded Kew Gardens up to 11,000 botanical specimens in 1813 from 5,500 in 1789, as reported in William Aiton’s *Hortus Kewensis* of 1789.⁹ George appointed Joseph Banks (1743-1820) as unofficial director of the Royal Gardens in 1773. In the same year, Banks named the South African Queen Flower (*Strelitzia reginae*) after Queen Charlotte and began to

⁶ Thornton (1807) dedication page.

⁷ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation* (London: Pimlico, 2003), 206-207; Vincent Carretta, *George III and Satirists from Hogarth to Byron* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 41.

⁸ Carretta 92.

⁹ Richard Drayton, *Nature’s Government* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 25-127.

cultivate it at the Kew.¹⁰ Queen Charlotte had a strong interest in botany since her childhood, and in 1797 she purchased the Kew Manor and grounds for personal use.

¹¹ Queen Charlotte avidly collected exotica throughout her adulthood and also helped to establish Kew Gardens in London as a locale recognized for encompassing the botanical world as an expression of imperial power, a true repository for rare plants found around the globe.¹²

Prompted by King George III and Queen Charlotte, Banks hired many plant collectors to bring back specimens from around the world. A few notable examples of Kew “plant hunters” are Francis Masson (1741-1805), who was the first of the Kew’s designated plant collectors. In 1772 he sailed with Cook’s second expedition

¹⁰ Nicolette Scourse, *The Victorians and their Flowers* (London: Timber Press, 1983), 2; Louise Frost and Alistair Griffiths, *Plants of Eden* (Cornwall: Alison Hodge Publishers, 2001), entry for *Strelitzia reginae*. 24-26; Sir Joseph Banks (comp. and ed. By Neil Chambers), *The Letters of Sir Joseph Banks, A Selection, 1768-1820* (London: Imperial College Press, 2000), 107, fn. 7; Joseph Banks in Edward Riou (comp. and ed. by M.D. Nash), *The Voyage of the Guardian, Lieutenant Riou, Commander, 1789-1791* (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1990), 221, fn. 2.

¹¹ Harvey Eugene Lehman, *The Lives of England’s Reigning and Consort Queens* (Bloomington, Indiana: AuthorHouse, 2011), 561.

¹² Judith Pascoe, “Queen Charlotte: Collector and Collectible,” In *The Hummingbird Cabinet: A Rare and Curious History of Romantic Collectors* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 70; The idea of the Kew Gardens as the center of a botanical empire is a relatively common idea that has been discussed most extensively by Richard Harry Drayton, *Nature’s Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the ‘Improvement’ of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), especially chapter 1, “A World in a Garden,” pp. 3-25. See also Ray Desmond, *Kew: A History of the Royal Botanic Gardens* (London: Harvill Press, 1995), especially 302-321, “The Botanical Metropolis of the World.” For an explanation of the types of exotica collected by Queen Charlotte, especially her enthusiasm for “exotic” clothing, accessories, and decoration, see Jane Roberts (ed.), *George III and Queen Charlotte: Patronage, Collecting, and Court Taste* (London: Royal Collection enterprises Ltd, 2004), 164-165.

to the Cape of Good Hope finding 500 new species of plants, and then spent the rest of his life collecting in the Canary Islands and Madeira, South Africa again, the West Indies, and Canada, where he died.¹³ Robert Brown (1773-1858) along with his illustrator Ferdinand Bauer (1760-1826) and the gardener Peter Good (unknown-1803) were yet another team that collected specimens for Banks. In the year 1801, this team set sail to collect at least 3,400 items from Australia, the Desertas Islands (a small Portuguese archipelago), Madeira, and the Cape of Good Hope. Banks instructed Good to collect live plants and seeds for the Kew, but both Good and Bauer were under Brown's direction.¹⁴ George Caley (1770-1829), James Bowie (1796-1836) and Allan Cunningham (1791-1839) were also sent out as collectors. Cunningham and Bowie went to Brazil between 1814 and 1816 to collect specimens for Kew Gardens, but Cunningham also traveled more extensively to Australia after 1816, and so did Caley, who was appointed the curator of the botanic gardens in St. Vincent in the West Indies.¹⁵ During the reign of George III, Kew Gardens became a site of central importance for the accumulation and transfer of botanical specimens on a global scale.

Political Contexts: The Seven Years War, The French Revolution, The Burke-Paine Controversy, and "Nature's Laws"

¹³ Allen Paterson, *The Gardens at Kew* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2008), 123.

¹⁴ Greg Keighery and Neil Gibson, "The Influence of Robert Brown on Western Australian Botany," *Australian Garden History* 14 (2002), 5-8.

¹⁵ Drayton 125; William Jackson Bean and William Turner Chiselton-Dyer, *The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew: Historical and Descriptive* (N.Y.: Cassell and Co., 1908), 18-25.

It would be an understatement to say that Thornton's *Flora* was produced during a time of intense warfare and strife. King George III began his ascension in 1760 with an environment of political instability because of the Seven Years War (1756-1763), a massive joint colonial/continental war that Britain fought primarily with France. There was widespread concern and numerous disagreements about reforming the workings of empire and a great necessity to resolve the accumulated debts of war.¹⁶ The war was brought to an end with two separate peace treaties, which arguably helped to make Britain into a more substantial colonial power. One treaty was the Treaty of Hubertusberg, signed on February 15, 1763, resolving conflicts between Austria and Prussia. George III appointed Lord Bute as Prime Minister in 1762 to negotiate the Treaty of Paris, which was signed on February 10, 1763, and meted out colonial territories between England and France. Britain was granted Canada, Cape Breton Island, Newfoundland, the Ohio River Valley, and all the land to the East of the Mississippi River, all of New France (except for St. Pierre and Miquelon, which were retained by the French), the Carnatic and Bengal regions of India, Minorca, and Senegal. France also agreed to evacuate all of the German territories of George III and his allies.¹⁷

Beyond the Seven Years War and the French Revolution (1789-1799), the major wars that occurred during late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and impacted Britain the most were: the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), the

¹⁶ Jeremy Black, *George III: America's Last King* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 210.

¹⁷ Daniel Marston, *The Seven Years War* (N.Y.: Routledge, 2012), 77.

French Revolutionary Wars (1792-1802), and the Napoleonic Wars (1799-1815). In her masterful study *Britons: Forging the Nation*, Linda Colley contends that these ongoing wars and the loss of the thirteen American colonies in 1783 led to a consolidation of national identity, aspirations to increase the wealth and scope of their empire, and the expansion of imperial interests around the globe, to be further discussed in Chapter three. In the half-century after the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), there was for the most part a more consciously and officially self-constructed patriotism in Britain which stressed attachment to the monarchy. Meghan Doherty argues that this strand of thought is readily visible in the *Temple of Flora*. Doherty, building on Colley's work, argues that Thornton's book is a nationalistic project tied to forming a British national identity, and called it "a material representation of an imagined solution to the problem of incorporating the vast empire into the notion of "Britishness."¹⁸

Even though there was a consolidation of British identity, there were still many controversies and also political divisions in England due to the French Revolution. The ensuing Burke-Paine Controversy was probably one of the biggest controversies sparked by the French Revolution. The Burke-Paine, or "Revolution" Controversy began with the dawn of French Revolution and ended with the government introducing measures to stop the spread of radicalism in the printed and spoken word.¹⁹ George III issued a proclamation on June 1, 1787 that called for

¹⁸ Doherty 52; Colley 143-145, 148-149.

¹⁹ Marilyn Butler, *Burke, Paine, Godwin, and the Revolution Controversy* (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1.

“the encouragement of piety and virtue,” and for the “preventing and punishing of vice, profaneness, and immorality.”²⁰ This included print material considered immoral or deviant, in either radical political views or lewd discussions of sexuality, for example. These rules also extended beyond print to speech. Many societies against vice also emerged: The Proclamation Society (1787), The Society for the Suppression of Vice (1802), and the Constitutional Society (1830).²¹

The policing of print culture possibly led to increasingly subtle and veiled allusions to sexuality. This seems to have been the case in Thornton’s work on plant sexuality, although his work was also acceptably conservative, royalist, and anti-Revolutionary, as I will show in Chapter three.

After the French Revolution, Edmund Burke (1729-1797) published *Reflections on the French Revolution* in 1790, which was meant to rally English support for the existing aristocracy, defended the French aristocracy, and sold 30,000 copies in only two years.²² Burke had been part of the liberal Whig party, a supporter of American revolutionaries, so his colleagues expected him to support the French Revolution and were surprised when he did not. Instead, his text supported “aristocratic concepts of paternalism, loyalty, chivalry, and hereditary principle,” and he negatively compared the French Revolution to the English Civil

²⁰ Charles Donelan, *Romanticism and Male Fantasy in Don Juan: A Marketable Vice* (London: Macmillian Press, 2000), 1.

²¹ Donelan 1, William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Stephen C. Behrendt (ed.), *Romanticism, Radicalism, and the Press* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1997).

²² Butler 1, 33-35.

War (1642-1651) in which Charles I had been violently executed in 1649, critiquing the overthrow of legitimate government in both cases.²³ In response to Burke, Thomas Paine (1737-1809) published his *Rights of Man* in 1791-1792, and 50,000 copies circulated.²⁴ Paine's *Rights of Man* was critical of monarchy, stated that the people have a right to revolt when the government does not protect them, and in general defended the French Revolution against Burke's attack.

For the purposes of this dissertation about Thornton's *Flora* as a botanical microcosm, it is worthwhile to mention that Paine argued that human rights originate in nature in his *Rights of Man*, criticizing monarchy with alternative proposals of republicanism, anarchy, and agrarian socialism.²⁵ He later went into further detail about this in his *Agrarian Justice* of 1796, in which he identified a tendency for civilization to make one part of society more affluent, and the other more wretched, than would have been the case in a natural state.²⁶ Burke's writings, although they are in political opposition to Paine's, betray similar ideas about ideal societies having an organic, natural basis, as opposed to the miseries and evils of "artificial society."²⁷ Burke never tired of pointing out that it was not on any rational

²³ Butler 33-35.

²⁴ Mark Philp, "Paine, Thomas (1737-1809)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [online edition].

²⁵ Butler 1.

²⁶ Philp unpaginated [online edition].

²⁷ Edmund Burke (ed. Peter J. Stanlis), *Edmund Burke: Selected Writings and Speeches* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 1963), 47-76.

system or plan that England developed civil liberty beyond any nation, but by “working after the pattern of Nature.”²⁸

These views were further expressed in the general enlightenment trope of the ‘noble savage’. Most famously discussed by Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), the idea of an aboriginal ‘natural’ man was commonplace in intellectual circles that included figures such as Joseph Banks and Omai (1751-1780). Omai was a young man from the island of Raiatea who had sailed back to England with Banks after his second expedition and became a favorite of London society because of his status as a human curiosity, as well as his charm, wit, and good looks.²⁹ Contemporary political ideals made the concept of the ‘noble savage’ compelling in the age of revolutions. Bernard Smith notes “Savages were endowed with the virtues that good republicans aspired to. Simple in his needs and desires, self-disciplined, courageous, and with a great capacity for endurance, the savage became a symbol of revolutionary freedom and ideal perfectibility.”³⁰

There was a strong relationship between the natural world, botany, and social theory in Britain in the 1790s, and as literary scholar Clive Bush says, the laws of nature and Linnaean botany often pointed to the “laws of society” in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.³¹ Many writers created botanical

²⁸ Burke 78.

²⁹ Joseph Campbell and M.J. Abadie, *The Mythic Image* (N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), 435.

³⁰ Smith 149.

³¹ Bush 297.

microcosms with a sociopolitical bent, including Erasmus Darwin's *Botanic Garden* (1789-1791), which praised the French Revolution for its attempts to rid society of tyranny and superstition, and criticized imperialism and slavery, Richard Payne Knight's *The Landscape* (1794), which views landscape gardening with a politically egalitarian eye, and James Gillray's satiric *New Morality* of 1798.³² Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* of 1792 attacks the traditional relationship between women and flowers (as well as insipid, florid prose and poetry written by women) in her overall argument that women should be given an education equal to men, which will in turn make them men's equals in society.³³ Robert John Thornton's *Temple of Flora* also participates in this gendered and politicized discourse of miniature floral microcosms created during a time of political dissent, warfare, and strife.

Robert John Thornton: A Botanical Biography

Collecting and Curiosity: Thornton's Early Years

In this background of political strife, Robert John Thornton was possibly born the year of his father's death in 1768, but the exact year and location of his birth is

³² Butler 1; Fredrika J. Teute, "The Loves of the Plants; or, the Cross-Fertilization of Science and Desire at the End of the Eighteenth Century," *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 63.3 (2000): 335; Janet Browne, "Botany for Gentlemen: Erasmus Darwin and the Loves of the Plants," *Isis* 80.4 (1989): 593-620; Alan Bewell, "'Jacobin Plants': Botany as Social Theory in the 1790s." *Wordsworth Circle* 20 (1989): 132-39.

³³ Bewell 137. For more information on this point, read his analysis on the ensuing pages.

uncertain.³⁴ His life and his botanical work both emphasize the curiosity and visuality frequently found in the twinned fields of botany and medicine. Botany and medicine have always been closely related fields. Although animals and plants were certainly studied for their own sake, early modern botany is widely accepted as a product of the revival and revision of classical texts in medicine and natural philosophy. Botany was especially introduced into the medical curriculum of European universities around the 1520s-1530s, when medical faculties throughout Europe replaced medieval textbooks with newly translated works by Galen, Hippocrates, and Dioscorides.³⁵ The medical plants in Thornton's *Temple of Flora* participate in this rich botanical history, yet they are also personified, perhaps with their own rich and complex biographical histories.

Prior to a discussion of Thornton's biography, I will discuss the biographies of his parents and his upbringing. His father was the humorist and poet Bonnell Thornton and his mother was Sylvia Braithwaite (1730s-1794) who was born in South Carolina to colonial settlers in the 1730s. Her parents returned to England in 1740. We do not have her exact birth date, but she was born after 1730, and before 1738.³⁶ During her voyage to England, a French sailor shot her father in the head.

³⁴ Anonymous, "Obituary for Robert John Thornton," *Gentleman's Magazine* 162 (1837): 94.

³⁵ Brian W Ogilvie, *The Science of Describing: Natural History in Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Karen Reeds, "Renaissance Humanism and Botany," *Annals of Science* 33 (1976): 519-42; Paula Findlen, "Anatomy Theaters, Botanical Gardens, and Natural History Collections," in Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston, *Cambridge History of Science*, vol. 3, 272-89.

³⁶ Berg 210.

Her mother, Sylvia Cole, raised her and married the Reverend Thomas Winstanley in 1747, who belonged to the Church of England. With such a traumatic early background, Sylvia Braithwaite was apparently a very severe, pessimistic, and depressed woman.³⁷ She was also characterized as an educated but ‘eccentric intellectual,’ and wrote a novel called *The Old Maid* along with many letters. Historian Temma Berg assesses her character from the tone of many of her extant letters, in which she self-presents as “upright, religious, sentimental, satiric,” with an “occasional sense of humor and the ridiculous seldom used on herself or those dear to her.”³⁸ In spite of her solemn demeanor and religious devotion to the Church of England, she was also known for her somewhat libertine ways (by early eighteenth-century standards, at least), since she filled her letters with “humorous, distressing, and somewhat perilous amorous encounters” and took “a very long time deciding whom to marry.”³⁹ Thornton’s mother’s religious background and sensual writings might partially account for his early religious education and aspirations to become a minister, but also his interest in libertine themes, which may seem contradictory to a modern reader. This religious background and numerous Christian themes combined with plant sexuality frequently manifest in several of the more sober descriptions of plants in the *Temple of Flora*—the Marian white lily and the Christ-like Passionflowers. Sylvia Braithwaite married Bonnell Thornton (1724-1768) on February 3, 1764. They had three children together: Bonnell George, who died at

³⁷ Berg 204-206.

³⁸ Berg 204-206.

³⁹ Berg 182.

age 25, a daughter named Sylvia, who died in infancy, and Robert John Thornton. Bonnell left Sylvia in poverty, and she supported herself with pen and needlework, along with becoming a schoolmistress prior to her death in 1794.⁴⁰

Robert Thornton's father, Bonnell Thornton was "warm, witty, and somewhat irresponsible," and apparently both he and his wife enjoyed satire.⁴¹ Bonnell Thornton was an extremely wealthy man who dressed in excessively buttoned, decorative laced coats, married well to Sylvia, and inherited a fair sum of 15,000 pounds.⁴² Bonnell Thornton's father supposedly disowned him because he failed at the family trade of medicine, and satirist Charles Churchill (1732-1764) wrote a poem to belittle him as a "mock doctor...who hast turn'd a prig, shook off thy two tailed or thy three-tailed wig/Why in laced clothes affect to shine a beau, so unphysician like from head to toe?"⁴³ Still, a primary document written by Dr. Nathan Drake states that Bonnell Thornton received his "Batchelor" degree in "physick" in 1754 from Christ Church, Oxford, where he was enrolled as a student since 1743 after passing "with reputation through Westminster School."⁴⁴ At Westminster School in London in the 1740s, Bonnell Thornton studied

⁴⁰ Berg 203, 213-216.

⁴¹ Berg 210.

⁴² Grigson and Buchanan 1.

⁴³ Churchill in Anonymous, "Memoirs of Robert John Thornton," in *European Magazine and London Review: Containing the Literature, History, Politics, Art, Manners, and Amusements of the Age* 44: July 1803, 3.

⁴⁴ Dr. Nathan Drake, "Bonnell (sic) Thornton," in *Essays Illustrative of the Rambler* (1809-10) 2:323-28. Reproduced online at [://spenserians.cath.vt.edu/BiographyRecord.php?action=GET&bioid=4917](http://spenserians.cath.vt.edu/BiographyRecord.php?action=GET&bioid=4917)

contemporary literature, especially journalism, and also received a Master's Degree for these studies at Oxford in 1750.⁴⁵ The *Alumni Oxoniensis* confirms that this information is correct. The official record of degrees conferred at Oxford states that Bonnell Thornton did his B.A. in 1747, a Master's degree in 1750, and a "BMed" in 1754.⁴⁶

Although his educational background suggests that Bonnell Thornton consciously decided to become a literary figure rather than continuing his work as a physician, he was known for being a "great wit"—a term that denoted not only humor, but also intellectual cleverness, thinking, and reasoning in early modern Europe.⁴⁷ He was also part of the satirical Nonsense Club, a group of five friends and writers who met each other at Westminster School and worked together between the years 1749-1764. Besides Bonnell Thornton, these men included Charles Churchill, George Colman, William Cowper, and Robert Lloyd, who edited numerous periodicals, and produced a large body of "fitfully brilliant satirical poetry, engaged in virulent theatrical and literary battles, and participated in the most important domestic political debate of their time."⁴⁸ Bonnell Thornton began to publish

⁴⁵ Lance Bertelsen Drake, *The Nonsense Club: Literature and Popular Culture, 1749-1764* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1986), 14.

⁴⁶ Joseph Foster, *Alumni Oxoniensis: The Members of the University of Oxford 1715-1886* (Oxford: James Parker & Co., 1891), 1441.

⁴⁷ In the Oxford English Dictionary, wit has many different definitions, but they all involve the intellectual faculties rather than the ability to make others laugh, strictly speaking, one definition reads: "good or great mental capacity, intellectual ability, genius, talent, mental quickness or sharpness, acumen." Definition 5a. for "wit" *Oxford English Dictionary* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁴⁸ Bertelsen 2.

journals at Westminster with a man named Christopher Smart, but his first real publication was “Ode on Saint Cecelia’s Day” in 1749, which was a burlesque satire. Other notable publications by Thornton and his friends include the satirical *Drury Lane Journal* of 1752, and *The Connoisseur*, from 1754-1756.⁴⁹ Bonnell was also praised as one of “the best classical scholars of his age,” and was famous for translating Plautus. Although Robert Thornton never knew his father because of his untimely death, Bonnell’s legacy doubtlessly influenced the development of Robert’s own wit, great sense of humor and nonsense, use of political satire in his botanical works, and his study of the great works of antiquity that reverberate through his classicized production, *The Temple of Flora*.⁵⁰

Not only did Robert Thornton study Greek and Latin literature at an early age, but he was also described in his biographies as an ingenious, intensely curious boy who was passionate about natural history and collecting, which is often under-investigated in his biographies. He kept a small botanic garden containing many wild flowers that he had gathered from the fields, and an aviary containing bats, every species of English hawk and a rather large assortment of pigeons, a moor buzzard, and a kite, which were mostly captured by Thornton himself during “his holidays and play-hours.” Despite his industrious ways, his grandmother scolded him for his “curiosity” and said that she “disliked young Thornton, as he was always

⁴⁹ Bertelsen 16-61.

⁵⁰ Anonymous, “Memoirs of Robert John Thornton,” in *European Magazine and London Review: Containing the Literature, History, Politics, Art, Manners, and Amusements of the Age* 44: July 1803, 3.

catching of insects and butterflies in her garden, instead of minding his books. Hence all his weekly allowance went to maintain his garden and menagerie.”⁵¹

Collecting and curiosity often blended in the early modern era, with curiosity inspiring the collection of natural rarities. To modern eyes, Robert’s virtuosity and passion for natural history as he romped in his little garden seems to be a youthful labor of love, but in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, curiosity was associated with idleness, pride, and even sin, which accounts for his grandmother’s disparaging remarks. Although curiosity is now widely regarded as a crucial ingredient in the pursuit of knowledge and is even associated with innocence, this was not always the case. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in England, when Thornton’s grandmother lived, curiosity was often associated with fruitless knowledge and the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden, which had been driven by a desire for forbidden knowledge according to Genesis. Despite its sinful nature, curiosity slowly began to be perceived as a starting point for true knowledge if it was properly disciplined.⁵²

Thornton’s Interdisciplinary Education

Perhaps in attempts to discipline Robert’s curiosity, his mother sent him to Trinity College in Cambridge at age sixteen in order to receive a theological

⁵¹ Anonymous, “Memoirs of Robert John Thornton,” in *European Magazine and London Review: Containing the Literature, History, Politics, Art, Manners, and Amusements of the Age* 44: July 1803, 4.

⁵² Peter Harrison, “Curiosity, Forbidden Knowledge, and the Reformation of Natural Philosophy in Early Modern England,” *Isis* 92 (2001): 265-290; Katie Whitaker, “The Culture of Curiosity,” in *Cultures of Natural History* (ed. Nicolas Jardine, James Secord, and Emma Spary, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 75-91.

education from the Reverend Mr. Taylor. His biographers state that he was initially sent to Cambridge with the intention of being “educated for the church, but that he evinced such a decided preference for the study of medicine and cognate subjects that the original idea was abandoned.”⁵³ Based on this information, Thornton seems to have been quite religious as a child and adolescent, perhaps because of his upbringing. Although he never became a minister, and began to study medicine and botany instead, religious themes can still be found in his botanical work.

Thornton also studied the Greek and Latin classics with the Reverend Mr. Hartley, the Rector of Bingley and Master of the Grammar School in Cambridge.⁵⁴ He received his degree in 1793.⁵⁵ While at Trinity, his attention also turned towards the intertwined fields of medicine and botany, academic interests that evidently ran in the family, since his grandfather had been an apothecary. As mentioned, Thornton’s father chose not to pursue medicine, and perhaps Robert felt the need to continue this pursuit on behalf of family tradition also a profession. According to his “Memoirs,” he was inspired to save lives because of the untimely death of his father, his elder brother, his sister, and his own near death experience from accidentally drinking too much of his ailing mother’s eau-de-luce, a volatile tincture of soap,

⁵³ Hemsley and Perkins 89.

⁵⁴ John Venn and J.A. Venn, “Robert John Thornton, “ *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), <http://archive.org/stream/p2alumniantabri06univuoft/p2alumniantabri06univuoft.djvu.txt>

⁵⁵ Anonymous “Memoirs” 5.

alcohol, and amber normally used to revive a fainting patient.⁵⁶ At Trinity, Thornton attended Professor Harwood's lectures on anatomy, Dr. Milner's lectures on chemistry, Thomas Martyn's lectures on botany.⁵⁷ At university, he was known for his excruciatingly intense concentration on visual detail in his anatomical studies, and I think that it is no coincidence that his memoirs recount a dissection of the eye instead of any other body part. His description of the eye's anatomy was so profuse that his fellow students snickered and his instructor had to tell him to stop:

The proficiency he made to anatomy was shewn, to the no final amusement of his fellow students, at one of the lectures on optics. The public tutor, the Mr. Rev. Jones, asked Mr. Thornton for an account of the anatomy of the eye...he introduced in the account he gave of the optic nerve, its investment of the membranes of the dura and the pia matter of the cerebrum, and set the whole class to biting their lips to suppress laughter, whilst the tutor was crying out, "That will do Sir! That will do Sir!", and his fellow students, after lecture, assured him he never would be asked again for any more anatomical descriptions.⁵⁸

Of all the body parts that Thornton must have been learning about, the eye is singled out as a site of anatomical inquiry in his memoirs, which might have also reflected his interests in the visual, a fact rarely commented upon by his biographers. His interests in dissection did not stop at the human body later in life. Thornton also visually and textually dissected the twenty of the twenty-eight personified plants in his *Temple of Flora* with great visual exactitude and detailed

⁵⁶ Anonymous "Memoirs" 4-5; Anonymous "Obituary" 94.

⁵⁷ Anonymous "Obituary" 94.

⁵⁸ Anonymous "Memoirs" 5.

anatomical language usually reserved for human beings, describing the “bellies” and sexual organs of the female plants, and wrote that “As each of these beauties of the vegetable race are carefully dissected, it is hoped that the rigid botanist will excuse the author who, striving at universal approbation, has endeavored to unite the *Utile Dulci*.”⁵⁹

Prior to the production of the *Temple of Flora*, Thornton inherited the family fortune, which permitted the production of such a lavish and expensive book. Robert Thornton spent his family fortune on the all-consuming pursuit of botanical and medical knowledge—and the *Temple of Flora* was part of this pursuit. Besides the independent production of this text, he also embarked on anatomical studies with Henry Cline, physiology with Dr. Haighton, and chemistry with William Babbington for three years at Guy’s Medical School and Hospital in the borough of Southwark in Central London, where he produced a dissertation about a discovery he had made in 1797, whereby “the animal heat arose from the oxygene air imbibed by the blood flowing through the lungs, and taken from the atmosphere received into them, and that in its circuit throughout the body it became decomposed, liberating the caloric from the oxygene air, which before held it in a neutralized or inactive state.”⁶⁰

Having written his dissertation at Guy’s after three years of study, he visited Edinburgh, Paris, Dublin, Holland, and Germany to obtain medical experience

⁵⁹ Thornton (1807) unpaginated.

⁶⁰ Anonymous “Memoirs” 6; Anonymous “Obituary” 94.

valuable for obtaining his license.⁶¹ He never lost interest in animal heat and gases, and one of his biggest influences was Dr. Thomas Beddoes, a scientific popularizer who attempted to cure diseases by the inhalation of various gases, and wrote about these procedures with a glittering classicism, sentimentality, and exoticism also found in *The Temple of Flora*.⁶² Thornton published a successful, five-volume octavo in 1798 about these Brunonian procedures entitled *The Philosophy of Medicine; or Medical Extracts on the Nature of Health and Disease, including the laws of the Animal Oeconomy, and the Doctrines of Pneumatic Medicine*.⁶³ Thornton eventually succeeded Sir Edward James Smith as a lecturer on medical botany at the united hospitals of Guy's and St. Thomas around 1804, and also served as a physician at Marylebone's dispensary for four years, and introduced the use of the foxglove for scarlet fever, studied cowpox, and wrote books on both diseases and their treatments.⁶⁴ Thornton became an M.D. of St. Andrews in 1805, and a licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians in 1812.⁶⁵ Presumably, Thornton began to practice medicine less as his passion for the *Temple of Flora* took over. He was relatively

⁶¹ Anonymous "Memoirs" 6.

⁶² Anonymous "Memoirs," 6; Grigson and Buchanan 2.

⁶³ Anonymous "Memoirs" 6; Robert John Thornton, *The Philosophy of Medicine; or Medical Extracts on the Nature of Health and Disease, including the laws of the Animal Oeconomy, and the Doctrines of Pneumatic Medicine* (London: C. Whittingham, 1799-1800).

⁶⁴ Anonymous "Memoirs" 7; Anonymous "Obituary" 94; Wilks 425-427.

⁶⁵ Anonymous "Memoirs" 7; Anonymous "Obituary" 94.

wealthy and perhaps decided to stop practicing in order to devote full attention to his book.

When lecturing on medical botany, Thornton used his plates from the *Temple of Flora* in a slide-show projection format to illustrate his points. He turned his lithographs into large, muslin “slides,” which were placed on a spool and placed cyclically and sequentially in front of the light of a candle. All of these images were beautiful but ephemeral, and none exist today because they burned when projected, according to Phillip Weimerskirch.⁶⁶ Perhaps this subtly suggests the ephemerality of flowers themselves. Although art was meant to preserve nature forever, these slides preserved it only as long as they could withstand the heat of the candle. Thornton frequently used scientific spectacle in his medical lectures, not only for pedagogical purposes, but also to increase public interest in his talks.⁶⁷

Thornton’s lectures sparked interest, and he commissioned a portrait of himself, eventually published in the *Temple of Flora*, that advertised his fame as a botanical lecturer and doctor. Many of Thornton’s accomplishments in medical botany are summed up in this commissioned authorial portrait engraved by W. Woolnoth on May 1st, 1799, found in several copies of the *Temple of Flora*.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Phillip Weimerskirch, “Robert John Thornton’s *The Temple of Flora*, His Transparencies and Their Use in Illustrating Lectures on Botany in England and America,” Conference paper delivered at the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing (SHARP), Washington D.C., July 16, 2011.

⁶⁷ Weimerskirch.

⁶⁸ Sir Samuel Wilks and George Thomas Bettany, *A Biographical History of Guy’s Hospital* (London: Ward, Lock, and Bowden, 1892), 427. While the engraver is Woolnoth, Bartolozzi’s name is also on this plate, perhaps indicating joint authorship of some kind. There are four engraved portraits of Thornton: one, in

(IMAGE 1.1) This portrait iconographically links Thornton with his medical and botanical careers by including a vignette of the front quadrangle of Guy's Hospital with its iron gates. "Two stalwart youths" carry an ailing man on a stretcher, and his weeping wife walks by his side.⁶⁹ The idea of a location such as Guy's Hospital having a biographical history, a life connected to its inhabitants, is underscored in Thornton's portrait because of his inclusion in the image.

Thornton's portrait is engraved above this vignette. He seems to be at pains to distance himself from the reputation of his poetically-inclined, medically-uninvolved, and somewhat overdressed, "foppish" father, despite the fact that he continues a family tradition in the pharmaceutical knowledge of plants. Dressed in elegant yet understated attire, Thornton wears a plain, dark coat with simple brass buttons, a white shirt with a moderately ruffled cravat, and he does not wear a fancy powdered wig, electing instead to neatly pull back his natural hair. He holds Linnaeus' *Genera Plantarum* of 1737, an iconic text on plant classification, and the label beneath his portrait reads: "ROBERT JOHN THORNTON, M.D., Public Lecturer on Medical Botany." There are numerous plants engraved above Thornton's portrait that can also be found in the *Temple of Flora*, and a hive swarming with honeybees, which symbolized industry and thrift from the time of Mandeville onwards. For Thornton the imagery also suggested more than just industry. It also signified the

folio, by Bartolozzi, after Russell, with a view of Guy's Hospital, from the 'New Illustration,' 1799; another, in octavo, by Ridley from the same original.

⁶⁹ Wilks and Bettany 427.



IMAGE 1.1, William Woolnoth, Authorial Portrait of Robert John Thornton, May 1st, 1799, courtesy of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

productivity of British colonies from the sixteenth century onwards. Bees refined pollen into honey just as English colonists, nourished by agrarian philosophies of Pliny and Virgil that depended on cows and bees, sought to hone the raw substances of colonial lands such as America and Africa into refined commodities. This symbolism also reflects the concept of subscribing to idea of the strict social order found in colonies of bees.⁷⁰ Thornton makes this colonial connection explicit in an ode to the honeybee in the *Temple of Flora*, since the poem refers to the industry of the “little plunderer,” who is “content with industry and love.”⁷¹ In a footnote, Thornton also describes bees as obedient subjects with a Queen who visits every cell of the hive on a daily basis, summoning her subjects to “proceed to their several useful labors of the Commonwealth.”⁷² The production of Thornton’s *Temple of Flora* betrays a similar sort of industry as the honeybees swarming away at their hive, distilling and refining raw botanical substances from the colonies into a sweet and useful commodity to be consumed by upper class Europeans. Thornton’s education as a botanical doctor also becomes apparent in the *Temple of Flora*, since many of his lavishly illustrated plants also have medical applications and he mentions this whenever possible. These plants, along with being described as useful objects, are also personified whenever possible with extensive religious and classical metaphors.

⁷⁰ Tammy Horn, *Bees in America: How the Honey Bee Shaped a Nation* (Louisville: Univesrity of Kentucky Press, 2005), 1-17.

⁷¹ Thornton 1807 unpaginated.

⁷² Thornton 1807 unpaginated.

Lifecycles of the Author and His Book: The Production of the Temple of Flora

From the late 1790s onwards, the history of the author becomes deeply entangled with the history of his book. Thornton devoted a great portion of his life to his *Flora*. His book, about the lifecycles of personified plants, almost seems to have a lifecycle of its own—a birth, life, and dramatic death because the author spent his entire fortune on the production of this three-volume book, entitled *The New Illustration of the Sexual System of Carolus von Linnaeus*. *The Temple of Flora* is the third part of this book, and my main focus, but I frequently include information from the other volumes in the hope that I will not isolate the third volume from its companions.

It is impossible to tell if any copy of the *Temple of Flora* is complete or not. The image and text were both issued in parts. In 1894, Hemsley and Perkins said that no complete collation existed.⁷³ The *Temple of Flora* is a folio, and the uncut engravings and letterpress are about eighteen by twenty-four inches.⁷⁴ As far as we know, the content of all three volumes is as follows: The first complete volume was meant to contain a title page, two sub-titles, portraits of the author by Bartolozzi, after Russell; of Linnæus by Henry Meyer, after Hoffmann, ornamented by Bartolozzi; of Sir Thomas Millington by Woolnoth, after Sir Godfrey Kneller; and of Linnæus in his Lapp dress by Henry Kingsbury, after Hoffmann. This is either plain or colored. Next, a portrait of Queen Charlotte by Sir William Beechey, ornamented by Bartolozzi; a dedication to the Queen in six-character ornamental writing, and a

⁷³ Hemsley and Perkins 90.

⁷⁴ Hemsley and Perkins 90.

dedicatory address. Next comes the beginning of the letterpress of the body of the work itself. A leaf, bearing only the subtitle “Preliminary Observations,” precedes the letterpress. The preliminary observations consist of “brief, yet singularly lucid,” descriptions of parts of flowers, “illustrated by a diagrammatic clavis.”⁷⁵ These images and preliminary observations are bound together with the text of Thornton’s “Prize Dissertation on the Sexes of Plants,’ which is mostly a translation of Linnaeus’ *Sexum Plantarum Argumentis et Experimentis Novis* into English, with copious footnotes strongly defending Millington’s claims to the discovery of the sexuality of plants. There is also a plate representing the pollen of various flowers, reproduced from one published by Geoffroy in 1711.⁷⁶

The second part opens with another image of Linnaeus in Lapland dress, painted by Hoffmann and engraved by H. Kingsbury, both colored and uncolored.⁷⁷ consisted of “The Genera of Exotic and Indigenous Plants that are to be met with in Great Britain.’ This part also consists of 168 pages of text and images, without date or publisher’s name, but this part is often missing or bound separately and little information exists about it.

⁷⁵ Hemsley and Perkins 90.

⁷⁶ George Simonds Boulger, “Robert John Thornton,” *Dictionary of National Biography* vol. 56 (1885-1900): 304; Hemsley and Perkins 90. Hemsley and Perkins are basing this information on the Kew Copy presented by Sir Joseph Hooker “a few years earlier,” because they feel that it is the most complete one that they have seen. Boulger does not specify which copy or copies he is consulting, but his information is basically the same.

⁷⁷ Hemsley and Perkins 90.

The third part was issued in 1799 as ‘Picturesque Botanical Plates of the New Illustration...’ priced with the text at twenty guineas, but also issued simultaneously, apparently without the text, as ‘Picturesque Botanical Plates of the Choicest Flowers of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America.’ In 1804 it was reissued as ‘The Temple of Flora, or Garden of Nature, being Picturesque Plates,’ and in 1812, re-engraved on a smaller scale, 20 inches by 15 1/4, as ‘The Temple of Flora, or Garden of the Botanist, Poet, Painter, and Philosopher.’ This part has no fewer than eight titles and subtitles, and thirty-one plates.⁷⁸

I could not find a single scholar who discussed the letterpress of the *Temple of Flora* because emphasis is placed almost exclusively on the beautiful images. The *Temple of Flora* is unpaginated, and it is very tedious to count hundreds of pages manually in order to sort out how many images and pages of text are in the book. There is also no guarantee that it will be a complete copy. There is, however, a downloadable pdf of the *Temple of Flora* on the Missouri Botanical Garden website, which automatically counts the pages. The *Temple of Flora* includes both images and text that begins on page 114 and ends on page 361. There are 247 pages of images and text, but I also counted 90 blank pages that are interspersed with the images and text. These 90 pages include photos of the cover at the back.⁷⁹ As I discuss below, there are technically thirty-three plates and eight pages of ornamental

⁷⁸ George Simonds Boulger, “Robert John Thornton,” *Dictionary of National Biography* vol. 56 (1885-1900): 304; W. Botting Hemsley and W. Frank Perkins, “Robert John Thornton M.D.,” *Gardeners’ Chronicle* v.2 (London: 41 Wellington Street, Convent Garden W.C., 1894), 89-90, 276.

⁷⁹ Missouri Botanical Garden,
<http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/bibliography/16#/summary>

writing. Keeping all of this in mind, there are about 116 pages of letterpress. This copy, as is the case with the others, is not complete, and this is only an estimate.

The connections between botanical medicine, religion, the classics, and collecting coalesce in the *Temple of Flora*, of which 750-800 copies exist worldwide.⁸⁰ Although Thornton had previously published extensively on medical works, the *Temple of Flora* was his first extensive venture into botany.⁸¹ Although we

⁸⁰ Grigson and Buchanan 59. Handasyde Buchanan is responsible for this figure. Thornton's advertisement for the lottery of these prints is direct evidence that 199 copies were printed specifically for the lottery, and 200 portfolios of plates without text.

⁸¹ The anonymous author of Thornton's obituary provides an almost comprehensive list of his publications; I have filled in the blanks: Beyond contributions to the 'Philosophical' and 'Monthly' magazines (Roy. Soc. Cat. v. 982), Thornton published: 1. 'The Politician's Creed ... by an Independent,' 1795-1799, 8vo. 2. 'The Philosophy of Medicine, being Medical Extracts,' 1st ed. 1796, 4 vols. 8vo; 2nd and 3rd ed. 1798; 4th ed. 1809, 5 vols.; 5th ed. 1813, 2 vols. 3. 'The Philosophy of Politics, or Political Extracts on the Nature of Governments and their Administration,' 1799, 3 vols. 8vo. 4. 'Facts decisive in Favour of the Cow Pock,' 1802, 8vo. 5. 'Sketch of the Life and Writings of William Curtis,' 1802?, 8vo; another edition in Curtis's 'Lectures on Botany,' 1804-5, 3 vols. 8vo. 6. 'Plates of the Heart illustrative of the Circulation,' 1804, 4to. 7. 'Vaccinæ Vindiciæ, or a Vindication of the Cow Pock,' 1806, 8vo. 8. 'Practical Botany,' 1808, 8vo. 9. 'Botanical Extracts, or Philosophy of Botany,' 1810, 2 vols. fol., with two portraits and one plate. 10. 'Elementary Botanical Plates to illustrate "Botanical Extracts,"' 1810, fol., with twenty-six portraits and 165 plates. 11. 'Alpha Botanica,' 1810, 8vo. 12. 'Sketch of the Life and Writings of James Lee, prefixed to Lee's Introduction to the Science of Botany,' 1810, 8vo. 13. 'A New Family Herbal,' 1810, 8vo, dedicated to Dr. Andrew Duncan, with woodcuts by Bewick; 2nd ed., dedicated to the Queen, but otherwise a reprint, 1814. 14. 'A Grammar of Botany,' 1811, 12mo; 2nd ed. 1814. 15. 'The British Flora,' 1812, 5 vols. 8vo. 16. 'Elements of Botany,' 1812, 2 vols. 8vo, dedicated to Professor Thomas Martyn. 17. 'Outline of Botany,' 1812, 8vo. 18. 'School Virgil (Bucolics),' 1812, 12mo; 2nd ed., a reprint, 1821, 8vo. 19. 'Illustrations of the School Virgil,' 1814, 12mo, worthless little woodcuts; re-issued in 1824 with additional woodcuts by Blake of fine quality. 20. 'Juvenile Botany,' 1818, 12mo; another edition, entitled 'An Easy Introduction to the Science of Botany, through the Medium of Familiar Conversations between a Father and his Son,' 1823, 8vo. 21. 'Historical Readings for Schools,' 1822, 12mo. 22. 'The Greenhouse Companion,' 1824. 23. 'The Religious Use

have no evidence about Thornton's exact motivations for creating the *Temple of Flora* in records of commissions, he and his team of artists began to prepare a great deal of its portraits and botanical plates in the 1790s and early 1800s, using the media of mezzotint, aquatint, and stipple, with additional hand-coloring in some cases.⁸² We know this because of the dates of the prints and the fact that some prints also appear in Thornton's *Philosophy of Botany, or Botanical Extracts* (1799). The prints that appear in *Philosophy of Botany* vary depending on the copy, similar to the *Temple of Flora*.⁸³

Otherwise, based on primary evidence from Thornton's *Flora*, it seems that political as well as financial motivations began and ended the production of his book, to be discussed further in chapter three. For now, it is worth mentioning that he hoped to emphasize British superiority in the art and science of botany, and he alternately described his book as a "national undertaking," or a "national work."⁸⁴ He expresses the Britishness of the *Temple of Flora* and implied competition with France by including lines from James Thomson's poem "Liberty" on the main title page: "Shall Britons in the field, unconquered still the better laurel lose?—In finer arts and public works shall they to Gallia yield?"

of Botany,' 1824, 12mo. 24. 'The Lord's Prayer, newly translated, with Notes,' 1827, 4to.

⁸² Grigson and Buchanan 59-66.

⁸³ Cardew 282.

⁸⁴ Thornton (1807) unpaginated.

The colored plates were all dedicated to Queen Charlotte, consort of King George III—“Her Gracious Majesty, the Bright Example of Conjugal Fidelity and Maternal Tenderness, Patroness of Botany and of the Fine Arts.” He continues his dedication to the Queen:

From the unbounded protection, so liberally bestowed by an august KING, and the best of QUEENS, all the useful and ornamental sciences, with the pleasing arts of painting and engraving, have reached their pre-eminence; nor have the English nation less reason now to be proud of their superiority in type and paper.⁸⁵

Thornton promoted the glorification of national botany with the collection of imperial specimens from all over the world, but also from Europe in the *Temple of Flora*. The *Temple of Flora* was produced between the years 1797 and 1812, the dates of the earliest and latest plates in the third volume. Although the publication years for the folio are frequently listed as 1799-1807 in library catalogues for uncertain reasons, the earliest plates actually date to 1797 and latest plate to 1812. The earliest plates are the *Tulips* and the *Aloe*, which both date to May 1st, 1798, while the *Queen Flower* dates to January 1st, 1812.⁸⁶ Thornton had initially intended for his publisher Thomas Bensley to print seventy collectible plates of exotic plants with landscape backgrounds in the third and final part of his book, the *Temple of Flora*. The Napoleonic Wars, a time when “the moderately rich very justly complain they are exhausted through taxes laid on them to diffuse rapine, fire, and murder

⁸⁵ Thornton (1807) dedication plate.

⁸⁶ Grigson and Buchanan 62-63.

over civilized Europe,” accounted for his inability to finish.⁸⁷ In the folio edition, there are only thirty-one plates, but thirty-three if one counts the *Queen Flower* of 1812 in addition to the *Queen* of 1804, and the 1798 *Aloe* in addition to the *American Aloe* of 1807. This should be taken into account, because they are completely different prints produced in different years.⁸⁸

Thornton hired a global community of artists, poets, and authors, both European and non-European. Despite his global scope, Thornton emphasizes the British authors above all. Thornton said that he hired “the most eminent British artists,” and to commission poetry from “poets laureate.” Not everyone involved in his book’s production was British, however.⁸⁹ Thornton directed the artists, choosing the plants, flower symbolism, and the backgrounds, “with scenery appropriated to their subject.”⁹⁰ Although many of these artists were fairly well respected in their own time, they were definitely not the most eminent of all British artists and poets, and for this reason they are seldom listed in their entirety in books about Thornton.⁹¹ There were twenty-eight poets, at least twenty-eight painters,

⁸⁷ Thornton (1807) unpaginated.

⁸⁸ Grigson and Buchanan 62.

⁸⁹ Grigson and Buchanan 8

⁹⁰ Grigson and Buchanan 8

⁹¹ The most unfortunate examples of this are Buchanan and Grigson 8 and Desmond 117 and 119. Almost nobody who writes about the production of this book appreciates these artists and poets as authoritative figures. Buchanan and Grigson, Desmond calls the poetry “egregious,” “ostentatious, excessively theatrical, and melodramatic.” Buchanan, Grigson, Desmond, and Stearne all define success in terms of money and being a fellow in the Royal Academy, mentioning that “none of the team are otherwise much remembered in the history of art,” and that they were

and forty-three engravers.⁹² Several were women (for example, Maria Cosway, who painted the frontispiece of the goddess Flora), some were non-British, and most of the others were lesser-known artists for their time who worked in diverse aesthetic traditions, such as landscape, still-life, or portraits. Several works of art by more famous artists were also reproduced in the *Temple of Flora*. Thirty-one works of art were copied by late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century engravers in the *Temple of Flora*.⁹³ These copied works included Raphael, Rembrandt, Chinese works of art, and works by botanical illustrators like Nehemiah Grew, George Ehret and William Curtis. The poets also had diverse backgrounds. Three are women, such as Anna Seward, who wrote a biography of Erasmus Darwin, several are not British, others are scholars of India like Sir William Jones, still others are natural historians, such as George Shaw, who was in charge of the natural history section of the British museum. In some cases they wrote new pieces for the volume, and in others the published verses were reproduced.⁹⁴ As with many other early modern books, the

relatively minor figures in their own time who had to work very hard to earn a living. Reinagle often failed at academy elections before becoming an R.A., and was always short on money, similar to Pether.

⁹² A thorough, comprehensive list of the poets, painters, and engravers involved in this project and the works that they created is available online, courtesy of the Lindley Library. For copyright reasons, I cannot reproduce this list in my dissertation: "Comparison of Plates," and "Poems included in the texts of Robert Thornton's *New Illustration of the Sexual System of Linnaeus* (1799-1807) and *Temple of Flora* (1812) with identification of the poets," (London, Royal Horticultural Society: 2007):

http://www.lindleylibrary.org.uk/docs/Thornton_poems.pdf.

⁹³ Please consult Lindley library list online for details.

⁹⁴ Please consult Lindley library list online for details.

authorship is decentralized and diluted—there is a centralized author, but he is not the only visual or textual authority.

Beyond the comprehensive lists that the Lindley library provides, it is worth singling out several of the authors, artists, poets, and their other accomplishments to give a sense of the scope of Thornton’s project, the rich tapestry of influences woven together in this book, and the intellectual circle of contacts in which Thornton functioned. Aside from Erasmus Darwin, William Curtis, and Linnaeus, there was also Henry James Pye, who was the only poet laureate in the entire book. There was a prose statement with verse redaction from Queen Charlotte about war, and quotations from illustrious poets from the past such as Catullus, Ovid, Sappho, Hafiz, Anacreon (translated by Moore), and Shakespeare. Thornton’s book was singled out in his obituary as a “magnificent work” which involved the “pencils of Opie, Reinagle, Russell, Miss Burney&c.” and “the muses” of twenty-eight poets.⁹⁵

It is worthwhile to discuss several different types of poets employed by Thornton. I have identified several main categories, which sometimes overlap. It is important to acknowledge the interdisciplinarity of these historical figures and the time period in which they lived, and frequently each poet has more than one disciplinary identity. Several of these poets were especially interested in colonial or exotic territories, and the best-known example is Sir William Jones (1746-1794), a pioneering Sanskrit scholar and founder of the Asiatic Society, as well as the author of *Poems: Chiefly Translations from Asiatick languages* (1772). He also formulated the hypothesis that Sanskrit was related to the European languages by descent from

⁹⁵ Anonymous “Obituary” 94.

a common ancestor. Thomas Maurice (1754-1824), the author of *History of Hindostan* (1795-8), and of various poems, some published in his series *Indian Antiquities* (1793-1800), wrote poems for Thornton's *Flora*. Samuel Wilcocke Hull (c.1766-1833) also falls into this category. Hull was a poet, dramatist, and historian who sometimes wrote under the pseudonym of Lewis Luke MacCulloh. He was involved in Red River Colony experiment, and became a controversial journalist in Canada. There were also political figures, such as Pierre de Bernis (1715-1794, a Foreign Minister of France on the eve of the Seven Years' War; who entered the priesthood after resignation and rose to become Archbishop of Albi and Cardinal. De Bernis, of course, also counts as a religious figure. Yet another religious figure is Robert Lowth (1710-1787), a Bishop of London and the Oxford Professor of Poetry from the years 1741-50. Several botanists and natural historians also wrote poems: Thornton posthumously quoted René Rapin (1621-1687, the author of *Hortorum libri IV* (1665), who translated into English as *Of Gardens* (1673); William Roscoe (1753-1831, author of *Monandrian Plants* (1828), but also of various poems and translations; and Dr. George Shaw F.R.S. (1751-1813), the keeper of the natural history section of the British Museum from 1807-13. Thornton hired classicists such as Thomas Moore (1779-1852, who translated *Odes of Anacreon* (1801). Finally, Thornton employed women, such as Frances Annabella Rowden (1773-c1840), author of *A Poetical Introduction to the Study of Botany* (1801 and subsequent editions), Anna Seward, the "Swan of Lichfield" (1742-1809), a romantic poet who wrote a memoir of Erasmus Darwin's life in 1804, Cordelia Sheeles or Skeeles (so far untraced), and Charlotte Turner Smith (1749-1806), another British Romantic who

ironically seemed to support the ideals of the French Revolution at a later date. All of these ladies and gentlemen were “invoked to swell the triumph” of *The Temple of Flora*.⁹⁶

Some of the painters and engravers who created his aquatint and mezzotint prints of imperial and national flowers are also comprehensively listed in the Lindley library lists. These artists can also be grouped by the types of art for which they were most celebrated, mostly portraits, landscapes, and flower and animal paintings. Of course, several artists were famous for more than one genre. Several of these artists were portraitists, which is interesting if one considers the anthropomorphic properties of Thornton’s floral plates and the fact that Thornton referred to his botanical illustrations as “portraits.” The portraitists included: Peter Henderson (active 1799-1829), who was also known for his genre studies; John Russell (1745-1806, Royal Academy), a portraitist and a “crayon” [e.g., pastel] painter to King George III and Queen Charlotte, the Prince of Wales, and the Duke of York, John Opie (1761-1807, Royal Academy), a history and portrait painter with an education in classical literature; Maria Cosway (1759-1838), a woman who was part of the Royal Academy, an Anglo-Italian painter of portraits and mythological scenes, who studied with Johann Zoffany, Fuseli, and Joseph Wright of Derby, and was also a musician. Sir William Beechey (1753-1839), was also from the Royal Academy and portrait-painter to Queen Charlotte, and Harlow (no first name traced, 1878-1819), was a portraitist and candidate for Royal Academy, but opposed to it.

⁹⁶ Anonymous “Obituary” 94; please consult the Lindley library list online.

It is unsurprising that Thornton hired many landscape painters, because the *Temple of Flora* always depicted plants within their native landscapes. The most prolific of these landscape painters was Phillip Reinagle (1749-1833, a landscape artist trained at the Royal Academy). He served as the primary artist of *Temple of Flora*—fourteen of the 28 plates are by Henderson, and 11 of the plates are by Reinagle.⁹⁷ Other landscape artists were Abraham Pether (1756-1812), primarily known for his moonlight landscapes, and Edward Dayes (1763-1804), known for his topographical watercolors involving landscape and architecture. Obviously, botanical illustrators such as Sydenham Teak Edwards (1769?-1819) were also involved in the project. Edwards was a fairly famous botanical draughtsman who was trained by William Curtis. Several animal painters were involved in the production, which is interesting when one considers the intimate relationship between the flowers and their animal companions in the plates. These engravers of animals were James Ward (1769-1859, Royal Academy), and John Landseer (1769-1852), the father of Edwin Landseer. John Landseer painted landscape views and biblical scenes as well as a series of animals. These artists came from diverse aesthetic traditions, encompassing portraiture, landscape painting, and botanical illustration, and all three of these genres coalesce in the *Temple of Flora*.

We know who read Thornton's book from his prospectus, which includes a subscription list. The volume attracted 597 subscribers, such as Queen Charlotte, the Prince and Princess of Wales, the Princess of Württemberg, the Duke and Princess of Gloucester, 9 other "foreign kings and potentates," 74 members of the

⁹⁷ Blunt and Stearn 237.

English nobility, and 5 foreign nobles, 194 members of the landed gentry, 266 “medical gentlemen,” 20 florists, and 14 “public bodies,” or institutions.⁹⁸

Twenty-eight of the plates were advertised in 1797, issued as individual plates with appending texts sold initially at 1 guinea, and then at twenty-five shillings each between 1799 and 1807.⁹⁹ By 1803, we know for certain that sixteen of the twenty-five plates had been issued, for twenty-five shillings apiece, or about \$160.00 U.S. today when taking inflation into account.¹⁰⁰ A better way to look at the cultural and financial value of objects is to compare them to other objects of a similar value in the same time period. For comparative purposes, in the same time period one shilling could buy admission to Vauxhall Gardens, where one could see real plants and be entertained. One could theoretically have this experience of visiting the Vauxhall twenty-five times or buy one of Thornton’s prints for the same price. For one guinea, the initial cost of one of Thornton’s prints, a person could buy a “special auricula plant.” In other words, one could purchase the genuine object for the same price as the print. Thornton’s *Flora* most likely failed almost as soon as it was issued because of the incredibly expensive cost of the prints, relatively speaking. In this way, it can also be said to have been an ephemeral production.

⁹⁸ Thornton (1798) 2. For a full list of specific names, see p.2 of Thornton’s prospectus, and also Robert John Thornton, *March 1st, 1799, will be published, The new illustration of the sexual system of Linnaeus. By Robert John Thornton, M.D.* (London, 1799), 6-7.

⁹⁹ Hemsley and Perkins 89-90, 276.

¹⁰⁰ Anonymous “Memoirs” 7. I came up with this contemporary figure through using a historical calculator that uses formulas that take inflation into account.

Despite its patriotic, political sentiments, the book failed almost as soon as it was issued because of the incredibly expensive cost of the prints, relatively speaking. In the year 1812, Thornton had to auction off all of the plates and copies of his book because it failed financially. He spent his father's entire fortune on the production of this book and went bankrupt.¹⁰¹ Ironically, Thornton also blames politics for the book's demise in his brief addendum, "Apology to my Subscribers," at the very end of the *Temple of Flora*. He claimed that his book would never be finished because of ongoing wars. He writes:

It was my idea, had the times been propitious, to have greatly enlarged this part of the work, and presented the world with seventy PICTURESQUE BOTANICAL COLOURED PLATES...but during the progress of this expensive work...infuriate war has violently raged, which like a devouring conflagration destroys everything before it, commerce, agriculture and the arts...The earth is inundated with human blood! The man of sensibility, his heart overcome with grief and shame, beholds such atrocious scenes with horror!¹⁰²

There is almost more evidence about what concluded rather than what initiated the production of the *Temple of Flora* in the literature on Thornton. In biographical accounts of Thornton's life aside from his medical education, the period from the late 1790s to 1812 almost reads like a history of the *Temple of Flora* instead of his life.

Authors and/as Objects: Influences on Thornton's Temple of Flora

Innumerable places and historical figures influenced Thornton's work, and the histories of these places and historical characters intertwine and overlap in a

¹⁰¹ Cardew 450-452.

¹⁰² Thornton unpaginated.

series of author portraits in the *New Illustration*. As a way of calling attention to his influences, Thornton commissioned twenty-six portraits of prominent botanists, natural philosophers, medical gentlemen, and chemists, fellows of the Royal Society, and members of the Linnaean Society for the second volume of the *New Illustration*. In this series, these gentlemen were closely surrounded by objects and locations that shaped their careers. Their portraits assume an almost object-like quality since they are presented as black-and-white oval bust-length figures with a carved, sculptural appearance. The objects that surround the portraits, the landscapes and floral specimens, assume an animated appearance. These visual biographical details also metaphorically bring these portraits to life.

The men depicted in this series include: Reverend Stephen Hales, FRS, who was the author of the book *Vegetable Statics*. He is depicted with a scene of botanical specimens enclosed in air pumps. There is also Charles Bonnet, surrounded by his "Great Chain of Being," Reverend Colin Milne, FRS, who is not well-known today, but authored the *Botanical Dictionary*, William Withering, FRS and MD, who was a fellow of the Linnaean Society. William Curtis, FRS, who is depicted with the frontispiece of the *Flora Londonesis* beneath him, Reverend Joseph Townsend, John Ray, Erasmus Darwin, Linnaeus, Sebastian Vaillant, Joseph Tournefort MD, who is depicted with a sheet of dissected plants and a "Zephyr showing to the Astonished World the System of Tournefort." Priestly and Lavoisier, John Mayow and John Evelyn also make appearances. Thornton also includes portraits of Nehemiah Grew, Secretary of the FRS and enthusiast of plant dissection alongside a view of a Royal Society meeting room, Antoine de Jussieu, the Earl of Bute, to whom Thornton refers

as the “Maecenas of Botany,” Aylmar Bourke Lambert Esquire FRS, the Vice President of the Linnaean Society, James Edward Smith, the President of the Linnaean Society, Reverend Thomas Martyn, Daniel Rutherford, Lamarck, J.J. Rousseau, George Shaw, and Sir John Hill, with the Kew Gardens. Hill was the Superintendent of the Kew during the years when Thornton produced his book. The Kew is depicted in scenic view beneath his portrait.

Although it will be impossible to give a detailed analysis of every portrait, I will focus on portraits of two botanical books and figures that greatly influenced Thornton besides the Linnaean corpus: William Curtis’ *Flora Londinensis* (1777-1778) and his *Botanical Magazine* (1787-present), and Erasmus Darwin’s *The Botanic Garden*, in its two halves of *The Loves of the Plants* (1789) and *The Economy of Vegetation* (1799).¹⁰³ Linnaeus had many portraits in Thornton’s book, which I discuss in Chapter two. I give Linnaeus his own chapter because he is arguably the biggest influence. After all, the *Temple of Flora* is the third part of a three-volume book entitled *The New Illustration of the Sexual System of Carolus von Linnaeus* and warrants a separate discussion.

There is a great deal of evidence that William Curtis’ *Flora Londinensis* directly inspired Thornton’s book.¹⁰⁴ Thornton said this specifically in his *Biographical Sketch of the Life and Writings of the Late Mr. Curtis’ Lectures*. Thornton singles out Curtis’ *Flora Londinensis* as being “not upon a neat, diminutive,

¹⁰³ Grigson and Buchanan 2.

¹⁰⁴ Ray Desmond, *Great Natural History Books and their Creators* (London: The British Library, 2003), 114.

inadequate scale, but on one that was equally just, magnificent, and noble, like our Empire—one truly worthy of the British nation.”¹⁰⁵ This statement is consistent with Thornton’s own aims to encapsulate the British Empire on a grand scale with flowers, since he explicitly referred to the chapter with floral plates in the Temple of Flora as the “Universal Empire of Love.”¹⁰⁶

Thornton included a portrait of Curtis depicted next to the frontispiece of Curtis’ book, the *Flora Londinensis* (**IMAGE 1.2**). The stylistic conventions of this portrait are similar to the one of Thornton, depicting Curtis in an oval frame in understated attire with two snipped botanical specimens placed directly above him and a flourishing landscape below. Curtis, while obviously affiliated with the botanical specimens and landscapes that surround him, is still slightly set apart from these objects and places because he is isolated in an oval with a surrounding line that demarcates his portrait as a separate space and conveys the impression of a relief sculpture. The oval portrait has a blank background, and Curtis’ soft, stable features have a chiseled, stony appearance in comparison to the light, frothy landscape below and the delicate, detailed flowers above. There is a small, sculptural plaque with carved letters directly beneath him that identifies him both as a Fellow of the Royal Society and as the author of the *Flora Londinensis*. The small, bucolic landscape depicted below is identical to the one depicted on the frontispiece of the *Flora Londinensis*. It is identified as the imagery on the frontispiece of the *Flora Londinensis* with cursive font beneath the landscape.

¹⁰⁵ Robert John Thornton, *Sketch of the Life and Writings of the Late Mr. William Curtis’ Lectures*, v. 3. 1805, 16; Thornton (1807) v.3. unpaginated.

¹⁰⁶ Thornton (1807) unpaginated.

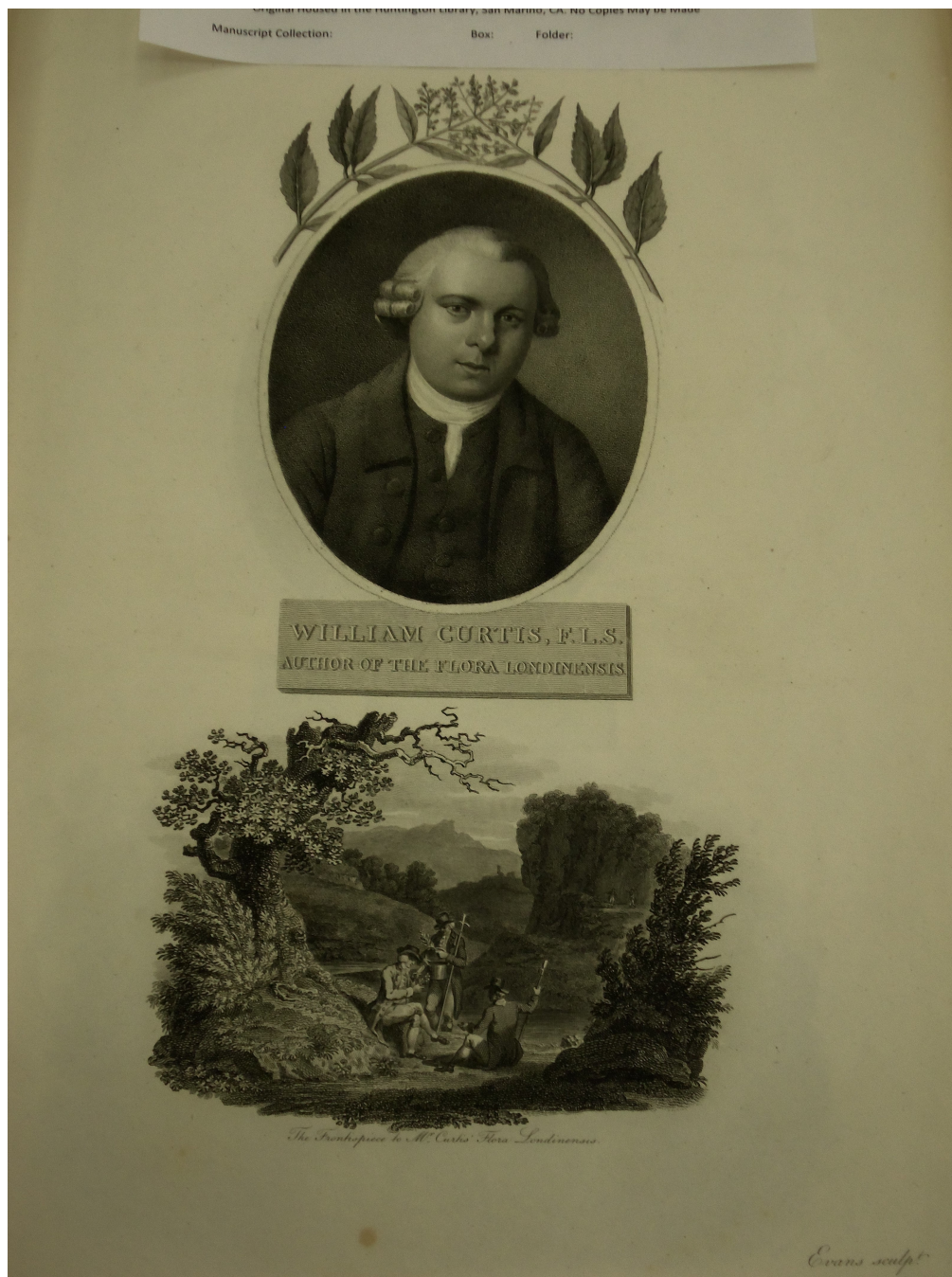


IMAGE 1.2, William Evans, Portrait of William Curtis, 1802, in the *New Illustration*, courtesy of the Huntington Library.

Besides his extensive textual quotation of Darwin throughout the entire *Temple of Flora*, Thornton explicitly calls our attention to Erasmus Darwin as an influence in the following passage: “Whilst the honourable exertions of a great nation have been lately concentrated to embellish and illustrate the fancy of poets, or sacred and historic truth; the science of botany, advanced as it is by Linnaeus, and subsequent authors, and by the glowing imagination of modern poets [i.e. Dr. Darwin] who have improved on Ovidian Metamorphosis.”¹⁰⁷

The portrait of Erasmus Darwin (**IMAGE 1.3**) displays the doctor in an oval, three-quarter length portrait format. Darwin, similar to Curtis, is enclosed in an oval frame with a blank background and has a substantial, sculptural appearance. Darwin is presented as an ample figure in an elaborately buttoned coat. He does not address the viewer with his gaze, but seems to turn inwards as if lost in thought. Perhaps this inward gaze further renders him into a sculptural object to be pondered, as opposed to a more humanized subject for the viewer to address with eye contact. Several plants are depicted directly above Dr. Darwin, and the stony, sculptural plaque that identifies him also lists that he is “author of the ‘Loves of the Plants,’” as well as being a MD and FRS. Similar to Curtis, he is inextricably linked with his book.

¹⁰⁷ Thornton (1807) unpaginated.

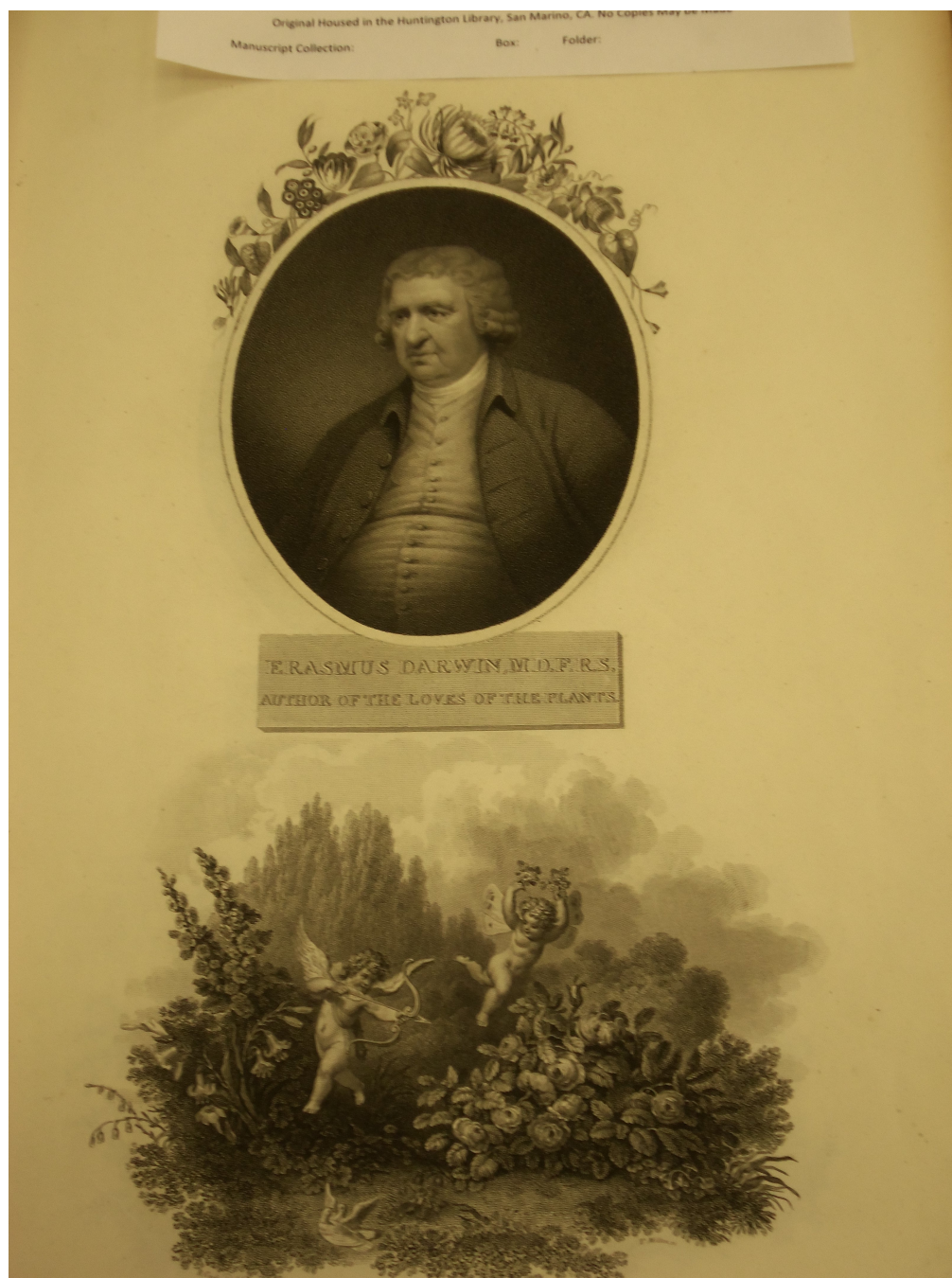


IMAGE 1.3, William Holl Sr., after J. Rawlinson, Portrait of Erasmus Darwin, 1803, in the *New Illustration*, courtesy of the Huntington Library.

The weighty, intense presence of the doctor is at odds with the delicate, airy, vibrant landscape scene beneath. Darwin's solid, stable, motionless appearance contrasts with the motion of the windblown trees and flying putti below, and the dainty, detailed, diverse flowers that flourish above his portrait. This contrast evokes a duality between the vivacity of objects and mythical figures and Darwin's solidity and utter stillness. The product of his deep musings on the personified botanical world seem to manifest outwardly in an imaginative landscape scene culled from "The Loves of the Plants" depicted directly beneath him. This scene includes two frolicking putti who pick flowers and shoot a bow and arrow at the plants, which in turn implies that plants have the capacity to feel love as they are struck with Cupid's arrow, just as humans do.

In spite of influences from Curtis and Darwin, which emerge in the form of frequent visual and textual quotations as well as portraiture, Thornton engaged with material on personified plants differently than his peers. Curtis, for example, never visually personified plants and he also never situated them in landscape backgrounds prior to the creation of the *Temple of Flora*. Shortly after the *Temple of Flora* was issued, however, Curtis created a book based on the *Temple of Flora*. This book, entitled *The Beauties of Flora* (1806-1820), also had personified plants in landscapes, which I discuss in the conclusion of my thesis.¹⁰⁸ Thornton's other main

¹⁰⁸ Curtis' book is exceptionally rare, and its plates are very few in number compared to Thornton's. Many of the plates were engraved by J. Hopwood and F.C. Lewis after paintings by Clara Pope. Wilfrid Blunt and William T. Stearn, *The Art of Botanical Illustration* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club L.T.D., 1994 [reprint, 1950]), 242.

influences, Linnaeus and Darwin, personified plants in an almost exclusively literary manner.

Lifelikeness: Further Texts on Plant Personification that Influenced Thornton

To the best of my knowledge, Thornton's *Temple of Flora* is one of the first entire volumes of a book in the history of botany devoted to depicting personified plants in the landscapes of their countries in a visual, literary, and medical manner in collectible colored plates through the relationship between image and text. Plants have their own lives and biographies in Thornton's book, a human capacity for emotion. Precedents exist for Thornton's work, which he does not explicitly mention, and not all of his influences appear in visual portraits or textual footnotes. It is important to take these popular, uncited sources into consideration alongside the cited, academic sources that Thornton openly mentions.

Beyond the texts about plants and society that I mentioned in the history section of this chapter and are extremely well-known in today's scholarship about plant personification, there are other books that ought to be mentioned, which are probably not as well-read today as they were in the late eighteenth century. Striking resemblances can be found between Thornton's work and John Langhorne's (1735-1779) *The Fables of Flora* of 1772 (**IMAGE 1.4**), which includes flowers in black and white illustrations accompanied by poems that personify each flower. The flowers become emblems for human virtues. The scene of the crocus in this text greatly resembles the snowdrops in Thornton's *Flora* (**IMAGE 1.5**), with the snowy landscape, cloudy sky, rustic English cottages, the castle in the distant background, and the prominent placement of the flowers in the foreground bursting through the

frost, as if to signify the arrival of Spring. David Longworth's 1803 *Enchanted Plants* is a similar type of floral emblem book, also in black and white, with fewer illustrations. In both cases, the plates are not altered in different states and they are not collectible. Still, while these works have some of the elements that I mentioned, (depicting personified plants in visual and literary through the relationship between image and text), they do not have all of these elements woven together in precisely the same way as Thornton's *Flora*.



IMAGE 1.4, John Langhorne, *The Crocus*, from *The Fables of Flora*, 1772, courtesy of the Huntington Library.



IMAGE 1.5, Snowdrops, painted by Abraham Pether and Engraved by William Ward for Robert John Thornton's *Temple of Flora*, mezzotint with aquatint added in third state, September 1804, courtesy of Grey Herbarium, Harvard University.

The role of color and the variability of the plants in the plates contribute to the impression of lifelikeness in Thornton's *Flora*. So does the one-to-one correspondence in scale. Langhorne and Longworth's books were both miniatures. The lifelike properties of Thornton's illustrations were noted by many of his peers. Dr Rutherford FRS, Professor of botany and president of the Edinburgh College of Physicians said:

The New Illustration, I may well judge, from the specimens before me will indeed far surpass in Elegance and Splendour every thing that has hitherto been offered to the memory of Linnaeus. I do not know which most to admire, whether the accuracy of the Designs, the softness and delicacy of the Engravings, or the general effect of the whole. I never did see representation of any flowers whatever in colours more brilliant, or more just. At a small distance one would rather have imagined that the Real Objects themselves were before us, than only their pictures; the Deception is, I think, complete. The NEW ILLUSTRATION will be not only the most splendid Botanical Work extant, but a standard example, shewing to what a height one of the chief branches of the fine arts has attained in England.¹⁰⁹

Rutherford notes that the flowers could be perceived as "Real Objects," praising their skillful "deception," and noting the elegant splendor, the homage to Linnaeus and profusion of beautiful colors that were also "just," plausibly found in nature. The "brilliant colors" and "reality" of these flowers were subject to alteration between various editions of prints, however, which in many ways reflects the metamorphic changes found in the natural world.

¹⁰⁹ Dr. Rutherford FRS in Robert John Thornton, *March 1st, 1799, will be published, The new illustration of the sexual system of Linnæus. By Robert John Thornton, M.D. ...* (London, 1799), 3.

While Thornton was issuing parts of the *Temple of Flora*, he had an exhibition of the original paintings and drawings of his plates at 49 New Bond Street in 1804 in his self-styled Linnaean Gallery. To bring the contents of the book to life, he included an indoor bower, with “backgrounds expressive of the country of each flower,” decorated with foreign and English birds and butterflies “in the attitudes of life.”¹¹⁰ I later call attention to this episode to describe Thornton’s *Flora* as a textual curiosity cabinet, but here I would like to focus on the way that it was meant to stimulate subscription to keep the book alive, so to speak, and also to display the lifelike properties of the *Temple of Flora*. He held this show to stimulate subscription to the third and final portion of his book, *The Temple of Flora, or Garden of Nature, Being Picturesque Plates of the Choicest Flowers of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America*. He advertised this exhibition as “The Temple of Flora,” which was also a real site of amusement on the Westminster Bridge Road.¹¹¹ This sort of show was common for printmakers in early nineteenth-century London, and its primary purpose was squarely aimed at the sale of prints. These shows often publicized and promoted prints by means of other spectacles. These spectacles sometimes involved the infamous, vexed opposition between art and nature from antiquity onwards found in concepts such as *ekphrasis* and *paragone*. Throughout the *Temple of Flora*, Thornton draws upon these ancient ideas. There is a literary tension between the flowers that artists paint and authentic ones that are “painted by nature.”¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Grigson and Buchanan 3, Altick 109.

¹¹¹ Altick 109.

¹¹² Altick 99.

It is pretty likely that Thornton was offering the remaindered stock of his writings as 'prizes.' The lottery was probably serving the same function of an auction in raising money. Many bankrupts put their total assets into the salerooms, which Thornton was probably doing in a more gentlemanly way, which would be appropriate for the imagined clientele. These annual shows enlarged the market for separate prints made from prohibitively expensive paintings, and even increased popular demand for the prints after an audience saw the original works of art juxtaposed with printed copies of it. This sort of printed book, made after a gallery of paintings, was sometimes called a "museum without walls," and made an entire collection of expensive works of art slightly more accessible.¹¹³ Related economic ventures at this time included John Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery (1786) and Henry Fuseli's Gallery of the Miltonic Sublime (1799).¹¹⁴ Similar to Milton and Boydell, Thornton issued a descriptive catalogue of his exhibit in 1805:

"The Philosophy of Botany, or Botanical Extracts, including a New Illustration ... and the Temple of Flora;' 'A Grammar of Botany,' to be completed in fifteen monthly numbers or less, with seven or eight plates each, price three shillings, but given gratis to purchasers of the 'Philosophy;' 'The Empire of Flora, or Scientific Description of all known Plants, Natives and Exotics, [with] more than one thousand Dissections from Drawings by John Miller,' also in monthly parts, at three shillings, each with eight copper-plates, the British plants forming about fifty numbers, making two octavo volumes, with four hundred plates, to be followed by foreign plants in three volumes, with six hundred

¹¹³ Altick 106.

¹¹⁴ Altick 107-108.

plates; and 'Portraits of Eminent Authors,' at three shillings each. The part of the 'Empire of Flora' that was actually published was 'The British Flora' (5 vols. 1812), and the three portraits then issued were Erasmus Darwin, engraved by Holl after Rawlinson; Professor Thomas Martyn, engraved by Vendramini after Russell; and Sir James Edward Smith, engraved by Ridley after Russell.¹¹⁵

Twenty-four engravings were published afterwards, and Hemsley and Perkins provide a complete list. They were issued separately at five guineas, included in 'Elementary Botanical Plates ... to illustrate Botanical Extracts' (London, 1810, folio), and in some copies of the 'New Illustration.'¹¹⁶ In spite of all of these publications, the 1804 show was moved to Thornton's house in Manchester Square in 1805, since it was unsuccessful, in keeping with Boydell, Fuseli, and numerous other galleries involved in "the melancholy procession of doomed and expensive attempts to enlist showmanship in the service of art."¹¹⁷

Thornton exhibited his paintings once again in 1811-1812 at the European Museum on King's Street, when he obtained an act of parliament authorizing him to organize a lottery of his botanical works, and this was advertised as 'The Royal Botanical Lottery, under the patronage of the prince regent, of twenty thousand tickets at two guineas each, and ten thousand prizes, of a total value exceeding 77,000 pounds' The first prize was the entire collection of original pictures "of

¹¹⁵ W. B. Hemsley and W. F. Perkins 89, 276.

¹¹⁶ Boulger 304.

¹¹⁷ Altick 109.

Flowers, Allegorical subjects, and Heads of Botanists” from the Linnaean Gallery on exhibition at the European Museum with a “superb copy” of each the other books that formed the prizes, which was valued at over five thousand pounds. The second class of prizes consisted of 199 copies of three folio volumes of *Botanical Extracts, or The Philosophy of Botany*, together with 199 copies of *The Temple of Flora* and the *New Illustration* (1807 versions) ‘in five folio volumes;’ the third class, 200 portfolios of plates in the *Temple of Flora*; the fourth class, the 1812 quarto edition of *The Temple of Flora*, or 600 sets of the quarto plates “richly colored and valued at 15 pounds each”; the fifth class, 2,000 copies of the *Flora Britannica* of 1812 (5 vols. 8vo, with four hundred plates) worth 5 pounds each; and the sixth class, 7,000 copies of the *Elements of Botany* (2 vols. 8vo, with two hundred plates), also 5 pounds each. The trustees of the lottery, especially James Everard, Lord Arundell, agreed to destroy the copper plates within a month of the draw to increase the value and originality of the plates.¹¹⁸

Despite its immense cultural success, Thornton’s book failed financially at The Royal Botanical Lottery. This lottery was meant to raise £42,000 and to dispense prizes amounting to £77,000. It is unknown how many tickets were sold out of the 20,000 tickets proposed.¹¹⁹ Possibly the lottery failed, since Thornton did

¹¹⁸ Boulger 304, Grigson and Buchanan 5, An advertisement for the auction on May 1st, 1812 read “All the PLATES are to be DESTROYED...immediately after the drawing, so that the prizes would “rise considerably in value.”

¹¹⁹ Cardew 450-453. This article reproduces advertisements for the lottery from 1811. Thornton went bankrupt from the production of this book and died in poverty.

not give enough notice of the draw, and not enough tickets had been purchased before the final draw on May 6th, 1813. Thornton lectured on botany at his Linnaean Gallery and the Argyle Rooms on May 5th to raise enthusiasm for his lottery, but as the memoir in *The Gentleman's Magazine* reports, "the results were not sufficiently successful to restore his fortune, and he was ever after a beggared man."¹²⁰ A less expensive quarto edition of color plates in *The Temple of Flora* without the rest of the *New Illustration* was published in 1812. In spite of Thornton's numerous subsequent publications, he left his wife, son, and daughter very poor when he died at Howland Street, Fitzroy Square, on 21 Jan. 1837.¹²¹

The death of Thornton's career occurred simultaneously with the death of his book, linking biographical subject with biographical object. His life story became synonymous with the production of his book in every biographical account in primary and secondary sources. Nobody has ever explored the significance of this aspect of Thornton's biography, which shows an all-consuming passion for botanical works, fueled by his medical and antique interests and patriotic devotion. I hope I have shown that the materiality of the author, his book, and his career are inextricably linked.

Thornton's book intended to show the durability of authority figures in spite of the frailty of flowers, but also the power of art, which could preserve them forever. Exhibited among genuine naturalia in Thornton's Linnaean Gallery to create a tension between the real and the artificial, viewers like Rutherford thought that

¹²⁰ Grigson and Buchanan 7; "Obituary," 94.

¹²¹ Grigson and Buchanan 7; "Obituary," 94.

Thornton's paper empire could be as authentic as the genuine article. In my mind, Thornton's *Temple of Flora* never failed, as is so often claimed. Instead, he created a textual monument to natural knowledge that never succeeded financially, but nevertheless still enjoyed some cultural success. Perhaps this is so because there were so many costly alterations and transformations between its covers, which could never contain nature's immense variation through the endless combinations of plates and the changes within them.

These tensions between the permanence of botanical authority figures and the short life cycles of personified flowers are two themes that figure prominently in the next chapter. So do the ancient concepts of *ekphrasis* and *paragone*. Although Chapter one interpretively analyzed Thornton's life and the history of his book's production in a somewhat diachronic timeline, the next chapter explores the visual expression of transhistorical time. Chapter two will explore the ways that Thornton evinced a sense of timelessness through the conscious combination of ancient mythological sources like the goddess Flora and modern sources like Linnaeus.

CHAPTER 2

Botanical Olympians: Representing the Past in Thornton's Universal Empire of Flowers

IMAGE 2.1, Flora, Æsculapius, Ceres, with Cupid, Honoring the Bust of Linnæus, painted by Russell and Opie and engraved by Caldwell, April 1, 1806, courtesy of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

“All Animated Nature owns my sway, Earth, sea, and air, my potent laws obey, And thou Divine Linnaeus, trac’d my reign, O’er trees, shrubs, and Flora’s beauteous train, Proved them obedient to my soft control, and gaily breathe an aromatic soul.”

¹

With the deft tip of a pointed arrow, Cupid inscribes these poetic verses on the centrally placed, white marble bust of Thornton’s botanical muse, Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778), who inspired the creation of the *Temple of Flora*. Ancient gods and goddesses surround Linnaeus: Aesculapius, the god of medicine, Flora, the goddess of flowers, and Ceres, the goddess of grain and agriculture (**IMAGE 2.1**). A Zephyr resting on a downy, grayish-blue cloud above Linnaeus strews small bouquets of pink, blue, and yellow flowers on his head, while Ceres crowns him with a laurel wreath. The Zephyr’s presence “denotes spring, the season most favorable to the study of botany.”² Although the season is specified, Thornton creates a sense of static timelessness as he depicts the aforementioned famous botanical gods and goddesses from the past and present in one image, introducing Linnaeus into this canon of Olympians and immortalizing him too as a god in his quest to create a “National Homage” to this already celebrated botanist. What many meanings are there in Thornton’s appreciation of the “soft control” of all animated nature instigated by Linnaeus mentioned in the poem above—a soft, yielding command of the natural world encompassing the earth, sea, and air of the entire world, all simultaneously subjected to Cupid’s love, Linnaeus’ botanical scholarship, and

¹ This poem and plate are included in the front matter of the *Temple of Flora*. Charlotte Lennox in Thornton (1807) unpaginated.

² Thornton (1807), *Aesculapius, Flora, Ceres and Cupid Honouring Linnaeus* unpaginated.

Thornton's artistic command over the diversity of the floral kingdom?

This chapter investigates Thornton's use of ancient sources on botany. These authority figures consist of mythical gods and goddesses associated with botany in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, but also include ancient botanical authors cited by Linnaeus and Thornton, such as Pliny, Ovid, Theophrastus, and Dioscorides. The literature on "the ancients and the moderns" in the eighteenth century is immense and the revitalization of ancient sources in this period is considered a commonplace banality, but this phenomenon has never been thoroughly investigated in the specific context of Thornton's botanical work.³ In analyzing Thornton's simultaneous use of contemporary and ancient sources, I explore the ways that he creates a sense of transhistorical time in his world, as he depicts famous botanical figures from the past and present harmoniously co-existing. Historian of science Lisbet Koerner mentions that in Sweden there was a Romantic nationalist process of Linnaean deification that prompted cultural conservatives of the nineteenth century to position Linnaeus as a "flower king." According to Koerner, such a title nostalgically gestures to the past by embodying the military and racial virtues of Sweden's seventeenth-century empire, but also pointed to a modern realm where modernity, science, and progress were at the fore.⁴ Although Thornton was British and not Swedish, I argue that he treats Linnaeus in a similar fashion in his images and text.

³ Kemp 212-214. Martin Kemp briefly discusses the use of ancient sources in eighteenth-century botany and includes Thornton.

⁴ Lisbet Koerner, *Linnaeus: Nature and Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 185-186.

The classicized whiteness of these ancient and modern gods and goddesses, appearing in the stylized profiles, manner of neoclassical dress, and Linnaeus's alabaster marble bust and his central position as a masculine authority figure are also under investigation in this chapter. Thornton suggested that lifecycles, race, gender, and the boundaries between animate and inanimate entities were of primary concern in this particular image, if not the entire text, by setting up a series of binary oppositions in his description of this image. He mentions in a footnote to the poem associated with this picture: "The effect indeed of this picture throughout is greatly heightened by contrast. You have old age and infancy, male and female, fair and brown, animate and inanimate."⁵ Following Thornton's logic, I argue that race and gender intersect with the sense of neoclassical timelessness that Thornton creates. I contend that the past, present, and occasionally the future are collapsed into one entity as these classical models of time frequently involve the notion of a lifecycle of birth, life, and death. This lifecycle often has a sense of hierarchy and the notion of progress enfolded into it. My thesis is that one of the primary reasons for Thornton's collapse of historical time is to bring ancient classical sources into the present in line with then-current conventions depicting Western natural science as a civilizing influence in a colonial context.

The relationship between the classics and the British imperial agenda is vast, although Thornton's text has never been analyzed through this lens. Scholarship about the classics and colonialism especially flourished in the mid 1990s, which emphasized first and foremost that the classics were an instrument of power and

⁵ Thornton (1807) v.1 of the *New Illustration*, 6.

cultural authority. Imperialist discourses that referred to eighteenth and nineteenth-century Britain as the “New Rome,” was only part of the equation amidst their influence on all other aspects of culture.⁶ Several texts deal with the role that images play in shaping this discourse in a very broad sense, for example Richard Hingley’s *Images of Rome* (2001), although this focuses primarily on the modern age.⁷ Several volumes written more recently deal with the question of cultural ownership in a postcolonial context, and explore the way that classicism has been used both in Britain and in the colonies as a malleable entity that could be used to challenge the dominant hierarchy of British imperialism in literature, art, and other cultural productions. In this way, classicism is not just a single, generic monolithic entity, but exhibits considerable diversity.⁸

This revitalization of the classics as a form of Western authority and progress assumes three main guises in Thornton’s text, so I divide this chapter into three related parts. The first part examines how Thornton depicts Linnaeus as an authority through tropes of exploration and neoclassical aesthetics, including temporal conceptions of biography and history in these fields. Second, I turn to Flora. If Linnaeus is the botanical patriarch of the *Temple of Flora*, Flora is the

⁶ Jane Webster and Nicolas Cooper, *Roman Imperialism: Post-colonial Perspectives* (School of Archaeological Studies, University of Leicester, 1996); Norman Vance, *The Victorians and Ancient Rome* (N.Y.: Blackwell, 1997); Catherine Edwards (ed.), *Roman Presences: Reconceptions of Rome in European Culture 1789-1945* (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁷ Richard Hingley, *Images of Rome: Perceptions of Ancient Rome in Europe and the United States in the Modern Age* (Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2001).

⁸ Barbara E. Goff, *Classics and Colonialism* (Duckworth, 2005); Lorna Hardwick and Carol Gillespie (eds.), *Classics in Postcolonial Worlds* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2007); Mark Bradley, *Classics and Imperialism* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2010).

botanical matriarch and heroine of that book. Although she kneels submissively and respectfully before Linnaeus' bust, she hardly plays a subordinate role in Thornton's text. Although she is civil and maternal, Flora as represented in Thornton's text and plates is a feisty, feminine force of nature that mercilessly duels with Art. She detests the ways that Art keeps Nature artificially alive and interferes with the natural cycles of birth, life, and decay. She only consents to let Art continue because it will further the goals of the British Empire. Continuing with gendered themes, the third part of this chapter explores representations of abduction in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in Thornton's text. I explore how Ovid's tales of abduction in the *Metamorphoses* animate and inform Thornton's depictions of human flesh turned floral and arboreal, and how this practice evokes notions, then current, of sexual conquest as a civilizing and colonizing practice. As women and young men flee from the embraces of the gods and goddesses, they die, and then slowly transform into productive and beautiful botanical commodities. This temporal and corporeal transformation from object of desire into desired object occurs on numerous occasions in Thornton's work.

Linnaeus, Botanical Patriarch

Thornton dedicated his book to Linnaeus (1707-1778), whom he called the "Great Northern Genius, Sire of Botany." The title of the three-volume work that includes the Temple of Flora is entitled *The New Illustration of the Sexual System of Carolus von Linnaeus*, and for this reason, I focus on Linnaeus as a guiding influence rather than Erasmus Darwin. Ironically, although Linnaeus was arguably a great influence on Thornton and included in the title of his book, the way that he

influenced Thornton has not been discussed at length. The poem that accompanies the white marble bust of Linnaeus suggests that neoclassical tropes are being used to honor him as an authority in botany, with verses that “perpetuate his fame” in a “laurel grove,” a traditional mark of respect, fame, and honor in antiquity. This poem also stresses that Linnaeus bid “the foremost of the human race to rise.” The foundation moment of the modern idea of race (but not the word itself) supposedly begins with Linnaeus’ *Systema Naturae* of 1735.⁹ In his classificatory writings about humans, Linnaeus had depicted the races in a continental hierarchy, even though the races had their own virtues. In later editions of the *Systema Naturae* from 1758 onwards, Linnaeus classified human beings according to the Four Continents model, and in turn, the humoral theories found in Four Temperaments model from antiquity, in the works of Hippocrates (460-370 B.C.) and Galen (131-200 A.D.). The Four Temperaments model, associated the four humors (black bile, yellow bile, blood, and phlegm) with four distinct personality types (melancholic, choleric, sanguine, and phlegmatic), which in turn were affiliated with the human races and their geographical territories.¹⁰ In Linnaeus’s racial scheme, the European

⁹ Schiebinger (1993) 119; François Bernier (1625-1688) was the first to divide the world into four “races” in 1684.

¹⁰ Carolus Linnaeus, *Systema Naturae per regna tria naturae*, 10th ed. (Stockholm, 1758), 21-23; Schiebinger (1993) 119; The literature on race and social geographies is vast and naturally has expanded beyond Schiebinger’s work. Also consult David Bindman, *Ape to Apollo* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002), Jan Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 18; Stuart Elden, *Reading Kant’s Geography* (Buffalo: SUNY Press, 2011), 334-340; Roxann Wheeler, *The complexion of race: categories of difference in eighteenth-century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 31-45, and especially David Livingstone, *Geography and Enlightenment*

“Europaeus albus” was in the superior position, marked by “quick invention” (i.e., being ingenious), “formed by the rules of symmetrical elegance and beauty,” “white,” “sanguine,” “dress[ed] in close vestments” (i.e., wearing tight-fitting clothing), and “governing by fixed laws” over the others.¹¹ In the Linnaean model of race, whiteness and European identity was bound up with neoclassicism. The boundaries between the human and vegetable world are extremely permeable in Linnaean theories of race. Linnaeus discussed botanical specimens simultaneously with their surrounding territories and the races of people who used them. Linnaean racial models were also applied to the territories and natural history specimens in each continent.¹² Linnaeus followed Aristotle in the idea that man was both animal and human, and because of this his animal or physical aspects could be incorporated into a taxonomy similar to one he had devised for animals or plants.

The Linnaean scheme included three other races of *Homo sapiens* besides the European: “Americanus,” “Asiaticus,” and “Afer.” In one of the first English translations of Linnaeus’s *Systema Naturae* dating to 1794-1802, Linnaeus called man a “microcosm, or small world,” and then split humanity into races based on various parts of that world.¹³ This popular volume was translated into English by Johann Friedrich Gmelin (1748-1804). He was a German doctor, professor, botanist,

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) and his *Human Geography: An Essential Anthology* (N.Y.: Blackwell, 1996).

¹¹ Linnaeus (trans. J. Frid Gmelin, FRS), *A Genuine and Universal System of Natural History* v1. (London: Lewis and Co, 1794-1802), 7-8.

¹² Bindman 62.

¹³ Linnaeus (1802) 7.

chemist, mineralogist, and FRS who also published the 13th edition of Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* in Latin in 1788. The English version translated by Gmelin is contemporary with the dates of Thornton's book, although doubtlessly Thornton also read the earlier Latin versions by Gmelin and others as a classicist. The Four Continents model in both the 1758 and 1802 versions alike forges a link between humans and their territories, including the animals and plants found in their lands.¹⁴ In the Linnaean racial scheme, the European was placed ahead of the "Americanus rubescus," who was "of copper-colored complexion," "obstinate," "free and satisfied with their condition," and "painted their skin with red streaks." (choleric), the "Asiaticus luridus," who was "yellow," "of sooty complexion," "of rigid fibre," "grave, haughty, covetous," "governed by opinion," and "dress in loose garments" (melancholic), and the "Afer niger," who was described as "black," "of relaxed fibre," "of a crafty, indolent, and careless disposition, and governed in their actions by caprice" (phlegmatic).¹⁵

The hieratic use of time embedded in the idea of the four continents, depicting a sequence from civilization to savagery, occurs to a much greater extent and in a different way in Linnaeus' classification of human skulls and phrenological types. **(IMAGES 2.2, 2.3, 2.4)** These images are ideologically similar to images by Blumenbach, Camper, and Lavater. Both suggest that Europe is at the head of this progression as a classicizing, civilizing influence over the other races and their continents. This sense of timeless simultaneity can also be found in these Linnaean

¹⁴Linnaeus (1802) 7.

¹⁵ Linnaeus (1794) 7-8.

comparative skull anatomies and phrenological types, show a steady progression of the races also stacked together on one page. These images used the concept of the “facial angle,” an idea frequently found in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century comparative anatomy premised on the concept that the ideal, classical head had a more vertical straight line drawn from the chin to the forehead. This straight line and higher forehead implied that this classicized European type was aesthetically preferable and more intelligent. In these diagrams, Apollo is frequently placed at the top, while monkeys are placed at the bottom. In one of these early images in Linnaeus, the facial angle of European and African races is compared to various animals—monkeys and birds—with a neoclassical, blond-haired, blue-eyed man at the top of this hierarchy. The other compares civilized and savage man, from childhood to old age, to death. A small, fleshy, youthful cupid with bouncy blonde curls and a humanized child-monkey play with two fruits at the top, followed by an older man in a powdered wig and his counterpart, the hairy savage. Finally, the skulls at the bottom represent that civilization and savagery are more than skin deep. These sequences relate to what Anne Mc Clintock calls “panoptical time.” She connects the phenomenon of panoptical time with the nineteenth century, but says it also has a prehistory beginning with Linnaeus. Panoptical time is a phenomenon in which the image of global history can be consumed at a glance in a single spectacle from a point of privileged invisibility, and notes that this phenomenon was especially prevalent in diagrams that metaphorically show the family tree of humanity.¹⁶

¹⁶ Anne Mc Clintock, *Imperial Leather* (N.Y.: Routledge, 1995), 7.



IMAGE 2.2, Comparative Skull Anatomy from Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* of 1794, courtesy of the Huntington Library.



IMAGE 2.3, Comparative Skull Anatomy in Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* of 1794, courtesy of the Huntington Library.



IMAGE 2.4, Comparative Skull Anatomy in Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* of 1794, "Representation of the Analogy betwixt Man and Brute," courtesy of the Huntington Library.

Inspired by the ideas of Johannes Fabien, Mc Clintock states that “just as Linné (another referent for Linnaeus) attempted to classify the fragmentary botanical record into a single archive of natural form, so social evolutionists after 1859 undertook the massive attempt of reading from the discontinuous natural record a single pedigree of evolving world history. Now not only could natural space but also historical time could be collected, assembled and mapped onto a global science of the surface.”¹⁷ In these images, time is secularized, chronologized, and spatialized as time becomes a geography of social power, a “map from which to read a global allegory of social alliance.”¹⁸ With panoptical time, images of archaic time are set off against European modernity,¹⁹ but this depends on how one reads the image in terms of how progress is depicted. There is an upward sense of progress if the image is read with respect to the final image of top row, which culminates in a white, neoclassical man or child. Still, there is also a fear that this anachronistic space can become atavistic and civility can slide into savagery if one reads progress the way that one reads a western text, from the upper left to the bottom right, with the conclusion at the bottom right. Although to a certain degree time and history appear “static, fixed, covered in dust”²⁰ in these images, there is plenty of flexibility in the ways that savagery and civilization can be read within this framework. These slippages are even more dramatic in Linnaeus’ text, since Linnaeus states very

¹⁷ Mc Clintock 36.

¹⁸ Mc Clintock 15.

¹⁹ Mc Clintock 40.

²⁰ Mc Clintock 40.

strongly that strong analogies can be drawn “betwixt man and animal” and “betwixt man and vegetable.”

Thornton hagiographically traces Linnaeus’ life in the *Temple of Flora* through image and text. The book describes the historical formulation of Linnaeus’ theories, tracing the arc of his life from his youthful explorations in Lapland where he is depicted as an anti-classical, ethnographic, non-European “other” to his venerable old age where he is depicted in neoclassical format as a famous scientific sage. While Linnaeus’s own use of classical sources also increased throughout his lifetime, it is Thornton who makes Linnaeus into a model of European scientific authority despite his origins at the margins of that image.

A Simple Swain with Wond’ring Eye: Linnaeus Discovers Lapland

The front matter of the *Temple of Flora* most often includes an 1805 replica of a portrait of the young Linnaeus made in 1732. **(IMAGE 2.5)** The portrait was originally painted by a pupil of Linnaeus’s named Martin Hoffman (flourished 1730s, dates of birth and death uncertain) and engraved by Henry Kingsbury in April 1795. Thornton later republished the engraving in 1805.²¹ When displaying his botanical paintings and prints in an 1804 exhibition at New Bond Street, Thornton described this image as a “whole length of Linnaeus, aged only thirty-two, in Lapland dress. By Hoffman. An original picture.” He also adds in a footnote that it was originally painted in Holland by Gronovius (i.e. Jan Frederik Gronovius, the Dutch botanist who lived between 1686-1762 and a teacher of Linnaeus), and is the

²¹ Linnaean Society of London, *Proceedings of the Linnaean Society of London* (London: Academic Press, 1888), 15.

only original picture of Linnaeus in England.²² If this information is correct, then Gronovius is the originator of this image. Also, if one takes into consideration Linnaeus' birth date and the date at which the painting was executed, his age probably would have been closer to twenty-five.²³ There are, however, three different versions of the painting and two different versions of this mezzotint print used by Thornton.²⁴

This early portrait of Linnaeus celebrates masculine discovery and exploration, both literal and intellectual, by depicting him as an intrepid man who has taken a brief respite from his expeditions in Lapland, a wild, northern region of Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Russia. Similar to early missionaries to China and later nineteenth-century ethno-botanists, Linnaeus sports an outfit from the culture that he has entered. It was also a common way for explorers to represent their understanding of another culture. Cultural cross-dressing was an index of a traveler's ability to master the alien and exotic, but also temporarily rendered the European traveler and exotic and foreign by his own culture's standards, argues literary scholar Beth Tobin.²⁵ But sometimes the exotic mastered them, since this incorporation also signifies that explorers have temporarily assumed the role of the

²² Linnaean Society of London 15; also see Koerner 39.

²³ Linnaean Society of London 15.

²⁴ Koerner 39; Linnaean Society of London 18. Two of these paintings are currently in Leiden, and the third is in Uppsala. Another version of this painting is by the Swedish artist Magnus Hallman.

²⁵ Beth Tobin Fowkes, *Picturing Imperial Power: Colonial Subjects in Eighteenth-Century British Painting* (Duke University Press, 1999), 110.

other. Linnaeus' Laplander costume includes a decidedly non-European blend of a Sámi tunic tied at the top with tassels, a round, conical hat, and pointy shoes made of reindeer pelt. His tunic is fastened with a belt holding a snuff-box, a needle to make nets, a shaman's drum made of a tortoise shell, talismans, and a ruler.²⁶

Statically posed in the middle of a dark, smoky, indeterminate background, he looks outwards at the viewer with a direct, solemn glance, and his cheeks are flushed bright red, as if he had just come inside after a long expedition in the frozen tundra. He ventured into the wild terrain of Lapland to discover new species of flowers starting on May 12, 1732, and Thornton specifies that this is the exact year depicted in the print. While in Lapland, Linnaeus noted the relationships between plants, the humans who used them, and the geographical territory that they came from, simultaneously taking notes about the plants that grew there and the people who used them for food and medicine.

The poem "Linnaeus Explores Lapland" by George Shaw accompanies this image and describes him as a "simple swain with wond'ring eye." He wandered "advent'rous stray," through "rude storms raging 'round him in vain" and "torrents crossing his dangerous way." Roaming through "craggy cliffs," amidst the whitening seafoam, no new natural history specimen can escape the attention of his "piercing glance." Thornton finally gestures towards the future with the lines "Hail Nature boast! Triumphant sage! Whom distant cen'tries shall admire; Whose name, rever'd through every age, shall never but with time expire!"

²⁶ Wilfred Blunt and Thomas Stearne, *Linnaeus: The Compleat Naturalist* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), 17.



IMAGE 2.5, Henry Kingsbury, Portrait of Linnaeus from Robert John Thornton's Temple of Flora, 1805, courtesy of the Huntington Library.

As in the poem, Linnaeus' portrait combines the present, past, and future of botanical scholarship, and also combines artifacts from his expeditions with textual knowledge. Linnaeus holds the eponymous botanical specimen *Linnaea borealis* in his hands, which grew in regions of Asia, North America and Europe, while a pile of books authored by Linnaeus signifies that textual knowledge complements his first-hand explorations and collections of floral specimens.²⁷ These books were written at a much later time than the Lapland expedition and eventually became the reason for his future fame. The only one that is contemporary with the historical moment being represented is the *Flora Lapponica* (written between 1732 and 1737, and published in 1737). The other books postdate his 1732 Lapland trip, such as the *Musa Cliffortiana* (1736), the *Critica Botanica* (1737), and above all, the *Systema Naturae* (1735). All of these books rest on a neoclassical pediment with a white marble column on top of it. The *Systema Naturae* is set apart from the other books, in an upright position, stacked diagonally against the column. In fact, the *Systema Naturae* has the appearance of a small column because of the folds in the binding, which echoes the fluting of the column behind it, and possibly alludes to Linnaeus's magnum opus becoming a pillar of knowledge, a literary and scientific "classic" in the future.

Linnaeus' books would eventually become much more famous in the future than he ever was in 1732. While these texts were surrounded by classical architecture to suggest erudition, Linnaeus himself is decidedly anti-classical and not at all the typical image of the wise master, more the youthful adventurer. This

²⁷ Blunt and Stearne 17.

kind of imagery, however, can be considered part of a mythology of authority, as it shows his first-hand experience with adventuring in the field. At the historical moment depicted in the engraving, Linnaeus was still a student and not yet the great authority figure of botany that he eventually became. Because of the blank background, his foreign outfit, and the way that he poses with a botanical specimen, it is almost as if Thornton wishes to depict him in the guise of the exotic other. This isolation against a blank background, dressing in regional costume, and posing with botanical or other natural history specimens was at this time an extremely common way to represent Europe's others.

In fact, Linnaeus frequently adopted this convention in his own representations of non-Europeans, but not in Europeans. A representative example of this is the "Senegal Man and Woman" of 1794. **(IMAGES 2.6 and 2.7)** In these images, one of the most distinctive and striking features for my present inquiry is that the background is white rather than black. These conventions of botanical illustration with a blank, white background increase the ease with which specimens are metaphorically transplanted from one environment into another. These botanical conventions, when applied equally to human beings, also serve to convert them into natural history curiosities by disassociating them from a distinct time period, placing them in the empty, indistinct, objectifying, timeless ethnographic space of the blank background. The Linnaean figures are placed against a blank, white background with a small patch of vibrant green, grassy landscape underfoot. There are botanical specimens from Senegal placed directly next to them, entwined around a tree stump. The man, woman, and botanical specimens share space and

are interconnected, but they are strangely disconnected from the landscape. Instead, they are situated against a blank, white page that accentuates their dark skin and turns them into natural history objects.

Tobin discusses the aesthetic and ideological functions of this blank background, which is also a feature of many botanical plates illustrating the Linnaean system. Naturally, many blank backgrounds exist in natural history illustrations, and have been around well before the eighteenth century, but they signify different things depending upon context. For the most part, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the function of stripped-down plant illustration was for cataloguing and museum classification purposes. In those days environment was not part of the classification and hence not shown. Additional landscape or cultural features were not shown unless the function of the plate was to be artistic or educational in some way, or to appeal to a larger audience.²⁸

Tobin also states that botanical illustrations from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are often diagrammatic, typical of eighteenth and nineteenth century prints. The whole plant is seldom represented, nor is there any attempt to record how the vital parts of the plant function. Root systems seldom appear, nor do dissected, cross-sectioned stems, leaves, or limbs, but the flower is almost always depicted in cross-section. The plant's environment, relationships with other plants and animals, and climactic conditions almost never appear in Linnaean-influenced botanical illustration. Sometimes, these things are shown visually and textually, but

²⁸ Wilfred Blunt and William Stearne, *The Art of Botanical Illustration* (London: Collins, 1950), See especially pages 147-159, 211-218, 223-236, and 244-261.

not always. In the specific context of certain colonial specimens in the domain of visual allusion and representation, however, Tobin suggests that the blank background signifies that a great deal of the cultural context of these plants has been erased and negated as it has been wrenched from its native context and subjected to the Linnaean order, a popular part of the European botanical mindset since the 1760s to the early nineteenth century.²⁹ Tobin states even more explicitly and suggestively that “the white border and snipped twig of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century botanical illustration reinforced the idea that a plant could be plucked from one cultural and ecological context and inserted into another with ease and little regard for negative consequences.”³⁰

Although Lapland was in Sweden, Linnaeus described Laplanders as unusual human curiosities with a distinct way of doing things that were not quite European. They lived in a land with mountains haunted by hobgoblins, wore unusual clothing, and ate unusual foods, such as cloudberry and reindeer meat, milk, and cheese.³¹ Well into the nineteenth century, they were also at times considered more “Asiatic” than fully European, with an “Orient complexion” that “assimilates the Laplander to

²⁹ Beth Fowkes Tobin, “Imperial Designs: Botanical Illustration and the British Botanic Empire,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 25 (1996), 272; Also see Alix Cooper on the meaning of the indigenous in her book *Inventing the Indigenous: Local Knowledge and Natural History in Early Modern Europe* (N.Y: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³⁰ Tobin (1996) 269.

³¹ Linnaeus (1811) 221,281.

the Natives of Japan.”³² While Linnaeus was in a privileged European position as a white explorer who would eventually write famous books, in many other ways he is depicted in his earlier years as non-western other.

Thornton’s poems and prose also depict Linnaeus as a misfit who is marginalized by European high society at this early stage in his life. In the text that accompanies this print, Thornton describes Linnaeus as an “ardent explorer,” who is “planning out his sexual system,” but instead of immediate fame he “encountered the opposition of men of the highest literary eminence,” and “the most violent and bigotted (sic) opposition, “ as well as “curious resentment,” “ridicule,” and “enlightened but still prejudiced rejection.” These stories of early rejection and iconoclasm are, of course, common parts of scientific authority and biography as well, an alternate interpretation of this text. This was, in fact, the moment when Linnaeus began to engage in the initial stages of plant classification, and studies about how man and “vegetable” worlds interacted and to receive intense criticism for it. It was also during this time when he began to devise a new system of botanical classification that would eventually become the sexual system, since the existing methods were unable to keep pace with the huge amount of new specimens that he found.³³ The fact that Linnaeus holds a flower named after himself in his portrait and permitted himself to be botanized as a plant reveals an intense personal devotion to his project of classifying plants.

³² For example, this happens in Thomas Curtis, *The London Encyclopedia* (London: J. Haddon, 1839), 480-484.

³³ Blunt and Stearne 17.



IMAGE 2.6, Image of Senegalese woman from Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae*, 1794, courtesy of the Huntington Library.



IMAGE 2.7, Image of Senegalese man from Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae*, 1794.



IMAGE 2.8, Francesco Bartolozzi, Portrait of Elderly Linnaeus in the *Temple of Flora*, 1806, courtesy of the Huntington Library.

“Taming Science and Bringing it Home”: Fame and Neoclassical Authority

The portrait of Linnaeus as a Laplander in Thornton’s text sometimes appears alongside the aforementioned neoclassical scene of Cupid and ancient gods and goddesses admiring the bust of Linnaeus and the image of Cupid inspiring the plants with love. Historian of science John Heilbron describes Cupid as a domesticating figure, an iconographic device that signifies the “taming of science” and the concept of literally “bringing it home” in the field of eighteenth-century natural philosophy.³⁴ These associations are extremely evocative in a text about exotic botanical specimens being brought back to Britain, and then subjected to the European classifying schemes of Linnaeus. Following eighteenth-century conventions of depicting cupids engaged in scientific activity, cupids often appear with many of the celebrated scientific figures in Thornton’s book, as if to suggest that domesticating and taming new knowledge is their occupation. Linnaeus is no exception. **(IMAGE 2.8)** The portrait of the elderly Linnaeus, also by Hoffman and engraved by Francesco Bartolozzi (1727-1815) on May 1, 1806 appears later in the book and depicts him in an ovoid frame surrounded by grey clouds shot through with sunbeams. Linnaeus is depicted as a kindly, older man who smiles softly at the viewer. He wears a powdered wig and a maroon jacket with metal buttons. A medal of honor, the Knight of the Polar Star, is pinned to his coat. Indeed, the text associated with this image describes him first and foremost as a “Knight of the Polar Star, First Physician to the King, Professor of Botany at the University of Uppsala

³⁴ J.L. Heilbron, “Domesticating Science in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Science and the Visual Image in the Enlightenment*, ed. William Shea (Canton, MA: Watson Publishing, 2000), 1-25.

&c&c.” In spite of his contemporary dress, he is in an exalted, heavenly realm. Small *putti* frolic amongst festoons of pastel pink and blue flowers with an angel dressed in diaphanous, white robes flying above him and trumpeting his fame.

This combination of the two portraits shows the passage of time, with Linnaeus in his younger years, exploring foreign countries for their botanical treasures at the beginning of the book, combined with a portrait of him in his elder years enjoying his fame in an immortal realm at the end. Fame is often signified by neoclassical iconography in all of his portraits, from the marble bust, to the books placed on the classical pediment near a marble column, to a refined portrait of Linnaeus at the end of his life surrounded by cupids. I wish to argue that Thornton’s depiction of the progression of a botanical lifetime also shows a sense of hieratic, racial progress. In the early portrait of Linnaeus, he is depicted as an “other” dressed in Lapland gear and then later becomes an “authority,” depicted with the trappings of neoclassicism. Flora, a goddess depicted in similar neoclassical conventions, is second in command after Linnaeus. Although Flora seems like a secondary figure in Thornton’s book, appearing at the foot of his sculpture, she nevertheless exerts a strong civilizing presence in the images and texts as the matriarch of the flowers.

Flora, Botanical Matriarch

Flora makes her debut into the microcosmic space of *The Temple of Flora* alongside the introductory images of Linnaeus, where she genuflects at the side of his bust, but she also appears in a print entirely dedicated to her in the front matter, entitled *Flora Dispensing Favors on the Earth*. **(IMAGE 2.9)** As described in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Flora was the goddess of flowers described as “a lady of

pleasure, who having gained large sums of money by prostituting herself, made the Roman people her heir, on condition that certain games called Floralia might be annually celebrated on her birthday. “She began her life as the uncontrolled, wild, free-spirited nymph Chloris, who turned into the productive and fertile Flora after she married Zephyr in Ovid’s *Fasti* and in his *Metamorphoses*.³⁵

Representations of Flora were full of duality according to historian of gender and visual culture Ann Shteir. She was represented either as a prostitute or as a feminine, maternal ideal with connotations of fertility. Sometimes the two prototypes overlapped, as is the case in Thornton’s text. From her very first appearances in antiquity, Flora was associated with nature worship and agriculture-based rituals about the flowering of cereal, vines, and fruit trees. Associations with prostitution counterbalanced these ideas about Flora as an earth goddess, however. Starting in the third century B.C. in Rome, there were six days of public festivals to appease Flora in order to ensure good harvests. These festivals included games and theatrical performances that were sexual in nature, with prostitutes who took off their clothes on audience demand.³⁶

Tracing the history of this botanical goddess, Shteir contends that while Flora was used in botanical frontispieces and a great deal of art in the Renaissance, by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, she was gradually eliminated from more serious, “scientific,” botanical books. Her presence in books signified that the book would instead be a literary, popular text. Shteir explains how in eighteenth and

³⁵ *Encyclopaedia Britannica; or A dictionary of arts, sciences, and miscellaneous literature*, Volume 8 (Archibald Constable and Company, 1823), 686.

³⁶ Shteir 7.



IMAGE 2.9, Flora Dispensing her Favors on the Earth, painted by Maria Cosway and engraved by Woolnoth, May 1st, 1807, courtesy of the Grey Herbarium Library.

nineteenth-century England, there was an increasing division between scientific botany studied by professional male scholars and popular botany that was studied by both male and female amateurs. Women were encouraged to study popular botany at this time as an acceptable feminine activity. In women's self-cultivation, the maternal aspects of Flora were used to reinforce positive feminine roles in English society, and versions of Flora as a prostitute were not used anymore in this context. As is the case with the vast majority of other historical phenomena, this change occurred very gradually, and many instances of this can be seen much earlier than the nineteenth-century examples. This did not make Flora any less of an authority figure, but inflected her authoritative presence in botanical texts in a slightly different way to appeal to a popular crowd of readers that included women. Her appeal was still softly sensual, but became increasingly maternal.³⁷

In Thornton's book, Flora gracefully hovers amidst the clouds in a high-waisted, gossamer white robe with a pastel, daffodil-colored shawl billowing around her body, as she strews flowers upon the verdant landscape with a medieval castle in the background and tiny sailboats floating in the water, which make this landscape seem European, if not British. Art historian Meghan Doherty reads this image very adeptly as "an allegory for spreading the fruit of empire through British gardens and British gardening throughout the empire. Flora unites the (modern) landscape garden and Britain's past, in the form of a ruined castle, with the constant flow of plants, people, and information that was constantly arriving on Britain's

³⁷ Shteir 19-23.

shores brought by ships from throughout the empire.”³⁸ Flora is crowned with a wreath of pastel flowers, placed on top of her long, blonde curls. In many ways the title page is her “temple.” The fact that Flora has her own print gives her presence, substance, weight, and authority in Thornton’s book, in spite of her airy, supernatural appearance as she floats weightlessly in the sky above the British landscape. This supernatural, ethereal quality is part of her unique power, since it enables her to deal directly with the forces of Art and Nature in ways that would be impossible for mortals like Linnaeus, even if he has some god-like qualities in the representations above. Although in some ways he was presented as immortal and timeless, he was not considered a force of nature in the same way that Flora is. This is partially because Thornton also represents Linnaeus as a vulnerable human being who was subject to criticism and aging. By contrast, Flora gracefully matures from youth to adulthood, but does not become old. She poetically engages with the concept of floral lifecycles although she herself is impervious to the ravages of time. Although she is a feminine rather than a masculine authority figure like Linnaeus, her sensuality and innocence are still emphasized in the text. She is described as a “blue-ey’d goddess, jocund...in snow-white vesture, through whose thin folds, by Zephyr’s carest.”³⁹

The process of Chloris becoming Flora through Zephyr’s caresses can be seen in Botticelli’s famous Renaissance painting *Primavera* (1477-1478). **(IMAGE 2.10)** In this painting, Chloris is represented at the far left with flowers coming out of her

³⁸ Doherty 68.

³⁹ Thornton (1807) unpaginated.



IMAGE 2.10, Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera*, 1477-1478, courtesy of Wikimedia commons (public domain).

mouth. Zephyr, the blue-cheeked wind God, wraps his arms around Chloris and abducts her. With the passage of time, Chloris turns into Flora, who is depicted right next to Chloris and Zephyr. After her transformation, Zephyr allowed Flora to scatter seeds over a large area of the earth and to make it fertile. She was also known for giving color to the flowers and for giving the goddess Athena a flower that allowed her to conceive her son, Mars. That is why Botticelli depicts Flora in a dress with flowers on it, and also why she is reaching into a basket of flowers to toss them on the ground.⁴⁰

Thornton also stresses Flora's productive fertility, sexuality, and innocence. Described as the "lively goddess of desire" in Thornton's text, Flora nevertheless "smiles with the beaming grace of innocence," and is described as a goddess of "artless, sweet simplicity."⁴¹ This innocent sexuality can also be readily found in the image of Flora and others honoring the bust of Linnaeus, **(IMAGE 2.1)** but with a rose-colored shawl lightly draped around her bare shoulders, perhaps revealing a little bit more than it conceals. Flora's "sweetness" also assumes maternal connotations, since she is placed directly next to Cupid and turns towards him and the viewer with warmth and affection. Although Flora's dress appears modest to a modern viewer, she exposes her entire left leg to the upper thigh. While wearing high-waisted, non-restrictive, neoclassical empire dresses was considered high-fashion in the late eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, displaying this amount of flesh would have been considered vulgar for mortal women in the late eighteenth

⁴⁰ Shteir and Lightman (eds) 9-10.

⁴¹ Thornton (1807) unpaginated.

and early nineteenth centuries. The way that Flora opens her dress and subsequently exposes her entire leg has an accidental quality, which subdues the sensuality of this act, however. This gesture typifies representations of Flora because of the dualistic blend of virginal innocence, maternal sweetness, and frank sexuality, in accordance with Shteir's prototype.

For the most part, Thornton's Flora fits Shteir's model. She addresses a primarily non-academic audience from all levels of educated upper-class society, both male and female. She is represented as a softly sensual, sweet-faced young woman who simultaneously displays her flesh and looks after Cupid in a motherly fashion. She is also textually represented as a mother to her floral children on all four continents. Unlike Shteir's model, in Thornton's text she becomes a force of nature and an angry, jealous authority figure with whom to be reckoned. This representation of Flora is set out as a playful trope that runs through the printed pages.

Thornton brings Flora into his text primarily through an argument between Art and Nature. Although this poem is most often presented in the front matter, the metaphorical concept of art and nature doing battle runs throughout the entire text as an extremely commonly used and suggestive analogy in art and literary theory that should not be read as a literal example of Flora and Thornton having an argument. This metaphorical battle between art and nature had its origins in antiquity in the writings of Vitruvius, Martial, Philostratus, Pliny, Ovid, and Propertius, in which it was impossible to distinguish objects found in still life painting from real life because of the artist's skill at rendering the objects in the

paintings with such great verisimilitude that they seem real. There was a rebirth of this poetic and literary trope in early modern and eighteenth-century Europe, for example, in Erasmus Darwin's *The Loves of the Plants*.⁴² Thornton participates in this trend, and he voices the role of "Art" while assigning the role of "Nature" to Flora.

Shteir notes that Flora can be a protective mother, "who keeps a wayward family under her firm command," but she does not describe her as jealous or angry.⁴³ As I will show, in Thornton's text, Flora is not protective of her children in a realistic, modern sense. She is so obsessed with the natural cycles of birth, life, and death in Nature that she does not want her floral children to be immortalized by Art's artifice. In this way, she does not protect her children from death, because of her own jealous pride and fear that Art will outdo both her and Nature. For this reason, she is generally a troublemaker and enjoys stirring up conflict between Art and Nature. She frequently becomes outraged with Thornton for attempting to outdo nature with his artistry, but is ultimately pacified with poetry that expresses Thornton's good intentions. She ultimately permits him to finish the *Temple of Flora* because it will further the goals of the British Empire.

Thornton's Flora could be an antagonistic and bellicose woman, as in the poem "Flora Jealous" by Samuel Jackson Pratt (1749-1814). The goddess of flowers

⁴² Thomas da Costa Kaufmann, *Arcimboldo: Visual Jokes, Natural History, and Still-Life Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 170-171; also see Eric Jong, *Nature and Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 21; Kathleen Morgan, *Ovid's Art of Imitation: Propertius in the Amores* (Leiden: Brill, 1977).

⁴³ Shteir 19.

is portrayed in the text as if she were insanely jealous that Thornton painted her botanical children, the “choicest flowers from Europe, Asia, Africa, and America,” with greater skill than nature herself. Flora was an extremely proud mother, exalting her “beauteous family” of “fragrant children...shedding delightful odors in the air,” and thriving under her “magic touch and matchless hue.” This pride turned to anger as “Art’s pow’rful Magic on the Walls appeared,” which made the goddess “mad’n with the smart” and feel “the fierce anguish of a jealous heart.” She becomes outraged because she sees Thornton’s paintings on the walls, described as “another Flora” that seemed to “breathe and glow,” threatening her supremacy and power to animate and enliven the floral world. She cries:

And shall a mortal pencil thus presume...to emulate my lively bloom? Shall my own offspring thus untimely die and Art’s frail progeny flourish nigh? Shall these erect a temple of their own, and I descend a poor divided throne? Forbid it NATURE—NATURE rose to view; to meet whose arms the angry goddess flew; Then told her tale, then pointed to the flowers, whereupon proud art had lavished all her powers; ‘Till more indignant, as she more survey’d the imitation nice of light and shade; Th’ unfolding leaf, the soft bud newly burst, A second Flora vieing with the first.⁴⁴

Flora fears that Art will usurp the supremacy of Nature, superficially but exquisitely emulating its beauty. Still her anger indicates a genuine threat, for Art has the power of preservation and Nature does not—real flowers inevitably wither and die, while painted ones remain forever fresh and alive on the pages of Thornton’s book. Art becomes unnatural, with a “mortal pencil” immortalizing living

⁴⁴ Samuel Jackson Pratt, “Flora Jealous” in Thornton (1807) unpaginated.

plants that would normally undergo a cycle of birth, maturation, and death, an ancient concept found in Theophrastus's life cycles of plants that mimic human stages of life and reiterated by Thornton on many occasions. Calling upon Nature for assistance against Thornton's mimetic artistic representations of flowers, she demands to claim them for herself. Still, the "sister-goddess," who is Nature personified as a woman, does not permit Flora to do this because Art is in the service of Empire and is a form of praise to nature. Art is "incense at our shrine," which owes as much to genius as Nature herself, even if this genius is of a completely different variety than her own. Nature states: "The desire to paint the charms which we inspire, demands our praise—'tis incense at our shrine, and art proves our Empire more divine. Art's noblest effort but makes known our fame, Different our realms, our worship is the same." Upon hearing this, Flora "smil'd and all was harmony."⁴⁵

If not addressing the metaphorical, literary battle between Art and Nature in which art wins, then the passages about Flora always deal with the passage of time, and the cycles of life and death. For example, the "Lines Addressed to Dr. Thornton" at the beginning of the *Temple of Flora* read: "THORNTON, while polish'd Darwin (i.e. Erasmus Darwin) tells the loves of FLORA's gaudy train, 'Tis thine to guard from time's decay the fading glories of her reign."⁴⁶ In this case, the battle between art and nature is bound up with the battle between life and death, as Thornton attempts to capture the beauty of flowers with art before it fades and Flora resists this

⁴⁵ Thornton (1807) unpaginated.

⁴⁶ Thornton (1807) unpaginated.

process of preservation, even as she is entrusting Thornton to keep alive her works. Death is perceived as a natural part of life for flowers, with “many a petal charming in its decay.”⁴⁷ In contrast, fresh, perpetual beauty of youth is undesirable and unnatural. This cyclical transformation can also be found in Ovidian themes of rape in Thornton’s text, which changed human beings into productive, desirable botanical commodities.

From Object of Desire to Desired Object: Thornton’s uses of Ovidian Abduction

Thornton applauds the “glowing imagination of modern poets [i.e. Dr. Darwin] who have improved on Ovidian *Metamorphoses*.” Erasmus Darwin referred to his *Loves of the Plants* as “Ovid’s metamorphoses in reverse,” because the male and female plants in Darwin’s book constantly changed into humans, at least metaphorically speaking.⁴⁸ The personified plants found in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* are both men and women, and most of them transformed as a result of Apollo’s affection for them at a moment when they were on the brink of death. All of these Ovidian tales of plant personification involve the death of a human being and their rebirth as a vegetative life form, usually a tree or flower sharing traits believed to be similar to those found in their human counterpart. It may seem like circular logic to argue that these plants in the metamorphosis myths suggest a transformative lifecycle because the original Greek names of the people who are turned into plants are also the names that Linnaeus gives the plants several centuries later, precisely to honor the myths. Naming plants according to mythological characters, however,

⁴⁷ Thornton (1807) unpaginated.

⁴⁸ Thornton (1807), unpaginated.

took place in pre-Linnaean botany. In fact, people in the ancient world who were familiar with Ovidian myth also referred to real plants by their mythological names, which continued into the Renaissance.⁴⁹

These tales are strongly and perhaps incorrectly affiliated with “rape” narratives in antiquity and early modern Europe, although technically speaking, in many of the cases that I present, the “rape” never takes place. Rape is a modern term, and the word “abduction” would have been used instead in the early modern era. Abduction did not necessarily involve sexual penetration but the notion of “carrying a woman off,” a sort of kidnapping induced by sexual desire that would presumably end in a respectable marriage. Abduction was not criminalized in a modern sense in the early modern era in Ovidian visual and literary imagery. Instead, it was aestheticized and eroticized, presenting romantic cases where the perpetrator supposedly loves the victim and justifies the act (or attempted act) as a crime of passion that ultimately does no harm to the man or woman who merely transforms into a tree or flower after their death.⁵⁰

This change from human to botanical specimen might seem to suggest regression of life forms in the great chain of being, but in many ways it signifies a different progress. This is so because the reluctant woman or man who flees the god is transformed into a useful and practical botanical commodity at the end of this

⁴⁹ Hellmut Baumann, William Stearn, and Eldwyth Ruth Stearne, *The Greek Plant World in Myth, Art, and Literature* (Portland, O.R.: Timber Press, 1993). Baumann also provides many other examples of plant personification in the Greek world beyond what Ovid has to offer, especially on pages 59-92.

⁵⁰ The best-known academic source on this is written by the art historian Diane Wolfthal, *Images of Rape: The Heroic Tradition and its Alternatives* (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

tale. These myths were mapped onto actual marriage practices in the ancient world, which involved abduction in order to turn virginal maidens into fertile and productive women who were useful to their society because they could bear children. The female body in Greek literature was very often analogized to a fertile field. This sense of utility is further bound up with tropes of rape and colonization in the ancient world, in which “useless,” unmarried women are likened to fallow fields that must be “ploughed” to become fertile.⁵¹ Ovidian tales of marriage or often begin with abduction, as is the case of Persephone and Hades. Dougherty compares rape and marriage in ancient Greek society to colonization and suggests that it was based on myth. She states that both rape and marriage are institutions of “integration and acculturation,” concerned with uniting opposites and transforming the “wild and foreign” into a “productive and fruitful experience” as a tool of violence.⁵² She states that the “discourse of rape and the institution of marriage provide models for representing the complicated relationships that Greeks must forge with native populations upon colonizing foreign territory.”⁵³ Marriage in Greek culture was both civilized and violent. Desire was not just confined to the bedroom but becomes part of the broader colonial project of domination, conquest, and acquisition as the “rituals of marriage and the rhetoric of rape myth help shape the memory of contact between Greek colonists and native inhabitants in such a way as to represent the

⁵¹ Carol Dougherty, *The Poetics of Colonization: From City to Text in Archaic Greece* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1993), 63-64.

⁵² Dougherty 61.

⁵³ Dougherty 62.

inevitable violence of overseas settlement as a harmonious and productive union of opposites.”⁵⁴

This theme of abduction as productive fertility is found frequently in the *Temple of Flora*. Thornton includes snippets of many of the other aforementioned mythical transformations initiated by Apollo throughout his text. The myths of the Hyacinth, the Sweet Violet, and the Daffodil (Narcissus) are repeated in several small poems from Ovid. Thornton takes a special interest in the myth of Apollo and Daphne, however, and translates the entire myth from Latin to show his appreciation, if not his erudition. There are so many instances of Ovidian abduction, death, and transformation of women and men to flowers in Thornton’s text that it is best to look at this tale as a representative example in great detail. The transformation of Daphne into a laurel tree is arguably one of the most celebrated tales of plant personification in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* from antiquity to the eighteenth century, and although the myth itself underwent many interpretive transformations over time in literature and art, the basic plot remains the same. After Apollo killed a giant python, he mocked Cupid. Cupid shot Apollo with a gold tipped arrow to stimulate love for Daphne, and Daphne with a leaden arrow to inhibit love. Apollo then sexually pursues Daphne, who rejects him, and begs her father, the river god Peneus, to change her into a tree to escape Apollo’s unwanted advances and to preserve her chastity.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Dougherty 65.

⁵⁵ Allen Mendelbaum (ed.), *The Metamorphoses of Ovid* (N.Y.: Harvest, 1993), 24-25.

In antiquity, Apollo and Daphne belonged to rich narrative traditions—Apollo plays the part of the foolish lover who is infatuated with a woman who prefers to become a plant rather than to succumb to his advances, and Daphne belongs to the tradition of virginal huntresses pursued by urgent, divine ravishers. Virginité was not yet Christianized, but it was still a part of the cult of Diana, who made chastity a virtue and enforced it upon her followers.⁵⁶ It was this pursuit of chastity that was a catalyst for Daphne becoming a laurel tree, as she begged her father to transform her:

The nymph grew pale, and with a mortal fright, Tir'd the labor so long of such a flight, And now despairing, cast a mournful look Upon the streams of her paternal brook: "O help," she cried, "in this extremist need! If water gods are deities indeed: Gape earth, and this happy wretch intomb; Or change my form, whence all my sorrows come." Scarce had she finish'd, when her feet she found, Benumb'd with cold, and fasten'd to the ground: A filmy rind about her body grows; her hair to leaves, her arms extend to boughs; The Nymph is all into a *Laurel* gone.⁵⁷

Daphne is gradually paralyzed and slowly transforms into a plant-human hybrid, as her former swiftness contrasts with the sluggish tree-roots that are now her feet, the rough, thin bark (here called "rind") of the tree with her formerly tender skin, limbs with branches, and hair with foliage. There is some debate as to whether or not this type of metamorphosis constitutes a form of "dehumanization," as Mary Barnard claims.⁵⁸ Even though Daphne is no longer a human being in form,

⁵⁶ Mary E. Barnard, *The Myth of Apollo and Daphne from Ovid to Quevedo: Love, Agon, and the Grotesque* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987) 24-26, 34.

⁵⁷ Translation by Robert John Thornton (1807) unpaginated.

⁵⁸ Barnard 37.

there are many intimations of her former self, even as a laurel tree, and perhaps it is best to frame this transformation as a moment of hybridity and the flux of varied life forms, as opposed to reading this transformation as a lack of humanity.⁵⁹ Ovid and Thornton imply that she is still present even in her newly acquired form of a laurel tree, since she her heart beats under the bark and she still shuns Apollo, although she later “nods her head in consent” when asked to become a useful commodity.

While Daphne was “useless” as a recalcitrant maiden who refused to be abducted by Apollo, she is invaluable in her altered state in both Ovid and Thornton. After her transformation, Apollo asks her to participate in more chaste activities that are essential to his life as a god, such as wreathing his head with laurel branches, furnishing wood for his lyre and quiver, and guarding the house of Augustus.⁶⁰ The colonial associations of the Daphne/Apollo myth can also be found in Linnaean classification that discusses the plant’s utility and transience all at once. The laurel tree was sometimes referred to as a “Daphne” in antiquity, and even into the nineteenth century. Linnaeus followed the old Latin references and designated the name “Daphne” to about fifty species of bushes distributed from southern Europe eastwards through China. Linnaeus gave the bushes this name because just like Daphne, they were “considered choice possessions that resisted captivity, and they died quickly if they did not receive precise soil and temperature

⁵⁹ Yves Giraud, *La fable de Daphné: Essai sur un type de métamorphose végétale dans la littérature et dans l’art* (Geneva: Droz, 1968), 54-58.

⁶⁰ Mendelbaum 24-25.

requirements."⁶¹ This resistance and ephemerality increases the value of the plant, which is useful only as long as it is properly tended.

In the Ovidian *Metamorphoses*, men and women beloved by Apollo are transformed into plants to save them from death, which becomes the catalyst for their metamorphosis. This is a reflection of cosmic forces that are perpetually in flux in Ovid's earth that involved the creation of the world from inchoate matter, an "undigested mass of crude, confused, and scumbled elements, a heap of seeds that clashed, of things mismatched,"⁶² a shapeless swarm in which contrary natural elements waged war with each other. Just as the universe could morph into diverse forms, the life forms within the universe could—and did—change shape frequently. Therefore, universal forces are frequently enclosed within the miniature world of the personified plant, enfolding similarly universal concepts of life, death, and rebirth into their tiny forms. Planting a seed, watching it grow, mature, decay, and fall back into the earth became a perfect metaphor for human life cycles in botany and medicine, and perhaps it is not at all surprising that a human-plant hybrid would induce the most fundamental human concerns.

In many of the dramatic life cycles under discussion in this chapter, Thornton frequently incorporates a hieratic use of time depicting a sequence from civilization to savagery, either implicitly or explicitly. The past, present, and future are often condensed into one image in a narrative cycle, reinforcing a sense of progress and hierarchy. Thornton's use of transhistorical time did not just involve the use of

⁶¹ Bernhardt 107.

⁶² Mendelbaum 3.

historical sources from antiquity, such as Ovid. It also involved the juxtaposition of ancient and modern authority figures. This transhistoricity was also ingrained in the eighteenth century concepts of race and gender themselves, and Thornton applied it to his visual and textual studies of plants. Thornton's collapse of historical time transported ancient classical sources into the eighteenth-century, assisting with the depiction of Western natural science as a civilizing influence in a colonial context.

Having explored the ancient and modern authority figures presiding over the *Temple of Flora*, I examine the botanical residents of this book more closely in Chapter three. While Chapter two dealt with race, gender, and transhistorical time, the next chapter deals with the way that sequential time is expressed in the order of the plates in the *Temple of Flora*. Similar to the family tree sequences discussed by Mc Clintock, there is incredible flexibility in the ways that time and progress are depicted in the plates of the *Temple of Flora*, but also a certain degree of unpredictability in the order of things. The next chapter deals with this unpredictability and disorder of natural time sequences in floral life cycles. The natural order of things shifts in Thornton's floral plates, which were bought and sold individually, bound by the reader, and therefore had the potential to be arranged in diverse combinations. There were also many changes made to the plates themselves through the addition and subtraction of details. These changes to the prints arguably have a certain degree of symbolic meaning, which has never been investigated. The changes in the prints, especially the metamorphosis of fine visual details in various states of printing, have never been read alongside or against Thornton's text. I examine how these changes in the lifecycles of flowers and

landscapes relate to politics and the passage of seasons, and to concepts of human frailty and ephemerality during times of war and strife in Chapter three.

CHAPTER 3

Transience, Time, and Territory: The Changing States of Prints in Robert John Thornton's *Temple of Flora* (1797-1812)

Robert John Thornton's *Temple of Flora* was a collectible botanical book, since it was composed of plates issued separately in a series of parts. Each subscriber collected these plates individually as soon as they were published. For this reason, the *Temple of Flora* had the potential to be bound by the reader in varying combinations. In addition, the plates themselves were not fixed. Between the years 1797 and 1812 when the book was being produced, changes were made to the published plates, in terms of coloration and the addition or removal of details. In this chapter, I focus on the basic fact that no two copies of Thornton's book are identical. Intentional variations exist between states of prints and editions, a very simple but self-complicating aspect of its production that remains to be interpreted. By "simple but self-complicating," I mean that my very simple, factual observation about the material aspects of this book leads to more complex questions about the political, sociocultural and symbolic meanings of its diverse materiality and the implications for the visual representation of natural history. The collectible and ever-changing nature of this book, in which plates were often deliberately altered, shows the immense diversity and instability of the natural world. I argue that the instability of the natural world frequently dovetails with the political and social instability of Thornton's world in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as nature becomes a metaphor for social and political change, both positive and negative. This is not the only explanation, and adaptation to market forces probably

also played a role. I focus on politics instead because it seems to have been one of Thornton's main motivations that drove the production of these prints.

Thornton was politically very conservative. He was a royalist and an avid opponent of the French revolution, if not all warfare, which becomes apparent from reading his text. For example, he complains that "infuriate war has constantly and violently raged, which, like a devouring conflagration, destroys everything before it: commerce, agriculture and the arts, all the sources of public prosperity, and private happiness, are by it dried up and annihilated."¹ He also includes a series of anti-war poems in the *Temple of Flora* and an "Ode Against War" by Queen Charlotte. As Meghan Doherty mentions, in response to this "infuriate warfare," Thornton creates a "utopian space" that was intended to "shape British identity and to strengthen his readers' resolve against the French enemy."²

Doherty makes Thornton's political sympathies clear in her work, and I hope to build upon her ideas. I feel that Thornton's *Flora* is heterotopian rather than strictly utopian, however, incorporating elements of both utopia and dystopia for a plethora of audiences.³ I also look at the variability of the images in the context of Thornton's political agenda, rather than strictly viewing them as static entities that consolidate and solidify the British Empire and British identity against the French

¹ Thornton, "Apology to my Readers," frequently found in the back of the *Temple of Flora*, unpaginated.

² Doherty 51.

³ Michel Foucault (trans. Jay Miskowiec), "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* (October 1984): 1-9.

threat.⁴ I will argue instead that the images and text often suggest political instability felt around the contested colonies whose ownership was often in flux. There is also a sense of renewal of the British landscape, however. Themes of fertile, productive, new life and knowledge about the botanical world can be seen to coexist alongside destabilizing variabilities in nature terms of nation, race, and gender during times of war. In this way, it can be argued that the production of Thornton's book is not just about its solidity and materiality, but also about its variability and ephemerality, which in turn reflects political instabilities in the surrounding world.

Of course, the numerous changes and versatility of the plates also suggests a desire for originality on the author and consumer's part and a quest to turn the book into a saleable commodity. In 1812, after the financial failure of his book and the subsequent auction of his prints, the trustees of the auction agreed to destroy the folio-sized copper plates from which the paper prints were issued immediately after the lottery. This would increase the value and originality of the plates because no more paper prints could be produced. After this, a quarto edition supposedly without variable plates was immediately issued, also in 1812.⁵ Despite the fact that the 1812 quarto edition had no variations in and of itself, it is variable in a different way. It still shows the passage of time when compared to the preexisting 1807 folio edition. For example, plates in the 1807 folio edition are drastically different in the 1812 quarto. These changes include climactic changes, such as clouds becoming

⁴ Doherty 51.

⁵ Grigson and Buchanan 5.

thunderclouds, mountains becoming volcanoes, buds blossoming into flowers, and eggs hatching into birds.

The changes that occur from folio to folio between the years of 1797-1807 are actually less drastic than the ones that take place from folio to quarto in the year 1812. According to bibliophiles Grigson and Buchanan, who are quoted by almost every scholar who focuses on *Temple of Flora*, the quarto edition was intended to solidify the images and text to make them less variable and also less valuable. Grigson and Buchanan call the quarto edition “inferior” and a “pale shadow of its elder brother.”⁶ The quarto edition is almost completely overlooked by scholars of the *Temple of Flora* today. The quarto edition was also literally less valuable simply because it cost less money. An advertisement for the 1812 lottery states that the quarto copies were only 15 pounds. A more complete copy of the *Temple of Flora*, “with representations of the choicest flowers of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, The New Illustration of the Linnaean System, and Philosophy of Botany, making together five grand volumes, including several hundred plates” by Thornton’s artists cost 80 pounds. The advertisement stresses that the complete copy is made all the more valuable because “the plates afterwards [were] to be destroyed, according to an act of Parliament.”⁷

Presumably the folio edition was more valuable than the quarto because it was more “variable,” yet there is still considerable change and unpredictability in the quarto edition that has gone unnoticed. If one compares and contrasts the

⁶ Grigson and Buchanan 5, 60.

⁷ “Royal Botanical Lottery,” reproduced in Cardew’s “Doctor Thornton and the New Illustration,” 452.

quarto with the folio, one can still see time passing in the images from the 1807 edition of the folio book to the 1812 quarto. For example, the eggs in the birds nest in 1807 editions of the Roses plate do not hatch until the 1812 quarto edition. In the case of the Night Blooming Cereus and the Maggot-Bearing Stapelia, the passage of time from the quarto to the folio is shown with the plants progressively blossoming. By 1812, the buds in the stapelia have burst open into flowers, and there are two new buds in the cereus. There are, of course, many other changes that I discuss in the final part of this chapter. Grigson, Buchanan, and those who cite them consider the quarto edition to be the most visually and textually stable moment in the history of the *Temple of Flora* because it was produced after the plates were destroyed and therefore did not change in contrast to the more mutable folio edition.⁸ I argue instead that the quarto edition still exhibits considerable visual and textual instability because it builds on the changes in the folio to continue showing the passage of time in nature, which in turn has political significance.

"An Open-Ended Play": The Contextual and Material History of Thornton's Flora

First, I will briefly discuss the work that has already been done on the various states of Thornton's print alongside its contextual and material aspects. I will also cover aspects of its reception that are specific to the states of his prints, their collectability as a subscription publication, and his political stance. Finally, I turn to the mutability of his botanical plates and their collectible nature against this historical framework. Prior to this analysis, it is critical to define the term "state," which implies intentionality and deliberate changes in the field of printmaking.

⁸ Grigson and Buchanan 5.

Printmaking expert Arthur Mayer Hind defines a “state” in the field of printmaking as separate stages through which a print passes when new work is added to the plate itself. A “state” implies a deliberate and substantial change made to the print matrix itself, as opposed to changes made to ink and paper, which only constitute variations or impressions. This definition of a “state” as one or more prints made after modifying the plate is widely accepted.⁹ Of course, there are also surface variations in Thornton’s print because of hand coloring, but I discuss the changes made to states of prints.

My research on the altered states of Thornton’s prints is based on two different lists of the deliberate changes made to the plates over the years of the book’s production, as well as my own analysis of many copies of this book. Two sources that are especially useful in tracing the changes between plates are lists of the varied states of the prints compiled by book historians Handasyde Buchanan and Gordon Dunthorne, who explicitly refer to these changes as “states” in the same sense as what A.M. Hind described above.¹⁰ Although these comprehensive lists are full of valuable technical information of a visual nature, they do not interpret their observations or place them in cultural or literary contexts. Here I build upon the

⁹ Arthur Mayer Hind. *A History of Engraving from the Fifteenth Century to the Year 1914* (N.Y.: Dover, 1963), 15-16; Robert Verhoogt, *Art in Reproduction* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 43, fn 38.

¹⁰ Grigson and Buchanan 61-66 and Dunthorne 243-256. I was unable to reproduce the results of my own research in this dissertation because of copyright laws, which for the most part prohibit the full reproduction of a book. My notes and the textual comparisons make very little sense without a visual record of the plates, and words cannot fully capture every single variation that exists between copies. I can verify that every single one I have seen over the past four years is slightly different.

bibliographic work of Buchanan and Dunthorne to interpret the variation of plates.

¹¹

Some interpretation of the states of the prints exists, but neither in great detail, nor at great length. Both Meghan Doherty and Charlotte Klonk claim that the natural order of things shifts as the plates are arranged in different combinations. While these two authors note this in passing, it is not their primary aim to examine this feature of Thornton's book. Although she is not discussing alterations made to the plates, Doherty discusses the way that "Thornton's plates are rendered more veridical by presenting not only pristine blossoms, but also ones that are fading and have not yet opened. The various stages of blooming also convey the passage of time...and attempts to replicate the actual experience of seeing the various flowers in bloom."¹² Klonk does not examine the changes in the plates, but instead describes the "ordered continuity" of the plates as a subsection in a chapter about the *Temple of Flora* in her book *Science and the Perception of Nature*.¹³ She helpfully describes Thornton's collectable images in the *Temple of Flora* as "an open-ended play," a phrase I depart from here, and suggests that the plants might have been arranged by season, beginning with the ones that begin to appear at the end of winter, like the snowdrop and crocus.¹⁴ I suggest instead that Thornton's playfulness was anything but open-ended, and had definite political intention.

¹¹ Buchanan 61-66 and Dunthorne 243-256.

¹² Doherty 60.

¹³ Klonk 60-64.

¹⁴ Klonk 63.

Although there was certainly great potential for readers to bind the plates in varying combinations, every copy of the *Temple of Flora* that I have seen attempts to follow the order established in the table of contents. The other two volumes of *New Illustration*, however, show a great deal of variation in the way that Klonk describes. Perhaps this is because there was no table of contents in the other two volumes to direct the reader's perceptions of how to arrange the book. For this reason, I focus primarily on the altered states of the individual prints in the *Temple of Flora*, but also acknowledge the varied order of the all of the other plates in the *New Illustration*.

Turning to the plates themselves, what does it mean to alter prints, and what are the historical precedents? The altered states of the prints imparts a unique quality to the 750-800 copies of the *Temple of Flora* that exist worldwide today, because each is slightly different.¹⁵ Deliberately altering prints for aesthetic reasons was certainly not a new phenomenon, although to the best of my knowledge it has no precedent in the world of botanical illustration on such a grand scale. Grigson and Buchanan argue that alterations were deliberately made to every single plate of the book so that there was more than one state for almost every single one. There are some exceptions, however, and some of these alterations are much more obvious than others. According to the same authors, the prints that only have one state are the prints belonging to the front matter, *Flora Dispensing her Favors on the*

¹⁵ Handasyde Buchanan is responsible for this figure. Thornton's advertisement for the lottery of these prints is direct evidence that 199 copies were printed specifically for the lottery, and 200 portfolios of plates without text. Grigson and Buchanan 59.

Earth, Aesculapius, Flora, Ceres, and Cupid honoring the Bust of Linnaeus, and *Cupid Inspiring the Plants with Love*. Other prints with supposedly one state only are the *American Aloe* of 1807 (as opposed to the *Aloe* of 1798, with two states), the *Pitcher Plant*, the *American Bog Plants*, the *Pontic Rhododendron*, the *Narrow-Leaved Kalmia*, the *China Limodoron*, the *Sacred Egyptian Bean*, and the *Blue Egyptian Water Lily*. I do not discuss these prints with only one state in this chapter. It has been my experience, however, that these plates with one state are still subject to immense surface variation, with hand coloring and variations in ink. For example, the prints in the front matter are not always arranged in the same order, and the shading and coloration differs because they are hand-colored in addition to being printed. To cite only a few examples, the bird in the tree in the plate *Cupid Inspiring the Plants with Love* is sometimes grey, and at other times red. The goddess Flora in the print *Flora Dispensing her Favors on the Earth* is sometimes hand colored, but other times she is not.

Engravers and printers could make changes to the copper plates during the printing process by obliterating parts of it with a scraper and burnisher, or by beating it from the back with an anvil or hammer. Sometimes marginal sketches could be made with the point of a burin, which are called “remarques.”¹⁶ Most of the changes made this way are atmospheric, altering the landscape or natural world. One frequently cited example of an atmospheric change that pre-dates Thornton’s work is Rembrandt’s *Three Crosses* series in the 1650s. Other examples that post-

¹⁶ Frank Weitenkampf, *How to Appreciate Prints* (N.Y.: Moffat, Yard, and Co, 1916), 270. Weitenkampf was the Chief of the Print Division of the New York Public Library, where there is a copy of the *Temple of Flora*.

date Thornton's work are Charles Jacques' *Le Repos*, in which the cattle change into a flock of sheep, and the shepherd wanders over the scene in progressive stages of the print. The prints of the artist Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851) were altered posthumously in the series *Liber Studiorum* in 1904, in which the appearance of clouds changes, birds are introduced into the sky and water of the prints, and the season and time of day change.¹⁷

In spite of their variability, all of the prints in the Temple of Flora emerged from the solid visual referent of an initial oil painting, which an engraver would copy. Some of the original paintings for the *Temple of Flora* are in the library of the University of Göttingen in Germany. There are also one or two in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge.¹⁸ The engravings were either mezzotint or aquatint and stipple. Aquatint and stipple was a variety of etching that was probably invented around the year 1650 by Jan van de Velde, but was only truly developed and put to use about a century later.¹⁹ Both mezzotint and aquatint and stipple are celebrated for their ability to represent variation in tones and relative ease of altering the plates. In aquatint and stipple, the plate was covered with a powdered resin, which, under gentle heat, adheres to the metal in small specks. Another method involved dissolving the resin in alcohol. When a mordant is applied, the resin resists the action of the acid, which results in a fine network of lines upon the plate, for a granular effect. When printed, this gives a tone comparable to a watercolor wash.

¹⁷ Weitenkampff 269-270.

¹⁸ Many thanks to Phillip Weimerskirch for this information.

¹⁹ Blunt and Stearn fn 4, 238.

The depth of tone can be controlled by the use of stopping-out (putting a barrier over certain parts of the plate while treating the rest of it) or varnish, and various techniques and acid baths produced further gradations of tonalities.²⁰

Ludwig Von Siegen in Amsterdam introduced mezzotint engraving in 1643, and he showed his techniques to Prince Rupert in 1654, who brought this new art form to England where William Sherwin used it for the first time in 1669 to create a portrait of Charles II.²¹ The process is fairly simple in this form of printmaking, in which one works from dark to light rather than light to dark. First the plate is grounded, meaning that it is systematically worked over with a spiked tool until it is completely roughened. If inked and printed in this state, the plate would be completely black. The engraver then scrapes graduated highlights with a scraper or burnisher. The more burnished an area is, the less ink it holds, so that the design emerges from its basic blackness.²² Quite frequently, details of these plates were overpainted with watercolors, which also increased the variability and uniqueness of the plates.

The New Illustration consisted of three volumes, which were bound together in a dizzying array of combinations, because the book was issued in parts and it was the responsibility of the subscriber to do their own binding. Sometimes, all three volumes are bound together, or sometimes the plates are bound into two or three volumes. It was possible to subscribe to only one part of the book or to buy a single

²⁰ Blunt and Stearn fn 4, 238.

²¹ B.H. Morgan, *Baxter Prints* (London, 1918), 36.

²² Anthony Griffiths, *Prints and Printmaking* (Berkeley: UCLA Press, 1996), 83.

plate without the accompanying text. All of the plates in the *Temple of Flora* and some of the plates in the *New Illustration* are unpaginated, with no marks or signatures of any kind, which contributes to and encourages the potential variability of the images and text.

Book historian and biographer George Simonds Boulger has outlined the intended order of the *New Illustration* at length on the basis of archival research and his own experiences with the text. Although there was only a table of contents for the *Temple of Flora* and not for the entire *New Illustration*, which was publically printed for an audience (as opposed to private proofs), there is still information available about the order of the text that Thornton intended. The first complete volume of the *New Illustration* was “meant to contain portraits of the author by Bartolozzi, after Russell; of Linnæus by Henry Meyer, after Hoffmann, ornamented by Bartolozzi; of Queen Charlotte by Sir William Beechey, ornamented by Bartolozzi; of Sir Thomas Millington by Woolnoth, after Sir Godfrey Kneller; and of Linnæus in his Laplander dress by Henry Kingsbury, after Hoffmann; with Thornton’s ‘Prize Dissertation on the Sexes of Plants,’ which is mostly a translation of Linnaeus’ *Sexum Plantarum Argumentis et Experimentis Novis* into English, with copious footnotes strongly defending Millington’s claims to the discovery of the sexuality of plants, and a plate representing the pollen of various flowers, reproduced from one published by French apothecary, botanist, and chemist Claude-Joseph Geoffroy in 1711. The second part consisted of ‘The Genera of Exotic and Indigenous Plants that are to be met with in Great Britain’ (168 pp., without date or publisher’s name); but this part is often missing or bound separately. The third part was issued in 1799 as

'Picturesque Botanical Plates of the New Illustration ...' priced with the text at twenty guineas, but also issued simultaneously, apparently without the text, as 'Picturesque Botanical Plates of the Choicest Flowers of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America.' In 1804 it was reissued as 'The Temple of Flora, or Garden of Nature, being Picturesque Plates,' and in 1812, re-engraved on a smaller scale, 20 inches by 15 1/4, as 'The Temple of Flora, or Garden of the Botanist, Poet, Painter, and Philosopher.' This part has no fewer than eight titles and sub-titles, and thirty-one plates. ²³

Collecting and Empire in Thornton's Flora

The collection and arrangement of plates about the botanical and natural world, with attempts to bring order out of disorder in collecting practices, turns Thornton's text into a textual cabinet of curiosities. This is mediated in part by Thornton, who has offered a table of contents to suggest a possible order, but was mostly at the discretion of the owner. The owner could either use this order or find his own way of arranging the natural world. There are several themes that cabinets of curiosity and Thornton's *Flora* share. While many secondary sources about the cabinet of curiosity or *Kunstkammer* discuss the way that these spaces create a sense of order, there are innumerable types of order created by the owners of these cabinets depending on each collector and his or her aims. Cabinets of curiosity were repositories of economic and spiritual capital. The objects invoked wealth and wonder, which reflected the prestige of the collector, and reinforced social, political and religious hierarchies. The sixteenth and seventeenth-century century

²³ Boulger 304; Hemsley and Perkins 89-90, 276.

Kunstkammer played with pre-existing binary oppositions between art and nature that were omnipresent in literature and art theory, as we have seen in Thornton's *Flora*. Similar to the botanical specimens in Thornton's *Flora*, the objects and organization of the *Kunstkammer* blurred the extant boundaries between art and nature so thoroughly that it threw the spectator into a state of appreciative stupor. For example, antique sculptures were ambiguously classed as both fossils and art in many *Kunstkammern*. And, it was deliberately difficult to tell where nature's artifice ended and man's artifice began in objects like Bernard Palissy's life-like porcelain casts of animals. Although not every *Kunstkammern* was an encyclopedic microcosmic space, some claimed to be, such as King Rudolf II's collection in Prague.

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Thomas da Costa Kauffmann writes specifically about the *Kunstkammer* as microcosm, using Rudolf II's collection as an example. He argues that the *Kunstkammer* was a sign of the mastery of the world and therefore had political implications in the sixteenth century. Politically, Rudolf II's *Kunstkammer* symbolized the relationship between the microcosm and macrocosm and became a sign of universal rule by collecting things from all corners of the globe. It also became a site for diplomatic gift giving, and a site of self-presentation for a few select individuals who were able to enter it. The private nature of early *Kunstkammern* seems to defy its political function. After all, how could it serve a political purpose if it was not public propaganda? Kaufmann responds to these

²⁴ Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York: Zone, 1998), ch. 7 (also section on medieval collecting in ch. 2).

critics by stating that rumors of its glory verbally and visually spread throughout Europe in stories and printed accounts. While sixteenth-century writers responded to the wonders of nature with feelings of awe that often defied logical reason, curiosity had negative connotations. In Greek, *curiosus* meant busybody and in Latin *curiositas* meant dangerous, useless knowledge associated with the occult. Similar to Thornton's text, which was collected, read, and admired by royalty, Rudolf's *Kunstkammer* had a political function rather than a strictly curious one because it was a space that was meant to promote imperial aims.²⁵

Along with Park, Daston, and Kaufmann's interpretive accounts, Horst Bredekamp's model is also useful in exploring Thornton's aims because he addresses the politics of display and issues of temporality found in the cabinet of curiosity.²⁶ Bredekamp's book is not just about the *Kunstkammer*, but the politics of display, that is, the general underlying principle that guides the selection of objects and their arrangement. He shows that the *Kunstkammer* provided a visual division of nature in different historical periods, summarizing the chain of developments as a question of temporality. Along with the representation of time in the *Kunstkammer*, Bredekamp also addresses the representation and collection of geographical space. This was addressed by the inclusion of exotic botanical and zoological specimens

²⁵ Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *The Mastery of Nature: Aspects of Art, Science, and Humanism in the Renaissance*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), chapter 7.

²⁶ Horst Bredekamp, *The Lure of Antiquity and the Cult of the Machine: The Kunstkammer and the Evolution of Nature, Art, and Technology* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1995).

from Asia or the Americas in some *Kunstkammern*. This is also seen in Thornton's book. I address the question of geographical and ethnographic time in chapter four.

Thornton's early collecting habits, which I discussed in chapter one, included the physical gathering of flowers and birds into a garden and menagerie. I argue that these tangible methods of gathering flowers relate to the collectible nature of the floral plates as a textual mode of collecting and collating the natural world, both British and "exotick" for the subscriber. The gathering and cataloguing of botanical prints mimics the gathering of naturalia, which becomes clear in descriptions of exhibitions of Thornton's book. While Thornton was issuing parts of the *Temple of Flora*, he had an exhibition of the original paintings and drawings of his plates at 49 New Bond Street in 1804, an elaborate display of both art and nature in his "Linnaean Gallery." This gallery played with the permeable boundaries between art and nature found in cabinets of curiosity to create a similar sense of wonder. The exhibit included taxidermied animals, pressed or preserved flowers, and also illustrated flora and fauna. For example, there was an indoor bower, with illustrated, dioramic "backgrounds expressive of the country of each flower," decorated with real and illustrated foreign and English birds and butterflies "in the attitudes of life" thus creating a direct dialogue between real naturalia and their paper counterparts.²⁷

By encouraging the relations between the collecting of texts and of nature, Thornton also deliberately imitated his predecessor William Curtis. Thornton was especially inspired by Curtis' *Flora Londinensis* (1777-1778) and his *Botanical*

²⁷ Grigson and Buchanan 3; Altick 109.

Magazine (1787-present).²⁸ Curtis was Thornton's colleague and was probably one of the greatest influences on his book beyond Linnaeus and Erasmus Darwin.²⁹ In Thornton's *Biographical Sketch of the Life and Writings of the Late Mr. Curtis' Lectures*, he makes this inspiration explicit.³⁰ Clearly encouraged by the example of *Curtis's Botanical Magazine*, both men published prints in installments in which the images and text did not always match up. Of course, it is also possible that images did not always have to match up with the text, that there was never this intention in several cases. At any rate, the exquisitely detailed images stood on their own, or the reader had to do extra intellectual work to associate the image with the text. Publishing illustrated natural history texts in parts was extremely common in the first half of the nineteenth century and even occurred in the late eighteenth century, such as John James Audubon's (1785-1851) *Birds of America* (1827-1838) and Mark Catesby's (1682-1749) *Natural History of the Carolinas, Florida, and Bahama Islands* (1731-1743). Yet another example is the ornithological work of John Gould (1804-1881). His *Birds of Australia* (1869), for example, was published in twelve monthly parts.³¹

²⁸ Grigson and Buchanan 2.

²⁹ Desmond (2003) 114.

³⁰ Thornton (1805) 16.

³¹ For more on John Gould and his publications, see Jonathan Smith, *Charles Darwin and Victorian Visual Culture* (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2006), chapter 3 (pp.92-138) on "Darwin's Birds" is also about John Gould; and Jonathan Smith, "John Gould, Charles Darwin, and the Picturing of Natural Selection," *Book Collector* 50 (2001), 51-76.

These botanical images were also commodities, and many were also exotic commodities being gathered up from all four corners of the world. Curtis frequently depicted exotic plants alongside national favorites to satisfy his readers' curiosity, but this strategic move also created a dialectic between the national and the foreign, and in many cases emphasized that foreign plants were becoming national via implantation in British soil.³²

Like Curtis, Thornton promoted the national glorification of botany with the collection of imperial specimens from all over the world, but also from Europe. The colonial aspects of this botanical masterpiece do not stop at the botanical knowledge and accumulation of exotic plants, but also extend to aesthetics, since Thornton hoped to produce a work superior in type and paper, as well as the fine arts as an entire discipline. Not to be outdone by France in colonial or artistic matters, Thornton's title page reads: "Shall Britons, in the field; Unconquer'd still, the better laurel lose? In finer arts and public works shall they to Gallia yield?"³³ The response to this question was emphatically negative.

Produced during the time of the French Revolutionary (1792-1802) and Napoleonic Wars (1799-1815) in England, *The Temple of Flora* was designed as a "National Work," and stresses the natural order of things where the anthropomorphic plants know their place in the world that in turn ought to reflect

³² Ray Desmond, *A Celebration of Flowers: Two Hundred Years of Curtis' Botanical Magazine* (Kew: Royal Botanical Gardens, 1987).

³³ Thornton 1807 (Missouri Copy), 15. These lines by the poet Thomson are engraved on one of the title pages towards the center.

the social world.³⁴ Despite these ongoing wars and the loss of the thirteen American colonies in 1783, the English were still involved with projects that would increase the wealth and scope of their empire and the expansion of imperial interests around the globe. In the half-century after the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), there was for the most part a more consciously and officially self-constructed patriotism in Britain which stressed attachment to the monarchy and the increased expansion of Britain's empire in the years 1790-1820. This latter increasingly focused on the West Indies (a center of sugar production),³⁵ Asia (especially India and Sri Lanka),³⁶ the Pacific (especially Australia, a new penal colony),³⁷ and Africa (especially in the Cape of Good Hope, its environs, and areas along the East Coast),³⁸ although Britain retained its colonies in Canada, where 40,000-50,000 loyalists emigrated when they refused to take up arms during the Revolutionary War.³⁹

³⁴ Klunk 38-40. Although there were many other wars between the French and the English at this time, these are the ones that Thornton fixates on, or he discusses war in a more generalized sense.

³⁵ Robert Montgomery Martin, *The British Colonial Library in Twelve Volumes, Illustrated with Engravings and Maps, Forming a Popular and Authentic Description of the Several colonies of the British Empire* v. 2 (London: John Mortimer, 1836).

³⁶ Douglas M. Peers, "Britain and Empire," in *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Chris Williams (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 57-58.

³⁷ Australia's eastern half was claimed by Britain in 1770, and initially settled through penal transportation to New South Wales, founded in 1788. In 1901, this territory had grown to six colonies and the Commonwealth of Australia was formed. Peers 58.

³⁸ Martin v. 3, 3-11.

³⁹ David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2; John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War Money, and the English State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 176-178; Linda Colley,

Alliances were pursued with Afghanistan and Persia, although these countries were not colonial territories but affiliations intended to forestall Russian and French designs in Central Asian territories, with which the British often traded (especially China).⁴⁰ In 1798, Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Egypt, and subsequently Syria, with the object of dealing a blow to British colonial expansion. But, in the same year, Horatio Nelson gained a decisive victory over the French squadron in the Bay of Abukir in the Battle of the Nile, which in addition to Sir Ralph Abercrombie's victory on land forced the French to evacuate Egypt in 1801. At this point, Britain did not attempt to occupy Egypt, but restored the authority of the sultan under treaty.⁴¹ Despite losses in the New World, the British Empire grew at this time from 26 colonies in 1792 to 42 colonies in 1815, following a series of conquests of France and its allies, as the UK appropriated colonies as war bounty. There was also expansion from already occupied territories.⁴²

Geography and landscape were unstable categories in this context, since the lands were contested by colonial powers and their geographical boundaries frequently changed when their governance did. Several of the territories and

Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 143-145, 148-149; Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (N.Y.: Basic Books, 2003); Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011); King 6, 19; Klonk 38-40; Kemp 19.

⁴⁰Peers 57-58.

⁴¹ Arthur Silva White, *The Expansion of Egypt Under Anglo-Egyptian Condominium* (London: Methuen and Co, 1899): 45.

⁴² Peers 56-65.

associated flowers represented by Thornton were subject to this instability. For example, the Cape Colony was contested territory ultimately claimed by the British in the years that Thornton produced his book. It was occupied by the British in 1795, relinquished to the Dutch in 1803, reclaimed in 1806, and finally ceded to the British in the Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1814.⁴³ In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Canada was often called “British North America,” and sometimes the West Indies were affiliated with the Americas as well. Both Canada and the Indies shifted ownership several times throughout the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁴⁴ Britain had captured practically every West India Island belonging to any power they had been at war with by 1810, which were repartitioned in 1815 with the Treaty of Versailles some years after the production of Thornton’s book. British power, the power in the East India Company and its traders and soldiers, grew steadily during the years that Thornton’s book was being produced.⁴⁵ The EIC established its first factory in India in 1612 and initially functioned as a trading company, administered India after the battle of Plassey in

⁴³ Martin v. 3, 3-11.

⁴⁴ David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2; John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War Money, and the English State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 176-178; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 143-145, 148-149; Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (N.Y.: Basic Books, 2003); Ronald King, *The Temple of Flora*, (Vincenza, Italy: L.E.G.O., 1981) 6, 19; Charlotte Klonk, *Science and the Perception of Nature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 38-40; Martin Kemp, *The Temple of Flora: Robert Thornton, Plant Sexuality, and Romantic Science*, In *L'interpretazione del mondo fisico nei testi e nelle immagini*, eds. G. Olmi, L. Tongorgi Tomasi and A. Zanca (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 2000), 19.

⁴⁵ Martin 183-6.

1757 until 1858 after the Indian Mutiny, and the EIC was increasingly subject to government oversight between the years 1773-1858.⁴⁶ Warfare and shifting political affiliations led to many sudden, drastic changes in territory. Although the imagery associated with these changes will be discussed below in its own section, As Doherty states, Thornton's frequent "references to the French threat across the Channel as well as in other areas of the Empire, such as the Caribbean, work to consolidate his readers' sense of British identity and align themselves with his attempts to solidify the relationship between nation and empire within the space of the book."⁴⁷ Although this is the case in certain ways, this text also betrays the instability of a colonial world in flux.

In many ways, the changes found in the natural world, the natural cycle of the seasons through changes to landscape, animal or floral companions that appear and disappear between different copies of plates, and flowers blossoming between editions of prints all intensify in the changes that occur between the folio and quarto. In the analysis of the plates that follows, I trace several of these alterations, exploring the natural diversity in Thornton's imperial world of flowers. I examine the various additions of natural details that depict the cycles of nature over time in several plates that especially exemplify this trend, although changes occur in almost every single one.

"Various Odors and Varied Dyes": The Variation of Prints in Thornton's Flora

⁴⁶ Peers 57-58.

⁴⁷ Doherty 51.

The visual variations of prints in the Temple of Flora are hardly surprising if one considers the textual emphasis on natural diversity and variety in a colonial context of exploration and possession. Thomas Maurice (1754-1824) wrote verses for Thornton that emphasized the diversity of imperial plants and territories. Maurice, the poet and author of the books *History of Hindostan* (1795-1798) and the series *Indian Antiquities* (1793-1800), described the vegetable kingdom of the four corners of the globe where “nature’s pencil lights her brightest dyes” in the “purple blooms of Arabia, all of Brazilia flaming before our eyes” that would make even the “rival monarchs swell the note of praise,” along with references to the four seasons that determine the life cycles of plants in phrases such as “where everlasting summer pours its beams,” and also referring to the “harvest,” or autumn. He also describes the variety of colors and odors that emanate from the flowers and the diverse animals that surround them, or perhaps the animal properties of birds of paradise in the verse “where thousand birds their painted plumes unfold, and crests that blaze with azure and with gold.”⁴⁸

Maurice’s bird of paradise, or the Queen Charlotte flower, is meant to appear three times in a complete version of Thornton’s folio book—once in the plate *Cupid Inspiring the Plants With Love* (**June 1st, 1805, IMAGE 3.1**) and in the plate *The Queen* (**February 1st, 1804, IMAGE 3.2**). The person who initially executed an oil painting of this image was Peter Charles Henderson (?-1829). The engraver Richard Cooper (1780-c.1814) made a print based on Henderson’s painting, in the medium

⁴⁸ Thornton (1807) unpaginated.



IMAGE 3.1 Cupid Inspiring the Plants with Love, painted by Reinagle and engraved by Burke, stipple, June 1, 1805, courtesy of Grey Herbarium Library, Harvard University.



IMAGE 3.2 *The Queen*, painted by Henderson and engraved by Cooper, February 1st, 1804, courtesy of the Grey Herbarium Library, Harvard University.



IMAGE 3.3 *The Queen Flower*, painted by Reinagle, but no engraver's name mentioned, January 1st, 1812, courtesy of the Grey Herbarium Library, Harvard University.

of stipple and line.⁴⁹ There is yet another version of this flower, entitled *The Queen Flower*. *The Queen Flower* dates to January 1st, 1812, and is one of the very last images printed in this book **(IMAGE 3.3)**. The artist was Phillip Reinagle (1749-1812), although no engraver is listed, not even on the print itself.⁵⁰ Although there is supposedly only one state for each of these prints according to Dunthorne and Buchanan, I have found much more variation among this series of prints.⁵¹ The poem accompanying this flower expresses feats of imperial science achieved by war and colonial conquest, and also natural diversity.

In the poem attached to *Cupid Inspiring the Plants With Love*, the landscape is described as “teeming with nature’s lively hues,” and the one that appears later alongside the plate of *The Queen* continues these sentiments, with “Flora bringing from every clime her host of various odors and of varied dyes.”⁵² The variety of the floral kingdom is invoked in poetry, and it appears even when closely comparing two different copies of the Cupid plate. In one state, the landscape is rendered in a much more dark and stormy fashion, with a red and green parrot perched over Cupid’s head, while in the other the landscape is much brighter and the parrot appears to be a different specimen altogether because it is grayish-brown. In the

⁴⁹ Buchanan 62.

⁵⁰ Buchanan 62.

⁵¹ Buchanan 61.

⁵² Poet Laureate Henry James Pye in Robert John Thornton 1807 (Missouri Copy), 219.

plates of *The Queen*, the colors and tones of the images are completely different—with darker tonalities in one and lighter versions of the same color in the other, and the flower has blossomed and burst completely open in one plate, with three pistils instead of two with a tiny, pale, and almost transparent anthers emerging from its petals and a pale pink and grass-green stem instead of an olive green and dark red stem. Overall, the changes seem to be climactic and atmospheric, and the tints of the flowers also change according to the brightness or darkness of their environments, as is the case with most of the plates. Of course, these plates are hand-colored, and it is always the case that coloring varies from person to person and over time. As mentioned, Thornton's plates are more than just variants according to Dunthorne and Gordon. Thornton also spent a small fortune on his project, and if he had wanted a more static medium, he certainly could have commissioned this from his artists.

The changes in weather or climate possibly suggest political changes in climate and the destabilization of colonial landscapes. In historian of science Vladimir Jankovic's book, *Reading the Skies*, he argues that there was an emblematic and anthropomorphic culture of weather in seventeenth and eighteenth-century England with political implications. Although Jankovic focuses on meteors, he notes that the terms meteoric, meteorology, and the Aristotelian word "Meteorologica" still in use during the late eighteenth century did not just refer to meteors. It was meant to capture "the qualitative description of discrete meteorological events

separated by ‘anonymous’ interludes of atmospheric tranquility,” and the “fleeting, unstable character of these phenomena.”⁵³

These changes in weather did not have to be extraordinary or negative phenomena to have political significance, but could be phenomena considered ordinary today, such as lightening and storms. Conversely, respites from stormy weather could signify positive changes. Literal changes in climate were often associated with political changes in climate that could be either positive or negative. The Cape Colony, where the Queen Flower came from, was contested territory ultimately claimed by the British in the years that Thornton produced his book, as mentioned. The connections between unstable weather, territory, and politics become clear in the poem associated with the queen flower. The queen flower is textually represented as a scientific specimen that has been ennobled by removal from its original, dangerous, “rugged” context to “Britain’s better skies in a happier hour to enjoy the patronage and share the name of Queen Charlotte. Weather looms large in the text as this plant shifts its identity from African to European. The change in weather is mirrored in the image, where the Queen flower is moved from a dark and stormy environment into “better skies.”

Thornton’s plates of *Tulips* were also frequently subject to change. **(IMAGE 3.4 and 3.5)** Buchanan, basing his work on Dunthorne, lists that it was one of the earliest plates to be published by Thornton on May 1st, 1798. It was painted by Reinagle and engraved by William Earlom (1743-1822), in the medium of

⁵³ Vladimir Jankovic, *Reading the Skies: A Cultural History of English Weather 1650-1820* (Oxford: Manchester University Press, 2000), 3.



IMAGE 3.4, Tulips, painted by Reinagle and engraved by Earlom, mezzotint, May 1, 1798, first state, courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard University.



IMAGE 3.5, Tulips, second state, 1798, courtesy of Grey Herbarium Library, Harvard University.

mezzotint.⁵⁴ Buchanan notes that it was the first print to be published by Thornton. Two trial proofs of it exist, and two states.⁵⁵ Buchanan claims that the two states differ in terms of climate, architecture, and landscape. In the first state, the windmill and other buildings in the background are scarcely visible, which emphasizes the landscape, although the minute details of topography are relatively undefined compared to the second state. In the second state, the fields are reworked and show up clearly, and several bushes have sprouted in the meantime. The windmill and other buildings are much more visible, and have been painted over with a brick-red color. The sky is also reworked.⁵⁶ Based on my own experience, Buchanan's descriptions seem accurate—in the first version of the tulips, the sky is rendered in clear, light blue, and the schematic landscape is a cool bluish-green, but in the second state, the sky is either a dusky golden pink or an intense azure blue and the increasingly complex landscape is a dark, autumnal golden green. The flowers also appear much darker and more intense beneath the dark, cloudy sky, reflecting the change in the weather. The prose that accompanies this group of flowers notes its "diversity" and "variety."

Similar to the Queen Flower, Tulips are politicized, given royal titles, and the colors of each tulip are affected by the weather in each plate. The tulips, in the text, were thought to be flowers subject to extreme variation. The text also describes the changing political climate in Europe at this time. As one can see from the

⁵⁴ Buchanan 62.

⁵⁵ Buchanan 62.

⁵⁶ Buchanan 62.

backgrounds, several states of the print are stormy and several are clear, similar to the Queen Flower. Coupled with the political meanings of these flowers, the changes in weather might have political significance. The tallest tulip, tinged with black, was named after Louis the XVI, who was the monarch executed in the French Revolution in 1792 in the interests of French Republicanism. Thornton describes this tulip as “tinged with black, the true emblem of sorrow and mourning” and notes its impending death. Some other tulips are named after the Earl of Spenser, lord Admiral of the Navy during the later years of the French Revolution during the Napoleonic Wars, and his sister Georgiana, the Duchess of Devonshire.

The Carnations were also given royal titles, such as “Palmer’s Duchess, Caustin’s British Monarch, Midwinter’s Duchess of Wurtemberg, and the Princess of Wales.” This plate dating to April 2, 1803 was also subject to many minute variations in climate and coloration of flowers.⁵⁷ Buchanan state that “Carnations vary more widely than any others in the book in terms of climactic changes and the varied colors of these flowers reflect the weather.”⁵⁸

All of these changes suggest the passage of time, with the weather changing from sunny to stormy, and flowers blooming, growing, and slowly decaying in these prints. They also attempt to emulate the passage of time in the cycles of nature, which is a feat that normally remains unaccomplished by art, which is described in the Temple of Flora as having “immortalizing” properties. The passage of time is rendered explicit with an elaborate, Gothic clock tower with a tiny gargoyle looming

⁵⁷ Thornton (1807) unpaginated.

⁵⁸ Buchanan 62.

above the *Night Blowing Cereus* (**May 20th, 1800, IMAGE 3.6**), a plant from the West Indies that blooms only once a year for an entire evening. Thornton calls this flower a “Torch Thistle” because it possesses the blazing appearance of a torch at night. He claims to have seen “in our hot-houses twenty or thirty of these expanded on the same evening.”⁵⁹ Two different artists made the painting for this plate. Phillip Reinagle painted the flower, and Abraham Pether painted the moonlit landscape. The engraver was William R. Dunkarton.⁶⁰

In the case of the cereus, the “scenery is not appropriated to its subject,” and it has been transplanted into a British landscape even though it could not possibly blossom because of the cold weather.⁶¹ Under a moonlit backdrop, the cereus extends its petals in front of a tranquil stream in the pale moonlight. There are two different plates of this work in the folio edition, and also in the quarto edition. In the first state, the minute hand of the clock covers the dot between XII and I, the clock has no band, and there is a dark spot in the center of the cereus. There are also fewer waves in the water. In the second state, the water is wavy, a number of etched lines are added to the plate to strengthen the foliage of the trees behind the flower and the outer petals of the blossom, the center of the cereus has no dark spot, and the minute hand has moved, revealing the dot between XII and I, perhaps showing the passage of time.⁶² In this case, the passage of time is not about the ephemerality

⁵⁹ Thornton (1807) unpaginated.

⁶⁰ Buchanan 63.

⁶¹ Doherty 72.

⁶² Buchanan 63.



IMAGE 3.6, *Night Blooming Cereus*, painted by Reinagle, moonlight by Pether, engraved by Stadler, May 20th, 1800, courtesy of Dumbarton Oaks Library.



IMAGE 3.7, 1812 quarto version of Night Blowing Cereus, courtesy of the University of Madison Wisconsin Digital Library for the Decorative Arts and Material Culture,
<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/DLDecArts.ThornTempFlo>

of life, but instead about a rare moment in this flower's life when it flourishes. In the quarto edition (**IMAGE 3.7**) the clock tower has disappeared altogether, and there are two flowers and another blossom that is still waiting to open its petals to the beckoning moonlight.

In spite of its beauty, Thornton refers to this colonial plant as "grotesque" and "terrific," in the sense of inspiring terror, but this image is meant to show how the "sublimely foreign can be made beautifully national by way of imperial dominance" over time, according to Doherty.⁶³ At the same time, I think that this image signifies the incredible fragility and transience of this plant and uncertainties about whether it will be able to survive in an unfamiliar European environment or be fully able to blossom in unfamiliar ground. The transplantation of this flower from Jamaica to England underscores how transitions from one territory to another can be destabilizing. There was a larger political discourse at the time about whether subjects of the colonial empire and their botanical commodities in the West Indies and other territories could successfully thrive as transplants.⁶⁴ There was moral as well as political concern about sugar production among eighteenth-century British abolitionists. Revulsion against slavery was intense. Sugar, a botanical commodity from the West Indies, was literally connected to the slaves and workers who refined it because it often contained their blood, sweat, and even flesh. Parts of slaves and workers' bodies got severely cut with sugar canes or trapped in the machinery, becoming incorporated into the sugar. Abolitionists said that eating

⁶³ Doherty 72.

⁶⁴ Kriz (2005).

white sugar was the inverse of black cannibalism, and some propagandists called tea the blood-sweetened beverage.⁶⁵ As opposed to importing sugar (or sugar cane), Erasmus Darwin suggested growing British sugar beets instead.⁶⁶ Around the same time, there was deep concern about the transportation of slaves across the Atlantic in cramped ships.⁶⁷

Another good example of concerns about transplantation is the breadfruit plant, which the British Captain William Bligh (1754-1817) transplanted to the West Indies from Tahiti as a source of cheap food for the slaves.⁶⁸ After Bligh returned to England in 1793, he received a gold medal from the Royal Society of Arts for his efforts. The slaves refused to eat the breadfruit because it became a symbol of their servitude, but after emancipation in 1838 it became well known as a staple food of the West Indies and was more widely consumed.⁶⁹

Because the cereus flower can only blossom at night and not during the day when most Britons visited gardens, in some ways it also defies and destabilizes colonial authority. It does not open its petals in the daylight to the fetishizing gaze of a large British public, who would have very likely perceived it as an exotic commodity. Rather than simply showing how beautifully national this flower has

⁶⁵ Fara (2012)177-179.

⁶⁶ Fara (2012) 177.

⁶⁷ Fara (2012) 178.

⁶⁸ Jennifer Gall, *In Bligh's Hand: Surviving Mutiny on the Bounty* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2010), 187-188.

⁶⁹ Gall 188.

become for the British as a stable category, the shifting geographical contexts result in great uncertainties about the flower's ability to thrive, if not British dominance over the West Indies, which frequently changed hands.

The print of the Dragon Arum also alludes simultaneously to the passage of time, ephemerality, and the instability of territory. It has three states that all date to December 1, 1801. It was painted by Henderson and engraved by William Ward (1776-1826), in mezzotint with aquatint added in the final state. In the first state, the sky at the right has a definite mountain peak between the storm clouds that are carried across the top of the plate. In the second state, the top half of the plate has added mezzotint, which looks like a web of mesh has been placed over the print. The dark cloud now reaches to the middle of the plate. In the third state, the mountain becomes an erupting volcano with flashes of lightning flashing from the clouds above it.⁷⁰ **(IMAGE 3.8, 3.9, 3.10)**

Thornton was fascinated by volcanoes, which he called "burning mountains," and the way that they showed deep time and the instability of the earth. How could a steadfast mountain that had been stable for decades or centuries suddenly become an unpredictable and violent volcano? This geological question plagued Thornton and many of his contemporaries in numerous fields. Thornton writes about volcanoes especially in connection with Sir William Hamilton (1731-1803), Georges Louis Leclerc Buffon (1707-1788), and Erasmus Darwin's (1731-1802) work. Thornton took note of Darwin and Hamilton's texts and drawings of Vesuvius after its eruption in 1767. Mt. Etna also erupted in Sicily three times slightly before and

⁷⁰ Buchanan 64-65.



IMAGE 3.8 Dragon Arum, painted by Henderson and engraved by Ward, mezzotint (and also aquatint in final state), December 1, 1801, 1st state, courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard University.



IMAGE 3.9 Dragon Arum, painted by Henderson and engraved by Ward, mezzotint (and also aquatint in final state), December 1, 1801, 2nd state, courtesy of Grey Herbarium Library, Harvard University.



IMAGE 3.10 Dragon Arum, painted by Henderson and engraved by Ward, mezzotint (and also aquatint in final state), December 1, 1801, 3rd state, courtesy of Grey Herbarium Library, Harvard University.

during the production of Thornton's book, in the years 1787, 1800, and 1812. The ruins of Herculaneum and Pompeii were excavated in the 1730s and 1740s. In France, Jean-Etienne Guettard developed the theory that mountains were extinct volcanoes in 1752. Sylvain Maréchal wrote a play entitled *Le Jugement Dernier des Rois* in 1793 which used volcanoes as political symbols of revolutionary "fervor and destruction," which could signify "the ultimate demonstration of nature's justice," and annihilate "monarchs in a single, terrifying, and glorious moment." The same author also published a book on the antiquities of Herculaneum in 1780.⁷¹ The German antiquarian Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768) wrote letters about antiquities discovered around the Bay of Naples in Herculaneum and Pompeii in 1762. These discoveries were translated into French soon afterwards and into English in 1771.⁷² Many paintings were made of volcanoes in the *Encyclopédie* and also in the artist Pierre-Jacques Volaire's (1729-1799) work.⁷³

Thornton was a part of this trend, and wrote a substantial section about volcanoes, earthquakes, and comets in the *New Illustration* entitled "Of the Earth's Internal Heat."⁷⁴ Thornton, similar to many amateur geologists and natural historians, wondered about the origins of volcanoes. These pontifications about

⁷¹ Mary Ashburn Miller, *A Natural History of Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 140.

⁷² Johann Joachim Winckelmann (trans. Carol C. Mattusch) *Letter and Report on the Discoveries at Herculaneum* (L.A.: Getty Publications, 2011), vi.

⁷³ Miller 142.

⁷⁴ Depending on the copy, this section is bound into one, two, or three volumes. Sometimes it is absent. It is, however, consistently paginated, with numbers ranging from 85-150.

volcanic origins were fraught with debates over the split theories of “vulcanism” and neptunism,” meaning whether the Earth’s topography was determined by fire or water, respectively.⁷⁵ Historian Kenneth Taylor argues that the vast majority of geologists conceded that both fire and water played a role in their terrestrial theories, such as Buffon, who thought that water shaped the Earth’s surface in 1749, but also argued for “central heat” in the Earth’s surface.⁷⁶ Thornton followed Erasmus Darwin’s ideas that the central part of the earth consisted of a “*fluid Lava*, as a percussion on one part of such a fluid mass would be felt on other parts of its confining vault, like a stroke on a fluid contained in a bladder.”⁷⁷

Thornton seems to combine vulcanist and neptunist theories similar to many of his peers, describing the earth’s core as a “uniform mass of melted matter,” but also conceding the abilities of water to shape the earth’s surface, stating that “the waters covering the earth, formed for themselves beds, and mountains rose.”⁷⁸ “Alterations of heat and cold,” shaped the earth, but the “middle or central part remained unchanged...retaining a part of that heat which it received in its primeval approaches towards the sun; which heat, he calculates, may continue for the next six

⁷⁵ Noah Heringman, *Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 8, 105-106, 203-204; Miller 142.

⁷⁶ Kenneth Taylor, “Volcanoes as Accidents: How ‘Natural’ were Volcanoes to Eighteenth-Century Naturalists?” in *Volcanoes and History*, ed. Nicoletta Morello (Genoa: Brigati, 1998), 595-618.

⁷⁷ Thornton (1807) 88.

⁷⁸ Thornton (1807) 90.

thousand years.”⁷⁹ Ultimately, he felt that the “entire body of the earth is composed internally of a great *burning mass*; which is next placed in a heavy terrene substance, that encompasses it; round which is also circumfused a body of water.”⁸⁰ The heat emanating from the earth “arose from the *conflict of elements* contained within her bosom,” and resulted in a volcano.⁸¹

Like many of his peers, Thornton also explored the cultural facets of this geological issue, linking the instability of the earth to warfare, both ancient and contemporary. The erupting volcano evidently became a metaphor for political instability at this time throughout Europe according to historian Mary Ashburn Miller. Although she discusses this trend primarily in eighteenth-century France in her 2005 book *The Natural History of Revolution*, connecting volcanoes to revolution was a pan-European phenomenon. Volcanoes were emblematic of both the destructiveness of war and also were symbols of post-war purgative changes. As polysemic symbols, volcanoes signified different meanings for different political audiences. Miller states that “During the early years of the Revolution, it (e.g., volcanoes) symbolized the potential for unbridled force and destruction; it represented volatility and fear of cataclysm, playing a crucial role in the revolutionary language of watchfulness and surveillance. Yet, for a brief period that began with the call for terror as the order of the day, the volcano became a positive symbol of revolutionary transformation, emblematic of patriotic passion and

⁷⁹ Thornton (1807) 91.

⁸⁰ Thornton (1807) 91.

⁸¹ Thornton (1807) 93.

republican virtue. The image of the volcano was deployed as a symbol of constructive and purgative change at the moment at which terror itself became a positive and regenerative concept.”⁸²

In his text, Thornton noted that the most violent volcanoes were predominately found in colonial territories. He stated that Vesuvius and Aetna are “mere fireworks” in comparison.⁸³ It should be noted that this is not a European version of the dragon arum, but a colonial one because of its coloration. European arums are greenish-white, while the ones growing in non-European regions tend to be dark violet.⁸⁴ Thornton also negatively compared the inner workings of volcanoes to the roaring of cannons and to gunpowder, both in terms of noise and suddenness of firing, as well as the immense capability to destroy life in war. Thornton calls gunpowder “the most terrible engine invented for the destruction of life, whereby mortals imitate the august armoury of the Deity.” He notes the “possibility of its application for overturning cities and empires,” and contrasts the “rapid progress of this mischievous invention with the slow and laborious advances of reason, science, and the arts of peace.” Finally, he also mentions “war resembles these natural calamities.”⁸⁵

Volcanic eruptions were also rife with sexual politics. Ideas about volcanoes as sexual, regenerative and reproductive, intimately connected with cycles of birth,

⁸² Miller 140.

⁸³ Thornton (1807) 87.

⁸⁴ Thanks to Allen Grieco for pointing this out.

⁸⁵ Thornton (1807)128-129.

life, and death, should not be overlooked in a book about the sexual system of plants. Just as the volcano in Thornton's print is erupting, sending fire, ashes, and vapors into the atmosphere, the phallic stamen of the hypersexual, hermaphroditic flower also explodes with "a noisome vapor infecting the ambient air." The explosion of the volcano in the background mimics the explosion of the flower in the foreground. Volcanoes were frequently used as symbols of passion that could signify the love of one's country, but also the orgasmic release of sexual passion. They were phallic symbols. This imagery was frequently deployed in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For example, Marquis de Sade (1740-1814) used the volcano as a symbol for the release of repressed passion.⁸⁶ A series of pornographic prints also uses the volcano as a phallic symbol in a botanical context. Beneath a vignette of three young women walking through a forest of phalluses, there is an explicit close-up of a woman provocatively bending over to reveal her vagina, which is flanked by two cat o' nine tails at each side. Directly beneath this image, there is a phallic volcano erupting white lava. **(IMAGE 3.11)**

Beyond the Dragon Arum, the erupting volcano motif also appears in the 1812 quarto version of the plate entitled Maggot Bearing Stapelia. The folio version, painted by Henderson and engraved by Ward in aquatint, stipple, and line on July 1, 1801, has a mountain in the background. This suggests the transition from mountain to volcano. **(IMAGE 3.12)** Buchanan does not think that the two states of the Maggot-Bearing Stapelia differ very much. He does, however, say that in the first state the mountain behind the plant is wooded and has clouds above it, while both

⁸⁶ Miller 150.

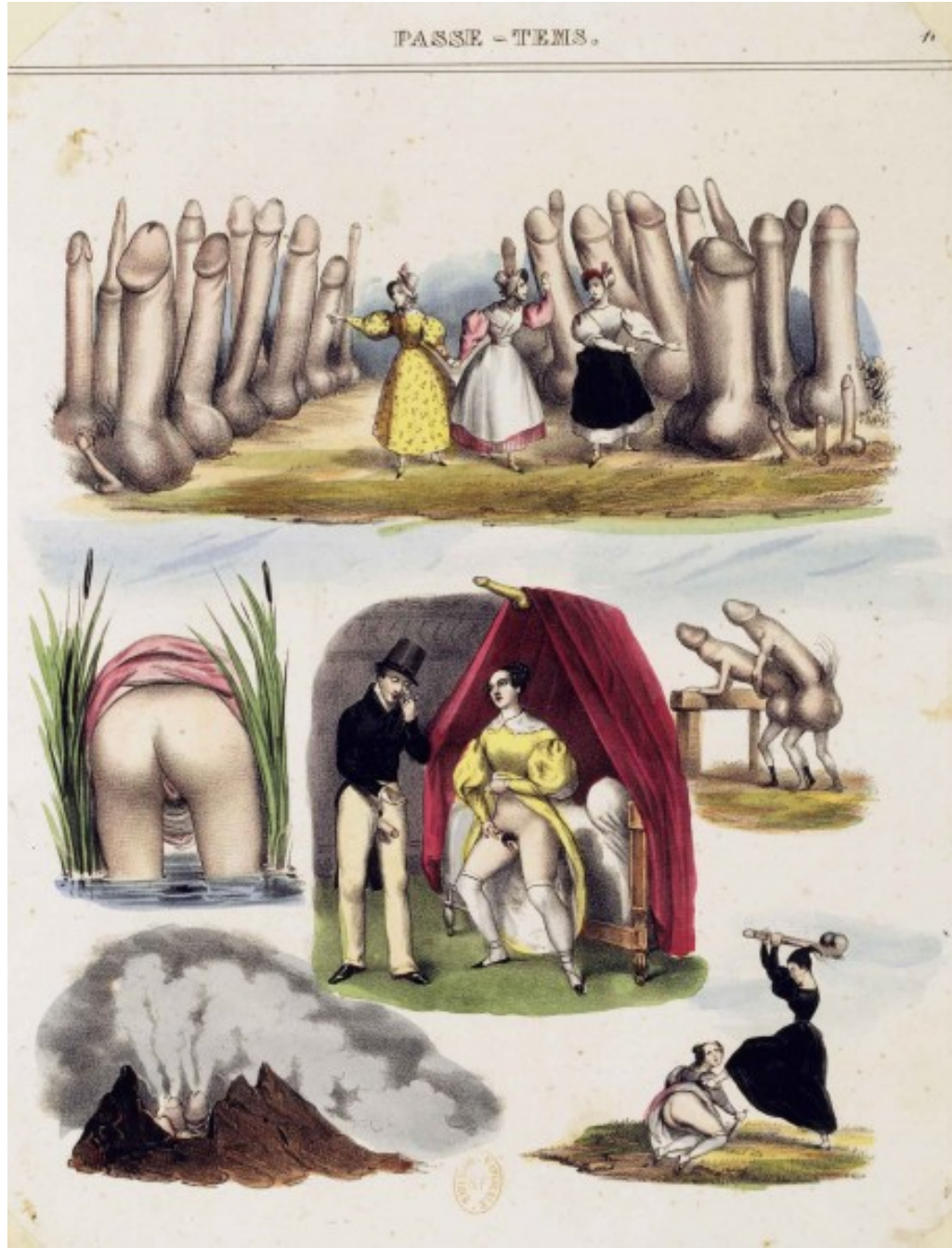


IMAGE 3.11, "Les Passe-tems," courtesy of "BNF: L'enfer ouvre ses portes," *L'Actualité*, July 29, 2013 (online source).



IMAGE 3.12, Maggot-Bearing Stapelia, painted by Henderson and engraved by Stadler, aquatint, stipple, and line, July 1, 1801, courtesy of Grey Herbarium Library, Harvard University.



IMAGE 3.13, The Maggot-Bearing Stapelia, quarto edition of 1812. courtesy of the University of Madison Wisconsin Digital Library for the Decorative Arts and Material Culture, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/DLDecArts.ThornTempFlo>

the trees and the cloud have disappeared in the second state.⁸⁷ He does not discuss the 1812 quarto version of this plate at all, which has substantial changes. **(IMAGE 3.13)** The mountain in the folio edition has become a volcano in the quarto edition. In this plate, there is an entire group of stapelias instead of one. The fir tree, which was placed directly behind the plant, has been relegated to a distant place in the background and is paired with another. Three of the four tawny buds have burst open to reveal speckled flowers, the snake is more prominently placed in the foreground and coils all around the entire stapelia rather than slithering underneath it. A lizard also appears as a new animal companion, and they seem to be involved in a confrontation, almost as if the serpent is guarding the plant.⁸⁸ The battle between the serpent and lizard possibly also has bellicose, violent connotations signifying warfare and revolution between opposing parties.

Thornton's plate of roses is another highly variable plate with great political significance suggesting vacillations between war and peace. **(IMAGE 3.14)** The variations, as is the case with all of the others, are intentional. This print dates to October 1st, 1805, and was painted by Robert John Thornton and engraved by Earlom in mezzotint and line. There are two states of this print. The first state shows a tightly-wound nest with visible strands of hay with lines that distinguish each strand from the next, while the second variation depicts a blurry, slightly unwound nest. Shafts of sunlight appear in the first state, and the central rose is

⁸⁷ Buchanan 65.

⁸⁸ Buchanan 65.



IMAGE 3.14, *Roses*, painted by Thornton and engraved by Earlom, mezzotint and line, October 1, 1805, courtesy of Dumbarton Oaks Library.

colored pink. In the second state, the central rose is orangish red and pink.⁸⁹ In the 1812 quarto edition, the Classical temple in the background has been replaced with a different variety of architecture, and the nightingale's eggs in the nest have hatched into baby birds.⁹⁰ **(IMAGE 3.15)**

Buchanan and Dunthorne miss one significant detail. The area near the sun at the upper left is often left blank. Still, some copies of this book also have tiny constellations surrounding the delicate rays emanating from the sun. **(IMAGE 3.16)** A lion representing Leo chases a crab that represents Cancer. This suggests the passing of seasons and time, as well as the life-cycles of plants, since the plate depicts flowers in all stages of life, from rosebuds to fully opened roses on the verge of wilting. These cycles of life and death should be read against the text, since the roses are situated in a section with three odes to springtime and blossoming new life, stanzas against war, and a call for a happy return to peace during wartime.

In Thornton's poem, "A happy return to peace," he briefly alludes to roses being scattered on the dead in battlefields, but also conveys a sense of renewal of the British landscape after wartime.⁹¹ From the "universal woe" of war emerges an emerging sense of pride in the British landscape, with "sweet-smiling PEACE" who "descends from heav'n above, creating joy, harmony, and love. The British flags are furl'd, the troops disband, and scatter'd armies seek their native land." After war, the British can once again attend to the landscape after the "country no longer grieves

⁸⁹ Buchanan 62.

⁹⁰ Buchanan 60.

⁹¹ Thornton (1807) unpaginated.



IMAGE 3.15, Roses, quarto edition of 1812 with detail of hatched eggs. courtesy of the University of Madison Wisconsin Digital Library for the Decorative Arts and Material Culture, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/DLDecArts.ThornTempFlo>

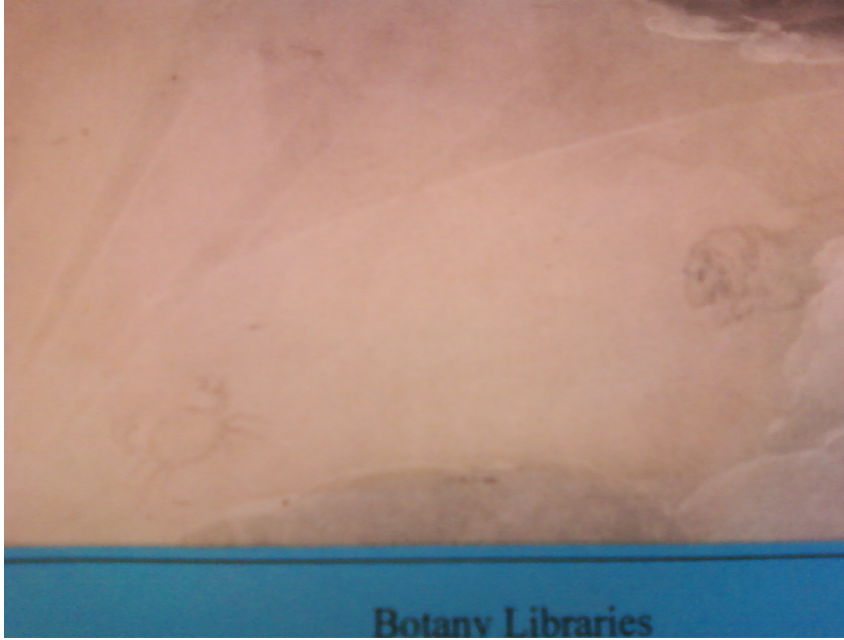


IMAGE 3.16, *Roses*, folio 1805, detail of constellations, courtesy of Grey Herbarium Library, Harvard University.

for its dead; the hind in comfort tills his native soil, and glad the earth repays his active toil," as "flocks...turn'd to fruitful ground." This poem concludes with the phrase "The alter'd scene now soothes my soul to rest, And wears each dreadful image from the breast."⁹²

This sense of flourishing new life can be also found in the quarto edition of 1812, in which the eggs in the nest have hatched into baby birds, signifying the passage of time and the beginning of a life cycle. In Thornton's experiments on embryology as well as in a public talk about embryology at the Linnaean society by John Ayrton in 1809, the egg is described as a "philosophical symbol of new life" and "the universal womb of nature."⁹³ This talk was published and distributed in 1810. In a poem by Erasmus Darwin reproduced in Thornton's book, the chirping of birds signifies the end of violent, warlike volcanic eruptions. After "billowy lavas boil," and the volcanic eruption comes to a conclusion with "reluctant fire in dread suspension sleep," the "incumbent land" becomes "glad with genial warmth" and "the mother bird selects their food with curious bill, and feeds her callow brood; warmth from her tender heart eternal springs, and pleased she clasps them with extended wings."⁹⁴

In many works that describe long-held, traditional folkloric beliefs about the natural world in England, such as the *Chambers Edinburgh Journal*, nightingales are

⁹² Thornton (1807) unpaginated.

⁹³ John Ayrton, "A Memoir the on the Physiology of the Egg, read before the Linnaean Society on the 21st of March 1809" (London: W. Glindon, 1810), 3-4.

⁹⁴ Thornton (1807) unpaginated.

known for their maternal attributes. The nightingales depicted here are perceived as exceptionally good mothers who reflect the values of society and who sing due to their intense love of harmony.⁹⁵ Perhaps the theme of nightingales as good mothers also alludes to human mothers being able to reunite with their sons after war, which is part of the happy return to peace in Thornton's text.⁹⁶ Nightingales begin to assume their maternal role and build nests in June on a tuft of grass and lay five or six eggs. As mentioned, the summer months of June and July are represented through the constellations in this print. While nightingales are associated with melancholy and mourning, they also symbolize a love of liberty because they are not easily caged, and they also were signs of vigilance because they could sing all night.

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Even though the quarto edition was intended to solidify the images and text to make them less original and also less valuable, there is still considerable change and a different type of variability in the quarto. The variability of the quarto is best viewed as an extension of the folio. If one compares and contrasts the quarto with the folio, time still unfolds and progresses. In this way, even what is considered to be the most visually and textually stable moment in the history of the *Temple of Flora* still shows a certain degree of variation and instability. In these plates, the natural cycles of British and colonial flowers are readily apparent as they wane and wax

⁹⁵ Jeni Williams, *Interpreting Nightingales: Gender, Class, History* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 33.

⁹⁶ Thornton (1807) unpaginated.

⁹⁷ William and Robert Chambers, *The Chambers Edinburgh Journal* v. 17 (London: W.S. Orr, 1852), 409-411.

with the passage of time and the seasons in different editions of the plates. They emphasize the tension between nature and art and capitalize on Thornton's mastery of the natural world. Chapter four continues with the idea of the collecting as mastery of the natural world and associated issues of geographic and ethnographic time in the British Empire. I partially explored these issues in the section on collecting and the *Kunstammer* in this chapter. In chapter four, I explore the idea of Thornton's text as a site of geographical collection as Thornton attempts to encapsulate the British Empire and its inhabitants in personified floral form.

CHAPTER 4

Allegories of Alterity: Flora's Children as the Four Continents

Robert John Thornton described his *Temple of Flora* as “a Universal Empire of Love” with the “choicest flowers of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America,” which he affectionately referred to as “children of the goddess Flora.”¹ Thornton published his *New Illustration* in multiple editions between 1797 and 1812, as a series of individual subscription plates to be collected and bound by each reader according to his or her personal preferences. Twenty-three of the thirty-one personified plant specimens are ‘exotick’ or colonial, newly imported from Asia, Africa and America, juxtaposed with eight examples of flowers at the beginning of the book that were naturalized into Europe for a much longer period of time (**TABLE 4.1**). Thornton intended for the plates to be arranged with the European plants first, followed by colonial examples. We know this because of the table of contents created by Thornton that stressed this order in the *Temple of Flora*, although the rest of the *New Illustration* exhibits more diversity in binding choices. Just as I follow Thornton’s intentions in the table of contents, in determining the origins of the plants, I follow Thornton’s descriptions of the plant’s origin rather than modern, technical descriptions of the geographical regions in which each plant grows. European and exotic flowers are always connected with their environments in the *Temple of Flora*.

¹ Thornton (1807) unpaginated. Thornton discusses his specific aims of his *Temple of Flora* in his frontispiece and the front matter of the third volume.

TABLE 4.1. Of all of the 31 color plates of plant life, only eight of them are considered by Thornton to be completely “European,” and are indeed represented as “naturalized flowers” in the text through the trappings of European civilization in the backgrounds or descriptions in the poems: the snowdrop, Persian cyclamen, hyacinth, rose, carnation, two plates of auriculas, and tulips. Five are Asian (“Persia,” India, and China): the Persian white lily, the Pontic rhododendron, the nodding renealmia, Chinese limodoron, Indian reed. The majority of the plants in the *Temple of Flora* are American, encompassing eight of the plates: the American aloe, the blue passion flower, winged passion flower, superb lily, pitcher plant, American bog plants, American cowslip, narrow-leaved kalmia. There are four African plants (3 in the folio edition, one in the quarto): the queen flower, dragon arum, maggot bearing stapelia, and the artichoke protea (quarto); and four plants from the West Indies: oblique leaved begonia, night blowing cereus, mimosa grandiflora, quadrangular passion flower. The two Egyptian plants are the sacred Egyptian bean and the blue Egyptian water lily.

FLOWERS	COUNTRY
SNOWDROP	EUROPE
“PERSIAN CYCLAMEN”	EUROPE
HYACINTHS	EUROPE
ROSES	EUROPE
CARNATIONS	EUROPE
AURICULAS (4)	EUROPE
AURICULAS (2)	EUROPE
TULIPS	EUROPE
PERSIAN WHITE LILY	ASIA
PONTIC RHODENDRON	ASIA
NODDING RENEALMIA	ASIA
CHINESE LIMODORON	ASIA
INDIAN REED	ASIA
AMERICAN ALOE	AMERICA
BLUE PASSION FLOWER	AMERICA
WINGED PASSION FLOWER	AMERICA
SUPERB LILY	AMERICA
PITCHER PLANT	AMERICA
AMERICAN BOG PLANTS	AMERICA
AMERICAN COWSLIP	AMERICA
NARROW-LEAVED KALMIA	AMERICA
OBLIQUE LEAVED BEGONIA	WEST INDIES
NIGHT-BLOWING CEREUS	WEST INDIES
MIMOSA GRANDIFLORA	WEST INDIES
QUADRANGULAR PASSION FLOWER	WEST INDIES
QUEEN FLOWER	AFRICA
DRAGON ARUM	AFRICA
MAGGOT BEARING STAPELIA	AFRICA
ARTICHOKE PROTEA (QUARTO EDITION)	AFRICA
SACRED EGYPTIAN BEAN	EGYPT
BLUE EGYPTIAN WATER LILY	EGYPT

In this chapter, I propose that Thornton presents his plates and text in a sequence and form that is deliberately intended to portray a microcosm of the British Empire, based on the Four Continents theme. I address Thornton's symbolic interconnections between plants, women, and the countries from which they came, and I claim that this connection is similar to the woman-continent overlap in allegorical figures of Europe, Asia, America, and Africa. This woman-continent overlap is found primarily between the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries in European representations of the Four Continents in a wide array of media, including but certainly not limited to atlases, decorative objects, printed allegories, and paintings.² In depictions of the Four Continents, female figures symbolizing these territories reflect and produce the social order. The allegorical figures of the continents were usually arranged in a hierarchical order from civility to savagery in the European mindset as followed: Europe, Asia, then Africa and America.³ Figures representing America and Africa were almost always nude or scantily clad, with dark skin when the artistic medium permitted, surrounded by botanical specimens and animals that were exotic, unfamiliar, and dangerous to the presumed readers, in

² This theme has been discussed extensively in exhibition catalogues, such as Hugh Honour, *New Golden Land* (N.Y.: Pantheon Books, 1975); Ernst van den Boogaart, "The Empress Europe and her Three Sisters," in *America, Bride of the Sun* (Belgium: Ministry of the Flemish Community, 1991); Elizabeth Mc Grath, "Humanism, Allegorical Invention, and the Personification of the Continents," in Hans Vlieghe, Arnout Balis and Carl van de Velde (eds.) *Concept, Design, and Execution in Flemish Painting* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 43-71; Sabine Poeschel, *Studien zur Ikonographie der Erdteile in der Kunst des 16-18. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Scaneg Verlag R.A. Klein, 1985); Le Corbellier 209-223.

³ Elisabeth Neumann, "Imagining European Community on the Title Page of Ortelius' *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (1570)," *Word and Image* 25 (2009), 429.

the wilderness with no architecture. Characterizations of America were based on early depictions of medieval wild men and women with a savage and sexualized appearance, feathers, wild amphibious beasts, armadillos, crocodiles, bows and arrows, and cannibalism. Tattoos or “painted skin” were also an important aspect of representing Native Americans and later on, Tahitians and Africans. Representations of Africa were quite similar, and were often dark-skinned, naked, sexualized, surrounded by all sorts of wild, poisonous animals such as serpents and scorpions, in a rugged landscape setting. Europe and Asia were frequently depicted as much more civilized, clothed, light-skinned, with architecture and civilized animals that were used for serving human beings. Asia was frequently depicted with white skin as Europe’s exotic sister. She often appeared in a variety of Orientalist costumes and turbans, with an incense burner or spices, silks, and pearls (symbols of wealth), camels, and exotic architecture such as pagodas. Europe was “simply an elegantly dressed woman of the nobility who could as well have symbolized Minerva or Spring,” often wearing a crown as the queen of the continents, holding a globe, and depicted with architecture and civilized and tamed animals such as horses.⁴

I argue that this hierarchical order is primarily ideological with some physical components. As we shall see, some of these allegorical figures are not always physically placed in the aforementioned order (Europe, Asia, Africa, America), although Europe is almost always depicted as being more civilized and ideologically superior to the other continents through text and the iconographic trappings mentioned above. At the same time, this physical order of the continents

⁴ Le Corbellier 209-223.

is sometimes followed, most often in the figure of Europe. Europe is often physically placed at the top, center, or in some other manner to indicate that she is the “queen of the continents,” with the other continents scattered randomly beneath her or at her side. This rather popular, if variable, worldview ⁵ is also reflected and produced in the *Temple of Flora*, since the order of the flowers in Thornton’s table of contents depicts European plants first, followed by other plants from the various continents in random order. In addition to being physically placed first at the beginning of the text, these European plants are most often rendered in pale tonalities with literal touches of white. Thornton also follows the ideological underpinnings of the Four Continents theme. He gives these European flowers backgrounds with architecture, royal titles, and the poetry associated with them almost always emphasizes “whiteness, paleness, fairness,” and civilized classical origins, which makes the white and muted colors in the images and the racial associations that they conjure up more noticeable because of the image-text relationship. Clearly, there are touches of white pigment on many of the overseas plants, but whiteness is also textually fore-grounded in many of the European plants as a sign of modest, innocent sexuality and civility in ways that almost never occur with non-European plants.

This collusion of image, text, and strategic positioning at the beginning of the text, all emphasizing European whiteness when considered together, scarcely ever happens with any of the Asian, American, or African plants. These latter plants are

⁵ Bindman 23-28. Bindman briefly but thoroughly traces the “vigorous presence” of the Four Continents in public art between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. See also chapter two of this dissertation.

often, but not always, depicted in colors other than pale or white hues and placed after the European plants. By studying the ways that visual and textual media reinforce racist and sexist stereotypes, I suggest that the uncultivated yet fertile sexuality of Africa and America was harnessed, controlled, and objectified through floral prototypes that suggest an symbolic substitution between women and objects. This interchangeability and collectability of plants, women, and colonial properties, this ordering of plants within a racial and gendered hierarchy projects cultural fears and fantasies onto flowers in a book that initially appears to be an innocent, harmless educational text.

I argue that the eight European examples placed at the beginning of Thornton's text are no coincidence and suggest a sense of European dominance over the colonial flowers. This dominance is expressed visually as well as textually, as floral objects and people are symbolically interconnected and interchanged. Thornton's images of overseas flowers do not look like women, allegorical or otherwise. Still, I contend that their surprising status as inhuman visual objects that are textually transformed into hybrid women-flowers is precisely what makes them so ripe for reinterpretation as hybrid objects of exotic or colonial desire as commodities that can be bought, sold, collected, exchanged, and ordered in a sociable community between two covers of a book. By collecting botanical objects from these continents (or floral representations of the continents themselves), and organizing them in between the covers of a book, a collector could control, contain, and possess what was unknown and unfamiliar.

I argue, however, that the hierarchical order of flowers representing the four continents in Thornton's book sometimes defied such control. Theoretically, each botanical plate in Thornton's *Flora* could be individually collected and rearranged in a different order than the one suggested by the table of contents, although it almost never happened in any of the copies I have seen. Still, there are many, less literal challenges to the extant order because of the hybridity of the plants in the plates. There are frequently visual and textual slippages that occasionally suggest the distant exotic origins of European plants and Christian themes can be found in the colonial plants. In this way, Thornton's text also articulates ambiguities about race, gender, and hybridity, which erode existing continental categories and notions about race and gender.

Allegories of Alterity and the Four Continents

The frontispiece of Thornton's *Temple of Flora* is printed with sumptuously engraved, cursive words that affiliate the diverse flora of the world with the Four Continents. Comparing the flora of the world to the Four Continents and then personifying them as Flora's children forges a firm link between his global community of flowers and the Four Continents at the very outset, shaping the reader's expectations for the rest of the book. The majority of flowers in his text are "personified" as "portraits" of Europe's others in the relationship between regularly reworked, variable color plates and the lively poetry and prose that consistently accompany them. While many of his flowers do not resemble human beings in a literal sense, the text performs the act of personifying them and inscribing them in

exotic territories.⁶ For example, Thornton's world included representative examples of plants in territories formerly possessed by England (such as the lost thirteen colonies of America), currently possessed (The Cape of Good Hope, India, and the West Indies), and ones that inspired exotic longing but were not colonial territories ("Persia," Egypt, and China).

But what, precisely, did Thornton mean by "exotick"? How did alterity operate in his community of flowers personified as the four continents? To answer these questions, exoticism and alterity, the ideological underpinnings of the four continents theme, and Thornton's application of this theme will be discussed at this point. I argue that the sort of exoticism found in Thornton's book is similar to the four continents theme in regards to its use in collecting practices to represent the symbolic mastery of the world, and also in the utopian desire to form a stabilizing, collective European identity set against equally reductive stereotypes of exotic and barbarous alterity in Asia, Africa, and America during times of colonial warfare and the resulting instability of geographical boundaries. By collecting the objects from these continents (or representations of the continents themselves), and organizing them into the small enclosed space of the cabinet of curiosity or between the covers

⁶ Thornton consistently uses the word "personify" to describe the visual and textual translation of colonial subjects into their botanical counterparts. The OED defines the term "personification" from the eighteenth century onwards as "The attribution of human form, nature, or characteristics to something; the representation of a thing or abstraction as a person (esp. in a rhetorical figure or a metaphor); (*Art*) the symbolic representation of a thing or abstraction by a human figure." Entry for "personification," *OED*, second edition 1989. The term "portrait" could refer to the portrayal of any object or scene, but often referred to a human subject by the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. Entry for "portrait," *OED*, second edition 1989.

of a book, a collector could control, contain, and possess what was unknown and unfamiliar.

“Exotick Alterity”

Adjectives such as “unknown” and “unfamiliar” appear with some regularity in eighteenth-century dictionary definitions of the term “exotick,” an adjective and noun that began to be used with some regularity around the turn of the seventeenth century. The basic definition was “belonging to another country, foreign, alien,” yet it was used more and more frequently to refer specifically to plant life during the 1700s and 1800s: “introduced from abroad, not indigenous. Now chiefly of plants (in popular language with added sense of ‘not naturalized or acclimatized’); also, of words, forms of speech or writing, fashions, etc.” Beyond this meaning, the term exotic had associations with “magique and witchcraft, “ with “glamour and the attraction of the strange” in spite of “barbarity and uncouthness.”⁷

The term “exotick” in the eighteenth-century sense dovetails with the postcolonial term “alterity,” because both definitions deal with the other placed in a web of sexual, racial, cultural, and geographical associations instead of treating the other as a somewhat disambiguated philosophical problem. When I describe the colonial or exotic other placed within geographical contexts or in relation to a European, colonizing Other, I consciously differentiate the word “alterity” from “otherness.” Many do not distinguish between the terms “alterity” and “otherness” and tend to use both synonymously with the word “difference” to allude to anything that is simply not the self.

⁷ Entry for “Exotic(k),” *OED*, second edition 1989.

Still, this is a vital distinction in the context of this chapter. The term alterity shifts the focus away from a philosophical concern with otherness, the epistemic other, and addresses a much more concrete “moral other” placed in a web of associations that are political, cultural, linguistic, or religious. The term alterity also implies a slightly greater interest in moving away from identification with the other, as in Mikhail Bakhtin’s description of an author disassociating himself from a literary character he has created. In the relations between self and other, the novelist perceives the character as having been created from within but also separate from the self in its distinct alterity. There is a dialogue between the author and character and transference across and between differences of culture, gender, class, and other social categories.⁸

In other words, alterity, in contrast to otherness, is not simply a philosophical problem, but is linked to material and discursive locations. This model is particularly applicable to Thornton’s text, in which personified, exotic flowers engage in a web of interactions in a microcosmic space that relates to the wider, macrocosmic world. These exotic flowers are assigned a race and gender by Thornton and the various authors and artists who carried out his commissions, and the flowers are also assigned a place in the world with religious, mythical, political, and geographical associations. The geographical identity given to these eroticized, exoticized floral subalterns is simultaneously specific and generically reductive.

⁸ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, “alterity,” “Other/other,” and “othering” in *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 1998), 11-13, 169-173; Bakhtin, Mikhail (Michael Holquist ed) *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981); Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 103.

There are varying levels of specificity with respect to the flower's country of origin—China, The Cape of Good Hope in Africa, and so forth, but they are also given generic, reductive labels that subsume their identities into one of four continents as “American, African, or Asian” plants juxtaposed with their “European” colonizer flowers at the very beginning of the book.

In Thornton's book, personified exotic flowers were also collected and associated with territories like the four continents, but there is a much stronger and literal sense of objectification in Thornton's text. In his text, women from the continents textually transform into feminized floral objects that have no apparent visual humanity upon initial inspection. Thornton's flowers do not look like people in a literal sense. By contrast, the allegory of the four continents has a greater sense of humanity and less literal objectification, since the continents are personified as women, albeit symbolic icons. The visual humanity of Thornton's flowers only becomes clear as he textually assigns these flowers personalities, physical traits, and the ability to speak and feel, while simultaneously robbing them of agency and a genuine voice of their own, making them ideal, passive objects of collection, textual manipulation, and exploitation.

Collecting The Four Continents

The allegorical theme of the four continents in printed books and decorations had an extremely wide distribution throughout Europe, as mentioned in the introduction. There are far too many examples to list them all here, but it is instructive to gesture to a few examples of the theme. From its inception as a printed image on the title page of Abraham Ortelius' *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* of

1570, the theme continued well into the nineteenth century, and would have been easily recognized throughout Europe as a standard aesthetic iconography. **(IMAGE 4.1)** Following the example of Ortelius' enormously successful book, the theme appeared in civic celebrations, royal pageants, monumental decorations on churches and city halls, and in many popular printed images.⁹ They were also represented in sculptures, pottery, and paintings, and collected as fine art objects as a "form of addiction" for white male European collectors according to the former emeritus curator of European sculpture and decorative arts at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Claire le Corbellier.¹⁰ Corbellier argues that the iconographic trappings of the four continents in parades and royal entries signified the ruler's prestigious authority over the world, if not his love of entertainment, pomp, and decoration. An example of this is the royal entry at Rouen, which included Native Americans and celebrated France's colonial efforts at gathering metals there, or Prince Phillip William, Prince of Orange's (1554-1618) royal entry that included representations of Asia, Africa, and Europe, all bowing down before him. Antwerp was an important early center for the development of this iconography, since it was the largest and most active port city in Europe in the sixteenth century. From this date forth, these images of the four continents, often shown as women, were incorporated into the

⁹ Marcel van den Broecke, Peter van der Krogt and Peter Meurer (eds.), *Abraham Ortelius and the First Atlas: Essays Commemorating the Quadricentennial of his Death 1598-1998* (Houten, The Netherlands: HES, 1998) 379-382.

¹⁰ Le Corbellier 209-223.

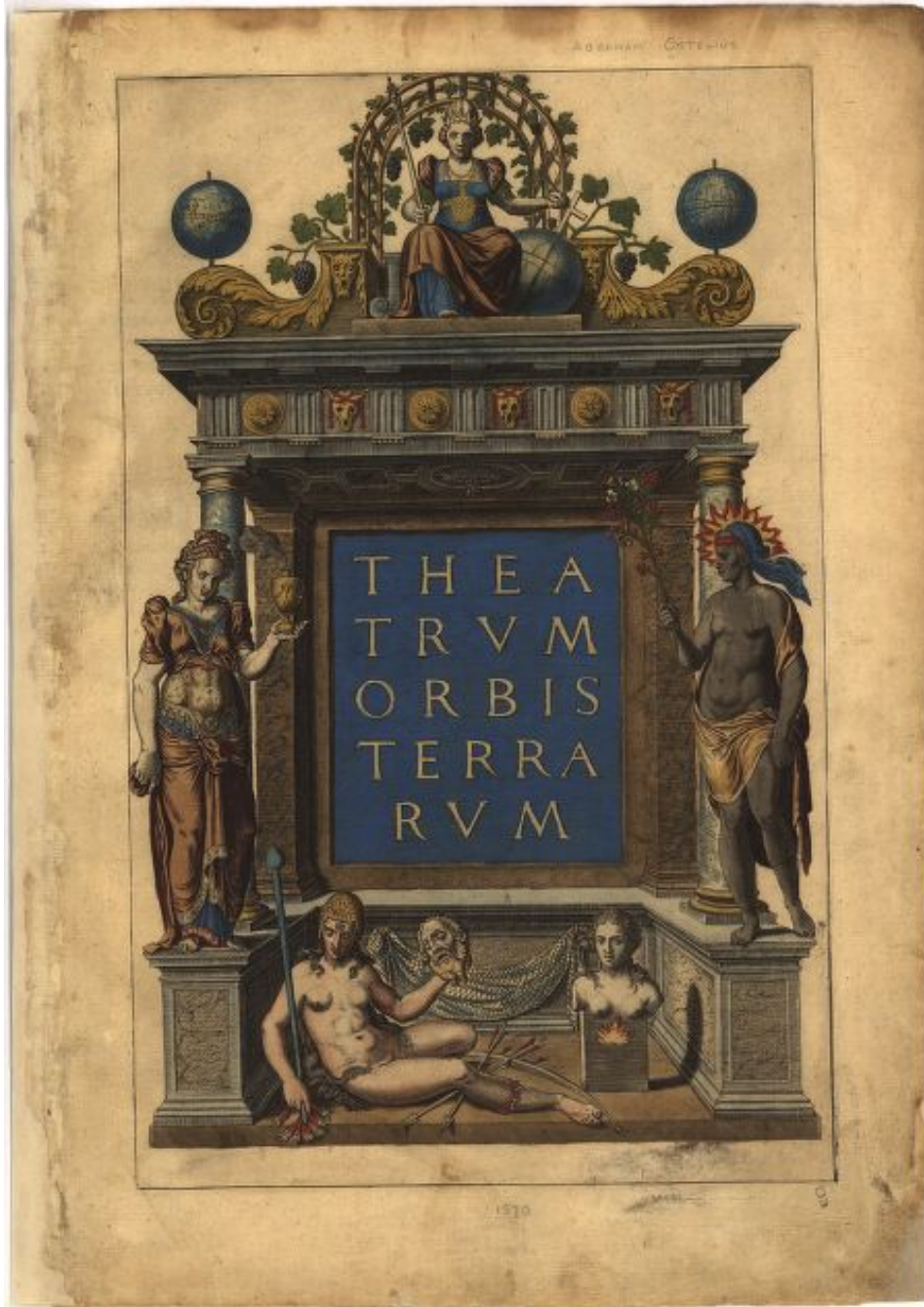


IMAGE 4.1, Abraham Ortelius, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, 1570, courtesy of Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division online.

decorative arts. Usually they were collected by men to be displayed in cabinets of curiosity.¹¹

Several other well-known examples from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries include the Dutch painter Jan van Kessel's *Four Continents* of 1666 (**IMAGE 4.2-4.5**), which art historian Victor Stoichita identifies as an example of "meta-painting."¹² In this series of four paintings, each of the Four Continents is symbolically represented within a cabinet of curiosity, with sixteen smaller paintings of natural history specimens from each continent surrounding the central scene.¹³ In turn, these paintings of the Four Continents and the *naturalia* associated with them were exhibited in real cabinets of curiosity, affiliating the theme of the Four Continents with collecting practices.¹⁴ In this series of paintings, Europe is ideologically established as the most civilized, dominant continent, sitting in a throne-like chair. She is the only continent dressed as a queen, wearing an ermine-lined cape, a crown and a cross, and regally presiding over her cabinet of curiosities amidst paintings of flowers and other natural wonders. In her right hand she holds a small golden figurine of victory, and behind her there are ecclesiastical figures that symbolize spiritual leadership. Portraits of famous European rulers with textual inscriptions decorate the walls, Louis XIV, Charles II of England, Charles II of Spain, Leopold I, Holy Roman Emperor, Juan Domenico Zuniga, governor of the Spanish

¹¹ Le Corbellier 209-223.

¹² Victor Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting* (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹³ Honour (1975) cat. No 109.

¹⁴ Honour (1975) cat. No 109.



IMAGE 4.2, Jan van Kessel, The Four Continents Series (Europe), 1666, courtesy of Wikimedia commons, in public domain. Note that this is an example of “meta-painting” according to art historian Victor Stoichita, since all four continents within the paintings are lounging in cabinets of curiosities, and that the actual paintings themselves would have been placed in cabinets of curiosities.



IMAGE 4.3 Jan van Kessel, The Four Continents Series (Asia), 1666, courtesy of Wikimedia commons, in public domain.



IMAGE 4.4, Jan van Kessel, The Four Continents Series (America), 1666, courtesy of Wikimedia commons, in public domain.



IMAGE 4.5 Jan van Kessel, *The Four Continents Series (Africa)*, 1666

Netherlands. A globe symbolizes her world dominance, as does military equipment such as jousting armor and pistols. Contact with other parts of the world can be found in natural history specimens from foreign waters, such as seashells in the print, and the Turkish carpet covering the dais upon which Europe sits.¹⁵ Asia is likewise clothed, and seated, in charge of her collection, although she does not wear a crown or have other markers of royalty or authority and is dressed in exotic costume. Africa and America also appear in cabinets of curiosity, but because of their partial nudity, the other nude bodies on display beside them, and the fact that

¹⁵ James A. Welu, *The Collector's Cabinet: Flemish Paintings from New England's Private Collections* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), 82-85.

they are seated on the floor amidst other natural history specimens, they almost seem to be collectable objects rather than collectors, as is the case with Europe and Asia. This establishes an ideological hierarchy, even if van Kessel never stated a specific order in which to arrange the paintings.¹⁶

This ideological hierarchy that stresses Europe's dominance can also be found in Charles Grignion's rendition of the Four Continents theme in 1740 (**IMAGE 4.6**). In this print, Europe is centrally placed, wearing a crown and holding a scepter as the queen of the continents, with markers of civilization surrounding her—a building, musical instruments, a book, a painter's palette, and a mask that represents drama. There is a horse behind her, a civilized and tame animal, and a cornucopia to symbolize abundance. Asia is next to her, also clothed but not wearing a crown. She holds an incense burner and has a camel at her feet. America and Africa are at the margins of the print, at the left and right. They are partially nude, and America holds two arrows and a bow, and wears a feather headdress with a crocodile beside her in the shadows, while Africa holds a cornucopia, wears an elephant headdress, and a lion and serpent curl up at her feet. America and Africa are depicted with dark skin, while Europe and Asia are not. Malachy Postlethwait's representation of the Four Continents of 1774 (**IMAGE 4.7**) uses a similar

¹⁶ Honour (1975) catalogue number 109.



IMAGE 4.6 Charles Grignion, *The Four Continents*, 1740, courtesy of the Huntington Library.



IMAGE 4.7, Malachy Postlethwait, *The Four Continents*, 1774, courtesy of the Huntington Library.

iconographic strategy to stress the ideological hierarchy of the continents, although Europe is placed first in line rather than centrally.

Finally, there is, perhaps, no better example of Europe's ideological hierarchy set within a shifting physical order than a set of playing cards designed by Henry Winstanley in 1675 (**IMAGE 4.8 and 4.9**). This set of cards includes Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, and various races from each continent. Each continent and race is described with text. Once again, Europe wears a crown and an ermine robe, holds a scepter, and is placed in a civilized environment with architecture. In the text, Europe is described as having the "most polished and ingenuous nations," "riches, fruitfulness, and stately towns and palaces," and an area of the world where Christianity is "wholly professed." This card also lists the continents in the usual hierarchical order: Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. These continents are also represented with the usual iconography—Asia has an incense burner and camel, America has a bow and arrows, Africa has the usual dangerous beasts. Even as the deck of cards is shuffled while playing games, the words and iconography of each continent remains consistent and reinforces the ideological hierarchy rather than shattering it. This is similar to Thornton's text, in which the plates have a set order in the table of contents, but could theoretically be shuffled and arranged according to the reader's preferences because they were bought separately and bound by the reader.

In sum, although the physical order of the Four Continents has great variability that generally emphasizes Europe's leadership in an ideological sense through iconographic props of authority (crowns, scepters, buildings/architecture,

ction:

Box:

Folder:



Africk is a Peninsula Joyned to Arabia Petrea by a narrow Isthmus, bounded on the East by the Red sea & bay of Arabia, On the North with the Mediterranean sea, and on the west & south with the Atlantick & Ethiopick Ocean. it is much bigger then Europe & lesser then Asia but less Peopled & fruitful then either. & was little Discoverd by the Ancients except towards the North which Passed vnder the name of Libya, it is Equally seated vnder the Equator aduancing either ways Near 36. degrees therefore most vnder the Torrid Zone here is all the generation of the Moors supposed to be the off Spring of Ham who was cursed of his father Noah here are many Idolaters Mahomitans & sum Christian Colonys. here are found most Monsters & variety of strange Beasts.

IMAGE 4.8, Henry Winstanley, *Four Continents Playing Cards (Africa)*, 1675, courtesy of the Huntington Library



IMAGE 4.9, Henry Winstanley, *Four Continents Playing Cards (Europe)*, 1675, courtesy of the Huntington Library

tame animals, even clothing), the basic iconography of each continent remained the same throughout the years and would have been recognizable to Europeans by sight alone, although poems or a textual label with the name of the continent accompanied many of these allegorical images. As is the case in Thornton's book, the Four Continents theme stressed a primarily ideological hierarchy, with Europe depicted literally or metaphorically at the top of the social order and the other continents scattered below her in varying combinations.

The four continents theme could be used in cabinets of curiosity to suggest a similar sense of mastery over the world. Pomian argues that for geographers in the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, the four continents represented the inhabited world embodied by allegorical figures, but this allegorical theme also enfolded examples of each continent's native peoples, animals, plants, minerals, and artifacts into its geographical contours. According to Pomian, it "can be perceived as a coupling of the symbolic and the actual in a pictorial inventory of the world, which was intended to be exhaustive."¹⁷

Images of the four continents were sometimes included in curiosity cabinets to allude to the categorical arrangement of a microcosm full of natural and artificial objects throughout the world, but also relates to the strategic assembling of the world within a small, educational space to make it more graspable and controllable. A good example of this trend can be found in Kaufmann's book *The Mastery of Nature*. Kaufmann argues that Rudolf II and other monarchs used this sort of worldly mastery in their cabinets of curiosity to symbolize the relationship between

¹⁷ Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 51.

macrocosm and microcosm and served as a sign of universal rule by collecting things from all corners of the globe. Although the cabinet of curiosity was a private space, by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was a gradual shift to the public space museums, moving away from the princely, elitist mastery over nature to a public, useful mastery of nature.¹⁸ The basis of the four continents theme in the history of collection was to order the world and then interpret that order, which was part of the philosophical basis of collecting, as the viewer of the collection is granted “the rare opportunity to contemplate at home and right before our eyes the things that are the farthest away.” In “excit[ing] a sense of wonder, collaps[ing] the boundaries of time and distance, travel[ing] between the present, past, and future.” In the mental process of viewing the cabinet of curiosity, the viewer has access to a timeless realm where everything has a hierarchical place, where the imaginative world of the cabinet signifies wishes and desires for the actual world.¹⁹

The collectability of the four continent theme made it an excellent choice as a basis for Thornton’s personified flowers, which in turn were gathered up from the four corners of the globe and bound together as a textual harem that pressed overseas flowers into the service of Europe.²⁰ In the case of curiosity cabinets and Thornton’s book, collecting allegorical depictions of female figures that represent the continents and flowers can be interpreted as a form of colonial fetishization that

¹⁸ Kaufmann (1993) chapter 7.

¹⁹ Simon J. Knell, *Museums and the Future of Collecting* (N.Y.: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2004), 92.

²⁰ I got this evidence from the subscription list, which includes women but betrays a mostly male audience for the book. Thornton (1798 [1797]).

attempts to control and contain that which is unfamiliar and erotic in familiar, public, educational spaces of European authority, dominance, and control—regardless of whether these spaces are literal or literary.

Notably, between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, this was regular practice. There was a very real interchangeability of plants, women, and colonial properties, collected, possessed, and manipulated by white colonial male authorities on voyages. Historian of science Patricia Fara has noted the explicit associations between the collection of botanical specimens and human bodies during the voyage of James Cook, although her work has wider associations and can certainly be applied to other voyages. Fara explicitly argues that Linnaeus’s personified sexual system of plant life broke down the boundaries between the human and the plant world so that people could be collected and exploited along with the plant specimens that were collected and brought back to England.²¹

A good example of this interchange between humans and objects is John Webber’s (1751-1793) *Portrait of Poedua* (1777-1785), executed on his voyages with Captain Cook. **(IMAGE 4.10)** This painting was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1785 under the title, “Poedua the daughter of Oree, the chief of Ulaitea, one of the Society Isles.”²² This image represents a three-quarter view of the young woman who is draped in white cloth beneath her exposed breasts, holding a fan, wearing two flowers at her ears. She has small, calligraphic tattooed markings on her arms. A

²¹ Fara (2003)70-96.

²² Rudiger Johnson and Bernard Smith, *The Art of Captain Cook’s Voyages* v.3 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 403.



IMAGE 4.10, John Webber, Portrait of Poedua, 1777-1785, courtesy of Wikimedia commons, public domain.

plantain tree has been situated to her left.²³ She is otherwise isolated and accentuated against a hazy, stormy sky.

The connection between the Tahitian woman and the botanical specimens of her country are fore-grounded, because she wears native flowers in her long black locks as visible signs on her body. The artifice of tattoos on her body contrasts with the more natural adornments provided by these flowers. John Ledyard, a corporal on Captain Cook's last voyage, believed that women ornamented themselves even more than the men of Tahiti. The tattoo became especially gendered as feminine because of its associations with ornament and decoration. It is telling that there are no large-scale oil paintings of tattooed Tahitian men, showing a preoccupation with associating tattoos, ornament, and femininity in eighteenth-century Britain. Banks compared these tattoos to black beauty patches used by European women to highlight their whiteness, so he perceived it potentially as a sign of beauty by his standards, but also as a sign of otherness and excessive vanity attained through superfluous ornament.²⁴ However, I do not wish to overdraw the boundaries between nature and artifice. The Cape Jasmine flowers (*morinda citrifolia*), natural botanical specimens that grow in Tahiti, have been used as ornament as well. J.R. Forster, who accompanied Cook on his voyages, remarked that "ye plaited hair was all filled with Cape Jasmine flowers...which looked so pretty as if the head had been

²³ Johnson and Smith 403.

²⁴ Harriet Guest, *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History* (London: Reaktion, 2000), 91 and 99.

set by pearls.”²⁵ The flowers in this passage are likened to European pearl hair ornaments, blurring the categories of artifice and nature. It is true that the flowers have been plucked from their natural location, but in this painting, so has Poedua, since she is situated in a supposedly “native” landscape rendered in British conventions like the personified plants in *The Temple of Flora*.

In these voyages, there was an interchangeability of colonial plants and people that were collected as objects of possession during their travels. Thornton’s German contemporary Alexander von Humboldt especially pushes the idea of comparing plants to humans even further than Banks or Cook—in his 1805 *Essay on the Geography of Plants*, the plants of the Americas become anthropomorphized “others” of Europe. These American, “savage” plants are perceived as the subjects of cultivation. The “savages” of America are likened to the uncultivated foods that they grow on their homelands, which they feed upon, incorporating the plants into their bodies.²⁶ He continues to perceive plants and people as mutually constituted by climate zones: “Man would be advised to examine what the character of vegetation consists of, and the variety of sensations vegetation produces in the soul of those who contemplate it. These considerations are all the more important because they touch upon the means by which the arts of imitation and descriptive poetry act upon us...How can this haven, this view of nature...influence the mores and primarily the

²⁵ J.R. Forster (ed. Michael Hoare), *The Resolution Journal of Johann Reinhold Forster* v. 2, (London: Hakluyt Society, 1982), 360.

²⁶ Alexander Von Humboldt (trans Francesca Kern and Phillipe Janvier), *Essay on the Geography of Plants* (Paris: Levrault, Schoell et Cie, 1805), 52, 55.

sensitivities of peoples? Of what consists the character of the vegetation from the tropics?"²⁷

Beyond the overt comparisons that Humboldt makes between plants and people that occupy the same climate zones, he anthropomorphizes plants as having "habits," "physiognomy," and describes them as "social:" "However, these immense forests do not offer a uniform view of social plants: every part produces diverse forms. Here we find mimosas...there baytrees...with no plant exerting its authority over the others."²⁸ The sociability and diversity of these South American plants combined with lack of order makes them ripe for European colonization. He notes the absence of cultivation in the Americas, contrasting it to cultivated European plants.²⁹ This colonial relationship is made explicit when Humboldt states: "This is how man changes the surface of the globe to his liking, and gathers around him plants from the most remote climates. In the European colonies of the Indies, a small cultivated plot introduced coffee of Arabia, sugar cane of China, indigo of Africa...This is how man—anxious and laboring, traveling to all parts of the world—forced a certain number of plants to inhabit all climates and all altitudes."³⁰

In many of these texts about voyaging, as is the case in Thornton's book, it is difficult to separate savage bodies from savage plants, human nature from "plant nature." The act of botanizing and ordering humanized plants within a European

²⁷ Humboldt 55.

²⁸ Humboldt 51, 55.

²⁹ Humboldt 53, 54.

³⁰ Humboldt 54.

classificatory system becomes almost analogous to the act of colonizing itself. While there are strong associations between the microcosmic plant and its universal, macrocosmic associations in early plant personification in a more general sense, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the personified plant becomes more closely affiliated with the four corners of the globe in colonial voyages.³¹ In both the allegory of the four continents and in Thornton's book, collecting was a form of control and possession of unfamiliar colonial territories, with a certain degree of overlap between objects and objectified others purchased as commodities and placed on display.

Visualizing Gender and Race in the Temple of Flora

Like the four continents, in which a union is forged between women and territory, European and exotic flowers are collected and connected with their environments as "scenery appropriated to the subject" in the *Temple of Flora*.³² They are represented in a lively, vivacious, personable fashion that reflects contemporary portrait-like or allegorical counterparts. While previous chapters address changes made to the plates as a reflection of natural diversity and cycles of life, this chapter explores the way that plants were ordered in terms of racial and gendered hierarchies found in the aforementioned accounts of plant personification. The table of contents in *The Temple of Flora* (**IMAGE 4.11**) reveals how Thornton intended the plants to be arranged, even if his subscribers, who purchased the plates individually

³¹ Swan and Schiebinger (2005).

³² Thornton unpaginated. These are Thornton's own words when he describes the landscapes that he commissioned from painters and engravers for the *Temple of Flora* in the front matter.

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ÆSCULAPIUS, FLORA, CERES and CUPID.

Honouring the
Flora of Virginia
Cupid inspiring the Plants with Love

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IV	<i>Snow-drop</i>	XVIII	<i>Winged Passion-Flower</i>
V	<i>Persian Cyclamen</i>	XIX	<i>Quadrangular Passion-Flower</i>
VI	<i>Group of Hyacinths</i>	XX	<i>White Lily</i>
VII	<i>Group of Roses</i>	XXI	<i>Superb Lily</i>
VIII	<i>Group of Carnations</i>	XXII	<i>Dragon Arum</i>
IX	<i>Group of Auriculas</i>	XXIII	<i>Maggot-Bearing Stapelia</i>
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XVII	<i>Common Passion-Flower</i>	XXXI	<i>Sacred Egyptian Bean</i>
		XXXII	<i>Blue Egyptian Water-Lily</i>

IMAGE 4.11, Printed Table of Contents for Thornton's Flora, courtesy of the Houghton Library. Although the plates were not always arranged in this order, it was what Thornton intended. The plates were intended to be arranged as follows, and I have indicated the number of states next to each one according to Dunthorne: (Part III: engraved title on 2 sheets; engraved table of contents; engraved dedication to Charlotte on 2 sheets; engraved part-title; 3 plates: "Flora Dispensing her Favours on Earth" (aquatint and stipple engraved, hand-colored), and "Aesculapius, Flora, Ceres and Cupid ..." and "Cupid Inspiring the Plants with Love" (color-printed stipple-engravings finished by hand); mezzotint and/or aquatint engraved plates printed in colors and/or colored by hand, comprising: "The Snowdrop" [Dunthorne state I]; "The Persian Cyclamen" [II]; "Hyacinths" [II]; "Roses" [I]; "A Group of Carnations" [II]; "A Group of Auriculas" [two only, I]; "A Group of Auriculas" [four, II]; "Tulips" [I]; "The Queen"; "The Aloe" [I]; "The Nodding Renealmia" [I]; "The Night Blowing Cereus" [I]; "The Oblique-Leaved Begonia" [I]; "Large Flowering Sensitive Plant" [I]; "The Blue Passion Flower" [I]; "The Winged Passion Flower" [I]; "The Quadrangular Passion Flower" [II]; "The White Lily" [II]; "The Superb Lily" [B, III]; "The Dragon Arum" [I]; "The Maggot-Bearing Stapelia" [I]; "American Bog Plants" [II]; "The Pitcher-Plant"; "The Pontic Rhododendron"; "The American Cowslip" [I]; "The Narrow Leaved Kalmia"; "The China Limodoron"; "The Indian Reed," Sacred Egyptian Bean, Blue Egyptian Water Lily.)

and bound them according to their personal preferences, did not always follow this order precisely. The copies that I have seen always make an attempt to follow the table of contents, however. Many of these plants grow in more than one location. In determining the origins of the plants, I follow Thornton's descriptions of the plant's origin rather than modern, technical descriptions of the geographical regions in which each plant grows.

Europe

Although Thornton's text and images are infinitely interpretable, and I encourage innumerable counter readings, there is a hierarchy similar to the four continent theme if one reads the relations between the images and the texts with respect to race. As if to establish European dominance over the other parts of the world, the first volume of color plates begins with eight European specimens (the snowdrop, Persian cyclamen, hyacinth, rose, carnation, two plates of auriculas, and tulips). While it initially seems as if the Persian cyclamen does not fit into this scheme, it is a flower known for its "dusky whiteness."³³ Furthermore, Ronald King points out that although this flower has the word "Persian" in its name, it is actually a European specimen, not from Persia at all.³⁴ Whiteness or paleness is stressed in all of the introductory plates of European plants in the *Temple of Flora* in either a textual or visual sense, and western Classical or Christian themes predominate in the texts. Even if a flower also happens to grow in other regions of the world as well as in Europe, this information is suppressed in Thornton's text in favor of

³³ Thornton unpaginated, "Persian Cyclamen."

³⁴ King (1981) 54.

emphasizing its European occurrence. The pastel palette of the prints of European flowers is often much more subdued, paler, and literally makes much more ample use of white than the majority of the plates that depict American, Jamaican, or African plants.

This whiteness is showcased in the image and text of the very first botanical plate of the series, the snowdrop. **(IMAGE 4.12)** Beyond racial reasons for depicting the snowdrop first, it is also appropriate that this would be the first plant to appear in the book, since it is the first in Europe to appear in the spring after the hardship of winter. Although other, darker flowers appear in this print, they play a secondary role because the title of the image indicates that the plate is dedicated first and foremost to the snowdrop. Cordelia Skeeles wrote a poem about the snowdrop for Thornton that personifies this specimen as pure and innocent, clearly inspired by the anthropomorphic style of Erasmus Darwin's work in *The Loves of the Plants*:

No warm tints or vivid coloring/ Paints thy bells with
gaudy pride/ Mildly charmed, we seek thy fragrance/
Where no thorns insidious hide/ Tis not thine with
flaunting beauty/ to attract the roving sight/ Nature,
from her varied wardrobe/ chose thy vest of purest
white/ White as falls the fleecy shower/ Thy soft form
in sweetness grows/ Not more fair the valley's
treasure/ Nor more sweet her lily blows.³⁵

The snowdrop has been textually rendered as harmless, delicate, free of the "gaudiness" of color, and full of an innocent, mild charm. This poetic inscription complements the accompanying mezzotint print designed by Abraham Pether and

³⁵ Cordelia Skeeles, "Snowdrop" in Thornton (1807) unpaginated.

engraved by W. Ward.³⁶ It seems as if everything about composition of the landscape has been strategically arranged to emphasize the pearly, luminescent whiteness of the snowdrop. It has been positioned in the foreground against a cozy, if somewhat dreary, dusky, grey winter landscape with rustic, wooden, English cottages in the background. The snowdrop has been positioned in a slightly off-center position in the foreground. It has been placed against yellow and purple crocuses that echo and reflect the color scheme of the delicate, waning sunset in the far background. Some of the crocuses occupy a much more central position than the snowdrop, but the brilliant white of the snowdrop is much more prominent. It dominates the composition as the brightest value despite its lack of color, leaving no doubt as to the true subject matter of this image. It is even brighter than the whitish-grey tonalities of the snow-encrusted hills and rooftops that frame it and ultimately serve to set off its whiteness.

The Persian Cyclamen (**IMAGE 4.13**) is described with its colloquial English nickname “Sow-Bread,” and the first physical characteristic that Thornton mentions is its “delicate white” shade. In a poem, Erasmus Darwin describes the cyclamen as a “pious” plant in a cycle of life and death, gradually bending her head into the earth to deposit seeds, which will grow and blossom next year among “London’s gasping crowds.”³⁷ The flower is depicted in a similar cycle of life and death as one of the brilliant white flowers withers and dies at the right-hand side, presumably with the hope of rebirth. As is the case with most of the European and Asian plants, there is

³⁶ King 52.

³⁷ Thornton, “Persian Cyclamen,” (1807) unpaginated.

architecture in the background to indicate civility, and in this case it appears to be a



IMAGE 4.12, Snowdrops, painted by Pether and Engraved by Ward for Robert John Thornton's *Temple of Flora*, mezzotint with aquatint added in third state, September 1804, courtesy of the Grey Herbarium.



IMAGE 4.13, Persian Cyclamen, painted by Pether and engraved by Elmes for Robert John Thornton's *Temple of Flora*, aquatint, stipple, and line, 1804, courtesy of Grey Herbarium.



IMAGE 4.14, Hyacinth, painted by Sydenham Edwards and engraved by Warner for Robert John Thornton's *Temple of Flora*, aquatint, stipple, and line, June 1801, courtesy of the Grey Herbarium.

hybrid between a pagoda and a church, although there is no evidence to indicate precisely what type of architecture it is.

There are also small trappings of civilization in the form of cottages and windmills placed directly behind the hyacinth (**IMAGE 4.14**), which is rendered in shades of white, light azure, and dark blue. Although the accompanying poem is entitled “an Eastern Ode,” it has to do with the Eastern wind rather than having colonial or exotic overtones. Beyond the lack of colonial content in the poem and the reference to “young zephyrs with gentlest gales,” Thornton also notes at the outset in his description of plates that the “Tulips and Hyacinths are placed in Holland”³⁸ rather than the East. Still, the mention of the “Eastern wind” conjures up evocations of slight exoticism. It deliberately contrasts this civilized European location with the “East.” This also occurs when Thornton contrasts the blissful landscape behind the Hyacinths with the “utter darkness,” “hissing of serpents,” “the yell of the tyger, hyena, and panther” and other strange animals making nocturnal noises in an “African scene...that would appall every heart with fear.”³⁹ The flower is also described in neoclassical Ovidian terms as the young man who enticed Apollo, although the white variety is called “LA HEROINE,” and the white one with red spots is called “DIANA VAN EPHESON.” The darker ones are given generic names that do not suggest personification at all. For example, the light blue is called “GLOBE

³⁸ Thornton, “Hyacinths,” (1807) unpaginated.

³⁹ Thornton, “Hyacinths,” (1807) unpaginated.

TERRESTRE,” the darkest blue one is simply called “VELOUR PURPRE,” and the single dark blue is called “DON GRATUIT.”⁴⁰

White and pink pastel shades predominate in the exquisitely detailed plate of roses that Thornton painted for the *Temple of Flora*, which was eventually turned into a mezzotint by Richard Earlom (1743-1822) on October 1st, 1805.⁴¹ **(IMAGE 4.15)** This flower is discussed as hybrid and exotic in footnotes, although Thornton also tells us in his footnotes that his roses are growing in Italy and England. The poetry for the most part emphasizes the flower’s classical origins and whiteness. Thornton calls the rose “The Queen of the Flowers,” in a “charming Arabic ode by Hafiz,” rendered into English from a Latin translation by Sir William Jones. In a series of footnotes, Thornton also discusses the passage of the nightingale from Egypt and Persia, and how they return back to Europe in the Spring and Summer to ‘warble out their songs of love,’ when the rose is also in blossom. Thornton even specifies their dates of their return to Europe, noting that ‘they reach Italy on the twenty-fourth of March, and visit our isle (e.g. England) by the second of April.’⁴² Presumably, Thornton has chosen a European setting for his roses, since the constellations near the sun in the upper-left-hand corner represent a lion (Leo) chasing a crab (Cancer), which symbolizes the two summer months of July and August.

⁴⁰ Thornton, “Roses,” (1807) unpaginated.

⁴¹ Grigson and Buchanan 61.

⁴² Thornton (1807), unpaginated.



IMAGE 4.15, *Roses*, painted by Thornton and engraved by Earlom, mezzotint and line, October 1, 1805, courtesy of the Houghton Library.

Hybridity appears in the coloration of roses as well, but Thornton also stresses its whiteness. Although the whiteness of the roses might seem secondary to the hues of the other flowers, it is once again among the first traits emphasized in the text, which reads that the rose is “esteemed as a *Spring Flower* whose attendants have been before described, and she moves at the head of this long procession of vegetable beauties, pouring out all her incense to Flora, with all the grace and dignity of majesty. Nature has given her a vest of purest white.”⁴³ The text foregrounds whiteness, making its presence seem greater to the viewer than it might actually be in the image.

In addition to whiteness in the image and text, the European roots of the rose and its designation as a civilized plant are demarcated by classical architecture in the background, in which a classical temple with a statue of a pagan god is situated on a hill placed behind the flowers. Classical references abound in the poetry, where the rose is personified as a “virgin flower,” “sweet,” and “childlike,” even if it was described in moderately sexual terms as well, as a flower used to adorn Bacchanalians and thrown into bowls of wine during their festivals, described by “SAPPHO, the Lesbian Poetess” as reminiscent of a lover’s blush as the white rose converts slowly into red, or as the blood of Venus falling on the white rose as she rescued her lover Adonis from the wrath of her husband Mars in the poetry of Catullus.

In these classical narratives about roses in *The Temple of Flora*, roses are white in their natural state, and transform into reds and pinks due to heightened

⁴³ Thornton, “Roses,” (1807) unpaginated.

emotions. Color is perceived as innocently sexual and entirely natural in these narratives, effusing the white innocence of roses with a lusty, rouge pigment playing over the pale petals. In many eighteenth-century texts and some nineteenth century images and texts, blushing was perceived as something that only white women were physiologically capable of, although there was some difference in opinion.⁴⁴ Blushing was associated with a variety of emotions, ranging from empathy, desire, or embarrassment. It was considered, above all, an expression of innocence and naturalness because it revealed inner emotions on the surface of the skin in spite of attempts to conceal feelings in literary, natural history, and political texts. In the poetry of John Keats (1795-1821), human blushing was also compared to roses in his *Lamia*, in which he states, “That from a whiteness, as the lily clear, blush’d into roses.”⁴⁵

Blushing is also discussed in the writings of two natural history authors frequently cited by Thornton, Georges Louis Leclerc Buffon’s (1707-1788) *Natural History of Man, the Globe, and Quadrupeds* and Alexander von Humboldt’s (1769-1859) *Personal Narratives of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of America During the Years 1799-1804*. For the most part, Buffon thought that only Europeans could blush, but he modifies this claim by describing two unusual cases of “hybrid,” light-skinned African women named Genevieve and Frances. Genevieve was described as

⁴⁴ Angela Rosenthal, “Visceral Culture: Blushing and the Legibility of Whiteness in Eighteenth-Century British Portraiture,” *Art History* 27 (September 2004), 563–92; Caroline Palmer, “Brazen Cheek: Face-Painters in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Journal of the History of Collections* 31 (2008), 195-213.

⁴⁵ Christopher Ricks, *Keats and Embarrassment* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1976), 22-24. The passage quoted from Keats is in the *Lamia* I, 21-26.

having a “tallow-colored” complexion with hair that was “reddish,” and eyes that “appeared of a dull blue.” She did not blush from heightened emotions as Europeans did, but instead from the physical sensation of sitting too close to the fire, which slightly tinged her cheeks and ears with red.⁴⁶ Frances was described as a hyper-pigmented woman who “changed color,” and “a whiteness gradually extended over her whole body” after the age of fifteen. After her skin changed color, Buffon described her blushing as the result of strong emotions, and stated that “when the passions of resentment, shame &c. are excited in this negress, her face and her breast blush with redness. In the same manner, all those parts which are exposed to the fire become red with the action of heat.”⁴⁷ In this account, blushing could be either physical or emotional, and was associated with light skin color to a greater extent than with race, strictly speaking.

Alexander von Humboldt felt that blushing was utterly impossible for any race other than Europeans, and said that the “dark races” were incapable of giving “external evidence of blushing of their deep internal feelings.” He continued that “it is only in white men that the instantaneous penetration of the dermoidal system by the blood can produce that slight change of color of the skin that adds so powerful an expression to the emotions of the soul. ‘How can those be trusted who know not how to blush?’ says the European, in his dislike of the Negro and the Indian.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Georges Louis Leclerc Buffon, *Natural History of Man* (London: Leavitt and Allen, 1857), 142-143.

⁴⁷ Buffon 146-147.

⁴⁸ Alexander von Humboldt, *Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of America during the Years 1799-1804* v. 1 (London: Henry G. Bohn), 1852), 305.

Thomas Henry Burgess and Charles Darwin challenged this extreme point of view in the mid-to-late-nineteenth-century, developing Buffon's ideas to a greater extent than Humboldt's.⁴⁹ In the first part of his book, Burgess notes that blushing occurred in the ancient and modern world in "all countries," and he also devoted an entire chapter to plant sensibility and floral blushing prior to discussing blushing in human beings.⁵⁰

Beyond these sources, one of the most famous of these texts on blushing in political texts of the Anglo-American world is Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781-1782), in which he states:

And is this difference of no importance? Is it not the foundation of a greater or less beauty in the two races? Are not the fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of color in the one preferable to that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immoveable veil of black which covers all the emotions of the other race?⁵¹

Unlike the "immoveable veil of black" that conceals emotions, in a natural blush, European cheeks become gorged with blood as an involuntary expression of shame or modesty in the face of love, lust, or any passion, and its involuntary nature made it all the more an alluring and authentic expression of modest self-

⁴⁹ Henry Thomas Burgess, *The Physiology or Mechanism of Blushing* (London: Churchill, 1839); Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London: D. Appleton & Co, 1872).

⁵⁰ Burgess, "Table of Contents" v.

⁵¹ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (London: John Stockdale, 1787), 230.

consciousness for most white eighteenth-century men.⁵² Thornton draws an even more direct parallel between blushing and red roses by calling the reader's attention to the red rose to the blushing bride in Anacreon's *Marriage Song*, and pointing out the red rose's common eighteenth-century nickname, "The Maiden's Blush."⁵³

The carnation, **(IMAGE 4.16)** which Thornton believed surely would have been "the rival of the rose," if it had been known to ancients, is classicized as a "DIANTHUS, the *Flower of Jove*," and as "*the fairest flowers o' th' season*" transplanted from "fair Italia's bosom" to "Britain's worthier region."⁵⁴ Carnations were considered a peculiar sort of European flower, referred to as "bastards," or "monsters," and perceived as traversing vexed boundaries between nature and artifice, although they were very beautiful and were given royal names, such as "Palmer's Duchess, Caustin's British Monarch, Midwinter's Duchess of Wurtemberg, and the Princess of Wales."⁵⁵

⁵² Karen Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 218-220. Harvey cites a wide variety of sources including magazines for women, pornography, and advice from father to daughters, in articles and texts such as "On Modesty," *Lady's Magazine*, June 1774, 376; "A Dissertation on Prudes," *Lady's Magazine*, June 1774, 309; Dr. John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy* (London: Robert Campbell, 1795), 26-27. For issues of race and blushing, see Tassie Gwilliam, "Cosmetic Poetics: Coloring Faces in the Eighteenth Century," in *Body&Text in the Eighteenth Century* (Stanford University Press, 1994), 144-163.

⁵³ Thornton, "Roses," (1807) unpaginated.

⁵⁴ Thornton, "Carnations," (1807) unpaginated.

⁵⁵ Thornton, "Carnations," (1807) unpaginated.



IMAGE 4.16, Carnations, painted by Henderson and engraved by Caldwell, aquatint, stipple, and line, April 2, 1803, courtesy of the Houghton Library.



IMAGE 4.17, Tulips, painted by Reinagle and engraved by Earlom, mezzotint, May 1, 1798, courtesy of the Grey Herbarium.

The tulip (**IMAGE 4.17**) is also described as a diverse, variegated flower and given royal names, such as Louis XVI, “The Duchess of Devonshire,” and the “Earl of Spenser.”⁵⁶ The prose that accompanies this group of flowers notes the “most cursory glance may indeed show us that diversity which tulips exhibit, along with their “variety,” and when they are “grouped together, you have a striking display of the wonderful power of the beneficent CREATOR.” A poem elaborates upon the natural diversity of this flower:

For who indeed can paint like NATURE? Can
imagination boast, amid his gay creation, hues like
these? And can he mix them with that matchless skill,
and lay them on so delicately fine, and make these
varied marks so just and true, that each shall tell the
name denoting its particular birth?⁵⁷

Painted by nature, the hues in each tulip’s variegated, streaked petals are tinted by the weather in each plate, and also show the life cycles of this flower. Similar to the text describing the roses, tulips are described as white in their natural state and then painted lavishly by nature or emotional states, as tulips are described as having “white veils and ivory bosoms” that are “dyed” or “blood stained.” Thornton calls attention to this flower’s “birth,” and several of the tulips are indeed at different stages of life. The ones that are closer to the ground are closed, but in ascending order they begin to blossom in a upsurge towards the pinnacle of this floral arrangement, with a black and white tulip that is at the peak of its maturity

⁵⁶ Thornton, “Tulips,” (1807) unpaginated. The Earl of Spenser was the Lord Admiral of the Royal Navy, and his sister Georgiana was the Duchess of Devonshire.

⁵⁷ Thornton, “Tulips,” (1807) unpaginated.

with widely opened petals, playfully called Louis XVI, the monarch executed during the French Revolution in 1792 in the interests of French republicanism, which threatened the British monarchy and was a primary reason for war with the French in the 1790s. It is inevitable that its petals will slowly begin to plummet to the ground in the course of a few weeks. In this case, the color black is not an indication of race, but rather a “true emblem of sorrow.”⁵⁸ In the Tulips, the final plate of the European plants, color signifies emotional states and royal colors (purple, red, and gold) rather than having any racial resonance.

Asia

There was occasionally a great deal of confusion surrounding racial categories in Thornton’s text, because there was also much confusion about these categories at large in eighteenth-century Europe. This happens most often with Asian plants, which are geographically very different from what we might consider to be Asia today. For example, Thornton refers to his pale, white-tinged Egyptian flowers situated in backgrounds with exotic architecture as being “Asiatick” and “Hindoo” at several points in his text. **(IMAGE 4.18)** According to historian of science, gender, and race Londa Schiebinger, Egypt was associated with the cradle of civilization and therefore many prominent eighteenth-century racial theorists and thinkers often considered Egyptians to be either Caucasian or Asian. She notes that

⁵⁸ Thornton, “Tulips,” (1807) unpaginated.



IMAGE 4.18, Blue Egyptian Water Lily, painted by Henderson and engraved by Stadler, aquatint, September 11, 1804, courtesy of the Houghton Library.

archaeologist, Hellenist, and art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann considered Egyptians to be Chinese, while the eighteenth-century racial theorist Christoph Meiners thought they were Hindu, and French naturalist Georges Cuvier and the

British surgeon William Lawrence did not associate them with Africa at all, but considered them to be “Caucasian” after comparing the skulls of mummies to skulls of many races.⁵⁹ Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840), however, distinguished three main facial types in ancient Egypt based on a comparison of skull types with Egyptian works of art, “the first like the Ethiopian, the second the Indian, and the third into which both the others have by the progress of time and the effect of the specific and peculiar climate of Egypt degenerated, spongy and flaccid in appearance, with short chin and somewhat prominent eyes.” The Ethiopian face was somewhat “degenerated from the white human prototype, but could nevertheless be harmonious, intelligent, and beautiful.”⁶⁰

Indian, Arabian, and Chinese flowers are also subsumed under the general category “Asian.” Similar to the European flowers, the Asian flowers in Thornton’s text are also tinged with white, or completely white, with exotic architecture in the background. They are scattered after the first eight European flowers in an apparently random order. Asia was frequently ranked second in consequence after Europe and depicted as much more civilized than the other continents, with religious overtones. Asia was frequently represented as much more luxurious than Europe with richer scents, materials, and fabrics surrounding her. Although classical references appear with much less regularity than European flowers, the Asian examples are frequently depicted with exotic architecture like pagodas or with

⁵⁹ Schiebinger (2004) 188.

⁶⁰ Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, “On the Natural Variety of Man (1795),” reprinted in *The Anthropological Treatises of Blumenbach* (London: Published for the Anthropological Society by Longman, Green, and Roberts, 1865), 301.

religious iconography relating to the Holy Land. Asia was frequently depicted as Turkish, Persian, or Indian and associated with Old Testament figures.⁶¹

The Arabian white lily (**IMAGE 4.19**) is an excellent example of these religious associations, described as a “native of Persia, where it majestically presents its finely-polished bosom to the all-enlivening sun, the object of worship in eastern nations. How contrasted is this flower with our humble Lily of the Valley, which even hides its delicate pendulous head from the feeble rays of the Spring!” Next, Thornton graphically describes the sexual parts of this flower, unlike the European flowers, but ends with the statement “Our blessed saviour thus alludes to it when addressing his faint-hearted disciples. “ Although this specimen has Marian associations, its Eastern heritage is fore-grounded at the outset and its sexuality is openly displayed in contrast to the humble whiteness of the European lily of the valley. Still, the sexuality of this plant is much less overt than any of the African or American specimens that follow, since it is “clad in white,” wearing clothes typical of personifications of Asia, and it exemplified “beauty, truth, and chastity attired.”⁶²

Unlike many of the white, European flowers, the text does not emphasize the flower’s whiteness as much as the image does. The whiteness of the lily is set off against a dark brown, almost black, rocky background with a classical temple in the

⁶¹ Neumann 431-432.

⁶² Thornton, “White Lily,” (1807) unpaginated.



IMAGE 4.19, White Lily, painted by Henderson and engraved by Stadler, aquatint, August 1, 1800, courtesy of the Grey Herbarium Library.

background. Although it is a comparable shade of white as the snowdrop and Persian cyclamen (which as we noted was European in spite of the playful allusions to its distant Persian heritage), the extreme darkness of the surrounding landscape casts shadows on the pale petals as parts of it turn eastward towards the light landscape in the background at the upper left, with soft, verdant hills and a small, circular temple made of white marble. The way that the parts of the lily incline slightly towards the east, facing the upper-left-hand landscape, recalls the notion expressed in the text of the lily facing the sun because of its eastern heritage, and perhaps even affecting the reading of the temple as “pagan” rather than “classical.”

As is the case with almost all of the other Asian plants, The Chinese Limodoron, **(IMAGE 4.20)** has a pagoda in the background. The other Asian plants all have European renditions of local architecture to signify their exotic civility, similar to many examples of the four continents theme. In the case of the Chinese Limodoron, it is slightly difficult to see because the building is unfinished and blends into the bluish-grey background. This unfinished state of architecture is somewhat rare in Thornton’s text and suggests a partially civilized state that is still somewhat rough and incomplete. The pagodas in Thornton’s text, are of course, not genuine, but instead cater to Orientalist ideas of how pagodas ought to look, similar to contemporary illustrations of pagodas found at the Kew gardens. The flower itself is tinged with white, but mixed with other colors and described as “white above, but of a brown-red beneath, elegantly contrasting with a bell-shaped nectary, exteriorly white at the base, but marked with a dark purple at its mouth and of a lighter tinge.” Thornton continues to describe the “organs of generation, which are curiously

fashioned,” if moderately concealed. The accompanying poetry evokes Asian stereotypes of “magic tales,” silken veils,” sweet smells evocatively described as “sweet carol from the blossom’d spray,” and the plum colored and lightly-shaded white petals are described in the accompanying poetry as “the plummy race” and “golden scaled beauties” who “glitter in each pictur’d vase.”

This description of “golden scale beauties glittering in each pictur’d vase” conjures up ornate, decorative, and exotic imagery associated with eighteenth-century Rococo Chinoiserie designs on vases and wallpapers throughout Germany, France and Britain, which often included floral patterns.⁶³ The art historian Hugh Honour describes the style of Chinoiserie in his classic study of the same title as the “limpid color of the porcelain colors of the Chinese palette...the spectacle of quaint little men and monkeys attired in richly embroidered silk robes, and intrigued by the exotic voluptuousness of the Orient—for to the eighteenth century imagination the harems of China appeared no less titillating than those of Turkey.”⁶⁴ It was an immensely popular style favored by men and women of all classes throughout Europe. Queen Charlotte, Thornton’s botanical patroness, had a room decorated with a Chinoiserie motif and a great deal of lacquer in Buckingham House during the years 1762/1763.⁶⁵ The Brighton Pavilion, a former royal residence built between 1787 and 1811 in Brighton, England, is yet another example of hybrid styles, since it

⁶³ Hugh Honour, *Chinoiserie: The Vision of Cathay* (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1973), 96.

⁶⁴ Honour 87-88.

⁶⁵ Honour 133.



IMAGE 4.20 Chinese *Limodorum* with what Thornton refers to as the “pagodas” in the background, painted by Henderson and engraved by Landseer, aquatint, stipple, line, February 1, 1804, courtesy of the Grey Herbarium.

has been described as “the marriage of an Indian exterior to a Chinese interior, flaunting lurid color combinations.”⁶⁶

Although Chinoiserie was immensely popular, there was much confusion about what exactly constituted so-called “Chinese styles” in Europe. It was a style with a great deal of hybridity that was accommodated to fit European tastes. The European sense of fantasy and frivolity led to pottery in the Chinoiserie style being painted with so-called Indian flowers, Japanese or Tibetan motifs, and Chinese wallpapers that were also called “Indian,” a term that was indiscriminately applied to imperial imports of any kind.⁶⁷ These racial and cultural slippages found in the hybrid, decorative, floral forms of British Chinoiserie were also prevalent in Thornton’s *Flora*.

Africa

According to Thornton’s table of contents, he never intended to place European examples after the first eight plates (the snowdrop, cyclamen, hyacinth, rose, carnation, two plates of auriculas, and tulips), although the white-tinged Asian flowers are scattered throughout the book. All of the European flowers lead up to “The Queen Flower,” or *Strelitzia Regina*, **(IMAGE 4.21)** alluding to Queen Charlotte wife of George III, to whom he dedicated his book as a “bright example of conjugal fidelity and maternal tenderness,” among other things, as there were four profusely flattering dedication pages in a row at the very beginning of the book along with a

⁶⁶ John M. Mackenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory, and the Arts* (London: Manchester University Press, 1995), 80.

⁶⁷ Honour 105, 108, 134.

smaller version of her likeness in the image *Cupid Inspiring the Plants with Love*.⁶⁸

(IMAGE 4.22) It is as if all the preceding, comparatively humble and common or less-royal European flowers with titles have made a crescendo-like procession up to their queen who embodies exoticism contained within properly established bounds, presiding over the colonial specimens that come after her in the book. These colonial attitudes of appropriating exoticism are amply apparent in the accompanying text by the poet laureate James Henry Pye:

On Afric's southern steep, where Gama's sail/ To the
tempestuous clime was first unfurl'd/ courting with
ample sweep the dangerous gale/ And op'd to Europe's
sons the Eastern world...GEORGE'S parental sway and
Albion's laws/ spreading where Ammon's empire never
spread/ To Thames blest stream her stores while
commerce draws/ From Ganges Bramin groves and
Indus bed/ Sudden a buoyant vessel meets his eyes/
Not launched by thirst of wealth or hope and fame/
Science alone directs the bold enterprise/ Her eye their
cynosure, her smile their aim...Crown of their labors!
This imperial flower/ wafted from burning Afric's
rugged scene/ 'Neath Britain's better skies, in happier
hour/ Enjoys the patronage of Britain's queen/ Grac'd
by her name, its shining petals boast/ Above the rest to
charm her favoring eyes/ though Flora brings from
every clime her host/ Of various odors and of varied
dyes/ While royal nymphs as fair as the Oreade race/
Who trod Eurota's brink or Cynthus's brow/ snatch
from the wreck of time each fleeting grace/ And bid its
leave with gloom perennial glow.⁶⁹

In this poem, the queen flower has been wrenched from an African context by British explorers who open up Africa to European scientific vision for this reason

⁶⁸ Thornton "Cupid Inspiring the Plants with Love," (1807) unpaginated.

⁶⁹ James Henry Pye in Thornton (1807) unpaginated.



IMAGE 4.21, The Queen Flower, painted by Henderson, engraved by Cooper, stipple and line, February 1, 1804, courtesy of the Grey Herbarium Library.



IMAGE 4.22, Cupid Inspiring the Plants with Love, painted by Reinagle and engraved by Burke, stipple, June 1, 1805.

alone, supposedly not for fame or fortune. The queen flower is one such scientific specimen that has been ennobled by removal from its original, dangerous, “rugged” context to “Britain’s better skies in a happier hour to enjoy the patronage and share the name of Queen Charlotte.

The queen flower presents a rather unique case in the *Temple of Flora*, since it is an African specimen from the Cape of Good Hope that is used to represent a respectable British queen. Sir Joseph Banks gave this flower the Linnaean name *Strelitzia Regina* in 1773 to commemorate Charlotte and her birthplace, Mecklenberg-Strelitz in Germany. There were many rumors about Charlotte’s African heritage, which supposedly came from her descent from Margarita de Castro y Sousa and a Moorish branch of the Portuguese Royal House.⁷⁰

In this case, exoticism has been used to metaphorically imbue the queen’s body with a sense of daring excitement. The danger of Africa, which is manifestly present in the two other plates that will be discussed later, has been tamed into an exciting exoticism appropriated by the queen. This gently tamed exoticism typified many of Queen Charlotte’s portraits, which combine imperial iconography with classical imagery. One example of this is Johann Zoffany’s famous painting, *Portrait of Queen Charlotte with her Two Eldest Sons* (1764-1765). **(IMAGE 4.23)** Charlotte’s sons, situated on her left and right, show her dual identities as European and “other.” The two-year-old Prince of Wales is dressed as Telemachus, the son of Ulysses and Penelope, and one-year-old Frederic is dressed in Turkish costume with a silver turban and a gown of blue and gold. The mood is playful but imperious.

⁷⁰ Hedley 293.

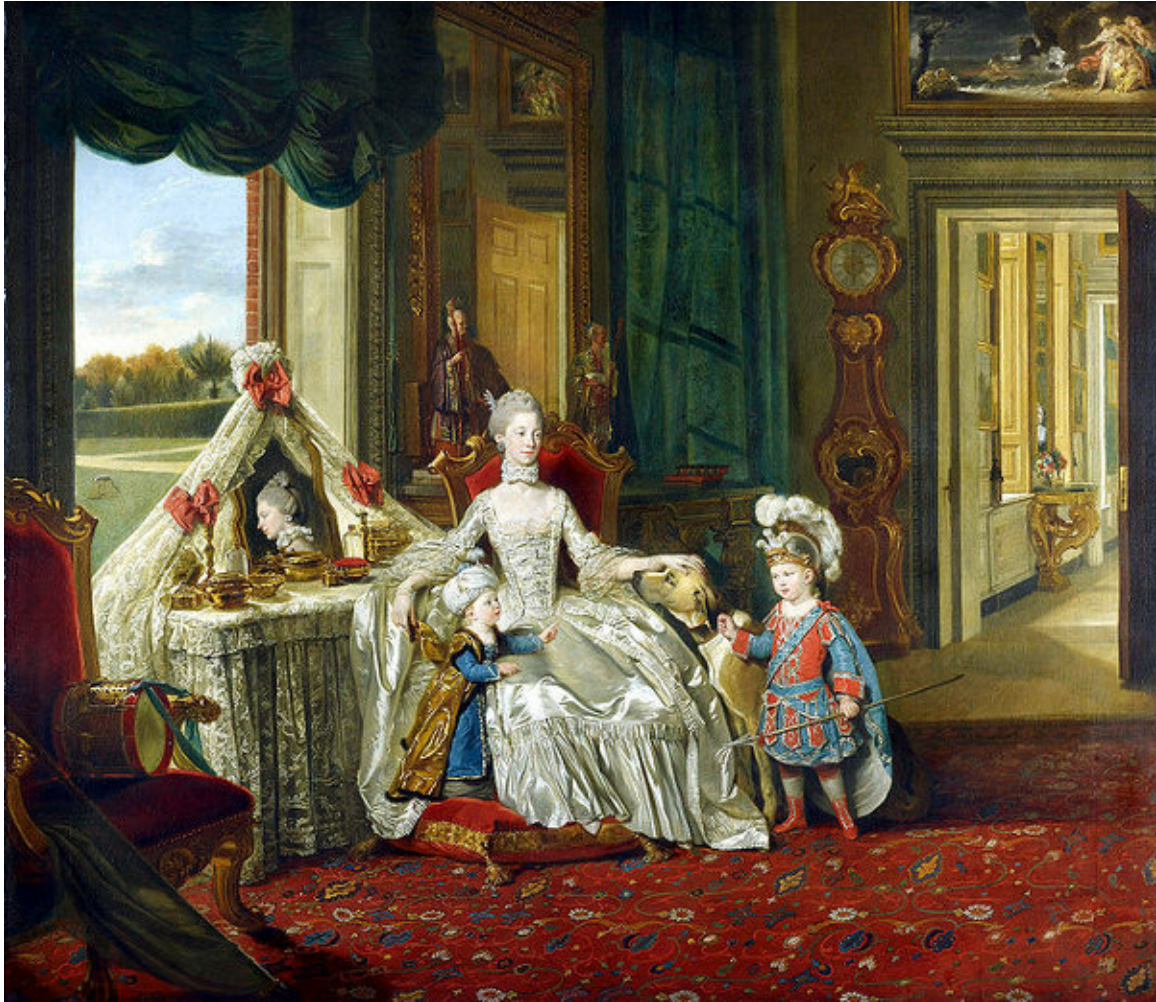


IMAGE 4.23, Johann Zoffany, *Portrait of Queen Charlotte with her Two Eldest Sons* (1764-1765), courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, public domain.

Charlotte's dressing room is decorated with a painting of an Ovidian theme that is possibly Titian's "*The Rape of Europa*" at the far upper right, a French clock, and Flemish lace, but it is also full of exotic imports, rich spoils of trade and empire. These included a Turkish carpet richly patterned with flowers, two lacquered Chinese Mandarin figures standing behind Charlotte's chair, a carved, oval, red, wooden, Chinese snuff-box on her dressing stand that was probably used for cosmetics, and the flamingo and palm tree on her palace lawn outside the window representing far-flung lands and voyages. The profile of Lady Charlotte Finch (1725-1813), who tutored Charlotte's sons, is reflected in distant hallway mirror to represent the world of learning. Not only did Lady Charlotte order the outfits for the princes, she taught them geography with many small toys, including early jigsaw puzzles, or "dissected maps," that the princes played with at the Kew Gardens so that they could one day rule the empire more effectively.⁷¹

As in the aforementioned portrait, a similar strategically tamed exoticism manifests in Queen Charlotte's portrait at the beginning of the book in one of the four dedication pages. **(IMAGE 4.24)** The Queen appears as a heavenly apparition, enveloped in clouds with small, flying cupids. Yet, even as these clouds around her bust-length portrait confer an otherworldly demeanor, in another sense they almost prefigure the way that she and the queen flower will share identities later in the book. This is so because the queen flower is also bust length and is also ensconced in a cloudy landscape. Additionally, just as the queen flower almost appears to wear a

⁷¹ Margaret Drabbel, *Pattern in the Carpet: A Personal History with Jigsaws* (N.Y.: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010), 135-138.

delicate, yet regal and exotic “crown” of purple, yellow, and red, Queen Charlotte also wears an exoticized, somewhat Islamic headdress with a crescent moon that is studded with brilliant jewels. This exotic crescent moon perched on Charlotte’s neatly coiffed head is tamed by means of its potential associations with Diana, the virginal moon goddess, in the European mythological tradition. It is interesting that Charlotte and Diana are compared in the poem about the queen flower, if only indirectly through mentioning the nymphs of the Oreade race who attend her.⁷²

The art historian Martin Kemp argues that the sexuality in this image is not meant to encourage “free love” in the same way that the libertine reformer Erasmus Darwin’s work often did. Kemp feels that this image constrained plant sexuality in a modest and socially acceptable way within in the boundaries of wedlock as well as peace and harmony in the world.⁷³ This flower can also be found in the first illustration of *Cupid Inspiring the Plants with Love*. **(IMAGE 4.25)** In this image, the brilliant queen flower has been modestly concealed behind several fronds of plants both distant and familiar, banana and breadfruit trees and English ivy. A small, innocent cupid shoots his bow at the flower, but perhaps also at the other plants in general if one is to take the title of this work literally. If we can take this title seriously as encompassing the entire plant world, which in turn represented the social order in microcosm, then this image does seem to be a call for peace. Kemp furthers this argument by stating that Thornton also reproduced Charlotte’s letter to

⁷² Thornton (1807) unpaginated: He is careful to point this out to the reader in a footnote.

⁷³ Kemp (2000) 19.



IMAGE 4.24, Portrait of Queen Charlotte as “The Patroness of Botany and Fine Arts,” in the Temple of Flora, painted by Sir W. Beechy and engraved by F. Bartolozzi, January 1, 1799, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, public domain.



IMAGE 4.25, Detail of Queen Flower in *Cupid Inspiring the Plants with Love*, courtesy of the Grey Herbarium Library

the King of Prussia in the *Temple of Flora*. This letter, which the queen had written as an exceptionally young woman, modestly yet articulately stressed the social horrors of war. She gracefully implored him to show some mercy for her people and the formerly beautiful botanical landscape of England, which had been ravaged by war.⁷⁴ The illustrations and texts of the Queen flower allude to themes of love, feminine virtue, masculine endeavor, world commerce, regal patronage, imperial glory and Britain's inherent virtues under God's divine purpose.⁷⁵

The rest of the specimens in the book present a direct contrast with the modified exoticism of the queen flower, and strongly allude to Britain's imperial glory over their others and their colonial specimens. In many of the illustrations that follow, because of the poetic personifications and portrait conventions used in representing the plants, it is difficult to tell the colonial subject from the colonial object of botanical discovery. While Thornton presented the Queen Flower in a flattering light, the other African plants (the dragon arum and the maggot-bearing stapelia) reflect stereotypical early modern European fears and anxieties about Africa and African women as dangerous, poisonous, possessing dangerous (hyper)sexuality, and being abundantly fertile but ultimately incapable of maternal instinct or self-cultivation. Although there were clearly much more "positive" interpretations of Africans in early modern visual culture as religious figures or as individuals who possessed inside knowledge of the ridiculous follies of white

⁷⁴ Thornton, "The Noble Sentiments of her Most Gracious Majesty, Charlotte, Queen of the United Kingdom, against War," Queen Charlotte in Thornton, "To his Majesty King of Prussia," (1807) unpaginated.

⁷⁵ Kemp 22.

Europeans, Thornton's images seem to emphasize racist stereotypes rather than presenting positive, affirming models.⁷⁶

Literary scholar Kim Hall searches for non-objectifying representations of black women in early modern visual culture, ways to imagine women with an "agency that is more than simply sexual," and "to see them not as anonymous bodies on display for the pleasure of European men or as passive recipients of male wisdom, but as women who resist, talk back, and test the patriarch with "hard questions."⁷⁷ Admittedly, Hall finds this to be the case to a much greater extent in individualized portraits, manuscripts, and sketches, as opposed to printed media. Sketched portraits suggest an immediacy, individuality, and intimate interaction with the sitter that many prints do not. Hall and I both share a preoccupation with the ways that printed artistic media and color contribute to perpetuating racist and gendered stereotypes. I share Hall's opinion that that "copied images serve to stereotype, to fix in the mind a certain image that accumulates cultural fears or fantasies," reminding us that the word "stereotype refers to a method of casting multiple copies from a papier-mâche mold and thus to a technological process of making multiple and immutable images."⁷⁸

⁷⁶ For a more positive, nuanced interpretation of Africans than Thornton's images and texts permit me to present here, see Kim F. Hall, "Object into Object? Some Thoughts on the Presence of Black Women in Early Modern Culture," in *Early Modern Visual Culture: Representation, Race, and Empire in Renaissance England*, ed. Peter Erickson and Clark Hulse, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000) 346-379; David Dabydeen, *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth-Century Visual Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 74-91.

⁷⁷ Hall 376.

⁷⁸ Hall 372.

Hall challenges her own idea by referencing the Latourian idea of immutable mobiles, noting the placement of the same image in different types of books can change the entire meaning. Still, the print often remains a stereotype that caters to identify non-European bodies and nationalities situated at the peripheries of centrally-placed boundaries in the examples she has selected.⁷⁹ In Thornton's *Flora*, prints are subject to the most intense variations in order and internal composition. Thornton hoped that the folio prints would be original enough to sell for greater sums of money at his 1812 auction, because after that point they would become both immobile and immutable in an unchanging and static quarto edition published in the same year after the auction.⁸⁰ The plates of the quarto edition did not change order or composition, and therefore they were less of an exotic commodity to be purchased by Britons.

The critic, writer, novelist, and professor of comparative literature David Dabydeen also analyzes the role of race in printed media and the connection between the art market and the slave market. Specifically, he looks at how black servants poked fun at the vulgar, obscene, diseased lifestyles of the rich and famous of the eighteenth-century white, aristocratic, British world in William Hogarth's printed series such as *Marriage à la Mode* (1745). In these collectible prints, iconography associated with Africa (mummy cases, strange, primitive animals like crocodiles, lizards, snakes, and monstrous hermaphrodites, imperial imports such as

⁷⁹ Hall 372.

⁸⁰ Grigson and Buchanan 5.

chocolate, coffee, tobacco, and tea—regardless of whether these things actually came from Africa, and black servants as objectified commodities to be purchased alongside imported goods) overturns our expectations of what is savage and what is civilized, as young white Earls infect little girls with syphilis, and young, white, married women attempt to seduce their African servants in open displays of sexual deviance. The black man, who was openly held to be the embodiment of sexual and cultural savagery in eighteenth-century Britain laughs at whites and in the process reverses these roles and negative perceptions. The black in *Marriage à la Mode* “symbolizes the natural as opposed to the artificial, the real as opposed to the ostentatious,” and also touches upon the theme of “nature vs. art.”⁸¹ These prints were meant to be collected as an artistic series, and the figure of the black alongside them.

Although Thornton’s prints are collectible objects that do not overtly make fun of the follies of white collectors, Dabydeen and I both examine the ways in which British artistic productions juxtapose colonial people with the resources of their countries, and the sale of art and people. Dabydeen draws a direct link between purchasing art and purchasing slaves, stating that in the English colonies, slaves and art were frequently sold under the same roof and that “buying blacks was as much an investment as buying art—hence the same care spent on inspecting the goods, the care of the connoisseur,” and noting that the term “patron” had the double valences of a “patron of the arts” and “owner of slaves.”⁸² In this way, he argues that

⁸¹ Dabydeen 75-81.

⁸² Dabydeen 87-88.

colonial imports, people, and art all become interconnected as they are bought and sold as commodities.

One salient example of this objectifying view of non-European women can be found in John Ogilby's (1600-1676) travel account to Africa. John Ogilby began his career as an actor and then had an extremely illustrious career pirating folio atlases from the Dutch. He made a great deal of material on voyaging accessible to seventeenth and eighteenth century British readers for the first time, and he was also Charles II's royal geographer. From 1669-1673, Ogilby issued seven folio atlases with translated and augmented commentaries that mapped Africa, Asia (here Persia and India), America, China, and Japan. Many of the prints in these travel guides were used in later eighteenth-century dioramas because of Thomas Betterton, one of the greatest actors on the Restoration stage and the producer of some of its most opulent extravaganzas. He owned Ogilby's atlases and they were a great source of inspiration in constructing exotic backgrounds for his theatrical productions, which in turn appealed to a wider public.⁸³

In Ogilby's travel account to Africa, Ogilby connects African women with the botanical produce of their country. He claimed that African women had "a great propensity to, and skill in sorcery, so that they can charm serpents...They believe farther, that they can bewitch in any such manner, as to cause them to die of languishing disease...at all times (they) chew and eat such Herbs and Barks of Trees,

⁸³ Joseph Roach, "The Global Parasol: Accessorizing the Four Corners of the World," in Felicity Nussbaum (ed.) *The Global Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2005), 93-107.

as are the greatest incentives to heighten their desires to almost hourly congresses.”

⁸⁴ Not only does the connection to witchcraft underscore a demonic sexuality that threatens masculinity, but the connection to the flora and fauna of the region with these women’s bodies is most significant in light of the topic at hand. The tree bark is incorporated into their bodies, imbuing them with the ability to engage in long bouts of sexual intercourse, and they can charm poisonous African beasts as a visible manifestation of their sorcery. His attitudes were more broadly reflected in the European mindset, and indeed travel accounts such as these produced knowledge for those who had likely never been to Africa for centuries afterwards.

The famous British mapmaker Charles Price (1680-1720) also represents Africa in a 1711 detail of a cartouche on a map of Africa as naked, sexualized, surrounded by all sorts of wild, poisonous animals such as serpents and scorpions, in a rugged landscape setting. **(IMAGE 4.26)** An elephant towers menacingly over her left shoulder. A few fronds of vegetation appear to sprout directly from her lap near the region of her genitalia, which remains uncovered even though she has white swathes of drapery nearby that wind around one leg and close to her naked breasts. She lightly touches a string of beads and turns her head to avert her gaze, a gesture which objectifies her and also serves a more decorative, trivial purpose of showing off a man-made earring. The beads and earring perhaps show some signs of civilization, but might also be a commentary on the excess and flamboyance of an otherwise nude body that has only been adorned with unessential, decorative items.

⁸⁴ John Ogilby, *Africa* (London: Thomas Johnson, 1670), 347, 390.



IMAGE 4.26, Charles Price, Africa, 1711 (map and detail of map), courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, public domain.

Price's renditions of Africa are represented as stunningly decorative, sexually threatening, and menacing to European readers. Africa is also presented as fertile because of the sprig of vegetation that emerges from her pubic region. However, she represents an uncultivated fertility, and one that is not easily tamed because of the dangers of braving the rough landscape and poisonous beasts that surround her. Thornton's image and text of the maggot-bearing stapelia especially embodies these ideas. **(IMAGE 4.27)** The beauty of this flower is undermined by a large fly perching on top of it, hinting at the maggoty putrefaction beneath its exquisite coloration, and a green snake slithers beneath it with its red tongue extended in a hiss. The snake's scaly green forms merge seamlessly with the plant, and indeed, Thornton states that the belly of the plant is speckled "like a serpent."⁸⁵ As its name would suggest, the plant bore maggots, and Thornton graphically illustrates this point in a textual sense: "It likewise has so strong a scent, resembling carrion that blowflies have in abundance around it, and mistaking the corolla for the flesh, deposit there their eggs, which are soon converted into real maggots, adding to the horror of the scene, some being seen writhing among the purple hairs of the flower, and others already dead for want of food, this vegetable in this rare instance deceiving and overcoming the animal creation."

Dr. George Shaw (1751-1813), the keeper of the natural history section of the British Museum from 1807-1813, personifies this plant for Thornton in a commissioned poem, describing the stapelia either as a "hag" with a "gorgon shape, rough arms, and scowling eyes," a "dire enchantress" who casts "horrid spells" in

⁸⁵ Thornton, "Maggot Bearing Stapelia," (1807) unpaginated.



IMAGE 4.27, Maggot-Bearing Stapelia, painted by Henderson and engraved by Stadler, aquatint, stipple, and line, July 1, 1801, courtesy of the Grey Herbarium Library.



IMAGE 4.28, Group of Stapelias, quarto edition. Courtesy of the University of Madison Wisconsin Digital Library for the Decorative Arts and Material Culture, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/DLDecArts.ThornTempFlo>

her “magic rites,” or as a cannibalistic, bloodthirsty “mother” who bears maggots and lures poisonous animals like toads and snakes close to her and eats them:

Mid the wild heights of Afric's stormy cape/
The fell stapelia rears her Gorgon shape/
Spreads her rough arms and turns with scowling eye/
Her bearded visage to the thundering sky/
to magic rites she bends her wayward care/
And with unholy vapors taints the air...
By native instinct round her drear abode/
glides the green snake or crawls the shapeless toad/
Lur'd to the hag by horrid spells subdued/
the care-crazed mother brings her num'rous brood...
The subtle fiend assumes a softer air/
And falsely smiles and feigns a mother's care/
But gone the parent, mid the cavern's gloom/
The dire enchantress drags them to their doom.⁸⁶

The same magic rites, fertility with lack of maternal care and cultivation of nature, venomous animals, and even connotations of cannibalism associated with Africa reappear in descriptions of the other African and American plants. The stapelia is situated against a rugged landscape with no signs of civilization in the background, unlike the backgrounds of many of the European or Asian plants, which show temples, cottages, pyramids, or pagodas. Like the landscape, the stapelia is much more rugged than many of the other plants, with jagged stalks that seem to have been dipped in blood. Four delicate, tawny buds tinged with dark brown sprout from deep within the plant, and one bursts into full bloom at the center with sanguine petals of deep orange and crimson tinged with black.

Even more dark and acidic colors, poisonous animals, and a violently erupting volcano have been added to the quarto edition of 1812. **(IMAGE 4.28)** In this plate, there is an entire group of stapelias instead of one. The fir tree, which was formerly placed directly behind the plant, has been relegated to a distant place in

⁸⁶ Thornton, “Maggot Bearing Stapelia,” (1807) unpaginated.

the background and is paired with another. Three of the four tawny buds have burst open to reveal speckled flowers, the snake is more prominently placed in the foreground and coils all around the entire stapelia rather than slithering underneath it. A lizard also appears as a new animal companion, and they seem to be involved in a confrontation, almost as if the serpent is guarding the plant. The landscape has completely changed and has taken on a somber, smoky, grey appearance, with a lightening bolt to the left and a flaming volcano to the right. This change also occurs in the third state of the 1801 and 1812 versions of the *Dragon Arum*, with lightening and an erupting volcano etched into the background. In spite of the immense beauty of these images, when they are interpreted alongside the text they become intensely coded European visions of Africa.

As if to further reflect these attitudes about Africa and African women in Europe, Thornton creates a slightly less grotesque vision of eroticism in the print of the dragon arum, **(IMAGE 4.29)** which Clive Bush refers to as the “most darkly erotic flower plate” in the *Temple of Flora*.⁸⁷ Thornton says of the African Dragon Arum:

This extremely foetid, poisonous plant will not admit of sober description. Let us therefore personify it. She comes peeping from her purple crest with mischief fraught: from her green covert projects a horrid spear of the darkest jet, which she brandishes aloft: issuing from her nostrils flies a noisome vapor infecting the ambient air: her hundred arms are interspersed with white, as in the garments of the inquisition: and on her swollen

⁸⁷ Clive Bush, “Erasmus Darwin, Robert John Thornton, and Linnaeus’s Sexual System.” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 7 (1974), 318.

trunk are observed the speckles of a mighty dragon: Her sex is strangely intermingled with the opposite! Confusion dire!—all framed for horror; or kind to warn the traveler that her fruits are poison berries, grateful to the sight but fatal to the taste, such is the plan of providence, and such her wise resolves.⁸⁸

This plant undulates against a dark grey landscape with no signs of civilization in the dark grey background, which appears to be one of the simplest landscapes in the entire book. By contrast, the dragon arum itself is a rather complex, detailed form, all dusky purple and jet black. It waves its curling, sprawling, highly stylized, ornamental dark green leaves in an agitated and almost hostile manner towards the viewer. The “strange and confusing” hermaphroditism of this plant is readily apparent in its purple hood with the crenellated outline, which envelops a black, phallus like stamen in its labia-like folds.⁸⁹ The exotic, explicit sexuality and ornamental qualities of the plant are further emphasized because of the relatively plain but foreboding landscape behind it. This landscape is also subject to great variation, with an erupting volcano and lightening bolts in later states of the print, **(IMAGE 4.30)** as if to underscore the volatile, impulsive, and transformative alterity of this flower and its territory.

⁸⁸ Thornton, “Dragon Arum,” (1807) unpaginated.

⁸⁹ Bush 318.



IMAGE 4.29, Dragon Arum, painted by Henderson and engraved by Ward, mezzotint (and also aquatint in final state), December 1, 1801, courtesy of the Grey Herbarium.



IMAGE 4.30, 1812 version of Dragon Arum. Note erupting volcano and lightning bolts in background, courtesy of the Grey Herbarium Library.

West Indies

Interactions between plants, landscapes, and animal companions become much more prominent and symbolic in images of plants from the West Indies, which were often considered part of the Americas in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This was also an area of great unpredictability and transformation, since it was the focus of fierce, ongoing naval conflicts between the British and French from the 1780s through the Napoleonic wars, and it was also a site of intense racial hybridity. Similar to Egypt, there was a great deal of ambiguity concerning the racial heritage of “West Indians,” and in fact the “West Indies,” along with the rest of the American continent, was often figured allegorically as an American Indian woman. Depicting her in such a way obviously served the interests of European colonizers who could rob the natural resources that these female allegorical figures so willingly relinquish.⁹⁰

There are two Jamaican plants depicted in the Temple of Flora: The Night Blooming Cereus and the Mimosa Grandiflora. Unlike the Night Blooming Cereus, depicted in a British setting, the Mimosa Grandiflora (or large flowering sensitive plant) from Jamaica has supposedly been placed in a local landscape. **(IMAGE 4.31)** This landscape is still rendered in British pictorial conventions and the image can certainly be read as furthering imperialist motives. This image is also unique because it includes a masculine human body interacting with the feminized plant life—a male “aboriginal” looks up with admiration at the large plant in the

⁹⁰ Kay Dian Kriz, “Marketing Mulatresses in the Paintings and Prints of Agostino Brunias,” in Felicity Nussbaum (ed.) *The Global Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2003), 195-210, especially pages 198-200, 203-209.

background. This male figure that holds a walking stick and is dressed in an abbreviated loincloth, depicted with a higher degree of nudity than many other European paintings of Jamaicans. The repeated forms of the feminized and personified plant in the front and back of the print in association with male aboriginal might suggest a polygamous sexual relationship. The celebrated colonial painter and printmaker Agostino Brunias' (1730-1796?) images of West Indians sometimes focus on polygamous relationships, such as the hand-colored print of *Chatoyer and his Wives* (1794). Chatoyer strikes a commanding yet relaxed pose, as he leans on his walking stick, and instructs his five wives to carry children or heavy materials on their backs in front of a lush, fertile landscape. Thornton also explicitly noted the polygamous relationships of the *mimosa grandiflora*, not to mention its inability to defend itself from invaders, and its ability to produce honey for the hungry mouths of enterprising, industrious hummingbirds, which are also conspicuously represented in the foreground of the print.

Mimosa Grandiflora (Large Flowering Sensitive Plant): This beautiful shrub is native of both the East and West Indies. It was introduced into our gardens in 1769, by Mr. Norman. It is found frequent in the mountains of Jamaica: hence one of the aborigines gazing at and admiring its flowers. It sleeps at regular periods by closing its two corresponding leaflets together, and the flowers are so rapid in their growth as to give them the appearance of spontaneous motion, nature having well dissembled in this tribe of vegetables the high attributes of sensation and action. Growing to the size of a moderate tree, it is not armed with spines as many of its congeners, nor does it possess...the power of retracting its branches, so as to set the whole plant in general motion upon the rude approach of an invader. Distilling honey, it is the indulgent parent of the hummingbird and nature has been so anxious for the preservation of this tribe, that besides multiplying the number of males

(stamina) to one pistillum or female, there are also several of its flowers which possess only a cluster of males.⁹¹

This plant is presented as incredibly fruitful and fertile, yet unable to defend itself. Yet, this lack of defense is presented as an entirely positive attribute, contributing to its productivity. Thornton mentions the plants ability to produce honey, which the hummingbird siphons away from the plant for later refinement. This might allude to the refinement of white sugar from raw cane in Jamaica, a central industry for Britain in the 18th century and beyond.⁹² Dian Kriz states that, “the refinement of black slave labor into the white sugar crystals...was such an integral part of the social rituals of polite culture in Britain.”⁹³ Sugar from the East and West Indies was such a major industry in Britain and so rife with racial connotations discussed in chapter 3, that the connection between defenseless honey-producing plants and small, conscientious creatures who refine it seems quite meaningful. The image and the text seem to allude to the relationships between Jamaican plants/bodies and British hummingbirds/colonialists. Thornton describes the hummingbird in a footnote a page after the plate:

There are several species of hummingbird...it is inconceivable how much these add to the high finishing and beauty of a fine western landscape...they are never still, but are continually in motion, visiting flower after flower, and extracting its honey...and they commit their thefts in the gentlest manner. ⁹⁴

⁹¹ Thornton, “Large Flowering Sensitive Plant,” (1807) unpaginated.

⁹² Kriz 69.

⁹³ Kriz 59.

⁹⁴ Thornton, “The Hummingbird,” (1807) unpaginated.



IMAGE 4.31, *Mimosa Grandiflora* (Large Flowering Sensitive Plant), painted by Reinagle and engraved by Stadler, aquatint, line, and stipple, December 1, 1799, courtesy of the Grey Herbarium.

The hummingbird (and perhaps by extension enterprising British colonizers) is presented as a civilizing influence, perfecting and contributing to the landscape rather than destroying it. Rather than presented as a disruptive influence, it has been portrayed as remarkably busy, energetic, and gently extracting sugary commodities from complicit subjects. In this case, the subjects are personified plants that allude to the bodies of slaves who engage in hard labor for their white colonizers. The personification of the plant seems especially compelling in this print because of the actual body of a slave that has been inserted into the print, engaging in an animated relationship with the plant in the background.

America

The complicity of the mimosa grandiflora/ Jamaicans to accommodate the efforts of the hummingbird/British is not found in the vicious, flesh-eating American plants. In several homosocial exchanges between male botanists in the Anglo-American world in the eighteenth century, the Venus flytrap defied classification as a specimen on the boundaries between animal and plant. Occasionally, naturalists in a social network of friends, such as John and William Bartram, Benjamin Rush, Peter Collinson, and many others even attributed human-like passions and sensitivities to these plants.⁹⁵ In the eighteenth-century, this plant was also associated with predatory female sexuality, if not a *vagina dentata*, with its toothy flesh-colored leaves that devoured unsuspecting insects.⁹⁶ Many other flesh-eating plants, such as

⁹⁵ Christoph Irmscher, *The Poetics of Natural History: from John Bartram to William James* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 31.

⁹⁶ Thomas Hallock, "Male Pleasure and the Genders of Eighteenth-Century Botanical Exchange: A Garden Tour," *William and Mary Quarterly* 62 (2005), 702-703. Hallock

pitcher plants, were associated with the Venus flytrap and had similar connotations.⁹⁷ The object of peculiar fascination combining scientific curiosity and erotic devotion, the Venus flytrap was given its Latin name after the goddess of love and was later commonly referred to by the salacious nickname “tipitiwitchet,” or “twitching fur stole.”⁹⁸ To cite only one example, botanist Peter Collinson (1694-1768) luridly exclaimed that he was “ready to Burst with Desire for Root, Seed, or Specimen of the Wagish Tipitiwitchet Sensitive.” He hoped to obtain one from the botanist and North Carolina governor Arthur Dobbs (1689-1765), but lamented that it would probably not be possible because the 73-year-old man had already married a 15-year-old bride, whom Collinson referred to as a “Tipitiwitchet” for him to “play with.”⁹⁹ This choice of language explicitly shows yet another sexual substitution between women and plants in a homosocial masculine exchange of knowledge.

Thornton succumbed to this trend of feminizing, sexualizing, and eroticizing carnivorous American plants, and illustrated three different plants in the print simply entitled “American Bog Plants”: the fetid pothos (skunk cabbage), the pitcher plant, and the Venus flytrap. **(IMAGE 4.32)** Notably, these representations of plants

cites many of these homosocial exchanges between male botanists, but especially focuses on the relations between John Bartram, his sons, and his colleagues.

⁹⁷ Hallock 712.

⁹⁸ Hallock 703; Daniel MacKinley and Charles Ernest Nelson, “‘This Wagish Plant—As Wagishly Described,’ John Bartram’s Tipititwitchet,” in *Aphrodite’s Mousetrap: A Biography of Venus’s Flytrap* (Aberystwyth, Wales, 1990), 131.

⁹⁹ Peter Collinson (ed. Alan Armstrong), *Forget Not Mee and My Garden: Selected Letters 1725-1768 of Peter Collinson FRS* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Association, 2002), 244; also see Irmscher 32 and Hallock 703.



IMAGE 4.32, American Bog Plants, painted by Reinagle, engraved by Sutherland, aquatint, July 1, 1806, courtesy of Grey Herbarium Library.

greatly resemble prints by the Bartram family, who engaged in many of the aforementioned homosocial botanical exchanges with Peter Collinson.¹⁰⁰ The skunk cabbage is a robust, water-loving plant with a strong, skunky odor. In Thornton's day, it was considered as dangerous as the dragon arum.¹⁰¹ The carnivorous pitcher plant, also represented on its own in the preceding plate, carried forth the theme begun by the maggot bearing stapelia because "the vegetable in this rare instance deceives and overcomes the animal creation."¹⁰² Thornton stresses that unlike the maggot bearing stapelia, which only catches and traps the flies and insects that come near it, the pitcher plant goes a step further and digests their carcasses in the liquid that it secretes at the bottom of the pitcher. Thornton therefore relates to the reader that the plant may truly be considered carnivorous.¹⁰³ The Venus flytrap simulates the actions of an animal ready to spring upon its prey. Of this plant, Thornton says that the leaves are deadly and dangerous:

Exactly similar in shape and contrivance to our rat trap, with spikes in the center and teeth around, also baited from glands which distil honey. No sooner does a deluded insect touch this honey, than the trap instantly closes and with such softness as never to miss its prey, and with such a spring as to defy all exertions to escape, and opens only when the insect is dead, when it expands again for fresh murders!¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Irmscher 32-34.

¹⁰¹ King 96.

¹⁰² Thornton, "American Bog Plants," (1807) unpaginated.

¹⁰³ Thornton, "American Bog Plants," (1807) unpaginated.

¹⁰⁴ Thornton (1807) unpaginated.

The bloodthirsty nature of this plant, which kills and eats the insects that try to tap its resources, is extremely reminiscent of European depictions of Native Americans engaged in gory acts of cannibalism against European colonizers. Two engravings in Hans Staden's (1525-1579) *Hans Staden: The True History of His Captivity* of 1557 illustrate this point. This book was still considered a valid source well into the late eighteenth century in Britain when Thornton worked, because it invoked the idea of a "true history," and it was widely translated into English and reused by English poets and travel writers as a basis for their own accounts. One such poet and author was Robert Southey (1774-1843), who stated in his *History of Brazil*, written over a period of many years and finally published in 1810, that Staden's book was "of great value and all subsequent accounts of the Tupi tribes rather repeat than add to the information that it contains."¹⁰⁵

Hans Staden's engravings depict male and female Native Americans disemboweling, chopping up, and eating their prisoners. In the first plate, a fire burns ominously in the foreground, and the women of the Tupi tribe have been placed in charge of preparing the cannibalistic feast. Although both men and women participated in cannibalistic rituals in Staden's account, he specifically genders this activity as feminine and sexualizes it with a great deal of horror:

When they first bring home a captive enemy the women and children set upon him. Then they decorate him in grey feathers and shave off his eyebrows and dance around him, having first bound him. They give him a woman who attends him and has intercourse with him. If the woman conceives they bring the child up until it is fully grown and then they may kill and eat it whenever

¹⁰⁵ Robert Southey in Michael Alexander, *Discovering the New World*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1976) 90.

the fancy takes them...then the slayer strikes him on the head from behind so that his brains are dashed out. The women immediately seize the body and drag him to the fire. They scrape his skin, making him quite white and stop up his fundament with a piece of wood so that nothing of him may be lost...then the four women carry away the four pieces and run with them around the huts with cries of joy. Then the posterior is separated from the forepart and they divide it amongst themselves; but the entrails are kept by the women, who boil them and make a thick broth or *mingau*. This they and the children drink.¹⁰⁶

Cannibalism was not only gendered as a feminine activity with sexual overtones in Staden's account, but this activity became part of the standard iconography of representing the country of America in allegorical personifications throughout Europe. Phillip Galle's (1537-1612) engraving entitled *America* of 1579-1600 shows the chief characteristics of this country in the eyes of Europe. The inscription below the print describes America as a female glutton who devours men, is rich in gold, mighty and powerful with the bow, rears parrots, and wears garlands of feathers. These characteristics are combined in the image of a sexualized naked woman who grips a severed head with one hand and carries a Brazilian club in the other as she nimbly steps over a disembodied arm. She wears the standard iconography of the feathered headdress.¹⁰⁷

The "murderous" pitcher plant represented in *The Temple of Flora* also appears to wear a feathery headdress because of the pointed yellow fronds that surround its circular center. **(IMAGE 4.33)** This plant practically seems to bend over a collection of small, flickering yellow leaves that resemble a fire, and in fact, it

¹⁰⁶ Hans Staden in Michael Alexander 108, 110.

¹⁰⁷ Honour (1975) cat. No. 91.

seems poised in anticipation of its next gory meal. The landscape behind the bog plants is decidedly more pleasant than the African examples, but it is completely uncultivated, with no signs of civilization. And clearly, to the British, tapping the immense riches of a country with carnivorous, murderous plants and people carried great risks that might have outweighed the benefits.

Conclusion

In comparing and contrasting “European” flowers with flowers from the other continents in Thornton’s *Temple of Flora*, I hope that my approach of reading personified botanical imagery in terms of its aesthetic and ideological implications had the benefit of revealing some of the exotic, racial, and gendered conventions that connected plants to colonial experiences or aspirations. In the *Temple of Flora*, images and texts based on the Linnaean sexual system are deployed by Thornton to emphasize the productive yet dangerous sexuality of Europe’s others. Thornton added the theme of the Four Continents to plant sexuality, even though he often challenged this model. These personified images of plant life both embody and reflect the relationships that Britain had with colonized people and resources, and the tenuous boundaries between these objects and objectified others become extremely blurry. Themes of displacement, hybridity, and what seemed to be an encyclopedic desire to possess and collect the ‘exotic’ in the form of a lavish book abound in Thornton’s *Temple of Flora*. The epistemology of Thornton’s botanical imagery, which involved colonial others unexpectedly embodied as the native specimens of their countries, pressed exotic flowers—literally and metaphorically—into the service of Europe. These botanical specimens, splendidly translated into

human form as sumptuous, collectible plates of flowers, popularized botanical objectification.

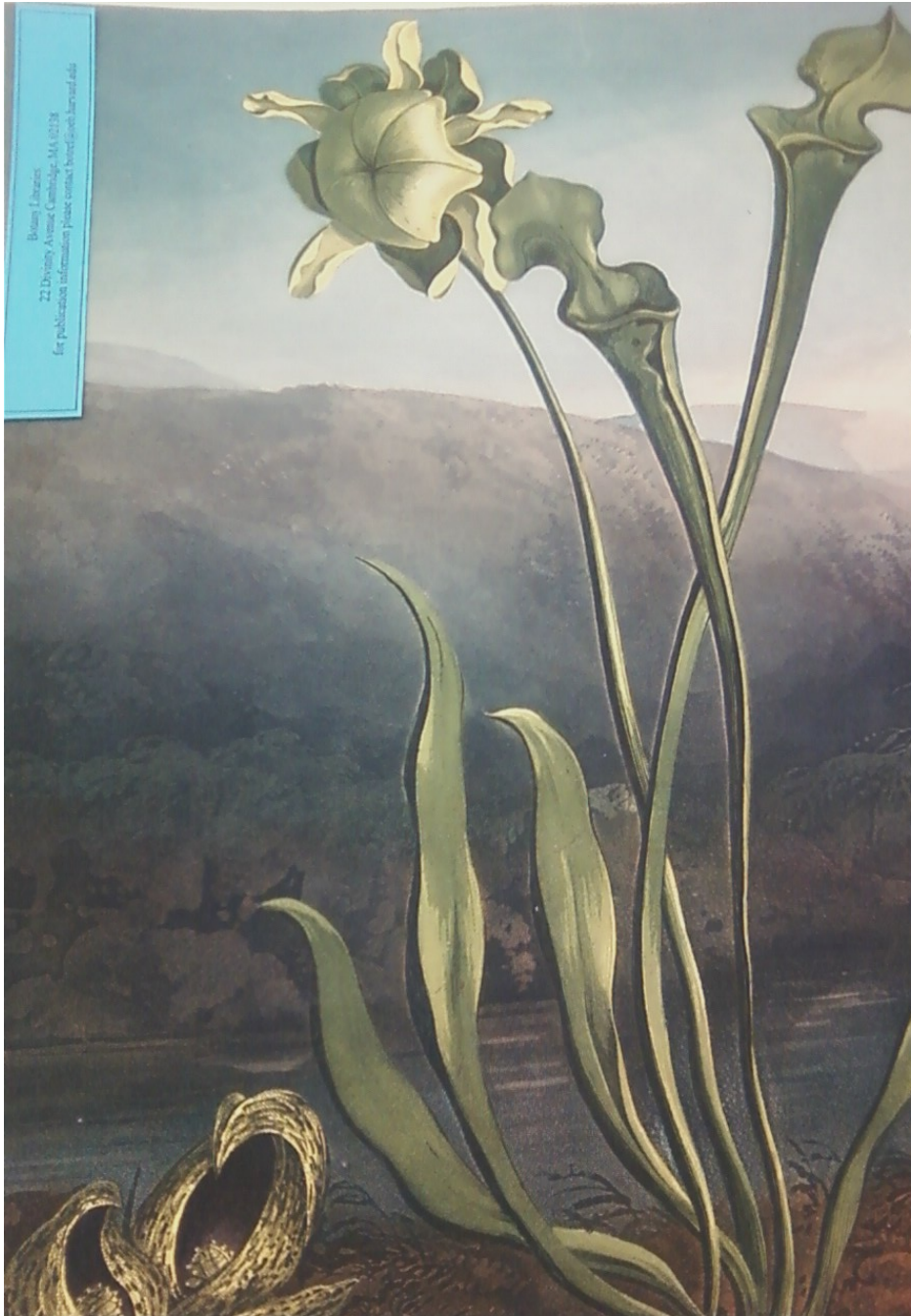


IMAGE 4.33, Pitcher Plants, painted by Reinagle, engraved by Cooper, aquatint, line, stipple, November 1, 1803., courtesy of Grey Herbarium Library

CONCLUSION

Other Worlds: The Cultural Afterlife of Thornton's Temple of Flora

Thornton's book did not cease to exist after its final date of publication and the 1812 auction. The *Temple of Flora* had a cultural afterlife. Thornton destroyed the original copper plates, but the image lived on as an image, copied and reduced in other books, but also in an early form of film. Thornton turned his engravings for the *Temple of Flora* into muslin paintings that were projected in front of candles. As mentioned in Chapter one, he used these "slides" for his botanical lectures, and none exist because they burned when they were projected.¹

I conclude by discussing the afterlife of Thornton's prints in multiple media, and I argue that Thornton's prints had a Benjaminian afterlife. Thornton's original oil paintings for the *Temple of Flora* that initially served as fine art were turned into prints that sold to a wider public. Then, after 1812, these prints were redesigned on a smaller scale as less expensive productions. The Benjaminian aspects of this book's afterlife truly come into play when one considers that Thornton turned his engravings for the *Temple of Flora* into projectable lectures.² These muslin paintings were not used as fine art, but instead as an early form of popular film that hundreds, if not thousands of people viewed and heard. The projected paintings also became

¹ Weimerskirch

² Walter Benjamin, (Edmund Jephcott, trans.), "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction/ The Work of Art in its Age of Technological Reproducibility (new translation)," (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2008 [originally published 1936]).

quite popular in America, and arguably had a more profound and broader impact there than they had in England.³

Although the plates were destroyed after the 1812 auction, variations of designs for the plates in the *Temple of Flora* can still be seen in Thornton's *Juvenile Botany* of 1818, an educational book on botany for adolescent boys.⁴ The *Night Blowing Cereus* on the book's frontispiece, *The White Lily*, and the *Nodding Renealmia* are exceptionally similar to the designs in the *Temple of Flora*, but are not exactly the same.⁵ Henderson, one of Thornton's original artists, designed the plates. "Weddell," who had never been involved with the *Temple of Flora*, engraved them. In my experience, the fifteen plates in *Juvenile Botany* are sometimes colored, but other times they are not. The difference in engraving technique and lack of color in some cases already gives the plates a different appearance in *Juvenile Botany*. While the *Nodding Renealmia* is very similar to the plate found in the *Temple of Flora*, the compositions of the *Night Blowing Cereus* and the *White Lily* are completely different from the plates in the *Temple of Flora*. Still, there are similarities between the plates in the *Temple of Flora* and *Juvenile Botany* in terms of the overall concepts of situating plants in their native territories and personifying them with prose and

³ Weimerskirch

⁴ Robert John Thornton, *Juvenile Botany: Being an Easy Introduction to that Delightful Science Through the Medium of Familiar Conversations* (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1818). This book has been fully digitized. <http://books.google.com/books?id=wW1GAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA10&dq=botany+for+children+thornton&hl=en&sa=X&ei=kNPuUcLRBc384AP3vYGYCQ&ved=0CD4Q6AEwAw#v=onepage&q&f=false>

⁵ Please see the frontispiece, the page that is marked as "To face page 1," and 187 of the online copy of *Juvenile Botany* for the illustrations of the cereus and renealmia, respectively.

poetry, prior to dissecting them. Similar to the *Temple of Flora*, *Juvenile Botany* is also about plant sexuality, but in *Juvenile Botany* the discussion of plant sexuality takes place in an educational dialogue between father and son.

Smaller versions of Thornton's flowers in the *Temple of Flora* also graced the pages of a very small book (only 4 9/16 x 2 5/8 inches) by multiple authors entitled *Remember Me: A New Year's Gift or Christmas Present*, which dates to 1825-1826.⁶ This book is discussed amongst scholars of William Blake to a greater extent than scholars of Thornton, who never list this book among his major publications. William Blake made an engraving for *Remember Me* entitled *The Hiding of Moses*, accompanied by four pages of letterpress.⁷ Still, *Remember Me* was ultimately organized by Robert John Thornton, who signed the introductory page with the words "A Tribute of Regard Presented by Your Affectionate Friend," at the bottom of the engraved frontispiece.⁸ Four out of nine engraved floral plates in this book, which were "tinted by T. Dales," drew their inspiration from the larger and more

⁶ Robert John Thornton (ed.), *Remember me! A New Year's Gift or Christmas Present*, (London: Poole, 1825-1826). Although I have seen this book in person at the Huntington, this book has also been fully digitized on google books: http://books.google.com/books?id=8N9qsulZOfYC&pg=PR11&dq=remember+me+a+new+year's+eve+or+christmas+present&hl=en&sa=X&ei=M7nuUciLL_jH4A03woCoDg&ved=0CDgQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q&f=false

⁷ Archibald George Blomefield Russell, *The Engravings of William Blake* (N.Y.: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co, 1912), 102. Phillip Weimerskirch suggested that I look at *Remember Me*, and also made an astute observation about *Remember Me* being almost completely overlooked by Thornton scholars. In fact, I have never come across this book in any other account of Thornton's works or biography.

⁸ G.E. Bentley Jr. and Martin K. Nurmi, *A Blake Bibliography: Annotated Lists of Works, Studies, and Blakeana* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964), 148.

lavish plates in the *Temple of Flora*.⁹ They are *The Night Blowing Cereus*, *The Snowdrop*, *The Renealmia*, and *The Dragon Arum*.¹⁰ The plates in *Remember Me* have greatly simplified compositions without landscape backgrounds. The flowers are situated on a small piece of turf. They are paired with a less complicated textual description and a snippet of a poem to personify the plant. The prose and poetry in *Remember Me* is usually also found in the *Temple of Flora*, but greatly simplified.

Remember Me also included a calendar of the upcoming year and enjoyable stories and images about British politics, exotic or colonial territories, medicine, instructions on how to paint flowers, which involved the relationship between art and nature in botany. These are all themes found in the *Temple of Flora*. There are sheets of music and a series of “exotic” or religious fictional stories by Thornton, his daughter Sylvia, and many others. Some examples include “St. Aubin and Angelina” by Sylvia Thornton, “Selico and Berissa: An African Story,” by Robert John Thornton, and “Bathmendi: A Persian Story,” by Sylvia Thornton. There is also political and medical information in this tiny text, but of a popular, entertaining nature with a fictional emphasis. Several stories about the life and reign of King George II are present in this book. Thornton also describes how Lord Byron died, as well as a medical account of how colds are caught, and how to avoid catching one’s death of “colds” and “inflammatory fevers” as Byron did. Thornton’s daughter Sylvia also gave instructions about the various parts of flowers and how to paint them. In

⁹ Bentley and Nurmi 148.

¹⁰ These flowers are on pages 148, 42, 149, 326 of the online version of *Remember Me*, but it is impossible to see the coloring. The flowers were obviously “tinted” in the Huntington version.

Sylvia's own words, this discussion takes place "in the form of a dialogue, upon the same plan as my learned father" between Sylvia and "Mrs. Thoroughgood."¹¹ Sylvia states: "without some knowledge of botany no person can become a good flower painter."¹² Many texts that draw inspiration from Thornton's work on personified flowers are emblem books or flower painting books.

After 1812, Thornton also reused the botanical imagery and ideas found in the *Temple of Flora* in other ways that did not involve print. After the auction, Thornton made several transparencies based on designs from the *Temple of Flora* to illustrate his lectures on medical botany. These transparencies were painted on thin strips of muslin wound around a roller, which passed in front of candles. They were the size of a large shawl, about four feet square, and they were designed with the intent of pleasing popular audiences.¹³ It seems as if Thornton printed his work for the *Temple of Flora* in order to sell it and make it more accessible to the public than paintings might be. It is therefore interesting that Thornton turned his prints back into paintings. This time, however, the muslin paintings were used to attract a broader, more popular audience in his lectures rather than serving as fine art. Amateur botanist and nursery owner Charles Whitlaw brought these projected paintings to America on December 29th, 1815. Although opinion of Whitlaw was low in the field of American botany, Thornton's transparencies became rather popular in New York. These transparencies received high praise in a New York newspaper,

¹¹ Sylvia Thornton in *Remember Me*, 88.

¹² Sylvia Thornton in *Remember Me*, 88.

¹³ Weimerskirch.

"The Evening Post," on January 2, 1816, shortly after some of his transparencies had been brought to New York:

We are indebted to Dr. Thornton, for introducing a new work of instruction—which promises to be as useful as it is novel—transparent paintings are made use of to depict the different parts of the plant, and these so magnified that they may be demonstrated to one thousand persons at one and the same time. The execution of the paintings far exceeds any thing of a similar nature ever exhibited in this country, and the exactness of the various representations serves to impress it more firmly on the memory than any mode of instruction heretofore used. Besides these, we observed some paintings from nature, wherein the whole plant is represented as magnified many times, and the surrounding scenery is generally annexed, mostly taken from views of the country of which the plant is a native. These transparencies were exhibited by Mr. Whitlow, who brought them from London, on Friday last, to the no small gratification of the spectators, and we are pleased to learn that he will continue his exhibitions, &c. on this evening, and those of Friday and Saturday next.¹⁴

This article mentions thousands of people witnessing what seems like early botanical film or slide projection, and Weimerskirch also provides us with evidence that women were present at some of these lectures. Apparently “upwards of fifty young ladies” attended Whitlaw’s classes in Charleston, South Carolina in the winter and spring of 1817 and 1818.¹⁵ Weimerskirch argues that Thornton was probably the first person to give scientific lectures with the aid of backlit transparencies, and

¹⁴ "The Evening Post," on January 2, 1816, in Weimerskirch. Weimerskirch cites numerous other sources that indicate great popularity in spite of Whitlaw’s lack of popularity as a botanist.

¹⁵ Weimerskirch.

his "New Illustration" probably had a greater influence in America than in England because of the lectures by Whitlaw. Thornton's plates, in the form of muslin paintings used as a form of early film, were still enjoying great popularity among the American public, seen and heard by many hundreds, if not thousands of people.

Along with Thornton's reuse of his own plates, and Whitlaw's slideshows in America, the *Temple of Flora* also influenced several other authors. It is impossible to go into detail about every single one of these productions, but I will give a few examples. Similar to Thornton's book, many of these productions involve the participation of women artists and include feminized, personified flowers as the main subject. Samuel Curtis, whose work was an initial inspiration for Thornton's book, created his own botanical world in response to Thornton's *Flora* between the years 1806 and 1820. The plates were engraved by the Worcester china-painter Thomas Baxter (d. 1821) after watercolors by Clara Maria Pope (1768-1838).¹⁶ There are ten engravings in Curtis' book that are created in the exact same style as Thornton's *Flora*, with obvious visual quotations from his work and a similar use of landscape backgrounds.¹⁷ Eliza Eve Gleadall also produced a book entitled *Beauties of Flora* (1834-1836).¹⁸ In this book, there are numerous textual quotations taken directly from Thornton's work. For example, the entry on the Persian Cyclamen in

¹⁶ Blunt and Stearne 208; Britten 183-184.

¹⁷ Blunt and Stearne 208.

¹⁸ Eliza Eve Gleadall, *The Beauties of Flora: With Botanic and Poetic Illustrations, Being a Selection of Flowers Drawn from Nature Arranged Emblematically: With Directions for Colouring Them* (Eliza Eve Gleadall at Heath Hall, 1834-1836). The copy that I saw was at Dumbarton Oaks, but it has been digitized. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/DLDecArts.BeautFlora>

Gleadall's work uses a poem about the Persian Cyclamen by Erasmus Darwin that is also found in the *Temple of Flora*.¹⁹ Her book is different than Thornton's, however, because the plants are not in landscapes. Also, she focuses more strictly on the plants as emblems of human character traits. Finally, her book also teaches the reader how to paint or "colour" flowers as well as how to appreciate their moral meanings and humanized traits, which is reminiscent of Sylvia Thornton's instructions of flower painting in *Remember Me*.²⁰ Although Thornton explored the dynamic relationships between art and nature, he never taught his readers how to paint flowers in a practical sense.

Unlike Gleadall's book, which is authored by a woman who educates her readers about botany, painting flowers, and discovering their moral meanings, women are usually presented as objects rather than producers of knowledge in Thornton's *Temple of Flora*. In Thornton's *Flora*, women are occasionally presented as botanical authority figures, such as the goddess Flora. Sometimes they are authors of poems and images, like Maria Cosway. More often than not, however, women are objectified as flowers from Europe and colonial or exotic territories. In this dissertation, I focused to a greater extent on women as personified flowers because I felt that this trend was understudied in contrast to women as readers and authors in the field of eighteenth and nineteenth-century botany. I hope I have shown that the textual collection and collation of these flowers on a microcosmic

¹⁹ Gleadall 5.

²⁰ Thanks to Linda Lott, who called my attention to this book and its similarities to the *Temple of Flora* while I was at Dumbarton Oaks.

scale mimics the act of macrocosmic colonizing and becomes a powerful tool of empire. Hopefully, I have also looked beyond the textual aspects of botany and empire to explore the power of images in this field. A primary aim of this dissertation was to show how images function historically, how beautiful botanical propaganda assisted in the building of British Empire in a very unexpected place like the *Temple of Flora*. It took more than text to build an Empire. Images also played a huge role in building stereotypes about colonial and exotic lands, therefore furthering the aims of Empire through pictures that spoke as loudly as—or perhaps even louder—than words.

At the beginning of this dissertation, I asked questions about how the power of images profoundly shapes conceptions of various worlds rather than looking at images as literal, causal reflections of these changes in worldviews. I asked whether or not a microcosm could assume that shape of a text that reflects and produces scientific knowledge about the world in a less literal format. I wondered if a text could become a world, rather than a world being fashioned from text. Most of all, I wondered what role visual culture plays in shaping scientific and sociological attitudes about race and gender within these multifaceted textual worlds.

I conclude by answering these questions in the affirmative, and by emphasizing that visual culture strongly shapes the study of gender and race in historical inquiry to a greater extent than I had ever realized. The value of my work for historians is precisely that Thornton did not leave many records except for the prints, and that these images can be encouraged to speak. Many historians of science believe that images can talk if we only listen to what they have to say carefully

enough. In the 2004 volume *Things that Talk: Object Lessons from Art and Science*, Lorraine Daston and other were concerned with unpacking the dynamic between the internal tensions of things in themselves, and challenging the way that scholars have always acted *on* things rather than *on their behalf*. Their text gave “things” their own voice instead of speaking for them. The “things that talk” in their book (paintings by Hieronymus Bosch and Jackson Pollock, a freestanding eighteenth-century column, glass flowers, daguerreotypes, Rorschach ink blots, soap bubbles, and Peacock Island) are usually defined by a tension between two opposing ideas or substances which gives them definition and boundaries, their sense of “thingness.” An example of this is the playful ephemerality of soap bubbles colliding with the status of soap as a solid, materialistic commodity, Rorschach blots that tell you who you are on the inside by their external forms, or the molding of glass into flowers as a near-substitute for nature. Thornton’s personified flowers belong to this tradition. By allowing these internal tensions within things to emerge and speak for themselves, they are granted agency in a nearly human manner. In this way, the boundaries between human and object often disintegrate when authors no longer speak for things, but let them speak for themselves instead in a nearly autobiographical sense. In this approach, perhaps, a thing is no longer an “object” that we can control, but a speaking subject to which we must relinquish control.²¹

By contrast, the cultural historian Peter Burke describes a method of working with images as historical documents in which images are silent “eyewitnesses” to

²¹ Lorraine Daston (ed.). *Things That Talk: Object Lessons From Art and Science*. N.Y: Zone Books, 2004.

past events, and it is the historian's job to interpret them correctly. As mute eyewitnesses, unlike Daston's talking things, perhaps, one has to be careful not to misinterpret images and to read them carefully against the text, as I hope I have done. Burke challenges the way that historians do research, by treating images as if they were "invisible" or as mere illustrations that supplement the text.²² He also critiques textually-based, iconophobic historians for "referring to their textual documents as sources, as if they were filling their buckets from the stream of truth, their stories becoming increasingly pure as they move closer to the origins."²³

Similar to Burke, in my primarily visual analysis of the *Temple of Flora*, I challenged the notion of the text as a transparent representation of what happened in the past, and therefore a "better" way to reconstruct the past than images. I hoped to give more weight to images as historical documents, not in terms of replacing texts, or surpassing them, but in listening to what images can tell us above and beyond textual knowledge. Still, I follow Burke's model insofar as I agree that images should not be used as hard "evidence" either "in the strictest sense of the term," because they show us the imaginings and musings of the past and other cultures, which is an equally valid way to write history.²⁴ An image can tell us so much more than words in some cases, and for this reason images have immense historical value as records. Images, however, go beyond simple historical records

²² Peter Burke, *Eye Witnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001), 10.

²³ Burke 13.

²⁴ Burke 15-20.

precisely because they are not mere reflections of the world around us. Images do not just mirror or mimic history; they also help to produce it.

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