

Grounds of Knowledge:
Unofficial Epistemologies of British Environmental Writing, 1745-1835

by

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DEDICATION

To all my fellow travelers.

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To paraphrase Carl Sagan: if you wish to write a dissertation from scratch, you must first invent the universe. The network of people and beings that made it possible for me to write this dissertation is literally endless, but in this space I would like to thank the few who have been closest to this project over the years.

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ABSTRACT

British literature from the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries has long been important to critical investigations centered on ecology and environmentalism. Ecocritical explorations of this literature, however, often look through texts to the plants, animals, and environments they represent, bypassing important questions about the act of representation itself. Resisting the temptation to take literary representations of the environment at face value, this dissertation moves the focus away from *what* written representations of the environment say about it to *how* those representations are made. Through a combination of close reading and examination of works in light of the literary critical and scientific ideals of their moment, I investigate the epistemological beliefs held by individuals and communities of authors about how knowledge is absorbed by the mind, what standards of documentation are necessary for its transmission in a written text, and which proofs of authenticity are required for it to be accepted as legitimate. *Grounds of Knowledge* discusses both literary and practical texts from the mid-1740s to the mid-1830s, including the works of William Collins, Joseph Warton, Thomas Warton, Charlotte Smith, John Clare, Jane Austen, and the agriculturalists Arthur Young, William Marshall, and William Cobbett. As these authors portray the environment in both literary and practical works, I argue, they use representational methods that are based on epistemological ideals as well as aesthetic and practical considerations. In each case, their works are governed by “unofficial” epistemologies—philosophies of collecting, apprehending, and disseminating knowledge that are implicit in written works and exist independent of academic and professional philosophy. By focusing on the epistemology of

representation, this dissertation fills a gap left open by traditional thematic ecocriticism as well as more recent ontologically-based forms of ecocriticism. It does not seek to undermine the ecocritical project but rather to provide a much-needed foundation for ecocritical investigation in understanding how and why British authors of the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries represented the environment in their works.

Introduction: “A real world & doubting mind”

John Clare’s long poem “January” (1827) depicts a family sitting snug by the fire side listening to a housewife’s supernatural tales—“from her memry oft repeats | Witches dread powers & fairey feats”—as a winter storm howls outside.¹ Eventually, the scene itself gives way to the speaker’s solitary meditations about similar moments from his own past. He mulls over the stories that used to terrify him as a child, particularly Jack and the Beanstalk, and reflects on how the transition from belief to disbelief in their truth has changed his experience as a listener over time. While the information in the stories remains the same, the embodied act of listening has changed: “Memory may yet the themes repeat | But childhoods heart doth cease to beat | At storys.”² Listening to the mental echo of the Giant’s bloodthirsty roars, the speaker suddenly emerges from his reverie:

I hear it now nor dream of harm
The storm is settld to a calm . . .
Those truths are fled & left behind
A real world & doubting mind³

The “truths,” fears and fantasies roused by listening to both these tales and the sounds of the storm outside, are only exposed as truths at the moment when they cease to be believed. In receding, these temporary beliefs provoked by aesthetic and sensory experience (the stories and the storms) leave behind both what is real and what makes a feeling of reality possible: a mind that can doubt. Here, self-consciousness about what one knows and believes is what in fact makes the truth—not the pure, blind belief of a child. Truth for Clare, then, is not exactly synonymous with belief or reality, but it is a category of knowledge that carries certain markers with it. The poem ends with the

“doubting mind,” having raised but refusing to explicitly work through questions about the nature of truth and its relationship to representation. What is the relationship between the “truth” conveyed by aesthetic mediation (in this case, fairy tales) and the “real world”? And what methods do works of art employ to allow or prevent us from knowing the difference between them? Clare’s poem, then, implies a philosophy of knowledge, but only partially exposes it and it is here that we see what I call Clare’s unofficial epistemology. In saying so, I mean that “January” is among other things a philosophical inquiry into the nature of knowledge, how it is absorbed by the mind, and how it is transmitted through language. But Clare’s enquiry cannot interface with the academic, scholarly philosophical discourse of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries because such discourse was closed to all but a few. Instead, the thorny questions about knowledge he raises are only implicitly philosophical and never allowed to rise to the level of official discourse.

Grounds of Knowledge: Unofficial Epistemologies of British Environmental Writing, 1745-1835 is an account of several unofficial epistemologies in British literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Specifically, it centers on one of the most potent and enduring sites of philosophical enquiry in this period: how is knowledge about the environment made through written representation? In describing the ways that literature of this period accounts for experience and conveys truth, I will tease out the beliefs in these works about how environmental knowledge is made. I do this not in order to expose the ideologies inherent in these texts, but to account for their implicit understandings of the mind and its relation to environment in a historically conditioned moment.

The meanings of both literature and environmental knowledge are fairly fluid among the texts I discuss. While this dissertation mainly considers texts that are literary in a more traditional sense of the word, such as Charlotte Smith’s *Beachy Head* or the *Odes* of William Collins, it also includes other environmental literatures, particularly agricultural prose and scientific poetry. The

works featured here speak to each other across not only the boundaries of genre, but the boundaries of purpose. And therefore, for instance, the latter half of this dissertation concerns soil, agriculture, and land use as well as narrative technique in agricultural prose and in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*. The environmental knowledge these works make is equally fluid. Generally speaking, I use the term environmental knowledge to specify any information about the non-human material world that authors convey to their readers. This could be anything from taxonomic names for birds to tables of agricultural experiments to descriptions of landscapes to accounts of wild plants overgrowing the ruins of a building. In contemporary usage, the term "environmental knowledge" is used most often in studies on sustainability practices and environmental education in both industrialized and traditional cultures.⁴ Environmental knowledge in these cases means one of two things, first: knowledge of the effects of one's actions on the environment, such as knowing the environmental impact of one's daily commute. The other use is related to the term "environmental literacy"—one's knowledge of the environment around one, such as the ability to know in which direction one is facing, knowledge of the movement of constellations and planets in the night sky, acquaintance with the topography of one's region, or of the species of local flora and fauna. In practice, the meaning of environmental knowledge in this dissertation does not differ significantly from its use in other disciplines, but my purpose in exploring the creation of environmental knowledge does. Whereas anthropologists and sustainability experts are concerned with preserving traditional environmental knowledge and introducing new forms of it into modern education, I am concerned with the moment of its creation in the text and philosophies of knowledge that underlie it.

My inquiry begins with the young poets of the 1740s—William Collins, Joseph Warton and his brother Thomas—and closes in the mid-1830s at the opening of the Victorian period in literature and art and the establishment of the Rothamsted Experimental Station, signaling the transformation of British agriculture into a modern scientific discipline. Within that time my main

subjects are the careers of the agriculturalists Arthur Young and William Marshall, Charlotte Smith poetry, Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, William Cobbett's last years, in which he published on agricultural practice, and John Clare's appearances in print, excluding later periodicals. There are also a few supporting characters whose works crop up in more than one chapter: John Aikin's poetry and works of literary criticism, William Gilpin's *Three Essays on the Picturesque* (1792), and the Scottish poet James Grahame's *Birds of Scotland* and *British Georgics* (1806-9.) Instead of building a narrative of progress, the chapters are porous, with ideas and practices swimming back and forth between writers and across decades. Nonetheless, this project has a strong sense of being appropriate to, and bounded within, the period of about a century that is defined in terms of beliefs about and practices of knowledge, aesthetic representation, scientific methodologies, and the environment.

Given that this dissertation covers the time period between 1745 and 1835, the reader may now be wondering why Romanticism and Preromanticism have thus far been absent from the discussion. Many of the authors I discuss in this dissertation have a troubled relationship with the Romantic period. Or rather, scholars of the past century have had a troubled time determining whether they fit into a Preromantic/Romantic paradigm and accordingly, much of their work on these authors has consisted of attempts to include or exclude them from the canon of Romantic literature. For instance, William Collins and the Warton brothers were brought into the category of "Preromanticism" in the early decades of the twentieth century—a categorization that has been both effective and controversial. Charlotte Smith, despite her enormous influence on Wordsworth, Coleridge, and other Romantic writers, was excluded from most serious literary study until feminist criticism of the 1970s drew her into the Romantic circle as both a strong influence on male Romantic writers and a critic of patriarchal literary practices. John Clare, most likely because of his stature as a "peasant poet" and his mental illness, was excluded from the Romantic canon until the 1970s and 80s as well, existing, if at all, merely on the margins of it under a "Wordsworthian

shadow,” as Harold Bloom put it.⁵ Jane Austen’s relationship to Romanticism has long been grounds for debate, her own subtle critiques of Romantic thought leading critics to wonder whether she is engaged fully in a more widely defined Romantic movement, a hold-over from the Age of Sensibility, or even a “proto-Victorian.”

While these debates are in many cases necessary—for within the institution of literary studies, an author’s inclusion on syllabi, graduate concentrations, and conference proposals often hinges on inclusion in a period—the enormous amount of time and energy, ink and pixels, devoted to the topic of canonization and category makes very little difference to the explorations of this dissertation. Like holograms, Collins, the Wartons, Smith, Clare, and Austen are simultaneously Romantic and not, depending on the angle from which we view them. Their works are on paths that sometimes parallel or cross Romanticism, and sometimes lead far away. In the end, I chose to forgo discussion of Romanticism, and without the burden of needing to articulate a new way of thinking about Romanticism *per se*, I found a network of texts and questions that a strictly Romantic project may not have allowed me to find.⁶ In what follows, I will introduce the major sites of inquiry that are of concern in the chapters.

Knowledge and the Sciences

It was during the period that this dissertation covers that philosophy and science, in the forms of natural philosophy and natural history, began to pull apart.⁷ And so while my authors’ epistemologies are unofficial, their dialogues with the sciences are often explicit. Charlotte Smith, John Clare, and James Grahame share the greatest interest in the sciences of the writers discussed here—particularly botany, zoology, ornithology, and geology. Each poet reacted to the specialization and professionalization of the sciences in a different manner. While Grahame, in his book-length poem *Birds of Scotland* (1807), drew heavily upon both scientific works and his own observations, he

abjured any claim to scientific authority. Perhaps anticipating criticism of the poem on scientific grounds, he prefaces it by stating that “neither do I give it as a *scientific* performance: I have studied not so much to convey knowledge, as to please the imagination, and warm the heart.”⁸ For Grahame, a poet who publicly renounces his or her work as a scientific performance also renounces his or her ability to convey knowledge. Smith and Clare, however, would not be so easily cowed by the specter of their work being criticized as unscientific. Smith bolstered her later poems with scientific footnotes, displaying her proficiency in technical description and taxonomy as well as her wide reading in scientific literature. Clare, on the other hand, rejected Linnaean taxonomy outright and preferred to use a highly technical and precise system of common names when describing plants and animals in his poems.⁹ These artistic choices were made against the backdrop of changing public discourse about the sciences and the arts. For instance, the increasing tension between the scientific and the aesthetic forms the history of one of the most important scientific institutions to emerge from eighteenth century England: Kew Gardens. The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew were originally founded by Queen Caroline in the 1720s as a pleasure ground, which then became a center for botanical research throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century under the guidance of John Stuart, 3rd Earl of Bute and Sir Joseph Banks, and were made the national botanic garden in 1840.¹⁰ While the gardens are perhaps more well known as a tourist attraction, Kew’s librarian-historian Ray Desmond notes that in the present, Kew is in fact “primarily a scientific institution dedicated to research in taxonomy, anatomy, cytogenetics, biochemistry, and conservation” and that historically the directors of the gardens have had to “reconcile the needs of recreation and research, of aesthetic considerations and scientific display.”¹¹ The literature discussed in this dissertation, then, is only a small but important part of the change in the relationship between the arts and sciences from the 1740s to the 1840s—a change that happened not only in the minds of authors, but at a national institutional level.

While scientific disciplines that emerged in the eighteenth century—particularly botany, geology, and chemistry—have garnered much attention from scholars of Romantic literature, there was one scientific discipline that worked on a different timeline than others, and which is most important to this dissertation: agriculture. Agriculture, the science of growing food, breeding and maintaining livestock, converting and enriching arable land and pasture, and minimizing the damage of pests, is of necessity a composite science. Geology, botany, chemistry, entomology, and zoology are necessary for understanding soil composition, plant nutrition, animal breeding, and pest control. The century between 1740 and 1840 saw a leap forward in British practices of agriculture and, importantly for this dissertation, the invention of a new kind of agricultural prose. Unlike the science into which it was first subsumed, chemistry, which began to be recognized as its own discipline as early as the 1780s, agriculture was not transformed into a scientific discipline until the early 1840s. This is not because people were uninterested in approaching agriculture in a scientific way, but because of the struggles of taking the everyday practice of farming and conducting the knowledge-making practices of classification and experimentation. In other words, unlike botany or chemistry, which bore little in relation to ancient herbal medicine or alchemy, agricultural knowledge had to be transformed from the practical to the experimental and from the tacit to the explicit even as day-to-day farming continued.¹² The unique position of agriculture as an everyday science makes it particularly compatible with my method of reading for philosophies of knowledge both implicit and explicit in environmental writing. Knowledge and writing practices for both literary and practical works crossed and re-crossed the boundary between tacit and explicit knowledge during this period. My inspiration for understanding agricultural writing as a genre that deals with problems of knowledge was John Barrell's chapter "The Landscape of Agricultural Improvement" from *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare*. Commenting on the agriculturalist William Marshall's written notes describing the state of agriculture in a tour through

northern England, Barrell notes that Marshall's detailed descriptions which accompany lists of facts "are there to answer the question, how do you know?"¹³ It is this question that, I found, was not only of the utmost concern to Marshall in his writing, but an insistent, implicit refrain throughout British agricultural writing of Marshall's day.

But even as agriculturalists carried on their unique struggles, they were always in conversation with and influenced by the larger scientific discourse. I am indebted to the works of historians of science, particularly Lorraine Daston, Peter Galison, Jan Golinsky, and Stephen Shapin, who, despite their different interpretations, account for the transformation of scientific epistemology over time: the philosophies and ideologies under which science was practiced, recorded, and disseminated, as well as how scientists were perceived by the public and perceived themselves. Their works, which stretch from before the foundation of the Royal Society in the mid-seventeenth-century to the rise of objectivity in the mid-nineteenth century and its fall in the late twentieth, have had a considerable influence on how I was able to take peculiarities I had found in the literature of this period and understand them in a larger context. In short, these works make clear the importance of not reading twentieth century scientific ideals into the scientific work of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Daston and Galison show that objectivity—the willful suppression of the self so as not to interfere with outcomes and data—did not become the dominant scientific paradigm until the mid-nineteenth century. Jan Golinski's works suggest that the scientists of this period understood themselves in relation to the work of producing scientific knowledge. Being a good scientist was not a matter of having no self, but having the right kind of self. Even at this time, the practice of empiricism was founded on facts gathered within the framework of subjective existence, one reason why, as many have noted, the literary arts and science cross-pollinated so freely. In this dissertation, we will not only see early scientific agriculture written as autobiographical narrative, but literary works that utilize scientific discourse for aesthetic ends.

In addition to works on the history of science, two works of literary scholarship have helped me construct a more complete picture of the interrelation between scientific and aesthetic discourses: Jonathan Smith's *Fact and Feeling* and George Levine's *Dying to Know*.¹⁴ Smith's work looks specifically at Baconian induction—or what people took to be Baconian induction—in literature from Wordsworth to Arthur Conan Doyle. Naïve Baconian empiricism, as it was understood by these writers, was the mere accumulation of facts without any guiding hypothesis or theory, and in attacking it made a “new formulation of scientific method that consciously sought to portray science as an imaginative, speculative, creative enterprise.” Even while remaining true to the ideal of objectivity, in this new science “truth is obtained through, rather than at the expense of, the creative imagination.”¹⁵ Levine's book, which begins with Descartes and jumps to the 1850s, is an examination of science's understanding of itself plays out in narrative form—in this case, the heroic story of the self-abnegating scientist, who will go to any length, even almost to the point of death, to erase his or her subjective experience in the name of truth. Smith and Levine books produce convincing readings of both the scientific method appearing in literature and scientific works taking their cues from imaginative genres, but their insights are mostly limited to a canon of nineteenth century thinkers and writers—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Carlyle, Dickens, Charles Darwin, George Eliot, J.S. Mill, Doyle—who were often perceived by their contemporaries as major contributors to public thought. This dissertation, on the other hand, focuses on the somewhat lesser-known literary and scientific traditions of this period and varied methods of making knowledge that arose from them: charts and tables, footnotes and endnotes, didactic and descriptive poetry, and fictional and autobiographical narrative.

Representation

Scholars have often had difficulty approaching eighteenth and nineteenth-century representations of the material world in part because the literature of this period has for so long been considered coextensive with Romanticism. From William Wordsworth's claim that description "supposes all the higher qualities of the mind to be passive" to Erich Auerbach's exclusion of Romanticism from his account of mimesis in Western literature, description, mimesis, verisimilitude, and representation have often been seen as inferior modes unconcerned with the true objectives of literary thought.¹⁶ But the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries was in fact a time of intense literary engagement with representation. Descriptive and didactic poetry flourished, amateur natural history writing began to come in to its own, and the novel, with its growing emphasis on everyday life, continued to mature. All of the authors featured here thought deeply about why and how texts should represent the material world, but because they for the most part did not see themselves as contributing to philosophical debates about representation, statements about the value of representation itself are few and far between. Part of my argument is not only that representational modes are important aesthetic qualities of some literatures of this period, but that these literatures worked with representation and its problems, rather than trying to use representation to ascend to other, loftier planes of expression.

Ecocriticism, Ethics, Epistemology, and a Note on "Nature"

In his recent book *Back to Nature*, early Modern scholar Robert Watson makes a point of bringing a discussion of ecological advocacy to the period he terms the Late Renaissance (1566-1660), where it has long been neglected by critics. While we find little in practice that resembles modern ecology in this period, what Watson does uncover is a reverse teleology provoked by the epistemological crisis of Renaissance humanism. Baconian empiricism uncovered a world that was

never entirely knowable; a world, in fact, which became more complex and unknowable the more it was examined through telescopes and microscopes. This unknowability, a new type of estrangement from the world, provoked a longing for unmediated contact with nature and its essences, in other words: a return to Edenic origins. Thus, “From the moment of their conception, modern ecological and epistemological anxieties were conjoined twins.”¹⁷ Watson’s study is an important reminder that ecology and epistemology have always been relevant to one another in the British tradition—and still are, as I demonstrate in the Coda to this dissertation. An important aspect of this project, then, is to bring a greater emphasis on the epistemology of representation into ecocriticism.

British literature of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries was one of the first fields of literary studies where the discipline of ecocriticism gained purchase. Since the 1990s, ecocriticism has evolved from the study of nature in literature at a thematic level to the opening up of larger questions of ontology. In other words, ecocriticism has moved from thinking about literary texts as representations of real beings and environments to thinking about what *being* is in the first place. In both cases, literature performs an ethical function, either in allowing us to appreciate and therefore want to protect the non-human, or by making us deeply question the category of humanity so as to see our fate bound up with the fate of all beings and species. But in the jump from the thematic to the ontological, ecocriticism has largely bypassed considerations of representation of the non-human in literature and whether or not representation is the basis for a sound ecology. Recently, Dana Phillips has taken ecocritics of American literature to task for being “spooked by literary theory and continu[ing] to resist the challenges it poses to the naive forms of realism central to the American nature writing tradition.”¹⁸ While Phillips unfairly ignores much ecocritical engagement with philosophy and theory (as well as unfairly criticizes ecocritics for printing their scholarship on paper and wearing t-shirts that say “I’d rather be hiking”), his point is that any refusal to engage with theories that pull apart language’s so-called ability to represent reality dooms

ecocritics to unquestioningly accept literary representations of environment at face value. The work of this dissertation is along the same lines that Phillips is trying to encourage—to pull apart the beliefs, biases, and structures of thought and language that undergird literature about the environment. In doing so, I am questioning ecocriticism’s assumptions about the status of the real world in environmental texts and providing studier groundwork for ecocritical inquiry.

Before going further, I wish to acknowledge three sets of ideas that contributed to the formation of this project: associationist epistemology, the phenomenology of perception, and the picturesque. While none of these became central to the dissertation, as I had originally thought, thinking about them together led me to focus on epistemology when reading environmental literature, rather than themes or ontology. Firstly, of importance to me is John Locke’s short chapter on the association of ideas—*ideas* are in this case objects in the mind such as sensations and memories, rather than the products of thought—in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. This chapter became the seed for what would be by the end of the eighteenth century one of the dominant theories of human cognition and mental development in British philosophy. Locke noted that while “some of our ideas have a natural correspondence and connexion with each other,” there is “another connexion of ideas wholly owing to chance or custom; ideas that in themselves are not at all of kin, come to be so united in some men’s minds, that ’tis very hard to separate them, they always keep in company, and the one no sooner at any time comes to the understanding, but its associate appears with it [. . .].”¹⁹ In the next fifty years, this chapter on ideas associated by chance or custom provided the grounds for David Hartley’s theory of how association works at a material level, by which sensations that enter the mind create physical impressions on the brain.²⁰ And by the end of the century, thinkers like Archibald Alison and Richard Payne Knight popularized association of ideas by using it to explain aesthetic taste.²¹

What none of these thinkers explicitly articulate, however, is that the association of ideas is greatly influenced by not only chance and custom, as Locke has it, but also by environment. One of Locke's examples illustrating the existence of association shows how he saw environmental influence on the human mind:

[. . .] a young gentleman, who having learn't to dance, and that to great perfection, there happened to stand an old trunk in the room where he learnt. The idea of this remarkable piece of household stuff, had so mixed itself with the turns and steps of all his dances, that though in that chamber he could dance excellently well, yet it was only whilst that trunk was there, nor could he perform well in any other place, unless that, some such other trunk had its due position in the room.²²

Locke's overall discussion of human understanding—discrete ideas entering an empty and fairly passive human mind and clumping together into complexes—seems to reduce human knowledge of the material world to a mechanical and non-interactive process, but his anecdote of the young gentleman and the trunk suggests something else. Knowledge is—terrifyingly—out of the control of the human will much of the time and depends on environmental influences that seem incidental.

While the association of ideas may never have been thought of as an environmental theory of human cognition by Locke and eighteenth century thinkers, it was prescient nonetheless. As I read more deeply into associationist epistemology, I also became interested in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, particularly his landmark book *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945.) For Merleau-Ponty, perception is what happens before language, before intellectual analysis. Perception in this sense is situated, embodied, and reciprocal—the world of perception cannot be flatly reduced to what we perceive, but is in fact a function of our relationship with the sensed and unsensed dimensions of things. Knowledge, then, has a far more complicated relationship with perception than was thought by the positivists whom he critiqued.

All knowledge takes its place within the horizons opened up by perception. There can be no question of describing perception itself as one of the facts thrown up in the world, since we can never fill up, in the picture of the world, that gap which we ourselves are, and by which it comes into existence for someone, since perception is the “flaw” in this “great diamond.”²³

Merleau-Ponty’s work has proven to be influential in recent environmental thought, being the main philosophical influence behind David Abram’s important books on environmentalist phenomenology, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1997) and *Becoming Animal* (2010).²⁴ Additionally, the critique of positivism in *Phenomenology of Perception*, which questions scientists who look through the microscope without ever stopping to consider what the act of looking is or means, parallels my critique of criticism that looks through the text without questioning what it means to “look” through textual representation in the first place.

Finally, we find an unlikely meeting place of epistemology and phenomenology in the picturesque. While the picturesque is an enduring aesthetic category, I am particularly interested in the period of its popularization by William Gilpin in the 1780s through the Picturesque Controversy of Humphry Repton, Uvedale Price, and Richard Payne Knight that lasted into the first few years of the nineteenth century. The theory of the picturesque is important to both practical and philosophical ideas about perception, knowledge, and taste. Gilpin’s treatment of the picturesque first gained currency in his travelogues about various places in Britain. When he attempted to systematically define this term in his *Three Essays on the Picturesque* (1792), it becomes clear just how muddled this category is. Where does the picturesque reside? In the landscape itself? In the mind of the viewer of a picturesque scene? In his or her landscape sketch or description of it? In the mind of the person reading the description or sketch? Gilpin’s essay leaves these questions unanswered, leaving others to take them up. While in 1794 Uvedale Price claimed that the picturesque—like

Burkean sublimity or beauty—resides in the landscape itself, Richard Payne Knight suggested that the picturesque is a result of the “pleasure derived from association” of landscapes with paintings, making the picturesque a category only available to those “in a certain degree conversant with that art.”²⁵ In response to Price and Knight’s philosophical observations on the picturesque in landscape gardening, the landscape architect Humphry Repton criticized them for “not having carefully traced, to all its sources, that pleasure which the mind receives from landscape gardening,” many of which reside in the body, such as comfort, or rely on the effect of looking at a scene while bodily moving through it, such as variety, contrast, and the change of seasons and times of day.²⁶ Knight relies on the association of ideas to circumvent the philosophical problems of aesthetics raised by Gilpin and unsatisfactorily answered by Price, while Repton—who actually participated in the day-to-day work of landscaping far more than the dilettantes Price and Knight—is closer to a phenomenology of perception in his thinking about what makes garden design effective. And so while I decided to leave a formal discussion of the picturesque out of the chapters, it was in many ways the philosophical problem of the picturesque that convinced me of the centrality of epistemology in environmental literature.

Overall, my approach to environmental literature may seem a bit cynical, particularly since neither the real, material world nor an ethical consideration of that world are my first concerns here. The reader will find few readings that assess the ecological commitments of the texts I discuss, although I will make no attempt to hide environmentally destructive practices or ideologies they display. Doing so may seem like a retreat from ethics back into the safety of the aesthetic text, but the truth is that we cannot discuss texts as ethical objects without understanding the world-views behind their production. Refusing to look only through the text at the material, then, is not the same as ignoring the material world. I contend that an epistemological approach can be grounded in ethical concerns. In his defense of Cartesian epistemology from dismissive, wholesale charges of

being unethical, George Levine answers the claim that because objectivity—selfless observation of outward phenomena—is impossible, those who attempt to practice it delude themselves into mistaking ideology for science. (The scientific racism of the nineteenth century is one of the most prominent examples.) While fully agreeing that the ideal of objectivity is impossible in practice, Levine argues that just because a system for creating knowledge *could* be appropriated for unethical ends does not mean it is itself unethical. It is “dangerously mistaken,” he says, to assume that “certain abstract theoretical scientific and philosophical positions have necessary and intrinsic connections with particular ideological positions.”²⁷ Those who bulldoze the experiences and the rights of others in the name of science, utility, and truth have are not entirely to blame when “the refusal of community, of shared discourse, of nonviolent grounds for belief”—all values of the scientific community—“has produced the most dreadful consequences.”²⁸ Levine’s questioning of a necessary relationship between epistemology and ideology is, I believe, necessary, but his motivations for doing so seem limited in the light of ecocriticism. Levine shares with other thinkers the baseline assumption that “knowledge is always inevitably for some human end” and “underpinning traditional epistemology is the desire for human benefit.”²⁹ While human benefit may always be behind traditional epistemology, I question whether epistemology benefits *only* human beings, or whether an epistemology that benefits human beings at the expense of other life forms is in fact truly ethical. (This question is not new—think of Victorian debates about vivisection, for example.) New work on the intersection of epistemology and ecology, such as Lorraine Code’s *Ecological Thinking*, suggests that epistemology can take cues from ecology in forming systems of knowledge that are anti-hegemonic. But even Code’s argument uses ecology as a model for restructuring systems of knowledge in human institutions, rather than using epistemology to change ecological practices.

And yet this dissertation, while holding open the possibility that an epistemological project need not be an unethical one, does not rush into a wholesale conclusion that epistemology is always an ecological practice. If anything, this work is a kind of proto-ecocriticism written after the fact, a necessary foundation for it. Onno Oerlemans, after surveying several strains of environmentalist thinking, notes their “common desire for a firm ethical footing by rooting value *in* the physical world. [. . .] The goal in each case is the ability to open human consciousness to the possibility of meaning, being, and value in [. . .] the realm of the physical or phenomenal.”³⁰ My interest is in a word that crops up twice in this analysis: *value*. While Oerlemans claims here that environmental criticism is a search for, or an argument for, value in the material world, I am interested in his and others’ unquestioned assumption that the environmental, ecocritical project is a search for *the valuing of nature* altogether. The value that ecocritics look for in literature could be intellectual, sentimental, religious, or aesthetic, but critics especially feel they have hit pay dirt when they find a Romantic writer with a seemingly deep-ecological perspective: valuing nature for its own sake. Lest it seem like my line of argument is about to take a deeply cynical turn--dismissing the value of value, for instance--I should state that I have no intent of casting the value of animals and environment in this period as an unimportant feature of its intellectual and aesthetic commitments. At the same time, I do not claim that all, or even most writers of this period valued the environment in the kinds of ways that seem so necessary for us in our current ecological crisis. Rather, my goal is to excavate a little ground under this search for value--this unquestioned assumption on which much ecocriticism over the past few decades has rested. For this reason, I am more concerned with method: not only, how did these writers make knowledge about the natural world, but also what methods do we as literary critics employ in ascertaining what they thought about, and how they valued, the natural phenomena that appear in their writings?

I would like to probe, question, and at times reject the assumption that just because a natural phenomenon appears in a writer's work, the work itself is a testament to that phenomenon's value. More importantly—and this is my specific intervention—I would like to undo the assumption that aesthetic works which display a great amount of empirical knowledge about natural phenomena do so out of a feeling of value for those phenomena alone, or that there is any direct proportion between the amount of knowledge about nature displayed in written work and the value it has for nature. This assumption—for instance, that since John Clare described nature more carefully and in greater detail than any of his contemporaries, therefore he loved nature the most and his work is a greater testament to the value of nature—is a slippery one. For on one hand, the truth of this statement seems self-evident to anyone who has read Clare and his contemporaries, but on the other its grounding in critical knowledge about Clare's aesthetic goals as a poet and the value of the environment in the poetry he read generally are completely unquestioned. While it would be cynicism to the point of absurdity to say that a personal interest in, or love of, nature is not reflected in Clare's poetry, it is also dangerous to assume that *knowledge*, and the display of that knowledge, is tantamount to love or value. Recently, Scott Hess has published a persuasive caution against using Wordsworthian Romanticism and its legacy as a basis for modern environmental ethics, and this project follows his lead in calling for self-consciousness about the kinds of environmentalism we might wishfully read into the literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.³¹

Chapters

Chapter One begins with three young poets of the 1740s: William Collins and the Warton brothers, Joseph and Thomas. In their youthful rebellion against the previous generations of poetry based on social morals, these poets claimed to be lovers of nature despite the fact that realistic, empirical descriptions of nature appear nowhere in their poetry. Taking their claims to love nature

seriously, this chapter analyzes the material basis for the highly aestheticized and allegorized appearance of the environment in their works. Joseph Warton's poem *The Enthusiast, or Lover of Nature* (1744-48), a manifesto of primitivism and anti-artificial aesthetics, begins by setting "nature" in opposition to the artificial or artful, but over the course of its evolution as a text, nature transforms into something similar to popular contemporary use of the word: the non-human environment. William Collins' poetry, written at the same time as Warton's, undergoes a different transition in its thinking about nature. Collins' ode "The Manners" links nature with knowledge, but in this case nature is the spontaneous and non-contrived, particularly in human behavior. Meanwhile, Collins' poetic landscapes undergo another transition, from allegorical representations of environmental figures like Evening in his earlier odes to traditional superstitions in his last great ode on the "Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland, Considered as the Subject of Poetry." In Collins' transition from allegory to superstition, it becomes clear that although Collins never used the word "nature" to refer to the material environment, he used allegorical and superstitious figures as a means of connecting the material environment with the human mind. Finally, the chapter ends with Thomas Warton's mature poetry of the 1770s-80s, in which he tests his ideas about the relationship between knowledge and the environment through his interest in Gothic ruins. Warton attempts to disavow his passion for Gothic architecture by opposing it to neo-classical style, enlightenment, and modernity. However, the material conditions of Gothic buildings themselves—overrun with plants and mosses, or filled with brilliant stained glass—mean that even as he praises enlightenment knowledge, his poetry undertakes its own intimate empiricism of the Gothic.

Continuing several of the threads of Chapter One, my second chapter, "Charlotte Smith, John Clare, and the World as if They Had Witnessed It," looks at environmental poetry in the decades after Thomas Warton's works leave off. Examining the methods of knowledge making for which Smith and Clare are known—explanatory notes and description, respectively—I articulate the

epistemic virtues of their poetry. “Epistemic virtue” is a term I borrow from Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison’s book *Objectivity*, which denotes the historically and culturally specific ideas about how to define and produce sound scientific research, experimentation, and data. In other words, a botanist in 1788 would have very different ideas about what constitutes a definitive description of a new plant species than a biologist would in 2015. While Smith and Clare have different methods of conveying natural historical knowledge in their poetry, both are committed to poetry that conveys a sense of a first-hand experience of the things they describe, whether or not that first-hand experience actually occurred. This epistemic virtue has as much to do with science as it does with Smith and Clare’s understanding of the poetic tradition in which they write and their sense of what makes environmental literature aesthetically appealing. Therefore, this chapter also discusses Joseph Warton’s *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope* (1756) and John Aikin’s *Essay on the Application of Natural History to Poetry* (1777), both influential essays that advocate for the use of accurate scientific descriptions in poetry based on the author’s experiences. Finally, this chapter also includes a note on scientific poetry in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and its use of endnotes.

Taken together, chapters One and Two constitute the first section of this dissertation, “Nature,” which is concerned with how poets from the 1740-1830s defined nature and portrayed the material environment in their poetry. Chapter Three, “‘ACTUAL OBSERVATION and SELF-PRACTICE’: The Subjective Science of Agricultural Prose, 1760-1830” opens the second half of the dissertation: “Soil.” This chapter focuses on three agriculturalists writing prose in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: Arthur Young, William Marshall, and William Cobbett. These men wrote about agriculture in a transitional time, when agricultural knowledge was being transformed from the tacit to the explicit, but before objectivity became the dominant paradigm in scientific thought and practice. Therefore their ways of justifying their own writing was not always, or necessarily, an appeal to the things they did out in the real world, but how they processed those

things through their subjective consciousnesses and recorded them for others to read. Their practices are empirical, but are rarely objective in the sense that the word took on in the mid-nineteenth century. In their insistence on the validity of their own personal experience at the expense of all other agricultural writers, Young, Marshall, and Cobbett made agricultural prose into an autobiographical practice and their meticulously recorded data only made sense within the framework of their life histories. In their emphasis on personal experience, these writers shared the epistemic virtues of Smith and Clare, but their works are set apart by both their practical focus and their use of narrative method.

My fourth chapter is about the much-studied appearances of landscape gardening—and the virtually unnoticed presence of soil—in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*. Although landscapes and discussions of landscape aesthetics appear in almost all of Austen’s novels, it is in *Mansfield Park* where the sinister heart of estate improvement is offered up for comment. As such, *Mansfield Park* is also the novel which has drawn the most critical commentary about the politics of landscape. This chapter, then, is not about landscape as a theme, but as a narrative strategy. At the same time, it discloses what is perhaps the novel’s greatest instance of the effect of the real: the naming of soil.

Finally, the Coda “Knowing Real Nature in Contemporary British Culture” looks at the continuation of these ideas in contemporary high- and middle-brow British culture. The problem of representation in the “new nature writing,” a recent wave of memoir-based books on natural history, is complicated by the disappearance of so many plant and animal species from the island of Britain. Is British environmental writing even possible, critics might ask, given that so little of the environment remains? A different problem of representation is presented by the works of the sculptor Andy Goldsworthy, who, since the 1970s has been producing works of environmental art that are as ephemeral as ice and leaf sculptures and enduring as dry stone walls. Given the

impermanent nature of his art, Goldsworthy uses photography to “talk” about his sculptures, setting the audience at a remove from them.

¹ John Clare, “January,” in *The Shepherd’s Calendar*, ed. Tim Chilcott, New ed. (Manchester England: Carcanet Press Ltd., 2006), 26 ll. 109-10. These lines are from Chilcott’s transcriptions of the MS. The 1827 version published by John Taylor renders them, “I hear it now, nor dream of woes; | The Storm is settled to repose.” Given the troubled status of Clare’s texts—especially *The Shepherd’s Calendar*, which was heavily edited in the transition from manuscript to print—I have generally pulled my quotations from modern editions which use a minimum of editorial intervention. This is not an endorsement of textual purism, an approach to Clare’s texts that I think neither possible nor desirable, particularly since Clare collaborated with his publishers on the editing of his manuscripts. However, I usually prefer MS over print variants because they often make more sense internally. The “harm/calm” of the MS seems more consistent with poem’s meaning than the published version’s “woes/repose.” In any case, Clare’s editors like Chilcott and Eric Robinson use a space in confusing cases where sense calls for an apostrophe (“he ll” for “he’ll,” when “hell” was evidently written in MS,) and add extra spaces where a period or quotation mark seemed to be intended.

Often throughout this dissertation, I have preferred to use original printed texts instead of modern editions when available so as to preserve the conventions and eccentricities of eighteenth century print. In the few cases where modern texts exist, such as Stuart Curran’s edition of Charlotte Smith, I have consulted them to check for major differences and alternate readings. To me, the work of modern editors has been invaluable in understanding textual history. Nowhere in this dissertation do I use the term *sic*.

² *Ibid.*, lines 269–71.

³ *Ibid.*, lines 325–32.

⁴ A few recent titles from the disciplines of ethno-biology and anthropology give a sense of how “environmental knowledge” is used in these fields, although, like all technical terms is it under constant re-evaluation and debate. Alan Bicker, Roy Ellen, and Peter Parkes, *Indigenous Environmental Knowledge and Its Transformations: Critical Anthropological Perspectives* (Routledge, 2003); Serena Heckler, *Landscape, Process And Power: Re-evaluating Traditional Environmental Knowledge* (Berghahn Books, 2013); Andrew Jamison, *The Making of Green Knowledge: Environmental Politics and Cultural Transformation* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁵ Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (Cornell University Press, 1971), 444–55.

⁶ That said, I am aware of my enormous debt to the body of Romantic scholarship that is evident in the notes and bibliography throughout. I am also aware of the viability of the road not taken. For Chapter Two’s Romantic twin, see Theresa M. Kelley’s essay “Romantic Exemplarity,” which deftly reads Charlotte Smith and John Clare’s natural history poetry in light of Romantic debates about exemplarity and the whole vs. the part. Theresa M. Kelley, “Romantic Exemplarity: Botany and ‘Material’ Culture,” in *Romantic Science: The Literary Forms of Natural History*, ed. Noah. Heringman, SUNY Series, Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 223–54.

⁷ Noah. Heringman, *Romantic Science: The Literary Forms of Natural History*, SUNY Series, Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 3–4.

⁸ James Grahame, *The Birds of Scotland: With Other Poems* (David West and John West, 1807), v.

⁹ For an account of Smith and Clare's uses of taxonomy, see Kelley's "Romantic Exemplarity." As recent scholarship has made clear, even as scientific practices became more specialized and the ideal of objectivity arose, there was not a complete separation between science and literature in the nineteenth century. Kelley, "Romantic Exemplarity: Botany and 'Material' Culture"; Daniel Brown, *The Poetry of Victorian Scientists: Style, Science and Nonsense* (Cambridge University Press, 2013); James A. Secord, *Visions of Science: Books and Readers at the Dawn of the Victorian Age* (OUP Oxford, 2014).

¹⁰ Ray. Desmond, *Kew: The History of the Royal Botanic Gardens*, History of the Royal Botanic Gardens, xvi, 466 p. (London: Harvill Press with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, 1995), 32, 84–102, 147–48.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, xiii, xvi.

¹² For instance, Edward J. Russell's *A History of Agricultural Science in Great Britain, 1620-1954*, 493 p. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966) devotes only 100 pages of its nearly 500 to agricultural science before 1840, despite the fact, for instance, that some of the first papers published by the Royal Society were on agriculture (particularly John Evelyn's work on soil science, *Philosophical Discourse of Earth*.) When did agriculture become scientific? This suggests that for Great Britain, it did not do so in any meaningful way until the 1840s and beyond. Russell's two chapters that deal with pre-1840s agriculture are entitled "Seeking a Road" and "The Way Becomes Clearer," suggesting that early agricultural science was closer to blind groping for a path that would only become clear in the 1840s. Sara. Wilmot, in *The Business of Improvement: Agriculture and Scientific Culture in Britain, C.1770 - C.1870*, (Bristol, England: Historical Geography Research Group, 1990), without undervaluing pre-1840 agricultural science or giving a teleological account of its development, makes a similar argument, noting that agriculture entered the universities as a subset of various disciplines, particularly chemistry, around the same time that the Rothamsted Experimental Station was created in 1844.

¹³ John. Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840; an Approach to the Poetry of John Clare*. (Cambridge [Eng.]: University Press, 1972), 91.

¹⁴ Jules David Law, *The Rhetoric of Empiricism: Language and Perception from Locke to I.A. Richards*, 1st ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Jonathan Smith, *Fact and Feeling: Baconian Science and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (Univ of Wisconsin Press, 1994); George Levine, *Dying to Know: Scientific Epistemology and Narrative in Victorian England* (University of Chicago Press, 2002).

¹⁵ Smith, *Fact and Feeling*, 13.

¹⁶ This is not to say that Romantic writers were themselves not concerned with representation, as much as literary historians sometimes would like to say otherwise. One of the best examinations of the representational mode in Romantic literature is Frederick Burwick's *Mimesis and its Romantic Reflections*, which takes on the notion that Romantic writers were not concerned with the representation of outward reality but instead turned inward to the subjective and ideal. Burwick also addresses the virulent attacks on mimesis by modern and postmodern theorists, particularly Heidegger, Derrida, and Giard, because it disguises the doubling back of language upon itself, that it may seem like a futile task to reclaim the mimetic mode for Romanticism. But Burwick goes on to show that in fact Romanticism—mainly through German thinkers like Schlegel and Schelling, whose interpretations of Platonic and Aristotelian mimesis also came into English through Coleridge, De Quincey, and Henry Crabb Robinson—had its own mimetic modes, and was self-conscious about the ethical and philosophical problems that a naïve mimesis can engender. Burwick's argument is both compelling and limited, for while it depicts philosophical debate and the sharing of ideas

among a small group of German, French, and English writers, most of whom had set themselves up as philosophers for their nation or time, it does not include the implicit or unofficial philosophy to be found in literature. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis; the Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953); Wordsworth, “Preface to Poems (1815),” in *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 626; Frederick Burwick, *Mimesis and Its Romantic Reflections* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2010).

¹⁷ Robert N. Watson, *Back to Nature: The Green and the Real in the Late Renaissance* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 7.

¹⁸ Dana Phillips, “Ecocriticism’s Hard Problems (Its Ironies, Too),” *American Literary History* 25, no. 2 (2013): 457.

¹⁹ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Roger Woolhouse (London: Penguin, 2004), 355.

²⁰ David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations. In Two Parts. By David Hartley, M. A.*, 2 vols. (London and Bath: London : printed by S. Richardson; for James Leake and Wm. Frederick, Booksellers in Bath: and sold by Charles Hitch and Stephen Austen, Booksellers in London, 1749).

²¹ Archibald Alison, *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste By the Revd. Archibald Alison, ...* (Dublin: printed for Messrs. P. Byrne, J. Moore, Grueber and M’Allister, W. Jones, and R. White, 1790); Richard Payne Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste.*, 3rd ed. (London: T. Payne [etc.], 1808).

²² Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 358. Locke adds—giving his own proofs according to epistemic virtue—that “I answer for myself, that I had [this story] some years since from a very sober and worthy man, upon his own knowledge, as I report it.”

²³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, *Phénoménologie De La Perception*. (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), 241.

²⁴ David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012); David Abram, *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology* (Vintage Books, 2011).

²⁵ William Gilpin, *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape:: To Which Is Added a Poem, on Landscape Painting* (printed for R. Blamire, 1792), 3–33; Uvedale Price, *An Essay on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful; and, on the Use of Studying Pictures, for the Purpose of Improving Real Landscape*, by Uvedale Price, Esq, *Essay on the Picturesque* (London: printed for J. Robson, 1794), Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste.*, 152.

²⁶ Humphry Repton, *Sketches and Hints on Landscape Gardening: Collected from Designs and Observations Now in the Possession of the Different Noblemen and Gentlemen, for Whose Use They Were Originally Made. ... By H. Repton, Esq* (W. Bulmer and Company Shakspeare printing-office, and sold by J. and J. Boydell; and by G. Nicol, 1794), 77, 78–79.

²⁷ Levine, *Dying to Know*, 13–14.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

³⁰ Onno Oerlemans, *Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature* (Toronto ; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 6.

³¹ Scott Hess, *William Wordsworth and the Ecology of Authorship: The Roots of Environmentalism in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (University of Virginia Press, 2012).

PART I: NATURE

CHAPTER ONE

Enthusiasts, or, Lovers of Nature:

Collins, the Wartons, and Poetry's Proper Materials

In 1755, an anonymous poem entitled “To a Gentleman, who Desired Proper Materials for a Monody” appeared in Benjamin Martin’s *General Magazine of Arts and Sciences*. Modestly wedged between two poems down the left-hand column of the page and almost easily overlooked, it proves a biting parody of mid-18th century British poetry.

Flowrets—wreaths—thy banks along—
Silent eve—th’accustom’d song—
Silver slipper’d—whilom—lore
Druid—Paynim—mountain hoar—
Dulcet—hermit—what time—
 (“Excuse me—here I want a rhyme.”)
Black-brow’d night—Hark! scretch-owls sing!
Ebon car—and raven wing—
Charnel houses—lonely dells—
Glimmering tapers—dismal cells—
Hallow’d haunts—and horrid piles—
Roseate hues—and ghastly smiles—
Solemn fanes—and cypress bowers—
Thunder-storms—and tumbling towers—
Let these be well together blended—
Dodsley’s your man—the poem’s ended.¹

While this poem appears impenetrable to those unfamiliar with the poetry of the mid-eighteenth century, its contemporary readers would have immediately recognized that it is composed of nothing but popular clichés. The source of these “materials” is a complex of poems written in the 1740s and

50s and the images and phrases that seemed to circulate among them like contagious diseases. The most direct target of “To a Gentleman” is probably Thomas Denton’s *Immortality: Or, the Consolation of Human Life. A Monody* (1754), a religious meditation in which “black-brow’d Night” appears in the first line, followed in train by “roseate hue,” “dulcet dew,” an “ebon car,” a “dark charnel,” Melancholy’s “Raven Wing” and a screech-owl.² Denton, however, is only a late-coming imitator, culling what were by that time stock phrases. For instance, Mark Akenside’s *Pleasures of Imagination* (1744) features the antiquated “what time” (for “when”), “dulcet,” “silent eve” and a “horrid pile.” William Mason’s “To a Water Nymph” (1747) features a “silver-slipper’d” female figure as well, and Robert Blair’s wildly popular *The Grave* (1743) contains both the “glimm’ring” taper and another screech-owl.³ As the last line of the poem suggests, most of these were published by Robert Dodsley and showed the influence of Dodsley’s house style on the poetry market. Despite these recent trends, however, the original source of many of these materials goes farther back than the 1740s. “Paynim” and “whilom,” for example, are not coincidental archaisms; they were favorites of Edmund Spenser, and were already antiquated by the time Spenser was writing in the 16th century. Likewise, “flowerets,” “paynim,” “dulcet,” “hermit,” and the “ghastly smiles,” appear in John Milton’s early works.⁴ Parodied here, then, are the young poets of the 1740s and ‘50s who, in reaction against Popeian moral satire, placed themselves in a poetic lineage descended from Spenser and early Milton that deliberately bypassed writers like Dryden, Pope, Swift, and Montagu.⁵ Included—rightly and wrongly—in the poem’s parody are three young poets who placed themselves at the front lines of this revolt: The Warton brothers, Joseph and Thomas, and William Collins. In the poems of the Wartons from the early 1740s we find wreaths, “Silver slipper’d” Isis, paynims, the world “clad in Midnight’s raven-colour’d robe, | mid hollow charnel [and] taper dim,” ebon thrones and scepters, piles of all descriptions, and so on.⁶ William Collins’ *Odes* (1746) escapes the lash directly, but includes among other things a cypress wreath, a fane, thunder, and a “hoary pile.”

“To a Gentleman” skewers bloated diction and endlessly recycled images, but also makes a larger point: that the poets of the previous decade had failed to find proper materials. That is, they had not found suitable subject matter about which to write poetry. The interstices of the poem mark a refusal to account for how Denton, Akenside, Mason, Blair, Collins, and the Wartons make their arguments. Only the raw materials matter here. While many poets from the mid-eighteenth century shared the same materials, they had different reasons for doing so. Writers like Edward Young, Robert Blair, and Thomas Denton—later labeled “graveyard” poets—were mostly concerned with questions of religion and the state of the soul. They used morbid images to create a vulnerable, meditative state of mind for the reader, but have little to say about the worth of those images in themselves. But for the Warton brothers and William Collins, the search for materials about which to write poetry was at the forefront of their concerns. While they exhibit all the foibles displayed in “To a Gentleman,” their search for proper materials led them to take up a more complex problem than the parody suggests. That is, not simply what the proper materials for poetry are, but *how* those materials are culled from the real world, and how knowledge of them can be passed onto readers. For these poets, the turn away from the abstract ideal *materials* of didactic moral satire meant turning toward the *material* world, or, at least, abstraction given material form. Furthermore, “To a Gentleman” leaves off at a fairly superficial level but the later poems of William Collins and Thomas Warton explicitly discuss the value of gloomy, superstitious imagery. In each case, as we will see below, this value lies in its capacity for making knowledge about the material world, and in some cases about what we now call the natural environment.

In this chapter, Collins and the Warton brothers have a great deal to say about an epistemology of environment, as counterintuitive as this may seem at first. Their poetry has often been read as a turn away from the world—particularly the world of social responsibility—toward inward aestheticism.⁷ And certainly from a twenty-first century perspective their works lack what we

would recognize as a realist or ecological understanding of the environment. In other words, their works seem ill-equipped to deal with questions of environmental knowledge because they seem to retreat both from abstract thought and from the real world about which knowledge can be made. But why, then, did the young Joseph Warton begin his opposition to the Popean program with a poem entitled *The Enthusiast, or the Lover of Nature*? Why does William Collins announce that his turn away from scholarship and formal learning is a turn toward “where Science sure is found, | From Nature as she lives around”? What would happen if we take these poets’ claims to “love nature” seriously? I will show that in doing so we begin to see the subtle shift in their definition of nature from human nature to the material world; their allegorized abstractions that roam the landscape become ambassadors between the human mind and the environment, and the overgrown abbeys and charnels of superstition become the very places where empirical inquiry into one’s surroundings can occur. While I am in no way suggesting that these poets exhibit an ecological understanding or conservationist approach to environment, or that they can even be read as “nature poets,” careful attention to their works will show us how their “natural” aesthetic focused on human nature prepared the ground for the naturalist/scientific strain of later poets like Charlotte Smith and John Clare. First, I will examine the early poems of Joseph Warton, particularly his blank-verse essay *The Enthusiast, or, the Lover of Nature*. Then I will move to the Wartons’ close literary associate William Collins whose most important poems are hesitant and at times cynical explorations of the ability of poetry to reflect the material world, and which use allegory and superstition as a solution to this problem. Lastly, I will move to Thomas Warton’s later career and its mature, chastened, but still stubborn views on poetry, knowledge, and truth, which are made possible by crumbling Gothic ruins and stained glass.

Joseph Warton's Nature

What did the rebellion against Popean moral satire look like? The famous advertisement of Joseph Warton's *Odes on Various Subjects* (1746) serves as its most succinct, and perhaps the best, statement. In its entirety, the advertisement reads:

The Public has been so much accustomed of late to didactic Poetry alone, and Essays on moral Subjects, that any work where the imagination is much indulged, will perhaps not be relished or regarded. The author therefore of these pieces is in some pain lest certain austere critics should think them too fanciful and descriptive. But as he is convinced that the fashion of moralizing in verse has been carried too far, and as he looks upon Invention and Imagination to be the chief faculties of the Poet, so he will be happy if the following Odes may be look'd upon as an attempt to bring back Poetry into its right channel.⁸

The advertisement sets up the volume, not necessarily as a series of pieces to be relished and regarded, but as the demonstration of a new poetics. While Warton claims to fear the displeasure of fashionable critics, the advertisement as a whole shows what he is really at pains to convey: that the aesthetic decisions of the following pages are deliberate and in reaction to current fashions. That is, if the work is found lacking, what critics deem its faults result not from lack of skill but from their inability to understand Warton's self-conscious acts of taste-making. Warton asks his readers not to relish and regard his poems, but to recognize in them what *should* be relished and regarded. But the poems themselves do not bear out the advertisement's strictures very well. *Odes on Various Subjects* seems to check thought at the door, and after the ambitious program announced by the author, does little to deliver on its promise. The Odes are on conventional topics: Peace, Fancy, Health, Liberty, and so on. The opening of the first poem, "Ode to Fancy," give an idea of Warton's aims and style:

O Parent of each lovely Muse,
Thy spirit o'er my soul diffuse,
O'er all my artless songs preside,
My footsteps to thy temple guide [. . .].⁹

Rather than bringing poetry back into its proper channel by displaying fancy and imagination, Warton tends to write directly about these qualities. Not surprisingly, he seemed to recognize that his talent was better suited for criticism and abandoned poetry by 1750.

Whether in poetry or prose, however, Warton's ideas about poetry's proper materials remained remarkably consistent across his career. In his "Gathering Book," the young Warton wrote a passage entitled "Subjects for a Picture" and "Similes," which is a disjointed list of ideas, a few of which I quote here.

The Solemn Silence of the Pyramids. The Dark gloomy Scenes in Mines. The Fall of the Nile. Distant Noises. Indian Brachmins wandering by their Rivers. Medea's nightly Spells. Meteors in the Night. Gripping of a Serpent or Crocodile. A Lamp in a lone Tow'r. Noises heard at Hell-Gates, that were shut. Extended prospects from Olym[p]us. The Flames of Ætna seen in a dark Night by Strangers. [. . .] Sailors Cries at Sea in a stormy Night. Traveller benighted. –Two strong Seas separated by an Isthmus—or two angry Lions by a wide river. The Priest bleeding: Old Men Slaughter'd[.] Loathsome as the twining of a Serpent round one's Body [. . .]¹⁰

Here we have a set of discrete images and ideas, some of which appeal to vision, some to touch, some to sound. Its structure is paratactic, meaning that it places phrases side by side, instead of arranging them into syntactic structures. What we have here are materials, not ideas or arguments—the same basic structure as "To a Gentleman." This memorandum was probably written in 1739, when Warton would have been 17 and writing, or about to write his first published work, *The Enthusiast*; while Warton did not intend for this memorandum to be a work of art, both share a paratactic quality. While *The Enthusiast* does unfold an argument over the course of its 200-odd blank-verse lines, the poem uses chunks of images, and leads the reader through its argument by replacing one set of images with another.

The poem describes the point of view of its speaker: the unnamed Enthusiast, or Lover of Nature. Its goal is to accomplish the articulation of an aesthetic mode—a "natural," passionate, and "soft" primitivist view of landscape gardening, painting, and poetry. The speaker also writes at length about the fortunate "primitive" peoples whose lives are filled with pains but who are

uncorrupted by luxury, themes that he takes directly from Roman writers. The poem is in essence a definition of what “nature” means from an aesthetic standpoint, but Warton’s revisions to the poem show a shift in his definition over time. Robert Dodsley published *The Enthusiast* in 1744 and asked Warton to revise the poem to be included in his *Collection of Poems by Several Hands* in 1748. Warton took the opportunity to insert a few passages of descriptive imagery that convey a slightly different definition of “nature.”

In the first edition, Warton’s definition of nature can be seen in passages like the following:

Rich in her weeping country’s spoils Versailles
May boast a thousand fountains, that can cast
The tortur’d waters to the distant heav’ns;
Yet let me choose some pine-top’d precipice
Abrupt and shaggy, when a foamy stream,
Like Anio, tumbling roars; or some bleak heath,
Where straggling stand the mournful juniper,
Or yew-trees scath’d; while in clear prospect round,
From the grove’s bosom spires emerge, and smok
In bluish wreaths ascend, ripe harvests wave,
Low, lonely cottages, and ruin’d tops
Of Gothick battlements appear, and streams
Beneath the sun-beams twinkle¹¹

Here we see that the difference between Versailles and the “natural” images that the speaker prefers have little to do with the distinction between human-made structures and environments versus non-human environments. In both cases, whether at Versailles or on the pine-topped precipice, human environments are a part of the scene. The difference between the two lies in the ostentatious manipulation of waters at Versailles versus the tumbling and twinkling streams. In other words, “natural” in this passage is the opposite of “tortur’d”—waters that tumble down are natural, while human artifice and ingenuity are necessary to make waters rise instead of fall. Similarly, Gothic structures and cottages are suited to “natural” landscape likely because of the age of the former and the humility of the latter. Ostentatious Versailles, on the other hand, is an open display of wealth

and power which does not conceal the artifice and effort that went into creating it, leading Warton to make a quite hackneyed political point.¹²

In the passage here that describes a “natural” aesthetic, images tumble like the mountain stream. Warton does not set up a scene—he culls a variety of images that do not fit together into a coherent picture: smoke from cottages, battlements, ripe fields of grain, and streams are all mentioned. But Warton takes no time to arrange them, he simply includes them. Again, the focus in this passage is on the materials—Versailles and its tortured waters are inappropriate and simply need to be replaced with another set of images.

Warton’s largest addition to the 1748 edition of *The Enthusiast* pursues the same paratactic strategy, although the “nature” it refers to is different. While the original poem contains a number of comparisons—landscape gardens like Versailles and Stowe are compared to wilderness, a richly dressed woman to a country girl, and Shakespeare to Addison—Warton added a long passage, which I quote here in its entirety, and which declines using comparisons to make its point. Instead, the speaker deliberately conjures an overwhelming number of images that cannot be resolved or arranged into a landscape view.

All-beauteous nature! by thy boundless charms
Oppress’d, O where shall I begin thy praise,
Where turn th’estatick eye, how ease my breast
That pants with wild astonishment and love!
Dark forest, and the opening lawn, refresh’d
With ever-gushing brooks, hill, meadow, dale,
The balmy bean-field, the gay-clover’d close,
So sweetly interchang’d, the lowing ox,
The playful lamb, the distant water-fall
Now faintly heard, now swelling with the breeze,
The sound of pastoral reed from hazel-bower,
The choral birds, the neighing steed, that snuffs
His dappled mate, stung with intense desire,
The ripen’d orchard when the ruddy orbs
Betwixt the green leaves blush, the azure skies,
The cheerful sun that thro earth’s vitals pours
Delight and health and heat; All, all conspire
To raise, to sooth, to harmonize the mind,

To lift on wings of praise, to the great sire
Of being and of beauty [. . .].¹³

The passage trusts that all of these sounds and images conspire to form a larger picture of a benevolent creator, but their role in raising, soothing, and harmonizing the mind is far different from the role they played in giving rise to the speaker's oppression with "wild astonishment and love." These two sentiments that bookend the passage—nature as an overpowering and chaotic beauty vs. nature as harmonizing proof of God's greatness—cannot easily exist together, and Warton makes no further attempts to reconcile them. Significantly, this is the only piece of natural description in the poem that is not compared to artful/human-made images; nor is it part of the speaker's fantasies of primitive human life. In other words, these are the only images of landscape, plants, and animals that appear in the poem for their own sake, and it is telling that their presence proves unmanageable. This lengthy emendation shows that the "Nature" in the poem's subtitle came to mean two things by 1748. *The Enthusiast* was originally written, not as a paean to non-man-made environments, but to a natural, primitive aesthetic. The wildness of Shakespeare, the simplicity of the country girl in her homespun clothes, and "simple Indian swains" embody this aesthetic as much as the copses, precipices, and riverbanks that are also described. But by 1748, the long addition suggests that Warton was also thinking about nature, now, as a material thing, a landscape whose magnitude could not be registered with ease by the poet. Even Warton's capacious paratactic sentences have a difficult time accommodating this new view of nature—nature as the non-human.

Warton's view of nature in *The Enthusiast* did not completely change between 1744 and 1748, but it came to accommodate a wider range of meanings. "Nature" no longer only means that which does not seem artificial or contrived, but also that which cannot *become* artificial or contrived because it is not the site of human intervention. In the Chapter Two, we will see that in his criticism in the 1750s, Warton began to consider the description of non-human-made environments for their own sakes to be a mark of imagination, perhaps finally of poetry brought back into its proper channel.

But next we will look at Warton's Oxford friend, William Collins, whose poetry takes on the same problem, although for Collins the solution takes him away from non-human environments and directly to artifice and allegory.

William Collins and the "Scene-full World"

In December of 1746, Thomas Gray wrote to a friend about the peculiar publication of "two young authors, a Mr. Warton & a Mr. Collins, both Writers of Odes," each of whom appeared to be "the half of a considerable Man, & one the very counterpart of the other."¹⁴ The works he refers to are Joseph Warton's *Odes on Various Subjects* and William Collins' *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegorical Subjects*, which appeared at the same time. What Gray did not know was that Warton and Collins were friends at Oxford and had planned to jointly write a volume of odes but decided to publish separately. Collins' poetry is indeed the counterpart of Warton's, known for its complicated syntax, its sophisticated and often antiquated diction, and its use of allegory and abstract images. The resulting difficulties may stem from its self-consciousness, which is both pervasive and understated. While Collins' body of work lacks programmatic prose statements like Joseph Warton's, much of his poetry is also about the act of writing poetry and of the qualities and materials necessary to poetic expression. The figure of The Poet is Collins' main concern, and like Warton's *Enthusiast*, his concept of (human) Nature undergirds the Poet's understanding of his task.¹⁵ But whereas Warton's focus shifted slightly over time as Nature came to mean both lack of artifice and lack of human artifacts, Collins' understanding of Nature at first glance is entirely anthropomorphic and anthropocentric. Nowhere in his poetry does the material world exist apart from human figures. However, I argue that Collins' anthropocentric allegory is in fact a product of his attempt to understand the material world and convey that understanding to his readers. The purpose of my

reading here, then, is to show how knowledge and nature function in Collins' poetry through his highly literary, highly allegorized works.

Collins' poetic career began early with his *Persian Eclogues*, a set of Orientalist poetic dialogues, written when he was 19 and published two years later. After he graduated from Oxford in 1744, he went to live the life of an author in London. Although he had a reputation among his peers for being indolent, Collins was committed to literature as a profession and was active in circulating his works among friends and publishers. He was, as the highly learned and allusive quality of his poems suggests, also an accomplished scholar of languages and literature. By the early 1750s, however, Collins was forced by mental and physical illness to withdraw from society and to stop writing altogether. The last of his literary friends to visit him was Joseph Warton in September of 1754—a visit, as we will see, which was crucial in preserving parts of Collins' small canon. Warton declared that Collins was very ill and living in almost total isolation under the care of his sister. He died in 1759.

It was during this last visit that Collins gave Warton copy of the *Persian Eclogues* annotated with changes. Warton saw these through the press a few years later, retitling the collection *Oriental Eclogues*. The amended title page contains changes that are telling. The first edition epigraph is from Cicero's *Pro Archia Poeta*, which Roger Lonsdale translates as, "But let us for a moment waive these solid advantages; let us assume that entertainment is the sole end of reading; even so I think you would hold that no mental relaxation is so broadening to the sympathies or enlightening to the understanding."¹⁶ On Collins' annotated copy, this and the publisher's information are rather vehemently scratched out and replaced with a quote from Virgil's *Georgics*: "and when on us the rising sun first breathed with panting steeds."¹⁷ The difference between the two epigraphs is striking. The first makes an argument about the volume that, in the context of Collins' friendship with Joseph Warton, champions poetry for entertainment over the moral and didactic. The latter

epigraph, however, makes no argument but is instead a very Collinsian image—quasi-natural, quasi-allegorical. It intensifies the sunrise by portraying it in allegorized form, fusing description of a real natural phenomenon and a human understanding of it into a single image. The change is emblematic of a tendency we see in Collins’ poetry to turn away from statements about what poetry should be and instead depict struggles of representation within poetry itself.

With this fused image in mind, I want to turn to Collins’ *Odes* and the late fragmentary draft “Ode to a Friend on his Return &c.” eventually published as “An Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland, Considered as the Subject of Poetry” in 1788. In these poems, Collins’ allegorical style displays his struggle to understand the place and meaning of the material world in poetry. While the exuberance of Joseph Warton’s *Enthusiast* implies that nature can be represented accurately through poetry, if difficult to arrange and control, Collins’ poems follow only but so far. As Richard Wendorf suggests, in Collins’ poetry “external nature is celebrated, [but] our ability to perceive that world in all its shapes and colors seriously questioned, and our reliance on the reflections of art intricately established.”¹⁸ For Joseph Warton, the overwhelming variety of natural scenes is a cause for ecstatic praise; for Collins it is a source of unease. In part, this has to do with the mechanics of Collins’ poetry and how they are related to its subject matter. As we saw above, Joseph Warton’s blank-verse lines and paratactic structure make it easy to insert descriptions at will, hence the changes from the 1744 to 1748 version of *The Enthusiast*: the solution to the problem of representing nature adequately is to simply *add more*. But Collins’ odic structure, his sinuous syntax, and sometimes complex rhyme schemes allowed for no easy insertion of imagery. Collins’ unease, as Wendorf suggests, also has its roots in his attempts to understand the relationship between the mind, the natural world, and the role of art as a mediator between the two. Representation and verisimilitude are far from straightforward for Collins, and like Virgil’s panting steeds of the sun, matters are further complicated by personal and cultural interpretations of real events.

Collins' *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegorical Subjects* is, not surprisingly, a mixture of odes on abstract topics (Simplicity, Fear, Peace, etc.) as well as current historical events. The two that will be my focus are the "Ode to Evening" and "The Manners." Both are not simply odes to their particular subjects, but frame themselves in pedagogical terms: the poet is learning how to portray his subject matter even as he writes about it. And although both are allegorical, I am less interested in an overall exploration of Collins' allegory and more interested in two questions: what does allegory have to do with Nature, the ostensible subject of each poem, and what does it have to do with pedagogy or the transmission of knowledge?

The "Ode to Evening" begins tentatively: "If ought of Oaten Stop, or Pastoral Song"—in the hesitant stutter of "ought of oaten" is a timid petition to Evening to teach the poet how to portray her. Given the overall thrust of the poem—the poet asks Evening to teach him to describe her even as he describes her—one would assume the Collins was indulging in false humility in order to display his mastery of the subject. But while the poem does display elegance and technical polish in its complex sentences, meter, and diction, one cannot help but note its failure to look at its subject matter for long. Unlike the profusion of Wartonian images, natural scenery in Collins' poetry shifts from foot to foot, appearing in the form of one prospect before dissolving and forming into another. The poem begins outdoors but ends indoors and Evening herself seems to lose her allegorical status. After asking to be taught, the speaker says

Then lead, calm *Vot'ress*, [Evening] where some sheety Lake
Cheers the lone Heath, or some time-hallow'd Pile,
Or up-land Fallows grey
Reflect its last cool Gleam.¹⁹

Not content with a generalized outdoor prospect, Collins moves the speaker quickly from the Lake to the Heath to the Pile to the Fallows before inclement weather moves him indoors to a "Hut [. . .] That from the Mountain's side, | Views Wilds, and swelling Floods [. . .]"²⁰ The quick pile-up of landscape imagery is similar to *The Enthusiast*. But whereas Warton's images are meant to lead to the

cumulative effect of passion and religious devotion, imagery in “Ode to Evening” seems unsure of where to settle and ends up retreating from Evening altogether. Images are propelled, not only by the tension resulting from treating literal nature as an allegorical subject, but also from the tension between wanting some material place in nature from which to speak, but not knowing where that might be.

The poem ends in the hut on a winter evening, where “*Fancy, Friendship, Science, rose-lipped Health, | Thy gentlest Influence own, | And hymn thy [Evening’s] fav’rite Name!*”²¹ At the end, in midst of the four allegorized figures, Evening herself disappears even as she is named. Evening becomes *an* evening—an ambient container of time in which the other allegorical figures of Fancy, Friendship, Science, and Health exist. On one hand, the ode imagines a single consciousness moving its way through a set of tangibly imagined landscapes, but on the other it is ultimately a retreat from portraying those landscapes with fidelity. The poem not only abandons images of evening in its final stanzas, but it puts Evening’s (unnamed) “fav’rite Name” in the mouths of abstractions. The end of the poem might lead one to conclude that only the idea of Evening, and not the tangible reality of evening, matter to Collins. I would say, however, that *knowledge* of evening, understood through the figure of Evening, is what is at stake here. Why does the poem lead from allegory to natural imagery and back to allegory? Because it is through allegory that Collins understands nature. Notice that Fancy and Science—the producers of poetic imagery and knowledge—are two of the figures who hymn Evening’s name. For Collins, there is a close link between allegory and the production of knowledge, a topic that he addresses directly in “The Manners.”

“The Manners” begins with a farewell to academic study, although it was probably composed some time after Collins’ departure from Oxford.²² In the poem, he states his intention to leave one kind of learning—solitary scholarship focused on the book—and take up another: focused observation of human character. But none of these actual observations—let alone any real people—

appear in the poem. Like the quartet of allegorical figures at the end of “Ode to Evening,” whose presence stands in for the people within the hut who are presumably embodying those traits, people in “The Manners” are also entirely replaced by their allegorical counterparts.

The poem begins with an explicit turning away from scholarship:

Farewell, for clearer Ken design'd,
The dim-discover'd Tracts of Mind:
Truths which, from Action's Paths retir'd,
My silent Search in vain requir'd!²³

Collins is not creating a dichotomy between truth and falsehood. Truth can be discovered in places other than “Action's Paths”—the movement of the real world—but he himself has failed to find it there. He does, however, suggest that the search for truth via scholarship is incompatible with creating knowledge poetically. The speaker's vain search for truth is silent, and perhaps required to be. Collins is using “requir'd” in the old sense of “asked for,” but his convoluted syntax allows the word to hover over the entire line, so there is a shadow of meaning that his scholarly search is required to be silent.

Collins, then, is making an argument about how knowledge is gained and transmitted and what role poetry may or may not play. Again, it is not a dichotomy between truth and falsehood, but between “Tracts of Mind” gained through silent scholarship and knowledge gained on “Action's Paths.” He is also specifically leaving behind, not simply scholarly knowledge, but knowledge based on Classical tradition: “Farewell the Porch, whose Roof is seen | Arch'd with th' enlivening Olive's green,” the portico of ancient Greece under which philosophers taught their students and debated one another. Note that the portico is decorated by the “enlivening” green of olive trees, but even this naturally defining feature cannot overcome the sense that artificiality reigns. It is this porch where

Where *Science*, prank'd in tissued Vest,
By *Reason*, *Pride*, and *Fancy* drest,
Comes like a Bride so trim array'd,

To wed with *Doubt* in *Plato's* shade!²⁴

The figure of Science, or knowledge, appears here in “prank’d” (pleated) and “tissued” (woven with gold or silver) clothing, dressed by the unusual trio of Reason, Pride, and Fancy. The wedding between science and doubt could produce two outcomes: healthy skepticism or endless intellectual wrangling. The fact that reason itself, along with pride (the pompousness of scholarship and academia) and fancy has dressed science in her fussy, antique outfit suggests the latter. Collins does not share in the enlightenment value of skepticism based on reason, although in a few lines he turns to what at first looks like empiricism.

Leaving scholarly knowledge behind at the ridiculous wedding ceremony, the speaker turns to another figure who holds out a more promising model for gathering and disseminating knowledge:

Youth of the quick uncheated Sight,
Thy Walks, *Observance*, more invite!
O Thou, who lov’st that ampler Range,
Where Life’s wide Prospects round thee change,
[. . .]
To me in Converse sweet impart,
To read in Man the native Heart,
To learn, where Science sure is found,
From Nature as she lives around:
And gazing oft her Mirror true,
By turns each shifting Image view!²⁵

It is through *Observance*—an old variant on “observation” that Collins probably chose for metrical reasons—that Science can be found again, this time not gussied up by human foibles, but in Nature. Although the language suggests movement in a landscape—“thy Walks invite,” “Life’s wide prospects”—by the end of the poem it is clear that Collins has little interest in the physical environment, but Nature here means *human* nature. The line “Nature as she lives around” seems at first to do with environment, that which “lives around” us. But the line means human nature as it

exists in many different types of people. At this point, one may ask: where is the Nature of Joseph Warton's Enthusiast?

Yet, "The Manners" feels like a rebellion in that it deliberately leaves a mode of gathering and disseminating knowledge behind; it abandons the dusty for the fresh, the antique for the new, the artificial for the genuine, the difficult for the pleasurable. But Collins has found that overthrowing a regime of knowledge does not necessarily mean that a new one will spring up in its stead. Just as "Ode to Evening" roves from place to place, trying to find a vantage point from which to view its subject and ends up not viewing it subject at all, "The Manners" is also a self-conscious search for its true subject, its true materials. The poem never directly mentions any of the Manners that Collins may be thinking of, although he does name the two powers by which he can portray them: "Humour" with his "comic Sock" and "young-eyed healthful Wit."²⁶ Through these, Nature can be found:

O Nature boon, from whom proceed
Each forceful Thought, each prompted Deed;
If but from Thee I hope to feel,
On all my heart imprint thy Seal!
Let some retreating Cynic find,
Those oft-turn'd Scrolls I leave behind,
The *Sports* and I this Hour agree,
To rove thy Scene-full World with Thee!²⁷

How is Collins' focus on the "Scene-full World" of human behavior different from moral didactic satire? One would conclude that Collins' goal was to write poetry after the mode of the Comedy of Manners—that he is interested in literary portraiture and the delineation of character. However, his style in the *Odes* is so abstract that it has no place for real people or even stock characters. Collins never actually commenced the project of portraying the "Scene-full World" in his poetry. His poems in general have very little to do with specific observations of real people or things—even fairly abstract things such as character type. Instead of viewing this as a failure or defect of his poetry, however, we should consider whether Collins was trying to describe something that did not exist in

the literary language of the mid-18th century. Collins' recourse to *manners* is a close but not entirely accurate version of allegorization that depends on real observation ("Observance") and seeks to make knowledge about the human and inanimate world. Observation of the real world seems to have no relevance here; Collins is uninterested in empiricism. But allegory and abstraction do, for Collins, make knowledge.

In his last known poem, Collins found an unlikely replacement for allegory as a medium through which knowledge can be made: superstition. When Joseph Warton visited Collins in 1754, Collins showed him a manuscript entitled "Ode to a Friend on His Return &c."²⁸ This poem was written for the Scottish dramatist John Home, and may have been completely forgotten by the literary world, had not Warton mentioned it to his brother Thomas and to Samuel Johnson. The manuscript was incomplete, but is nonetheless often considered Collins' masterpiece. It was written between late 1749 and early 1750, although considered lost for decades after Warton saw it and not published until 1788. Refurbished with lines to fill in the gaps, it was retitled "Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland, Considered as the Subject of Poetry" for publication in the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*. Although Collins had never been to Scotland, the Royal Society's interest in the poem was to help preserve the Highlands culture being destroyed by population clearances.²⁹ Again, as in "Ode to Evening," we see a poem about writing about the very thing the poem describes. In detailing the superstitions of the Highlands and the effects of their belief, Collins enters into his own indirect meditation on the relationship between credulity, materiality, and poetry.

Like "Ode to Evening" and "The Manners," the subject of this poem is writing poetry. The speaker bids his Scottish friend farewell, admonishing him to take inspiration from the Scottish landscape to which he returns.

Fresh to that soil thou turn'st, whose ev'ry Vale
Shall prompt the Poet, and his Song demand:

To Thee thy copious Subjects ne'er shall fail;
Thou need'st but take the Pencil to thy Hand,
And paint what all believe who own thy Genial Land.³⁰

The soil and vales here are again not important for their own sakes, but because they are host to “what all believe” who live there. What interests Collins are the superstitions that are bound to landscape—the giant Kelpie, a monster who drowns and eats travelers; the ghosts of three warring kings who have been buried together; the wizard of Skye, for instance. The people of the Highlands, according to Collins, believe that these figures roam the land.

Near the end of the poem, after describing several scenes from Scottish lore (and hence rendering the project he encourages in Home unnecessary), the poem self-consciously mounts a defense of the poetical rendering of superstitions. “[. . .] Scenes like these which, daring to depart | From sober Truth, are still to Nature true,” the poet claims.³¹ He goes on to describe the experience of reading/listening to Edward Fairfax’s 1600 translation of Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberate*.

How have I sate, where pip'd the pensive Wind
To hear His harp by British Fairfax strung,
Prevailing Poet, whose undoubting Mind
Believ'd the Magic Wonders which He sung!³²

The question raised here is: what constitutes belief in the magic wonders? As the lines at the beginning of the stanza suggest, Collins is not claiming that Tasso was of the opinion that the events he describes in the poem are historical fact. Rather, departing from “sober Truth,” they still require a kind of belief. It is this belief on Tasso’s part that translates the ultimate poetic effect:

Hence at Each Sound Imagination glows,
Hence his warm lay with softest Sweetness flows,
Melting it flows, pure, num'rous, strong and clear,
And fills th'impassion'd heart, and lulls th'Harmonious Ear.³³

Collins was fascinated by the idea of a place where superstitions have literal and universal belief. In other words: a place where his allegorized figures are not necessary because people see their equivalents literally roaming the landscape. Superstition—literal belief—is Collins’ way of

reconciling physical environment with human perception. Allegorical figures and the figures of superstitions are the bridge the gap between nature and the human mind. Through them, knowledge of environment is made tangible and understandable. Unlike Collins, who has to create allegorical figures in order to reconcile the human mind with its material environment, Home is lucky enough to have contact with a culture in which such figures already exist.

So why does Collins begin “Ode to Evening” with a request to be able to describe evening itself, only to end up back in an artificial, allegorized environment? We get our first clue in “The Manners”: real knowledge is to be gained from observation of general principles and types let loose in the world. And it is with the Highlands Ode that Collins provides his most developed answer to the question. In considering the superstitions of Highlanders, Collins is imagining a place where allegorized figures are made real through belief. If Highlanders literally believe that ghosts, fairies, and monsters exist in the world, there is no need for allegory; it is built into the culture. One striking feature of the Highlands Ode is how little use it makes of allegory compared with Collins’ earlier poems. Here the figures of superstition render allegory unnecessary, serving as the tangible manifestation of human thought. This is why literal belief is so important for Collins, why he needs to believe that Tasso really possessed an “undoubting Mind [which] Believ’d the magic Wonders which He sung!”

So far, neither Joseph Warton nor William Collins have manifested much concern for portraying the actual, material environment in what we would recognize in an empirical way. Although their “natural” poetry is a reaction to the artificiality they saw in moral essays and satire, their works seem foreign—if not downright harmful—in this moment of conservationism. But dismissing their poetry as simply not caring about nature or environment is also dangerous, because here we have poets working through the question, quite self-consciously: what are we looking at when we see “nature” in poetry? How do we know nature when we see it, and how does a poet let

others know what nature is? In the last section of this chapter, we turn to the poetry of Thomas Warton. His late poetry is much more recognizable to us when it comes to nature—for the first time we see empirical, recognizable descriptions of natural phenomena. But perhaps more importantly, we see Warton struggle with Enlightenment knowledge and its place in poetry.

Thomas Warton: Gothic Afterlife and the Lonely Enlightenment

Hence to some Convent's gloomy isles,
Where chearful day-light never smiles,
Tyrant, from Albion haste, to slavish Rome;
There by dim tapers' livid light,
At the still solemn hours of night,
In pensive musings walk o'er many a sounding tomb.

—Joseph Warton, “To Superstition”³⁴

Ignorance and superstition, so opposite to the real interest of human society, are the parents of imagination. The very devotion of the Gothic times was romantic. The catholic worship, besides that its numerous exterior appendages were of a picturesque and even of a poetical nature, disposed the mind to a state of deception, and encouraged, or rather authorised, every species of credulity: its vision, miracles, and legends, propagated a general propensity to the Marvellous, and strengthened the belief of spectres, demons, witches, and incantations.

—Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry*, 1778³⁵

These quotations show that superstition meant something very different for the Wartons than it did for Collins—at least on the surface. Simply, the Warton brothers equated Gothic taste with Catholic worship, an association suffused with their anti-Catholicism. Joseph banishes Catholicism to Rome, where it lives out its existence among the dim tapers and tombs of graveyard poetry. But for Thomas, things are more complicated. While he equates Catholicism with Medieval antiquity and superstition and associates Anglicanism with modernity and Enlightenment, he is again and again troubled by the fact that the place of poetry in this scheme puts him on the wrong side of his own prejudice. The stakes here are high—much higher than for Collins, who as an Englishman had the privilege of using superstition to exoticize Scottish culture and landscape to make a point

about poetry. If Thomas Warton, on the other hand, wants to define superstition as Catholicism, he must be ready to sort out the great tangle that results: is superstition religion? is it simply related to the aesthetics surrounding religious worship? is it at all useful in an age of Enlightenment? And from his perspective, as an ultra-Anglican professor at Oxford who had a life-long obsession with Medieval literature and architecture, he must do everything to avoid the appearance of Catholic sympathy.

For Thomas Warton, the Middle Ages are embedded in Gothic architecture. It was in monasteries and churches that knowledge was made and preserved, where superstition, scholarship, devotion, and imagination all flourished simultaneously. For Collins, superstition is a means of literalizing the relationship between the human mind and the world it explores. For Thomas Warton (“Warton” for the rest of this section) buildings raised during the reign of Medieval Catholic “superstition” provide literal frameworks for making knowledge—knowledge that, I argue, at once fails by the standards of Enlightenment skepticism even as it provides an alternate model for Enlightenment empiricism. Warton himself, embarrassed about dragging his feet into the modern era of knowledge-making, tried to disassociate himself from the Gothic in two of his most accomplished poems: “Ode Written at Vale-Royal Abbey in Cheshire” (1777) and his “Verses on Sir Joshua Reynolds’s Painted Window at New College, Oxford” (1782). In each, Warton ultimately belies his own claims for the advantages of the Enlightenment because try as he might, his poems portray the Gothic intimately, while the Enlightenment remains nearly unknowable.

Warton, like his brother and like Collins, began writing and publishing as a teenager. His youthful poem *Pleasures of Melancholy*, modeled on Milton’s *Il Penseroso*, was published by Robert Dodsley in 1747. This blank verse poem, comparable in length to *The Enthusiast*, is also a defense of an aesthetic mode, but a gloomy Gothic one, rather than a natural one. In particular, Warton is concerned with the literal space that Gothic ruins provide for meditation and reflection:

Beneath yon ruin'd abbey's moss-grown pile
Oft let me sit, at twilight hour of eve,
Where thro' some western window the pale moon
Pours her long-levell'd rule of streaming light;
While sullen sacred silence reigns around,
Save the lone screech-owl's note, who builds his bow'r
Amid the mould'ring caverns dark and damp,
Or the calm breeze, that rustles in the leaves
Of flaunting ivy, that with mantle green
Invests some wasted tow'r.³⁶

Pleasures of Melancholy was one of the targets of “To a Gentleman” and an inspiration for Thomas Denton’s *Immortality*, but Warton matured far beyond either poem over the course of his lifetime. Since much of the next 30 years were taken up with his duties as Professor of Poetry at Oxford and then Poet Laureate, as well as with his *History*, Warton did not publish any collections of his own poetry until he reached middle age. *Poems. A New Edition*, appeared in 1777, a slim collection comprised of original pieces and occasional verses.³⁷ After this collection, Warton also continued to write occasional verse until his death in 1790. Not surprisingly, Warton’s later works show a much greater degree of skill than *The Pleasures of Melancholy*. However, there are some remarkable continuities between Warton’s poetic materials and priorities as a poet across the 30 or more years that intervened between them. Warton’s preference for natural settings and Gothic ruins only intensifies in the latter poems.

Warton’s later poems are far better intellectually equipped to discuss the problems of knowledge and aesthetics that appeared in his early work. *The Pleasures of Melancholy* capitalizes on the early Miltonic mode, as well as the fashion of “graveyard” poetry, but does not convey a sense of why melancholic and Gothic imagery are important. In two later poems, however, Warton wrestles with the implications of a lifelong taste for the Gothic and antiquated—that is, a taste for a non-functional aesthetic. His and Joseph’s bold rejections of classical taste in the 1740s looked, by the 1770s and ‘80s, like puerile rejections of truth and order. But these poems are not a repudiation of

Warton's tastes, merely an explanation. The ground Warton gives over is that truth, as classically conceived, is at odds with his enthusiastic taste.

Poems is a slim volume with fewer than thirty pieces. It opens with several inscriptions and occasional poems to various royal and aristocratic figures, but the two latter sections, Odes and Sonnets, contain its most innovative poetry. In these pieces, it is evident that there has been a great change in Warton's natural subjects and his methods of description. The ode "The First of April" is an almost entirely descriptive poem, enumerating the effects of oncoming spring on the landscape. Among the many signs of spring in the woods and cultivated countryside appear the freshly-sown seedlings in the fields:

Scant along the ridgy land
The beans their new-born ranks expand:
The fresh-turn'd soil with tender blades
Thinly the sprouting barley shades³⁸

The minuteness and detail of description here is unprecedented in Thomas Warton's poetry. While the syntax is stilted (it takes a moment to figure out that the blades of barley are thinly shading the soil, not the other way around) we see here for the first time a description of something that is not an idealized or generalized part of the environment, but that feels empirically real. The difference lies not just in the appearance of bean and barley sprouts as a fit subject for poetry, but here we sense the tender blade of attention being used for different aims than in Warton's earlier works.

For the rest of this chapter, I want to turn to two poems in which Warton trains this heightened attention onto Gothic buildings. The early Warton's preference for ruined abbeys might seem like a moody teenage obsession, but as Warton moved into maturity his preoccupation with Gothic architecture—both in real life and as poetic material—became a site of intense intellectual engagement. He often spent his summers travelling the countryside, visiting and taking notes on various medieval buildings for a projected history of Gothic architecture. The history never materialized, but the many notes, letters, and poems he left behind on the subject show how he

turned the raw materials of Gothic ruins into meditations on modernity, social structures, and the creation of knowledge. One place he visited, whose ruins are now entirely gone, was Vale Royal Abbey in Cheshire, which inspired an ode. Like the beginning of *Pleasures of Melancholy*, we sense a lone figure walking pensively among the ruins of the abbey, but the latter poem is both local and detailed in a way that *Pleasures of Melancholy* is not. It begins with an evening scene like Gray's or Collins', but moves quickly to detailed description of the ruins of the abbey itself, with

every battlement o'ergrown
With knotted thorns and the tall sapling's shade.

The prickly thistle sheds its plummy crest,
And matted nettles shade the crumbling mass [. . .]³⁹

These botanical images, compared to those in *Pleasures of Melancholy* or even Joseph's *Enthusiast*, are most striking when Warton is describing the cheerful daytime scenes that serve as a foil to gloomy contemplation.

After the detailed description of what the abbey looks like now—and what, through Warton's antiquarian expertise, we know it lacks—the speaker draws attention to himself for the first time and immediately questions his own aesthetic response to the abbey, the response we now realize was embodied in the detailed description of the ruins.

Ev'n now, amid the wavering ivy-wreaths,
(While kindred thoughts the pensive sounds inspire)
As the weak breeze in many a whisper breathes,
I seem to listen to the chanting quire. —

As o'er these shatter'd towers intent I muse,
Though rear'd by Charity's misguided zeal,
Yet can my breast soft Pity's sigh refuse,
Or conscious Candour's modest plea conceal?⁴⁰

Importantly, the speaker links his thoughts with his environment in the same moment that he questions the wisdom of indulging in the aesthetic pleasures of such a place. As the abbey draws him in completely—so much so that in the imaginary sounds of the choir the days of English

Catholicism seem to rise once more—he gains a keen sense of the compromising position he is in. Therefore he must call upon Christian and enlightened virtues—pity and candor—to explain his attraction to this place. The poem seems to imagine that there are only two alternatives—to identify with the Gothic/Catholic, or to side with Enlightenment and Anglicanism. However, it enacts a third alternative—the construction of the Gothic space, not as a historical or Catholic one, but a space where thought, attention, and emotion can range freely without the interference of intellectual programs. But having in some sense already made the best argument for partiality to Gothic ruins through the descriptive passages, the poem proceeds to continue its dualistic argument.

The next two stanzas state, in a tone of concession, that the abbey had been the place of Warton's standby, "Superstition blind" (41), but the poem goes on to enumerate the virtues of an abbey: shelter for travelers, the preservation of learning and the arts, among others.⁴¹ After the digression on the virtues of the abbey, the speaker is brought back to the present among the ruins:

Thus sings the Muse, all pensive and alone;
Nor scorns, within the deep fane's inmost cell,
To pluck the grey moss from the mantled stone,
Some holy founder's mouldering name to spell.

Thus sings the Muse:--yet partial as she sings,
With fond regret surveys these ruin'd piles:
And with fair images of antient things
The captive bard's obsequious mind beguiles.⁴²

The Muse's knowledge is partial in both senses of the word. She favors the knowledge to be found within the inmost cells of the abbey even as that knowledge itself—only the name of one of the abbey's founders—is trivial. The knowledge gathered in this place is not part of the project of universal Enlightenment; it is confined to the footnotes of history and the gratification of personal curiosity. And yet—the muse who plucks moss from a stone to read a name is gathering knowledge through direct and in this case intimate experience. Like "partial," "obsequious" also has a double meaning here. The poet's mind is pliant and obedient, sensitive to the play between memory,

imagination, and environment, but it is also performing rites for the dead—the obsequies of Gothic architecture.

The poet pardons the Muse who has bewitched his own mind, but ultimately his eccentric tastes, so contrary to the good of human society, must give way to the good of the whole. Thus the poem ends quite abruptly with the consolations of Enlightenment:

But much we pardon to th'ingenious Muse;
Her fairy shapes are trick'd by Fancy's pen:
Severer Reason forms far other views,
And scans the scene with philosophic ken.

From these deserted domes, new glories rise;
More useful institutes, adorning man,
Manners enlarg'd, and new civilities,
On fresh foundations build the social plan.

Science, on ampler plume, a bolder flight
Essay, escap'd from Superstition's shrine:
While freed Religion, like primeval light
Bursting from chaos spreads her warmth divine.⁴³

The poet's indulgences are countered with Reason's double-meaning words of visual knowledge. Reason forms "far other views"—that is, not only entirely different ideas, but also a far different visual perspective on the abbey than the partial Muse who gathers knowledge by plucking moss from stones. From this far different view, Reason "scans the scene with philosophic ken." That is, Reason scans the scene visually, but it also carries the connotation of scanning lines of verse and to judge. Likewise, her philosophic ken consists both of what she can see and what she knows—"ken" encompassing both of these meanings. The move from the partial Muse to Reason, then, is the move from local knowledge to knowledge on a grand scale. From Reason, social institutions arise, and Science and Religion burst forth from the ruins of Catholicism. These are the consolations of the loss of the Gothic: institutional knowledge and large-scale social improvements divested of superstition. Indeed, Religion's emergence from the abbey is a second Genesis, with the triumph of light over chaos.

Warton acknowledges that, rationally, there is no case to be made for partiality to Gothic ruins. But the structure of the poem tells a different story. In the last three stanzas, the reader is quickly hustled into Enlightenment and all particulars are pushed aside in favor of abstraction and generalization. While the first part of the poem lovingly dwells on the nettles, saplings, ivy, moss, and crumbling stone of the abbey, there is no room for such detail or intimate knowledge in the actions of Reason, Science, and Religion. With a sudden dynamism that borders on violence, they triumph over what the abbey had previously stood for. But by abandoning the abbey and casting its lot with Enlightenment, the poem has nowhere left to go. Attention to detail, direct bodily encounter, and the direct acquisition of knowledge—even though these seem to be Enlightenment scientific values—have no place in the institutional schemes of Reason and Science.

It is abstraction, not particulars, that allows Warton the pat ending and the quick closure of the Vale Royal Ode.⁴⁴ Here we have Collins reversed, as abstraction means for the first time alienation from the landscape rather than contact with it. As the Ode's hurried conclusion suggests, however, Warton had not fully worked through the problem of Gothic versus Enlightenment modes of knowledge. His most explicit undertaking of that theme would come five years later with his "Verses on Sir Joshua Reynolds's Painted Window at New-College, Oxford." The series of windows the poem refers to were installed in the 14th-century chapel of New College, Oxford in 1782-83. Sir Joshua Reynolds drew the designs for the windows, which featured several female figures in classical dress who represent various virtues. The installation of these neo-classical figures in a Gothic chapel provided Warton with a more public opportunity to meditate on the implications of his taste for the Gothic. The poem was printed as a pamphlet in 1782 and came out in a second edition in 1783 after the final installations had been finished.

Like the Ode at Vale Royal Abbey, "Verses" concedes Gothic taste to the importance of neoclassicism and Enlightened tastes and knowledge. Its tone is more light and humorous than the

meditative Vale Royal Ode, although this humor tends to mask Warton's reservations about Enlightenment knowledge. The humor is also playfully defensive, as it finally locates the taste for the Gothic not in the Muse of the Vale Royal Ode but in Warton himself, equating Gothic taste with personal eccentricity.

"Ah," the poem begins,

stay thy treacherous hand, forbear to trace
Those faultless forms of elegance and grace!
[. . .]
Nor steal, by strokes of art with truth combin'd,
The fond illusions of my wayward mind!⁴⁵

The speaker jokingly equates grace and elegance with treachery, and prefers his wayward mind over truth. As friendly and light-hearted as the tone is, a real sense of pain and alienation lurks under it.

Reynolds himself picked up on this in his short letter of thanks to Warton after the first edition publication:

It is a bijoux, it is a beautiful little thing, and I should have equally admired it, if I had not been so much interested in it as I certainly am; I owe you the greatest obligations for the Sacrifice which you have made, or pretend to have made, to modern Art, I say pretend, for tho' it be allowed that you have like a true Poet feigned marvelously well, and have opposed the two different stiles with the skill of a Connoisseur, yet I have no great confidence in the recantation of such an older offender; It is short, but it is a complete composition; it is a whole, the struggle is I think eminently beautifull

—From bliss long felt unwillingly we part

Ah spare the weakness of a lovers heart!

It is not much to say that your Verses are by far the best that ever my name was concern'd in. I am sorry therefore my name was not hitch'd in in the body of the Poem, if the title page should be lost it will appear to be address'd to Mr Jervais⁴⁶

"Mr. Jervais" was Thomas Jervais, the Irish glass painter who painted Reynolds' designs on the windows, and whose enamel technique was quite popular in the 1770s and '80s. Jervais was a well-known artist in his own right, and the New College Chapel windows are said to be the finest example of his art. Reynolds' concern is with the last verse-paragraph of the poem, which in the first edition of 1782 began, "ARTIST, tis thine, from the broad window's height | To add new lustre to

religious light.”⁴⁷ At Reynolds’ prompting, Warton changed it to “REYNOLDS, tis thine” for the second edition in 1783. Reynolds’ comment seems to be a response to the fact that the final lines of the poem mostly abandon considerations of form (that is, Reynolds’ contribution to the windows) to fixate on considerations of color and light. Neo-classicism and modern art, as both Warton and Reynolds see them, are embodied in the forms of the women, but despite the poem’s deliberate evocation of the struggle between Gothic and Classic, it is ultimately window-making technology that concerns Warton here.

The last lines of the poem show its vexed relationship with light, and by extension, metaphors of Enlightenment. As much as Warton tries, as he did in “Vale Royal” to associate modern neo-classical knowledge with modernity and Enlightenment, he was confronted with the contradiction that the brilliant, jewel-like colors of Medieval stained glass allow more light and are far more permanent than the Reynolds/Jervais windows’ milky translucent enamel. Warton knew well the differences between Jervais’ technique and those of Medieval craftsmen. He was interested in preserving bits and pieces from Medieval ruins, particularly what he called painted glass. Medieval painted glass as Warton knew it was different from Jervais’ method, which involved coating the glass with a translucent enamel glaze that was then baked on. Medieval painted glass, by contrast, was made by processes that stained the glass throughout. In some cases, this meant melting sand with various minerals that would tint the final product, or by coating the glass with a transparent paint made of metallic oxides and ground glass. To produce yellows and oranges, a silver stain was applied to the back of the glass which then penetrated and stained the glass as it was fired.⁴⁸ Medieval painted glass, then, was not only more transparent, but its color was far more durable than enameled glass. Indeed, the Reynolds/Jervais window is said to be “much deteriorated” in the present.⁴⁹ In attempting to praise the enameled glass, Warton is unable to disguise the brilliance of stained glass:

“Ye Colours, that th’unwary sight amaze, | And only dazzle in the noontide blaze!” which he contrasts with

Those tints, that steal no glories from the day,
Nor ask the sun to lend his streaming ray;
The doubtful radiance of contending dyes,
That faintly mingle, yet distinctly rise;
Twixt light and shade the transitory strife;
The feature blooming with immortal life:⁵⁰

An advantage of enameled glass is that its colors can be seen no matter the light outside, whereas stained glass is dark unless illuminated from without. Even so, the stained glass amazes and dazzles the sight even as it depends on the sun’s rays—perhaps like divine inspiration—to do so. The dependable and consistent enameled glass is of “doubtful radiance,” whose colors “faintly mingle” even as they are distinctly clear at all times. As in the Vale Royal Ode, the Gothic is a place to see detail, brightly and clearly, if less reliably. Thus Warton, even though embarrassed by the subjectivism of his Gothic taste, struggles with metaphors of light and Enlightenment. In the case of this real-life clash of Gothic and neo-classical, he cannot ignore the evidence of his eyes.

Considerations of light and color aside, it is clear that correct attribution was not Reynolds’ only concern. The poem, as flattered and pleased with it as Reynolds was, did not leave him convinced of the sincerity of Warton’s “conversion” to neo-classical tastes. As the poem states and Reynolds suggests, old habits of mind and feeling are difficult to change. Thus Reynolds’ reading of the poem is as perceptive as it is self-interested. His playful remarks about Warton’s false conversion are followed by a semicolon and paragraph break, and then begin anew—almost as if after a re-perusal of the poem. Significantly, the lines that he quotes, “From bliss long felt unwillingly we part: | Ah, spare the weakness of a lover’s heart!” and those that portray the struggle he refers to occur immediately before the speaker’s conversion—or rather, surrender—to a modern aesthetic.

Chase not the phantoms of my fairy dream,
Phantoms that shrink at Reason’s painful gleam!
That softer touch, insidious artist, stay,

Nor to new joys my struggling breast betray!⁵¹

In the end, he concedes victory to Reynolds, however:

Thy powerful hand has broke the Gothic chain,
And brought my bosom back to truth again:
To truth, by not peculiar taste confined,
Whose universal pattern strikes mankind;
To truth, whose bold and unresisted aim
Checks frail caprice, and fashion's fickle claim;
To truth, whose charms deception's magic quell,
And bind coy Fancy in a stronger spell.⁵²

As in the Vale Royal Ode, truth and enlightened knowledge are dynamic, powerful, and violent. Fancies flee before Reason's "painful" gleam. However—is the enameled glass window actually powerful enough to provide such a gleam? We have little time to question—Reynolds' painterly hand "has broke" Warton's Gothic tastes, truth itself "strikes" mankind and is "bold and unresisted" in checking, quelling, and binding alternative tastes and modes of knowledge. The price of Enlightenment is heavy for Warton, despite his attempts to include his poetry within its program.

Conclusion

While Joseph Warton most explicitly explored the question of what Nature means in poetry, it was Collins and Thomas Warton who struggled longest trying to understand the relationship between the material world and human knowledge. Collins' career as a poet ended before he could fully articulate his vision of how allegory and superstitions, even though they are abstractions, allow us to understand the concrete. Thomas Warton, on the other hand, was unwilling to persist in his defense of the Gothic, even as his poetry shows—against his own will—that Gothic taste creates a space for environmental knowledge that Enlightenment destroys. The anonymous poet of "To a Gentleman," then, was both right and wrong: superstitious and Gothic materials may not have constituted proper materials for poetry in themselves, but they were useful to Collins and Warton as each poet struggled toward an understanding of the relationship between poetry, its materials, and

the material world. In the next chapter, we will see two poets, Charlotte Smith and John Clare, take up this question where Collins and the Wartons left off. While Collins and the Wartons did not entirely succeed in their quest for a new set of materials, the work of these enthusiasts shows us how poetry that can look directly at the material world came into existence between the mid- and late eighteenth century.

By 1784, the publication of Smith's first collection *Elegiac Sonnets*, "nature" had come to mean what it colloquially means now: the material world that exists apart from human creation. In the subsequent works treated in this dissertation, we will encounter little of the ambiguity surrounding the meaning of nature that appears in *The Enthusiast*. The purpose of this chapter, then, has been to demonstrate that the transition in literature from the mid- to late-eighteenth century from nature-as-natural (not "tortur'd") to nature-as-material was bound together with questions about how to make knowledge about it.⁵³ I began with these poets, not because we can see our later understanding of nature in their works, but because in their poetry we see first the evolution of the concept of Nature as material for poetry and second their varying attempts to come to terms with the implications of their new materials. The following chapters will deal with nature as material environment quite literally—in the meticulous natural history writing of Smith and Clare, the autobiographical testimony of scientific agricultural writing, and in *l'effet de réel* of Jane Austen's landscapes in *Mansfield Park*.⁵⁴

¹ "To a Gentleman, Who Desired Proper Materials for a Monody," *The General Magazine of Arts and Sciences*, 1755, 134.

² Thomas Denton, *Immortality: Or, the Consolation of Human Life. A Monody*. (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1754), lines 1, 37, 40, 66, 67, 74 98.

³ Mark Akenside, *The Pleasures of Imagination: A Poem, in Three Books. By Mark Akenside, M.D. ...* (A. Wilson, 1744), 50, 97, 53; William Mason, *Poems by William Mason, M.A* (printed by A. Ward, and sold by Robert Horsfield, No. XXII. in Ludgate-Street; T. Cadell, in the Strand; and W. Tesseyman, York, 1764), 21; Robert Blair, *The Grave: A Poem* (M. Fenner, 1743), 4, 5.

⁴ Charles Grosvenor Osgood, *A Concordance to the Poems of Edmund Spenser* (Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1915), 955–56; John Milton, Stella Purce. Revard, and Lawrence. Revard, *Complete Shorter Poems: [with Original Spelling and Punctuation]*, Poems.Selections, xxii, 576 p. (Malden,

MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). For instance, Mason was inspired by “Thetis’ tinsel-slipper’d feet” in Milton’s *Comus*.

⁵ Interestingly, it is speculated that Thomas Warton himself wrote a parody on the same subject, entitled, “Ode to Horror. In the Allegoric, Descriptive, Alliterative, Epithetical, Fantastic, Hyperbolic, and Diabolical Style of our modern Ode-writers, and Monody-mongers.” If Warton did not write the poem, it is significant that he published it in *The Oxford Sausage* nonetheless. His editorial note says, “The author was himself a descriptive poet of the first class. Mr. William Collins thought himself aimed at by this piece of ridicule. His odes had just been published; and the last lines seemed to refer to a particular passage in them.” William Lisle Bowles, who reprinted the “Ode” and Warton’s note as a footnote to his own edition of Pope, claimed that “It might pass for a *serious Descriptive Ode* of the eighteenth century, with a certain class of poetical readers.” While the “Ode to Horror” parodies by making use of clichéd and overwrought language at every turn, such language does not appear naked, as it does in “To a Gentleman.” Alexander Pope, *The Works of Alexander Pope, Esq.*, vol 2., ed. William Lisle Bowles (J. Johnson, 1806), 362–63.

⁶ Samuel Wells Singer, ed., *T. Warton. J. Warton*, vol. 68, *The British Poets. Including Translations. In One Hundred Volumes* (Chiswick: Printed by C. Whittingham, College House, 1822), 29, 43, 111, 116, 57, 59, 100. The word “pile,” meaning an edifice, appears seven times in their combined works, each time accompanied by a different adjective.

⁷ I am indebted to a wide range of scholarship about Collins and the Warton brothers from the past century. Much criticism has tended to focus on either how these writers prefigure (or don’t prefigure) Romanticism and their contributions to aesthetic tastes in the mid-eighteenth century. Because Joseph Warton in particular promoted an aesthetic based on pleasure and imagination, scholars have tended to focus on aestheticism in these poets, rather than the role that the material may play in their poetry. (An important exception is Richard Wendorf’s book on Collins, which pays a great deal of attention to nature in Collins’ poetry.) Nevertheless, my work on these poets has been bolstered by many sources, the most important of which I list below: Marshall Brown, *Preromanticism*, xiv, 500 p. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991); Arthur Fenner, “The Wartons ‘Romanticize’ Their Verse,” *Studies in Philology* 53, no. 3 (July 1956): 501–8; Northrop Frye, “Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility,” *English Literary History* 23, no. 2 (June 1956): 144–52; Edmund Gosse, *Two Pioneers of Romanticism: Joseph and Thomas Warton*, British Academy Warton Lecture on English Poetry, VI, 19 p. (London: Oxford University Press, 1915); Joan Pittock, *The Ascendancy of Taste: The Achievement of Joseph and Thomas Warton* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1973); Richard Wendorf, *William Collins and Eighteenth-Century English Poetry* (Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 1981); Elise Deborah White, *Romantic Returns: Superstition, Imagination, History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

⁸ Joseph Warton, *Odes on Various Subjects*, 2nd ed. (London: R. Dodsley, 1747), 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 6 ll. 1-4.

¹⁰ qtd in. Wendorf, *William Collins and Eighteenth-Century English Poetry*, 29.

¹¹ Singer, *T. Warton. J. Warton*, 68:257 lines 25-38.

¹² The partial concealment of resources, as opposed to conspicuous consumption, would come to be a major part of the Picturesque style later in the century. A picturesque landscape designer might choose to install a primitive cottage on his or her property instead of a costly fountain or Grecian temple, making his or her true wealth a matter of speculation. Likewise, picturesque gardens often hid property boundaries to make estates seem more extensive than they were. Sydney K. Robinson delineates the political ramifications of this strategy. Sidney K. Robinson, *Inquiry into the Picturesque*, xiv, 180 p. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

¹³ Singer, *T. Warton. J. Warton*, 68:261 lines 145-64.

¹⁴ Thomas Gray, William Mason, and Norton Nicholls, *The Letters of Thomas Gray: Including the Correspondence of Gray and Mason* (G. Bell and sons, 1900), 153–54.

¹⁵ Much of Collins' small canon explicitly or implicitly discusses this topic. His "Ode on Poetical Character," "The Manners," and "Ode to a Friend on His Return &c." are all about writing poetry. Odes like "To Evening," "To Simplicity," and "To Fear" are not about their subjects themselves, but about how to write about the subjects.

¹⁶ Thomas Gray and William Collins, *Poetical Works*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press., 1977), 116.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 116–17 A facsimile of Collins' annotated title page appears on p. 117.

¹⁸ Wendorf, *William Collins and Eighteenth-Century English Poetry*, 127.

¹⁹ Gray and Collins, *Poetical Works*, 156 ll. 29–32.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 156–57 ll. 34–36.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 157 ll. 49–52.

²² *Ibid.*, 158.

²³ *Ibid.* ll. 1–4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 159 ll. 13–18.

²⁵ *Ibid.* ll. 19–30.

²⁶ *Ibid.* ll. 50–54.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 160 ll. 71–78.

²⁸ While this discussion focuses on superstition, knowledge, and their relationship to materiality and the materials of poetry in the Highlands Ode, Deborah Elise White's chapter, "Superstitions of Enlightenment: British Subjects and 'the subject of poetry' in the Odes of William Collins" is an indispensable account of subject matter and political subjectivity in the same poem. White, *Romantic Returns: Superstition, Imagination, History*, chap. 29–60.

²⁹ Gray and Collins, *Poetical Works*, 167.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 168–73, ll. 13–17.

³¹ *Ibid.*, lines 188–89.

³² *Ibid.*, lines 196–99.

³³ *Ibid.*, lines 200–203.

³⁴ Warton, *Odes on Various Subjects*, 20.

³⁵ Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry: From the Close of the Eleventh Century to the Commencement of the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 2 (London: Printed for, and sold by J. Dodsley, 1778), 462.

³⁶ Thomas Warton, *The Poetical Works of the Late Thomas Warton, and Poet Laureate*, ed. Richard Mant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1802), 70–71 lines 28–37.

³⁷ John A. Vance, *Joseph and Thomas Warton: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York and London: Garland Pub., 1983), 19.

³⁸ Thomas Warton, *The Poetical Works of the Late Thomas Warton, and Poet Laureate*, ed. Richard Mant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1802), vol. 1, 179 ll. 27–30.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 131 lines. 9–14.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 134 lines 33–40.

⁴¹ I say *an* abbey because I do not know if Warton is using Vale Royal Abbey as an emblem of all abbeys, or if he means to praise it specifically. Given the tumultuous history of the Vale Royal Abbey, it is difficult to know how much leniency Warton grants the abbey's former inhabitants—and how much candor he asks from his own reader in treating the abbey sympathetically. In a footnote to the poem, Warton tells the reader that the abbey was established by Edward I to fulfill a vow he made to God when his ship was caught in a storm. However, what Warton does not mention (and what he might not have known) is that the history of the abbey was marked with

violence, exploitation, and scandal; an account of its history reads like the most imaginative anti-Catholic propaganda. The locals resented the construction of the abbey, which split up already-existing parishes. The monks and locals—both peasants and gentry—had violent confrontations throughout the 15th century in particular. British History Online, “Houses of Cistercian monks - The abbey of Vale Royal,” *A History of the County of Chester: Volume 3*, June 22, 2003, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=39978#n73>.

⁴² Warton, *The Poetical Works of the Late Thomas Warton, and Poet Laureate*, 138 lines. 73-8.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 138–39 lines 81-92.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of the relationship between abstraction and empiricism (versus particularity and objectivity) in the late 18th century see Chapter Three.

⁴⁵ Warton, *The Poetical Works of the Late Thomas Warton, and Poet Laureate*, 54–62 lines 1-6.

⁴⁶ Thomas Warton, *The Correspondence of Thomas Warton*, ed. David Farier (Athens and London: U of Georgia P, n.d.), 452–53.

⁴⁷ Warton, *The Poetical Works of the Late Thomas Warton, and Poet Laureate*, 62 lines 101-102.

⁴⁸ Victoria and Albert Museum, “Making a Stained Glass Panel,” January 13, 2011, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/m/making-a-stained-glass-panel/>.

⁴⁹ Lionel Cust, “Jervais, Thomas (d. 1799),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁵⁰ Warton, *The Poetical Works of the Late Thomas Warton, and Poet Laureate*, 58 lines, 49-54.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 57, lines 37-40.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 59–60 lines 63-70.

⁵³ I am *not* suggesting, however, that the transition between these meanings of “nature” can be proven through the work of a single poet. The concepts defined under the word “nature” have a complex history of evolution, and it is by no means the case that *The Enthusiast* is proof of a wholesale transition from one meaning to another. For instance, Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English Language*, first published in 1755, gives “An imaginary being supposed to preside over the material and animal world” as the first definition of nature and “The native state or properties of any thing, by which it is discriminated from others” as the second. Johnson’s definition asks us to think about nature allegorically first, and then to think about it in terms of a being’s “natural” state—closer to the study of human nature in Collins’ “The Manners.” Johnson’s eighth definition of nature, “The state or operation of the material world,” is the closest to modern colloquial usage. “Nature - A Dictionary of the English Language - Samuel Johnson - 1755,” accessed August 18, 2015, <http://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/?p=15301>.

⁵⁴ For the rest of the dissertation, I will write *nature* without capitalization or quotation marks as the term is essentially the same as in modern usage. Following Timothy Morton and Michael Ziser, however, I will continue to use the term *environment* over *nature* when not directly referring to the language of texts.

CHAPTER TWO

Charlotte Smith, John Clare, and the World as If They Had Witnessed It

Despite William Collins' ambivalence, documented in the previous chapter, about whether or not poetry can represent the material world, it would be a mistake to assume that he had no interest in knowing the material environment in a literal way. Among the many scholarly footnotes included in his 1746 *Odes*, one points to the borrowing of ideas not from other pieces of literature, but from history and science. Reflecting on the relationship between Great Britain and France in the "Ode to Liberty," the speaker begins not with the political relations between the two nations, but with their geographical proximity and the geological theory behind it:

Beyond the Measure vast of Thought,
The Works, the Wizzard *Time* has wrought!
The *Gaul*, 'tis held of antique Story,
Saw *Britain* link'd to his now adverse Strand ‡,
No Sea between, nor Cliff sublime and hoary,
He pass'd with unwet Feet thro' all our Land.

‡ This Tradition is mention'd by several of our old Historians. Some Naturalists too have endeavour'd to support the Probability of the Fact, by Arguments drawn from the correspondent Disposition of the two opposite Coasts. I don't remember that any Poetical Use has hitherto been made of it.¹

Although concerned with what would become the science of geology, Collins' note does not seem much like a part of scientific discourse—he does not even mention the names of the historians and naturalists who have posited the theory that the island of Britain was once a part of the Continent. What interests me most, however, is that Collins is aware that he is using this information in an entirely new way. The theory of Britain's pre-historical attachment to the Continent, whether true or false, whether it belongs to the historians or the naturalists, is of interest to him because it has never

been part of “Poetical Usage.” In this stanza, Collins deliberately creates new poetic materials out of disciplines that create facts about material existence, but the reader can only recognize that he is doing so because of his note.

Sixty years later, another poet would return to the same geological conjecture, this time after geology emerged as a modern scientific discipline: Charlotte Smith in her posthumously published masterpiece “Beachy Head.”² Smith glosses the lines imaginatively describing the “vast Concussion; when the Omnipotent | stretched forth his arm, and rent the solid hills” of the land dividing England and France with the following note:

Alluding to an Idea that this Island was once joined to the Continent of Europe, and torn from it by some convulsion of Nature. I confess I never could trace the resemblance between the two countries. Yet the cliffs about Dieppe, resemble the chalk cliffs on the Southern coast. But Normandy has no likeness whatever to the part of England opposite to it.³

There are two significant differences between Collins’ and Smith’s notes. The first is that Smith explicitly attributes the separation of Britain and France to “Nature,” a nature that is strictly material. The nature that Collins had wanted to observe in “The Manners” is nowhere to be seen here. The second is that, while Collins contents himself with citing, but not naming other authors, Smith cites in the same way but downplays the works of others in order to speak from the authority of her own experience. “An idea” about England and France exists in the abstract, but Smith says “*I confess I never could*” trace the resemblance, implying that she had examined the coasts of England and Normandy, despite the fact that she did find a resemblance in the part of Normandy near Dieppe. Even though the “Idea” does in fact corroborate her own experience, she manages to make her experience the final word on the subject.

However, in spite of the differences between the notes themselves, neither poet was unique in writing them. By 1806, the year of Smith’s death, notes to poetry involving historical and scientific facts had become commonplace. The scholarly note, which points out the poet’s literary references

and thus also points to the poem's creation from other texts, came to share space with notes directed toward other disciplines of knowledge production. The reading public was ambivalent about the value of notes themselves, but the seeming ubiquity of poems with notes speaks of a great shift in thinking about the relationship between poetic materials and the material world that happened between the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Poetry became accountable to systems of knowledge for disseminating facts about the material world. And as Smith's note shows, authority by this time consisted of not only citing texts or the ideas of others, but citing one's own experience.

This aspect of poetic authority—the poet's claims of having directly witnessed what he or she writes about—is the focus of this chapter; and my analysis will center not only on Smith but also another poet who employed a similar rigor in his natural history poetry: John Clare. Both are known for their attentiveness toward their environments, although they used different methods for bearing witness to their experience. While Smith's notes allowed her to step out from behind her poetic persona to more explicitly attest to her experience, Clare's pervasive descriptions seem to directly transcribe the objects of his senses first-hand. Both poets, however, understand the limitations of poetic representation, and use claims to direct experience as a way to mitigate these limitations. Smith and Clare are thus connected to the debate about "naturalness" in poetry which began with the poets we saw in Chapter One. In this chapter, I want to think about Smith and Clare's work alongside the critical literature on this topic, particularly Joseph Warton's *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope* (1756) and John Aikin's *Essay on the Application of Natural History to Poetry* (1777). I begin with the natural history notes appended to Charlotte Smith's poetry, which may be one end result of eighteenth century debates about the relationship between science and literature and afterward, I will turn to Warton and Aikin's works to see how debate about the use of natural history in poetry arose and how Smith may have responded to it. Finally, I will consider the practices

of description, both as an aesthetic effect and a method for conveying knowledge, in John Clare's poetry of the 1820s and 30s. My concern here is not to prove that Smith or Clare observed environmental phenomena more closely than other poets, but that their aesthetics of "naturalness" and verisimilitude is based upon the particular theories of knowledge to which they subscribed. To these poets, I argue, actually witnessing phenomena was only important insofar as it allowed one to write about things *as if one had witnessed them*.

Whereas in the last chapter we saw poets working through the implications of representing one's material environment in poetry, the poets and critics featured in this chapter take for granted that poetry can and should represent and make knowledge about the environment. In thinking about the reasons for this shift, I will make recourse to both the history of science and literary history. In particular, Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison's concept of epistemic virtues undergirds my analysis of the writers featured in the next two chapters. Epistemic virtues, which Daston and Galison apply to visual rather than written practices of making scientific knowledge, are the "ideals and [. . .] historically specific ways of investigating and picturing nature" in the scientific culture of a given time.⁴ Daston and Galison use this term to chart the rise and fall of objectivity across the history of science, making the case that scientific practices have never been inherently objective, but rather that objectivity arose in the mid-nineteenth century in response to ideological shifts across Europe. While the argument that scientific ideals and practices emerge from culture is nothing new, the idea of epistemic virtues is particularly useful for understanding why some writers of both scientific and non-scientific literature in this period feel the need to base their knowledge on certain principles.⁵ The period of time covered by this dissertation ends in the mid-1830s before the conclusive enshrining of objectivity as an epistemic virtue and therefore what we will find will only sometimes be recognizable as science. My goal is to understand through both published works and private commentary which epistemic virtues were held by the poets and critics concerned with making

poetry an instrument of natural history. For these two different groups of writers, however, their goals are different although they share the same epistemic virtues. Warton and Aikin—both indifferent poets themselves who often failed to take their own advice—advocated a return to accurate description and correct use of natural history, improving the problem of bad poetry on a larger social scale. Smith and Clare, however, were more motivated by the integrity of their art in a less than sympathetic world. Both poets had little else to lay claim to but their experiences. For them, faithful accounting of what has happened is one of the few ways to affirm one's existence.

Charlotte Smith's "Beachy Head"

Charlotte Smith died on October 28th, 1806 after a difficult life and long illness. Publisher Joseph Johnson issued her last, unfinished volume *Beachy Head with Other Poems* in the following January. Accordingly, the reviews of it that appeared served as both criticism and obituary. In the *British Critic*, the reviewer lavished praise both on Smith's long poetic career and on the individual *Beachy Head* volume. Smith's poetry in general was characterized by "a most vivid fancy, refined taste, and extraordinary sensibility."⁶ However, he claims,

We could not, indeed, always accord with her in sentiment. With respect to some subjects beyond her line of experience, reading, and indeed talent, she was unfortunately wayward and preposterous; but her poetic feeling and ability have rarely been surpassed by any individual of her sex.⁷

The reviewer never states what these wayward subjects are, or how they led her to misguided sentiment. Is he referring to her displays of scientific knowledge? Her radical politics? Her often self-pitying rehearsals of her life story? However, with the criteria of "experience" and "reading," he suggests that her "preposterousness" stems from a lack of correct knowledge. With no further explanation, he praises the poems in the *Beachy Head* volume without exception, and then ends his account by noting that, "—Notes are added to all the poems, but of no material value."⁸ The meaning behind a lack of "material value" is also unclear. Does it mean that the knowledge the notes

communicate is worthless? If Smith's notes were of no help to the reader—and helping the reader is, after all, one of the ostensible purposes of notes—then what value would they have? The question is all the more urgent given that notes always accompanied Smith's poetry.

Twenty-two years earlier, Smith had made her debut in the literary world with *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784): ten sonnets and a single, modest footnote. As she wrote, revised, and published more poetry, Smith expanded her notes in size and purpose, and just as her poetry ranged from the elegiac and expressive to the political and descriptive, so her notes ranged from the personal to the argumentative to the pedantic. From her popular *Elegiac Sonnets*, to long poems *The Emigrants* and “Beachy Head,” and in her short poems on natural history, Smith's notes speak in different voices and to different purposes. In Smith's poetry, notes live a dual life, filling in gaps in the reader's knowledge as it relates to the poem while at the same time standing alone as tenuously connected texts. Since her poetic manuscripts have not survived, we will never know precisely what role notes played in her process of composition—although letters to her publisher suggest that Smith may have written the poems with notes in mind, but composed the notes separately.⁹

From the very first, Smith's notes do not justify their existence to readers. Her first published footnote appeared in the second edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* appended to the following lines of Sonnet II, “Written at the Close of Spring”:

The garland's fade that Spring so lately wove,
Each simple flower which she had nurs'd in dew,
*Anemonies, that spangled every grove
The primrose wan, and hare-bell mildly blue.¹⁰

At the bottom of the page, the note reads: “*Anemony Nemoroso, the wood anemony.” Although the poem mentions five flowers in total (the violet [line 5] and purple orchis [line 6] in addition to the anemone, primrose, and hare-bell quoted here) only the anemone has a note. The poem, then, is not interested in a complete catalogue of flower species—Smith neither cut nor added more notes to this poem throughout all subsequent editions of *Elegiac Sonnets*. This note highlights two ambiguities

in Smith's practice of annotation: the text's anticipation of ignorance in the reader, and the obscurity of the note's purpose. Why does this wood anemone require a note? The reader who stands to gain most from the it—someone who is unfamiliar with the wood anemone entirely—will be the least helped, since the common and taxonomic names of a plant rarely help one visualize it, or understand where it grows. Smith's readers would have found the note helpful only if they were willing or able to consult an expensive botanical dictionary with colored plates. By its very existence, the anemone note suggests an unlikely but ideal reader: someone familiar enough with botany to imagine several species of anemone in the moment of reading the line, but who would then demand more accuracy than the poem itself could supply. With the help of the footnote that narrows the flower down to a single species, this reader would be able to thereafter properly imagine the sight invoked by the poem. The scientific name corrects the deficiency: it is a packet of knowledge pointing out the flower's minute features that distinguish it from other species of anemone, and also suggesting the conditions and region in which it grows. It is capable of a kind of precision that cannot fit easily into poetry. Because Smith's aim is not to compose a systematic treatise on botany or supply her readers with detailed information about real-world flowers, the note is unbound by certain conventions of science—such as exhaustive cataloguing and consistency—and does not need to justify its purpose.

With its roots in glosses on Biblical and classical texts, the note has long been a favorite expression of pedantry. In his study on the historical footnote, Anthony Grafton shows how the foot/endnote evolved from a supplemental source of evidence and commentary in the Middle Ages to a powerful and understated tool of argumentation by the eighteenth century. And, as Grafton shows, changes to note writing practices over time were responses to both changes in scholarly practices and philosophical ideas.¹¹ But as for the note's literary use, Grafton confines himself to its better-known use in eighteenth century satire, where it functions much as “as the hockey-masked

villain in an American horror film uses a chain saw.”¹² However, Smith’s natural history notes serve a different purpose, not forwarding an argument, satirical or otherwise, but instead displaying what the author knows *precisely when* there is no legitimate reason to include that information in the main text. In the face of Smith’s copious scientific notes, two explanations seem to make sense. The first is that, as Ann K. Mellor claims, they establish Smith’s “credentials as a naturalist” before Smith goes on to question male-dominated accounts of natural history.¹³ For Jacqueline Labbe, Smith “used notational space to enlarge her creative space.”¹⁴ They allow room for political critique, particularly in establishing an authorial persona that would be rejected if it were part of the main text, but slips in, undetected through the notes. While neither of these claims is untrue, they account for neither the selectiveness nor the near-uselessness of many of the natural history notes. Mellor sees the notes as a means to an end (scientific authority), while Labbe has isolated the most interesting and politically significant of Smith’s notes to make her point. Neither reading accounts for the rote, mundane, and pedantic notes—whether they simply give the Latin name of a species, reel off a textbook description of a historical event, or cite literary allusions. My surmise as to why Smith’s notes seem so opaque in their purpose, and why they seem so recalcitrant to being fitted into larger arguments about significance, is that Smith is guided by certain epistemic virtues that she does not make explicit. The anemone note, however, is too slender of a clue to go on. If we begin looking at more apparatus—not simply Smith’s notes, but her letters—things will become clearer.

The first and most fundamental belief behind Smith’s natural history poetry is that the real, material environment exists outside of poetry and can be portrayed by it. While her natural history poems are often abstract in the sense that their purpose is to end with morals, rather than portray nature for its own sake, Smith never resorts to the kinds of allegorical abstractions that were so common with the poets at mid-century. (In particular, see the discussion of William Collins in Chapter One.) In the following note, which introduces the natural history fables in the *Beachy Head*

volume, she avoids a potential charge of plagiarism by attributing a chance coincidence of phrase to an unerring fact of physical existence:

There is nothing I am more desirous of avoiding, even in a trifle like this, than the charge of plagiarism. I must in the present instance defend myself by stating that so long since as April 1805, Mr. Johnson was in possession of the MS. copy of this Fable. In July 1806, a friend brought with her from London, a volume called “The Birds of Scotland, with other Poems,” in which I read, what, if my fable had been first published, I might perhaps have thought very like an imitation. My lines of the Lark are:

“[. . .] That even the shepherd lad upon the hill,
Hearing his matin note so shrill,
With shaded eyes against the luster bright,
Scares sees him twinkling in a *flood of light*—”

Mr. Graham, in a more lengthened description, says of the Lark:

“[. . .] the ploughman at his furrow end,
[. . .] with rais’d hand
Shadows his half-shut eyes, striving to scan
The songster melting in the *flood of light*—”

The extreme resemblance of these passages may be accounted for, however, by the observation very justly made, that natural objects being equally visible to all, it is very probably that descriptions of such objects will often be alike.¹⁵

“Mr. Graham” is James Grahame, a Scottish clergyman known for his popular descriptive poem *The Sabbath*. Grahame published *The Birds of Scotland, with Other Poems* in 1806, while Smith was still working on the manuscript of *Beachy Head with Other Poems*. Smith’s defense is only partly successful. She saves herself from the charge of plagiarism, but at the cost of bringing attention to her use of the tired phrase “flood of light.” This phrase occurs not only in Grahame’s poem, but in other well known poems and collections throughout the eighteenth century: Dodsley’s *Miscellany*, the popular *Elegant Extracts*, Pope’s “Satire V. On Women,” and Night Seven of Edward Young’s *The Complaint*, for instance. The problem here is not that Smith and Grahame have seen the same thing (a plowman or shepherd shielding his eyes to look for the singing Skylark) but that they have read and absorbed the same phrases. On the surface, this would seem to be the same kind of failure that “To a Gentleman” had outlined in 1755, in which the failure to find original poetic materials is a failure of phraseology that has nothing to do with the material world. However, Smith’s reasoning here

suggests otherwise. Perhaps to deflect the embarrassing coincidence of phrase, she turns the reader's attention instead to the natural environment, which she explicitly locates outside both poems. Her understanding of the relationship between poetry and environment is unambiguous: "natural objects" exist objectively and have an existence separate from any human consciousness. It is possible, then, that two poets could see the same thing in the world and write about it in similar ways.

If the first of Smith's epistemological assumptions is that different people can share the same view of the material world, for her the virtue is to be found in going against the grain by relying on one's own view above others. While putting together the text of the fifth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* in early 1797, Smith wrote to Cadell and Davies, saying that the main text was finished and ready, but the notes "will take at least three days, As I will not be told as I was before (by Dr Darwin & another judge) that I was deficient in correctness of natural History."¹⁶ Presumably, Smith means here that her labors in writing the notes will be longer because she will have to make reference to books, rather than relying on a person to give her precise corrections. Later in the same letter, Smith discusses the three poems by her friend living in Portugal, Henrietta O'Neill, which were to be included. However, Smith was doubtful about one of the poems that described plants and natural scenery around Lisbon, which, because of O'Neill's "want of being accustomed to study such objects, are I am sure represented by wrong names & in other respects incorrect." For Smith, even though O'Neill's poem is otherwise "beautiful," it cannot go to press while it contains natural historical inaccuracies. "Nothing is more easy to correct without injury to the Poetry or Spirit, but I have not been able to obtain any history of Portugal to enable me to do this, & am afraid I must omit the Poem on that account."¹⁷ From this letter we can see that accuracy in matters of natural history was a great concern for Smith. The error that led her to put cypress swamps in the northeastern United States in her novel *The Old Manor House* (1793) was the exception, rather than

the rule.¹⁸ But we also see here that while Smith relied on texts and on other people for her natural historical information, she clearly had a great amount of unease in doing so. For a cash-strapped woman attempting to use her writing to support her children, buying expensive volumes on natural history was impossible, and borrowing them meant lost time and perhaps lost dignity. And Smith would only trust her own eyes or the text of an expert, as we see by her omission of Henrietta O'Neill's poem. Although O'Neill was the one of the two women who had actually lived in Lisbon, her experience was not a suitable substitute for Smith's own.

Having established Smith's general approach to the relationship between poetry and environment, I will focus for the rest of this section on the *Beachy Head* volume. "Beachy Head" is Smith's most ambitious work. While focusing on its namesake cliff on the coast of Sussex, the poem contemplates natural and human history, both on a grand scale (creation of the cliffs when they were rent from mainland Europe, invasions of England over the course of centuries) and a local one (plants and animals that live on the cliff, the lives of smugglers who live near the shore). About a dozen shorter poems follow, most of which center on topics of natural history, either in a fanciful or didactic fashion. In accordance with the more scientific subject matter, the notes to the *Beachy Head* volume have a greater bulk and scope than the notes to the *Elegiac Sonnets*. These notes also require a different kind of labor from the reader: since there are no callouts, the reader must both anticipate which words and phrases will be noted and then find the note in the back of the volume if it exists. The reader has three choices, then: to flip back and forth constantly between the text of the poems and the end notes to look for any notes that might be there, to ignore the notes entirely, or to read the notes on their own as a separate work. The notes are loosely tethered to the main poetic text, discrete chunks of information that may or may not have any kind of necessary relationship to the poem. They provide us with leverage for thinking about how knowledge works in

Smith's poetry precisely because of their explicit engagement (or non-engagement) with public and private knowledge-making: natural history, national history, local history, and memory.

I should be clear, however, that Smith did not have the final say in how the notes were printed. As a posthumous volume, it has the feel of a work lacking the polish of authorial control. It begins with a short preface by Johnson stating that Smith has died, leaving the title poem unfinished; the volume lacks a table of contents. Because Smith intended the *Beachy Head* volume to match the two volumes of *Elegiac Sonnets*, it looks as though the entire volume was to be published under the heading "MISCELLANEOUS POEMS," which precedes the title of "Beachy Head" on the first page and is never followed by another such heading. Following Smith's wishes as stated in her July 1806 letter, Johnson printed the notes as endnotes, but omitted callouts she requested and failed to advertise the notes on the title page. As a result, it would be possible to read through all the poetry of the *Beachy Head* volume before realizing that one-third of the book consists of notes.

Because of the lack of note callouts, *Beachy Head: with other Poems* does not so much direct its readers' attention, but allows it to range freely inside the volume. The reader is far less likely to look at the notes in conjunction with the text because she would not even anticipate the need for them. Instead, she is presented with knowledge that she did not even know she needed. For instance, Smith annotates these lines that describe boys chasing a plover away from her nest in order to steal the eggs:

And often, from her nest, among the swamps,
Where the gemm'd sun-dew grows, or fring'd buck-bean,
They scare the plover. . . .¹⁹

Thusly:

Sun-dew.—*Drosera rotundifolia*.
Buck-bean.—*Menyanthes trifoliatum*.
Plover.—*Tringa vanellus*.²⁰

As with the wood anemone note, the need for these notes is not immediately obvious, since they could at best serve a small set of readers, well-versed enough in botany and ornithology to know or

have access to information about these specific species. Rather, they display a self-sufficient superfluity, a flouting of utility. They exist in loose association with the poem; they neither support nor depend upon it. Rendered on the page like poetry, they are pleasures of aesthetics and mastery, as well as displays of knowledge.

However, as the notes progress, they begin to betray a body of knowledge tied, not to public sources, but an individual subjectivity. In “Beachy Head,” the relationship between Smith and the poem’s speaker is murky. Over the course of her published works, Smith cultivated a public persona through her prefaces, mainly by rehearsing the details of her life story—her disastrous early marriage, financial difficulties, and the deaths of her children—in the prefaces to the successive editions of *Elegiac Sonnets*. She may have intended on continuing this persona in the *Beachy Head* volume, but the lack of a preface leaves the possibility in doubt. Even more doubtful is whether the persona in Smith’s prefaces is the same as the persona in her poetry, and whether either of those are the same one as in her notes. In any case, both the poem and the notes hint at a personal history similar to Smith’s biography. About 250 lines into “Beachy Head,” the speaker reveals that, although she knows and speaks of this landscape intimately, she is not currently in it. Referring to her life story of being married off very young, and taken from her family’s country estate to London, she reveals that the downs and cliffs around Beachy Head are “Haunts of my youth! / Scenes of fond day dreams, I behold ye yet!”²¹ but in imagination only. In reality, Smith lived her last years in Tilford, Surrey, about 50 miles from Beachy Head.²²

In the notes, then, we see that many of the natural history insights are neither the products of immediate observation nor of book knowledge but of long memory, cherished over a lifetime of misery and hardship. For instance, in responding to the poem’s description of strange shell-like fossils in the chalk cliffs, the note puts these discoveries in personal context:

Among the crumbling chalk I have often found shells, some quite in fossil state and hardly distinguishable from chalk. [. . .] It is now many years since I made these

observations. The appearance of sea-shells so far from the sea excited my surprise, though I then knew nothing of natural history. I have never read any of the late theories of the earth, nor was I ever satisfied with the attempts to explain many of the phenomena which call forth conjecture in the books I happened to have access to on this subject.²³

As with the theory about the French and English coasts, Smith refuses to allow book knowledge to take precedent over her own experience, even if her experience is decades old. She first discovered these forms when she was very young, but her knowledge of them has remained the same despite her wide reading in natural history over time. In a twist on this theme, Smith uses “Beachy Head” as an opportunity to revise a natural history fact from an earlier poem while not losing ground to another authority. For instance, the Nightjar—a relative of the better known Whip-poor-will—appearing in the main text of the poem, she footnotes it thus:

It was this bird that was intended to be described in the Forty-second Sonnet (Smith’s Sonnets). I was mistaken in supposing it as visible in November; it is a migrant, and leaves this country in August. I had often seen and heard it, but I did not then know its name or history.²⁴

Correcting her earlier work, Smith once again makes natural description personally significant. While the shorter natural history notes may display ease and mastery, reading the notes from beginning to end makes the reader aware that the taxonomic names are the product of a few short years’ cherished memories and a lifetime of scientific knowledge acquired to sharpen those memories as they inevitably faded.

In Smith’s poetry, notes account for information which, for whatever reason, does not fit into the main text: that which is too technical, bulky, personal, pedantic, or detailed to be accommodated by poetic argument and the rules of versification. In other words, notes provide not only the “creative space” that Labbe speaks of, but a space in which Smith is not accountable to readers for utility or aesthetic merit, and which allows her to uphold her epistemic virtues by displaying a personal catalogue of hard-won knowledge and closely-defended personal memory that may or may not be of interest to anyone else. Joseph Johnson’s downplaying of the notes may be an

tacit acknowledgement of this fact. Perhaps he did not make the notes easily accessible because he recognized that they might not have been written for the benefit of readers. In any case, Smith wrote her natural history notes because they were the firm foundation for the knowledge portrayed in her poetry. They allowed her space, not simply to display her knowledge, but to attest, whatever the cost, that her knowledge was based on her own experience.

Poetry of the “Present and Real”: Joseph Warton and John Aikin

Despite Smith’s unambiguous epistemic beliefs and virtues, it is still unclear how these virtues and their application to poetry arose in the years between Collins’ time and her own. Given the vagueness and generality which characterized the verse of Joseph Warton, William Collins, and Thomas Warton’s early works, how have we arrived at the publication of *Beachy Head: with Other Poems* in 1807? How did it become possible for a poet like Smith, not only to incorporate her personal knowledge of natural history matters into poetry, but to discuss natural history with such precision in the first place? One part of the answer can be found in an unlikely place: Joseph Warton’s prose. In the last chapter, we saw Joseph Warton’s definition of Nature change over the course of his short-lived poetic career. But Warton continued to think about nature—by now with a lower-case *n*—in his criticism, particularly his most well-known work, *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope* (1756). Warton’s main argument is, not surprisingly, that imagination and passion, not didacticism and morality, are the chief poetical powers (which had the somewhat controversial effect of making Pope into a good, if second-rate, poet.) The *Essay* does, however, have much to say about description in Pope’s *Pastorals* and “Windsor Forest.” For Warton, both of these early poems, despite their other virtues, are marked with deficiency and impropriety in their too-generalized and often-borrowed images. Rather than simply pointing out how the passages of description in these

pieces are inadequate, however, Warton praises the description of both the ancient poets and James Thomson's *Seasons* at Pope's expense.

Speaking of the third century Sicilian poet Theocritus' pastorals, which Pope imitates in his own, Warton describes the gulf he sees between the former's imagery—drawn from direct experience—and the latter's. Theocritus, says Warton,

described what he saw and felt: and had not need to have recourse to those artificial assemblages of pleasing objects, which are not to be found in nature. [. . .] [T]he beauties of that luxurious landscape so richly and circumstantially delineated in the close of the seventh idyllium, where all things smelt of summer and smelt of autumn [. . .] were present and real.²⁵

An important shift has taken place since we read *The Enthusiast*. It is safe to say that very few of the images in that poem were “present and real” to Warton, but rather, they were, as Warton says of Pope, “Rural beauty in general, and not the peculiar beauties” of any place.²⁶ But Warton's new concern here is historical and environmental verisimilitude. Theocritus' images are unequalled by Pope, or anyone else, because he described what was “present and real” to his senses. Warton adds that “We can never completely relish, or adequately understand any author, especially any Ancient, except we constantly keep in our eye his climate, his country, and his age.”²⁷

Warton then begins his discussion of Pope's “Windsor Forest” by noting that “Descriptive Poetry was by no means the shining talent of Pope.”²⁸ Rather than dwelling on too many of “Windsor Forest”'s defects, Warton makes a long digression in which he discusses the merits of what he considers to be perhaps the most successful British descriptive poem: James Thomson's *The Seasons*. Thomson's *Seasons* is a series of four long blank-verse poems, each describing a season in a free and desultory style, mixing description, fiction, and exposition. Composed in the late 1720s, *The Seasons* was one of the most well-known and widely read British poems of the eighteenth century. In praising Thomson, Warton dwells, not necessarily on Thomson's strengths as a writer, but his strengths as an observer:

Thomson [. . .] hath enriched poetry with a variety of new and original images, which he painted from nature itself, and from his own actual observations: his descriptions have therefore a distinctness and truth, which are utterly wanting to those, of poets who have only copied from each other, and have never looked abroad on the objects themselves. Thomson was accustomed to wander away into the country for days and for weeks, attentive to, ‘each rural sight, each rural sound;’ while many a poet who has dwelt for years in the Strand, has attempted to describe fields and rivers, and generally succeeded accordingly. Hence that nauseous repetition of the same circumstances; hence that disgusting impropriety of introducing what may be called a set of hereditary images, without proper regard to the age, or climate, or occasion, in which they were formerly used.²⁹

The criterion for originality is not the creation of things *sui generis* from the mind, but bodily witnessing environmental phenomena and transcribing them closely.³⁰ While Warton is not solely concerned with “nature” or environment—he criticized Pope for bringing Greek customs into Windsor Forest as well as Greek plants, animals, and landscapes—close observation of environmental details is a sign of genuine artistry. For Warton, poems that portray the material environment should do so with fidelity and draw upon lived experience, rather than other poets.

Warton’s insistence on “present and real” things as the basis for original poetry in 1756 would look different twenty years later. John Aikin’s *Essay on the Application of Natural History to Poetry* (1777), was itself published by Joseph Johnson exactly 30 years before *Beachy Head: with Other Poems*. Smith cites Aikin twice in her notes, once as a source of inspiration for her descriptive poetic style, and again as a source of natural historical material. Aikin, the brother of the widely read poet Anna Laetitia Barbauld, was a physician who published on many subjects and, as Jeffrey Plank argues in “Aikin on Science and Poetry,” assumed that “literature, like medicine, is a social institution and that change involves rejection of some and adaptation of other literary techniques.”³¹ Aikin’s practical and systematic approach encourages poets to use the most recent findings of natural history—as well as their own senses—instead of repeating the wearied images of earlier writers.

No literary complaint is more frequent and general than that of the insipidity of Modern Poetry. While the votary of science is continually gratified with new objects opening to his view, the lover of poetry is wearied and disgusted with the perpetual repetition of the same images, clad in almost the same language.³²

The problem with modern poetry lies with its images—that is, descriptive passages that bring sights to the mind’s eye. As we will see, Aikin believes that poetic images can serve as replacements for real images, but only if handled precisely. The problem with modern images is that poets take their images from other poets, which are by then worn out and inaccurate. The problem is not lack of genius, but lack of imagery drawn from the poet’s own senses. The result is that poetry becomes a transcription of other poets’ poetry, rather than a description of real life:

descriptive poetry has degenerated into a kind of phraseology, consisting of combinations of words which have been so long coupled together, that, like the hero and his epithet in Homer, they are become inseparable companions.³³

Aikin cites examples like the use of the droning or humming beetle as a symbol of the evening, which recurs even in good poetry such as *Macbeth*, Milton’s “Lycidas,” Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard,” and William Collins’ “Ode to Evening.” The image itself is not a problem, but its “successive adoption by so many different writers sufficiently evinces [. . .] a real want of variety in poetical imagery, proceeding from a scarcity of original observations of nature.”³⁴ Plank notes that, “Like other eighteenth-century critics and philosophers, Aikin assumes that poetry makes statements about reality”³⁵—and so it follows that the main criterion for judging the merits of a descriptive poem is, perhaps not its fidelity to reality, but its use of imagery personally witnessed by the person writing. “Even in poets of a higher order,” Aikin claims, “the hand of a copyist may be seen much oftener than the strokes of an observer.”³⁶ In other words, the problem is that the poetry gives the impression that the images have come from the medium of text, rather than personal, first-hand experience. For the rest of the *Essay*, Aikin both outlines the mistakes of other writers and dwells upon what he sees as the most effective images in the poetic tradition.

Like Smith, Aikin believes that poetry is able to directly represent material things and that the only problem lies in poets not taking advantage of this fact. However, this does not mean that either Warton or Aikin believed that the purpose of nature poetry was to provide a transcript of the

environment. The poetry they recommend, like the loco-descriptive poems of Thomson or the later poet Richard Jago, always mix morality with natural history description. Warton and Aikin do, however, think it is possible to transcribe reality. Smith and Clare also implicitly attested to this belief, but their poetry is proof that they knew that representation is more complicated than it seems. Hence Smith's resorting to notes when poetry itself failed to render the environment. To say that Clare and Smith took Warton's and Aikin's advice is not to say that Warton or Aikin offered a compelling reason for basing images on direct experience. For Smith and Clare, the stakes were higher than simply creating poetry devoid of tedious images and inaccurate descriptions.

John Clare and the Epistemology of Poesy

Clare was, in a sense, the poet who took the ability of poetry to reproduce the environment with fidelity the furthest. Many of his poems are nothing but unvarnished description, and he was known in his own day, as he is known now, for his ability to minutely describe his environment and the details of human, plant, and animal life. However, this does not mean that Clare was unselfconscious about his role as a descriptive poet. As many scholars have pointed out, Clare's self-image as a nature poet was carefully crafted in his relationships with his fellow writers and the reading public.³⁷ But my interest here is in the way that Clare articulated a philosophy of representation for himself—how he expressed his own epistemic virtues. First we will look at the influence of Aikin's ideas on Clare's work, and the poetic canon of naturalists that Clare constructed for himself, and then we will see how these values play out in his own poetry.

While Clare's attempts to publish natural history prose were never successful, he was a learned and experienced natural historian and wrote much on the subject in manuscript. In one of several natural history letters he wrote to his publishers Taylor and Hessey, he meditates on poets who have not relied on the work of other poets when writing their natural descriptions, but who

write descriptions from accurate, supposedly first-hand observation. Clare claims that he does not want to be so forward as to “direct” the reading of Taylor and Hessey, but he does produce a list, at times very specific, of poets whose works have natural images, in Aikin’s words, “deduced from the author’s observation”:

your favorite Chaucer is one Passages in Spenser Cowleys grasshopper and Swallow passages in Shakspear Miltons Allegro & Penseroso & Parts of Comus the Elizabethian Poets of glorious memory Gays Shepherds week Greens Spleen Thomsons Seasons Collins Ode to Evening Dyers Grongar hill & Fleece Shenstones Schoolmistress Greys Ode to Spring T. Wartons April Summer Hamlet & Ode to a friend Cowpers Task Wordsworth Logans Ode to the Cuckoo Langhorns Fables of Flora Jagos Blackbirds Bloomfields Witchwood Forest Shooters hill &c with Hurdis’s Evening Walk in the village Curate & many others that may have slipt my memry³⁸

At the end of the letter, he adds: “In my catalogue of poets I forgot Charlotte Smith whose poetry is full of pleasing images from nature.”³⁹ Here we see the lineage that I began to trace in Chapter 1 come to its conclusion. Like Collins and the Wartons, Clare emphasizes Spenser and Milton and skips from the mid-seventeenth century to Thomson’s *Seasons*, omitting late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth satiric and didactic verse. Collins and Thomas Warton are included here, and Joseph Warton is an absent presence—for here is poetry brought back to its “proper channel,” although in a way Warton had not anticipated. Through Clare, we can see that Joseph’s attempts to revise literary history were a success. And at the very end of the lineage comes Charlotte Smith herself.

But unlike Smith, Clare wrote no notes and precious little in the way of prefaces. It is her images that he values, and the lack of framing in his own poetry means that Clare’s images have always given sympathetic readers a sense of being honed down to the thing itself, no more, no less. In many cases, Clare’s description is so focused that there does not even seem to be room for the movement of thought. It is this latter characteristic that Clare’s unsympathetic readers have found limiting. However, what if, for Clare and many of his readers, description is a kind of thought? Just as Smith’s notes forwarded an implicit theory of knowledge and its place in poetry, so, too, does

Clare's poetry provide us with alternatives for understanding what kinds of knowledge can be conveyed through writing. This is why, even though Smith's and Clare's methods are so radically different, I find it useful to look at them together: they share the same epistemic virtues: that knowledge about the environment can be made in poetry and that the basis for doing so is the poet's own experience.

In 1820, when Clare published *Poems Descriptive*, it was widely discussed, both publicly in the press as well as privately by Clare's friends and patrons. While the merit of the poetry itself was up for debate, there was at least a consensus among readers about two things: that Clare was an example of primitive or natural intelligence, and that he showed a talent for describing nature accurately. These truisms persisted throughout the main period of Clare's public reception—the fifteen years between *Poems Descriptive* and his last volume, *The Rural Muse* in 1835—and have continued, in some form or another, to the present day. For many of Clare's earliest readers, he had an unusual ability to act as a medium or conduit for the impressions of nature, to almost literally translate the countryside into verse. An unsigned review appearing in the *Eclectic Review* of January of 1822 claims that

These poems breathe of Nature in every line. They are [. . .] not studies from nature, but transcripts of her works: his cattle, his birds, his trees and bushes are all portraits. There is a literal fidelity in the sketches [. . .]. The best substitute for a walk in the country [. . .] would be, so far as the mind is concerned, the perusal of some of the poems of John Clare.⁴⁰

Another reviewer goes even farther, claiming that Clare's poetry is so true to reality that it can nearly replace the embodied experience of walking in the countryside: "he has described things as they exist, with the fidelity to the original, that we cannot separate the reality from the description."⁴¹ Reading Clare is like holding an open book in front of one's face and confusing its black marks with natural phenomena. Description, as represented in these reviews, has an extraordinary amount of power—which, for some, can cause a kind of pleasing epistemic confusion. This kind of evaluation

is strange because it clearly untrue—no one actually confuses a book of Clare’s poetry with the natural environment. And yet, it has come up so consistently over the history of the reception of his works that I am inclined to take it seriously.

Virtually everywhere Clare’s works were reviewed, his descriptions of nature were praised; the only question was whether or not description is desirable on its own terms. The ecstatic praise of magazines like the *Eclectic Review* was matched by skepticism elsewhere. The most famous expression of doubt about Clare’s poetry comes to us from John Keats, by way of their shared publisher, John Taylor:

I think he wishes to say to you that your Images from Nature are too much introduced without being called for by a particular sentiment. . .his Remark is only applicable now & then when he feels as if the Description overlaid & stifled that which ought to be the prevailing Idea.⁴²

If, to Keats, description stifled thought and sentiment, there were doubts by others as to whether description is decorous enough for poetry at all. As one skeptical review of Clare’s first two volumes put it: “We do not conceive that [. . .] accurate delineations of mere exterior objects, can atone for a general deficiency of poetical language.”⁴³ The battle over Clare’s poetry has always been the battle over the value of representation—of “mere description”—itself. Observation and description are enough to transport the reader, embodied and whole, into another place—but they go no further. Clare delineates the landscape but does not help us think about it; his observation comes at the expense of real thought and knowledge and cannot be an appropriate foundation for poetry.

The assumption that “accurate delineations of mere exterior objects” equals thoughtlessness ignores the problems of knowledge that Clare worked through in his poetry. In the evolution of his poetry, we can see Clare working out these problems for himself, as well as reading about them in the works of others. While I have found no proof that Clare had ever read either of Aikin’s essays (although it is not out of the realm of possibility, for his literary friends often lent him books that they thought would be of interest to him) he did own a copy of Aikin’s edited volume, *Select Works of*

the British Poets, which includes notes and biographical introductions to each by Aikin.⁴⁴ In his introduction to Thomson, Aikin claims that *The Seasons* is, “the first long composition, perhaps, of which natural description was made the staple, and certainly the most fertile of grand and beautiful delineations, in great measure deduced from the author's own observation.”⁴⁵ Whether or not Aikin was Clare’s only source for this idea is beside the point, but as Clare matures as a reader of poetry, we see that his main criterion of quality in nature poetry is exactly that. In the remainder of this chapter, I will explore Clare’s tentative and unsystematic epistemology of poetic description—that is, his understanding of how the poet both receives and produces knowledge about nature through observation and description—and how it relates to natural history. We will see that Clare’s description is precise enough at times to be used for species identification, but it does not pretend to be a transcript of reality—unlike what many of his readers have thought. First I want to look at how Clare understood the process of writing poetry about nature in his poem “Pastoral Poesy” (c. 1831-2) and then see how this works in one of his most minutely descriptive poems, “The Yellowhammers Nest” (c. 1825.)

Like most of Clare's poetry, “Pastoral Poesy” has a paratactic, rather than syntactic argument. Instead of building up to a claim through carefully ordered steps Clare assays the same ideas over and over again, trying them out in different imagined scenarios until the poem reaches an acceptable conclusion. In “Pastoral Poesy,” the poet-speaker, who is sensitive to the beauties of nature, portrays a cow boy playing and working in the field, a shepherd, and an old man whittling in his doorway as they react to a summer storm and other natural phenomena. Although on the face of it, the poem seems to be advocating an anti-intellectual attitude toward nature poetry, at a closer look it proves to be a philosophic essay—albeit unsystematic—of the relationship between mind, sensory phenomena, and language. The poem begins with the poet’s thesis:

True poesy is not in words
But *images* that *thoughts* express

By which the simplest hearts are stirred
To elevated happiness (emphasis mine)⁴⁶

It is easiest to read this as a leveling poem which argues for a rich life of the mind in even the lowest classes, but doing so can lead to ignoring the poem's theory of knowledge. The first two lines show that, despite its easygoing leveling tone, "Pastoral Poesy" is also quite technical. Clare is not making the case that natural scenery, or true poesy, is simply and uncomplicatedly taken into the mind. Rather, he is suggesting an epistemology of poesy—a system by which sensory input is taken and used by the mind, a system which may or may not bypass the use of language. Just as in thinkers like Locke, Hume, Berkeley, in which simple words like "idea," "impression," or "sensation" turn out to have incredibly specific technical meanings, we get the sense that Clare, too, is working out a theory of mind, even if his is less systematic or clearly defined.

Nevertheless, what Clare means by saying that poesy is not in words, but in *images* that are expressed by thoughts is unclear at first. Is poesy, then, input or output? Does it exist inside the human brain as a product of sensory input and the mind's workings, or is it the expression of those things? The description of a shepherd and the speaker weathering a storm together gives more clues:

Is music aye and more indeed
To those of musing mind
Who through the yellow woods proceed
And listen to the wind

The poet in his fitful glee
And fancy's many moods
Meets it as some strange melody
And poem of the woods

It sings and whistles in his mind
And then it talks aloud
While by some leaning tree reclined
He shuns the coming cloud⁴⁷

Both the shepherd and the poet take shelter from the storm, but the shepherd's reaction is based on physical needs only. The speaker takes shelter so as to "meet" the storm with his mind by

“shunning” the inconvenience of the rain. The shepherd’s and poet’s reactions differ by the way they take in information at the sensory level: the poet experiences the storm as an aesthetic object—as “music aye and more indeed”—in the first moment of perception. His mind processes the “song” of the storm, first on its own terms (“it sings and whistles”), and then by transmuting it into language: “And then it talks aloud.” While this may be a leveling poem in terms of social class, it is not a leveling poem entirely—Clare makes clear the distinction between minds that are able to perceive and create aesthetic beauty and minds that are more or less bounded by practical concerns. When we read the poem in this way, we see that Clare by no means saw an easy equivalence between poetry and language. His thought might have been unsystematic and obscure to us, but it is also clear that along with Clare’s attempts to defend his subject matter and his poetic style, he took it upon himself to define a philosophy of poetic expression.

Not only did Clare’s poetic practices differ from mainstream Romantic poets, but his poetic theorization challenges them. His famous critique of Keats’ allusiveness, is as follows:

In spite of all this his [that is, Keats’] descriptions of scenery are often very fine but as it is the case with other inhabitants of great cities he often described nature as she appeared to his fancies & not as he would have described her had he witnessed the things he describes⁴⁸

I want to push hard on Clare’s wording here, and I think it can withstand the pressure. Clare is not necessarily charging Keats with a failure to describe things *as they are*, but his wording suggests that he is charging Keats with a failure to describe things *as if he had witnessed them*. The difference between these two charges is a great one. It means that Keats is not necessarily being inaccurate or ignorant, but rather, he is not coding his poetry with the kinds of truth claims that Clare finds compelling. By allowing myth and allusion to do descriptive work for him, Keats does not uphold Clare’s epistemic virtues. What matters to Clare is not descriptive transparency or accuracy itself, but writing in a way that *gives the impression* of such transparency and accuracy. His writing makes claims to authenticity by making a show of reproducing images from nature.

I will end with a reading of one of Clare's most well-known poems, "The Yellowhammers Nest," which was published in his last volume *The Rural Muse* (1835.) Writing in the second person, Clare never provides complete context for the poems, but begins *in medias res*, walking through the woods with a friend looking for birds' nests—not as boys do, to abduct the eggs, but to observe the nests as naturalists. "The Yellowhammers Nest" begins with a jolt—the narrator's utterance prompted by the sight of a bird leaving her nest:

Just by the wooden brig a bird flew up
Frit by the cowboy as he scrambled down
To reach the misty dewberry—let us stoop
And seek its nest—⁴⁹

The speaker beckons to his companion to follow where he saw the bird emerge from, and they find the nest quickly:

—Aye here it is stuck close beside the bank
Beneath the bunch of grass that spindles rank
Its husk seeds tall and high—tis rudely planned
Of bleached stubbles and the withered fare
That last years harvest left upon the land
Lined thinly with the horses sable hair
—Five eggs pen-scribbled over lilac shells
Resembling writing scrawls which fancy reads
As natures poesy and pastoral spells
They are the yellow hammers and she dwells
A poet-like—⁵⁰

Here, the parataxis of experience mixes with minute detail focused on particulars. We cannot find the Yellowhammer's nest unless we understand where it is found and marked by a bunch of grass. Likewise, we cannot look at the nest without understanding where its elements came from, and thinking of last year's harvest and the stubble fields of autumn. All of this is true, there is no denying. But "The Yellowhammers Nest" quickly begins its departure from pure experience and description into moralizing. Once the speaker sees the eggs—notice the precision with which he can use them to identify the bird—he quickly enters the realm of fancy. It is as if the moment which might have been footnoted by Smith is instead used as a starting point for another phase in the

poem. The sight of the eggs is inextricable with their identification, and once the Yellowhammer is identified simultaneously as the bird in nature and the “poet-like,” the poem takes a turn for the surreal, and the moral.

[...]she dwells
A poet-like—where brooks and flowery weeds
As sweet as Castaly to fancy seems
And that old molehill like as Parnass hill
On which her partner haply sits and dreams
O'er all his joy of song—⁵¹

Suddenly we are taken out of the minute description of the earlier lines and shown the same landscape implied by the first part of the poem, this time overlaid with a mythical landscape including the Castalian spring and Mount Parnassus.

—so leave it still
A happy home of sunshine flowers and streams
Yet in the sweetest places cometh ill
A noisome weed that burthens every soil
For snakes are known with chill and deadly coil
To watch such nests and seize the helpless young
And like as though the plague became a guest
Leaving a houseless-home a ruined nest
And mournful hath the little warblers sung
When such like woes hath rent its little breast⁵²

Like Smith's personal ruminations in the notes to “Beachy Head,” “The Yellowhammers Nest” turns back onto the poet rather unambiguously. The Yellowhammer dwells a “poet-like” on her little Parnassus, but ultimately the snake invades her nest and destroys her family and work.⁵³ The other birds' nest poems written in this style have a similar hinge, either where the realistic and minutely described landscape becomes fanciful, or where awareness of death and danger creep in as the speaker contemplates the nest in front of him. Clare's detailed descriptions are not only phenomenological—that is, not only focused on outward particulars—but they move when he moves, see when he sees, and think when he thinks; they are personal in a literal sense. Clare does not dispense with the realm of the metaphorical, the “illusions or allusions” that he finds so suspect

in Keats' poetry, rather, he just uses them differently. In part, it is his complex understanding of the relationship between natural phenomena, the mind, and written work that makes "The Yellowhammers Nest," and many poems like it, such a strange hybrid of fact and fancy. For Clare, it is the moment of scientific certainty that allows the poet's subjective fancies to creep in. Thus his poetry is often no less "illusive or allusive" than Keats', but the imaginative parts work in conjunction with the representations. It is the world as if he had seen it that opens up a space for the things he can only imagine he has seen.

Conclusion: A Note on Notes, Science, and Poetry

But let us not be so hard on poor John Keats for the sake of John Clare. I have just shown that Clare's "delineations of mere exterior objects," which have a long history of dismissal by critics, have their basis in Clare's philosophy, if never systematically defined, of the relationship between environment and the mind of the poet. But Keats, who according to Clare merely "described nature as she appeared to his fancies" had his own defender nearly sixty years ago in Cleanth Brooks. In 1944, Brooks took it upon himself to rehabilitate the final lines of Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and their famous notion that truth is beauty and beauty, truth, in the wake of skepticism by critics like T.S. Eliot and John Middleton Murry. Looking at the urn as Keats does, as a "sylvan historian" of its Bacchanalian scene, Brooks wonders, what kind of history might this be, and what truth might it represent?

[T]he "truth" which the sylvan historian gives is the only kind of truth which we are likely to get on this earth, and furthermore, it is the only kind that we *have* to have. The names, dates, and special circumstances, the wealth of data—these the sylvan historian quietly ignores. But we shall never get all the facts anyway—there is no end to the accumulation of facts. Moreover, mere accumulations of facts—a point our own generation is beginning to realize—are meaningless. The sylvan historian does better than that: it takes a few details and so orders them that we have not only beauty but insight into essential truth. Its "history," in short, is a history without footnotes. It has the validity of myth—not myth as a pretty but irrelevant make-belief, an idle fancy, but myth as a valid perception into reality.⁵⁴

For Brooks, “Ode on a Grecian Urn”—and by extension, all poetry—is more valuable than history *with* footnotes, that mucky detritus of facts which clings to a text. So whereas Clare faulted Keats for not writing his poetry in a way that seems to arise from lived, factual experience, according to Brooks’ reading of Keats, Keats faulted Clare for relying on the world of facts to create his poetry, rather than creating his own truth through imagination.

In thinking about this impasse of epistemic virtues, I cannot help but ask: why is the history of the “Grecian Urn,” as Brooks sees it, a history without *footnotes*? Why not a history without archives or testimonies or just plain facts? What is it about the footnote that encapsulates anti-poeticism for Brooks? Before moving on to Chapter Three and the staunchly factual genre of agricultural prose, I want to pause and consider more fully the history that Cleanth Brooks leaves out of his account of poetry vs. footnotes—namely, the amply documented practice of writing poetry *with* footnotes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Brooks uses the footnote as a wedge to split poetic knowledge from the knowledge that stems from more fact-oriented disciplines like history and the sciences, but the reality is that, as we saw in Smith’s poetry, writing poetry and making facts were intertwined.

From Smith herself we have little in the way of commentary on the value of notes themselves, although her letters to her publishers on the subject imply the great value they had for her in terms of outfitting her work with scientific accuracy that satisfied her in placing it before the public. As the nearly non-existent comments from her readers suggest, however, readers themselves cared little for notes. This is made clearer by James Grahame, the poet whose description of a skylark came dangerously close to Smith’s, and who also wrote extensive notes to his poetry. In the preface to his 1809 volume *British Georgics*, Grahame says

On the abuse of Notes much has of late been said, and justly said, both by critics and readers. With respect to the notes, which compose the concluding part of this volume, I can safely say, that, in adding them, I have been induced, by a firm

conviction that they would form a useful supplement to the poetical part of the work. In a composition partly didactic, it is often impossible to reconcile minuteness and precision with poetry. And even with regard to those topics, on which I have somewhat enlarged, explanation appeared not to be superfluous. My deficiency, too, of professional authority, seemed to require a frequent reference to authors, who united practical to theoretical knowledge.⁵⁵

Grahame's preface attempts to forestall doubts about the enterprise of writing poetry about scientific subjects and appending explanatory notes. Such a project requires disavowal of knowledge, authority, and purpose. Despite the erudition of the endnotes to *British Georgics*, as well as to *Birds of Scotland*, Grahame's strategy for presenting them to readers is to deny their worth as contributions to public knowledge, implying that poetry can only educate indirectly by inspiring a desire to learn.

Grahame stubbornly, if sheepishly, presents works to the public whose value he claims is doubtful, but in doing so, he is not alone. His works are similar to Smith's in that they present themselves first and foremost as aesthetic works. But perhaps the most famous examples of poetry-with-notes from this period are Erasmus Darwin's *Botanic Garden*, which contained the long poem "The Loves of Plants, with Philosophical Notes" and William Gilpin's "On Landscape Painting" appended to his *Three Essays on the Picturesque*. Both works are attended by copious footnotes or endnotes, whose purpose is as much to defend as to explain or defend the content of the poems themselves.

William Gilpin was a clergyman and amateur artist most well known for popularizing the notion of the picturesque. His illustrated journals of travels around Great Britain, published in the 1780s, were widely read and were partially responsible for the fad of picturesque tourism and amateur outdoor sketching. In the early 1790s, Gilpin published *Three Essays on the Picturesque*, which systematized his definition of the picturesque, as well as his thoughts about sketching landscape and picturesque tourism and includes at the end of the volume a long blank-verse didactic poem called "On Landscape Painting." In his preface to *Three Essays*, Gilpin makes a long apology for the existence of "On Landscape Painting," which, while it makes no reference to the poem's footnotes

(which take up a considerable bulk—twenty-one pages of notes to twenty-three pages of poetry) gives us a sense of genre anxiety around technical and scientific terms and their place in poetry.

Gilpin tells how he wrote some verses about landscape painting and sent them to a friend, who liked the content of the poem, but not the versification. Several years later, he was criticized by another friend—William Mason, best known for his own didactic poem on gardening and a contemporary of the Warton brothers—for writing too poetically in his picturesque descriptions of the Lake District.

Here,

I told him the fate of my fragment; lamenting the hardship of my case——when I wrote verse, one friend called it prose; when I wrote prose, another friend called it verse. In this next letter, he desired to see my verses; and being pleased with the subject, he offered, if I would finish with my poem (however carelessly as to metrical exactness) he would adjust the versification. But he found he had engaged in a more arduous affair, than he expected. My rules, and technical terms were stubborn, and would not easily glide into verse; and I was as stubborn, as they, and would not relinquish the scientific part for the poetry.⁵⁶

Gilpin's genteel defensiveness is somewhat justified: "On Landscape Painting" is a wretched poem, aesthetically speaking, but more because of Gilpin's poor ear for poetry than his occasional use of technical terms. There is something amusing and perverse in this story—particularly Gilpin's willingness to hang onto the poetry manuscripts after a number of years, his eagerness to share the poem with his friends and then the public, despite his friends' ambivalent responses. The value of the endeavor to write poetry about a non-poetic topic has a strong, even irrational draw.

Intellectually, there is no good reason for "On Landscape Painting" to exist, except perhaps its staging of the difficulty of making verse and science compatible. The "scientific part" and "the poetry" are in constant tension, and there is a stubbornness about technical, scientific terms that does not allow for euphemisms or synonyms, but demands that aesthetic rules are suffered to be broken.

The manuscript copy of "On Landscape" that resides in the Bodleian Library tells an even more interesting story about Gilpin's attitude toward his work, and whether or not it should be

considered poetry. The friend who finally helped him with the versification was William Mason, poet and landscape gardener. The MS that Gilpin sent to him was a fair copy made by Catherine Brisco, which was already titled “On Landscape Painting, a Poem Enscribed to William Locke Esq.” Mason’s first order of business was to suggest a title more appropriate for such a work. His suggestions appear on the blank page before the start of the MS and are as follows:

The Principles of
Landscape Painting
a Poetical Essay
Addressed to []
or
An Essay
On the Principles of Landscape [Painting]
In blank Verse
or
On Landscape Painting
[~~A Poetical? Essay~~]
An Essay in Metre⁵⁷

The three suggested titles, “The Principles of Landscape Painting: A Poetical Essay,” “An Essay on the Principles of Landscape Painting in Blank Verse,” and “On Landscape Painting: An Essay in Metre” show the lengths to which Mason went in order to avoid calling this manuscript a *poem*. A “poetical essay” was as close to the word “poem” as he would allow it to get. Generally, Gilpin took most of Mason’s suggestions, and when he disagreed, he would often give reasons why. However, Mason’s three title suggestions were summarily, and silently, ignored and the work went to press retaining its original title.

Gilpin’s footnotes themselves go further to show the inadequacies of poetry to explain scientific concepts in the way that that he intends. Most often, the footnotes are long glosses on terms or techniques—asides that are not possible within the structure of verse. However, in Gilpin’s footnotes it is unclear whether it is the scientific or poetic that needs to be defended. Directing his readers’ attention to the effects of light and texture in natural landscapes, he tells them to

Trace then with care

Her [Nature's] varied walks; observe how she upheaves
The mountain's tow'ring brow; on its rough sides
How broad the shadow falls, what different hues
Invest its glimm'ring surface. (30-35)

The un-called endnote for this passage reads:

Some perhaps may object to the word *glimmering*; but whoever has observed the playing lights, and colours, which often invest the summits of mountains, will not think the epithet improper.⁵⁸

Is Gilpin defending his technical principles, or aesthetic choices? Is “glimmering” a scientific term?

If a kind of irrational impulse to write poetry brought this work into being at any cost, then the notes overcorrect this impulse. They are detailed, overlytechnical, and, when necessary, defensive.

The counterpart to Gilpin's defensiveness about introducing scientific and technical terms into poetry is Erasmus Darwin's exuberance about introducing poetry into scientific discourse.

Darwin's botanical treatise “The Loves of Plants,” part of his longer poem *The Botanic Garden* (1789), describes the need for such a poem in warm, enthusiastic language:

The general design of the following sheets is to inlist Imagination under the banner of Science; and to lead her votaries from the looser analogies, which dress out the imagery of poetry, to the stricter ones, which form the ratiocination of philosophy. While their particular design is to induce the ingenious to cultivate the knowledge of Botany, to introduce them to the vestibule of that delightful science, and recommending to their attention the immortal works of the celebrated Swedish naturalist, LINNEUS.⁵⁹

The “while” in the middle paragraph anticipates a balancing clause that never comes, but instead the passage keeps ascending in its excitement, ending in adoration of Linnaeus. Nevertheless, the notes which occur on almost every page of the poem pull against the imaginative quality of the poem, which anthropomorphizes the sexual parts of flowers. For instance, the passage about the nasturtium,

The chaste Tropaeo leaves her secret bed;
A faint-like glory trembles round her head;
Eight watchful swains along the lawns of night
With amorous steps pursue the virgin light (148-49)

is accompanied by a long footnote explaining that nasturtium flowers really do “emit sparks or flashes in the mornings before sun-rise” but “Nor is this more wonderful” than other natural electrical phenomena, like eels (148-49). As if that were the only part of the passage that needed rational explanation! (N.B.: None of the nasturtiums in the hanging basket on my deck have emitted sparks to date.) Darwin’s note is less of an adequate explanation for the passages, than a correction of imagination.

As aesthetic works, “The Loves of Plants” and “On Landscape Painting” are all but unreadable for modern audiences. Furthermore, they still raise an obvious question that neither Gilpin nor Darwin could satisfactorily answer: why write verse when something may more clearly be explained in prose, as the necessity of footnotes suggests? Why do Grahame, Gilpin, and Darwin insist on aesthetic mediation of empirical information?

In looking at poetry-with-notes, particularly as it relates to scientific subjects, the counter-intuitive is the obvious: notes do not contribute to greater knowledge, technical expertise, or realism. They are the place where, instead, problems of knowledge, personal messiness, and irrational attitudes toward the text and its knowledge begin to leak out. The ambiguous relationship between notes and empirical fact make notes seem like unnecessary complications for conveying even basic delineation of ideas and forms in poetry, rather than helpful, clarifying apparatus. Going further, not only do notes get in the way of conveying knowledge, they actually interfere with that process. This leads to a paradox: notes grant poetry entrance into scientific and technical discourse because they can handle technical terminology in a way that poetry cannot, but at the same time, the notes become the justification for writing about technical or scientific subjects in poetry at all. The larger point I want to make here before moving on to Chapter Three is that although epistemic virtues cross genres, writing techniques are their tangible manifestations. Smith’s notes and Clare’s descriptions are each poet’s method of conveying those virtues, while the notes of Grahame, Gilpin,

and Darwin attest to ambiguity behind the presentation of scientific ideas in the literary genre of poetry. As we leap into the non-literary world of agricultural prose, we will see a complementary phenomenon: agricultural writers' use of the literary genre of memoir to bolster the scientific validity of their work. Spanning works of literature and science, as well as these two chapters, the same set of epistemic virtues persists as we step into an adjoining field of the world as if one had witnessed it.

¹ William Collins, *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegorical Subjects* (London: A. Millar, 1747), 26–27.

² For a detailed account of the development of geology and literature together, see: Noah Heringman, *Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004).

³ Charlotte Smith, *Beachy Head: With Other Poems* (London: Printed for the author, and sold by J. Johnson, 1807), 4, ll.6–7; 143–144.

⁴ Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books; Distributed by the MIT Press, 2007), 28.

⁵ In addition to Daston and Galison, I have been helped by the following works on the history of scientific cultures and/or the relationship between science and literature. Jan Golinski, *Science as Public Culture: Chemistry and Enlightenment in Britain, 1760-1820* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Jan Golinski, "Humphry Davy: The Experimental Self," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 45, no. 1 (Fall 2011): 15–28; George Levine, *Dying to Know: Scientific Epistemology and Narrative in Victorian England* (University of Chicago Press, 2002); Brian W. Ogilvie, *The Science of Describing Natural History in Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England*, 1st ed. (University Of Chicago Press, 1995).

⁶ "Art. IX. Beachy Head, with Other Poems. By Charlotte Smith. New First Published. 12mo. Price 5s. Johnson. 1807," *The British Critic: And Quarterly Theological Review*, August 1807, 170.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 174.

⁹ The work of tracking down references seemed to make the composition of the notes lag behind the main text, especially when Smith had difficulty accessing the books she needed. For instance, in October of 1799, having just moved to new lodgings, she wrote to Cadell and Davies: "I have brot all the Poetry I owe you finish'd all but a few notes & find my books all pack'd in great boxes....Be so good therefore as to lend me Popes Homers Odyssey from whence I must take the only note I cannot otherwise supply" (Smith, Charlotte, and Judith Phillips Stanton. *The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003. 334-35.)

¹⁰ Charlotte Smith, *Elegiac Sonnets and Other Essays*, 2nd ed. (Chichester and London: Printed by Dennett Jaques. And sold by Dodsley, Gardner, Baldwin, and Bew, 1784), 3 ll. 1-4.

¹¹ In particular, see Anthony. Grafton, *The Footnote: a Curious History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), [http://hdl.handle.net/2027/\[u\]:mdp.39015040061684](http://hdl.handle.net/2027/[u]:mdp.39015040061684).

¹² Grafton, Anthony. *The Footnote: a Curious History*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 114.

¹³ Mellor, Anne K. "The Baffling Swallow: Gilbert White, Charlotte Smith and the Limits of Natural History." *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 31, no. 4 (December 2009): 299–309. 305.

¹⁴ Labbe, Jacqueline. “‘Transplanted into a More Congenial Soil’: Footnoting the Self in Charlotte Smith’s Poetry.” *In Ma(r)king the Text: The Presentation of Meaning on the Literary Page*, edited by Joe Bray, Miriam Handley, and Anne C. Henry, 71–86. (Aldershot, England ; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2000.) 73.

¹⁵ Smith, *Beachy Head*, 182–84.

¹⁶ Smith, Charlotte, and Judith Phillips Stanton. *The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith*. Correspondence. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 255.

¹⁷ Smith, *Letters* Ibid.

¹⁸ Charlotte Turner Smith, *The Old Manor-house: A Novel ...*, 4 vols. (Newman, 1822).

¹⁹ Smith, Charlotte. *Beachy Head: With Other Poems*. (London: Printed for the author, and sold by J. Johnson, 1807), 14.

²⁰ Ibid., 154.

²¹ Ibid., 20.

²² Fletcher, Loraine. *Charlotte Smith: a Critical Biography*. Basingstoke, Hampshire : New York: Macmillan ; St. Martin’s Press, 1998.

²³ Smith, *Beachy Head*, 158-59.

²⁴ Ibid., 173.

²⁵ Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope (1756-1782)*, Popeiana; 18-19, 2 v. (New York: Garland Pub., 1974), 3–4, [http://hdl.handle.net/2027/\[u\]:mdp.39015005119691](http://hdl.handle.net/2027/[u]:mdp.39015005119691).

²⁶ Ibid., vol. 1 p. 20.

²⁷ Ibid., 5.

²⁸ Ibid., vol. 1 p. 20.

²⁹ Ibid., vol. 1. p. 42.

³⁰ As we will see in the next chapter, agricultural writers at this time also made this criterion the basis for sound scientific observation.

³¹ Jeffrey Plank, “John Aikin on Science and Poetry,” *Studies in Burke and His Time* 18 (1977): 176.

³² John Aikin, *An Essay on the Application of Natural History to Poetry* (London: Warrington□: printed by W. Eyres, for J. Johnson, No. 72, St. Paul’s Church-Yard, London, 1777), 1–2.

³³ Ibid., 5.

³⁴ Ibid., 9.

³⁵ Plank, “John Aikin on Science and Poetry,” 171.

³⁶ Aikin, *An Essay on the Application of Natural History to Poetry*, 6.

³⁷ See in particular two recent studies: Paul Chirico, *John Clare and the Imagination of the Reader* and Mina Gorji, *John Clare and the Place of Poetry*. Chirico’s book is a series of readings of Clare’s various rhetorical stances toward his current and imagined future audiences, pointing up Clare’s consuming obsession with literary immortality and the ways he subtly groomed his imagined audiences to think of his persona and poetry. Gorji’s book is a study of how Clare saw himself fitting into a larger poetic community, even if much of that relationship was one-sided. In both cases, these authors show that careful readings of Clare’s poetry will uncover the artful, rather than the artless. Paul Chirico, *John Clare and the Imagination of the Reader* (Basingstoke [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Mina Gorji, *John Clare and the Place of Poetry*, Liverpool English Texts and Studies; 54 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008).

³⁸ John Clare and Margaret Grainger, *The Natural History Prose Writings of John Clare* (Oxford [Oxfordshire]: New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1983), 40–41.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 41–42.

⁴⁰ Mark Storey, ed., “Unsigned Review, Eclectic Review,” in *John Clare: The Critical Heritage* (London□; Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1973), 169.

⁴¹ Mark Storey, ed., “Unsigned Review, Druids’ Monthly Magazine,” in *John Clare: The Critical Heritage* (London; Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1973), 240.

⁴² Mark Storey, ed., “Some Opinions on ‘Solitude’,” in *John Clare: The Critical Heritage* (London□; Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1973), 122.

⁴³ Storey, “Unsigned Review, Druids’ Monthly Magazine,” 152.

⁴⁴ County Borough of Northampton Public Libraries, Museums, and Art Gallery Committee, *Catalogue of the John Clare Collection in the Northampton Public Library* (Northampton, UK: Northampton Public Library, 1964).

⁴⁵ John Aikin, ed., *Select Works of the British Poets, with Prefaces by Dr. Aikin* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1820), 415.

⁴⁶ John Clare, *Selected Poems*, ed. Geoffrey Summerfield (Penguin Classics, 2004), 163 ll. 1-4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 164–65 ll. 49-60.

⁴⁸ qtd. in P.M.S. Dawson, “Of Birds and Bards: Clare and His Romantic Contemporaries,” in *John Clare: New Approaches*, ed. John Goodridge and Simon Kövesi (Helpston, UK: The John Clare Society, 2000), 151. I quote Dawson’s transcription of the MS here, taking it on his authority that there are some errors in its transcription in *The Prose of John Clare*.

⁴⁹ John Clare, *Major Works*, ed. Eric Robinson and David Powell, Reissue (Oxford University Press, USA, 2008), 230, lines. 1-4.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, lines 7–17.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, lines 17–21.

⁵² *Ibid.*, lines 21–30.

⁵³ Clare’s struggles with mental illness and his growing hostility toward publishers and the literary establishment are catalogued in Jonathan Bate’s biography. Jonathan Bate, *John Clare: a Biography* (Macmillan, 2003).

⁵⁴ Cleanth Brooks, “History Without Footnotes: An Account of Keats’ Urn,” *The Sewanee Review* 52, no. 1 (Winter 1944): 100.

⁵⁵ Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate the critiques of notes that Grahame refers to. Grahame, James. *British Georgics*. Edinburgh J. Ballantyne, 1809. iv. Also see Chapter Three for a discussion of this preface in relation to agricultural writing.

⁵⁶ William Gilpin, *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape: To Which Is Added a Poem, on Landscape Painting* (printed for R. Blamire, 1792), v–viii.

⁵⁷ William Gilpin, “On Landscape Painting: a Poem,” MS. Eng. misc. c. 387, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

⁵⁸ Gilpin, *Three Essays*, 24. Note: “On Landscape Painting” appears at the end of *Three Essays* but is paginated separately.

⁵⁹ Erasmus Darwin, *The Botanic Garden. Part II. Containing the Loves of the Plants. A Poem. With Philosophical Notes.*, 1st ed., vol. 2 (London: printed by J. Nichols, for J. Johnson, St. Paul’s Church Yard, 1789), iii.

PART II: SOIL

CHAPTER 3

“ACTUAL OBSERVATION and SELF-PRACTICE”:

The Subjective Science of Agricultural Prose, 1760-1830

Our meditations on poetry as a representational genre now give way to meditations on narrative. Just as we answered the question: what are poetry’s proper materials? in Chapter One and how should poetry represent the environment? in Chapter Two, the next two chapters will answer the questions of what narrative is for when we make environmental knowledge and how narrative works to transmit that knowledge. Because I have put poetry first and narrative last, it may seem that there is a progression, sanctioned by either historical developments or logical induction, from the one to the other. However, this is not the case. The poems in Chapter One showed us how it became possible to create environmental verisimilitude in British literature starting in the mid-eighteenth century, but the works of Chapters Two, Three, and Four stand beside each other in chronological time and are different manifestations of the same set of epistemological problems. In Chapter Three, we will retreat from Clare’s poetry of the mid-1830s back to the agricultural prose of the 1760s and following it forward again to William Cobbett’s *Rural Rides* of the 1820s, published in 1830. The narratives in this chapter exist in the margins—they are to be found in prefaces and notes, tucked away out of sight of the “real” business of agricultural writing: facts, charts, tables. These narratives are the life stories of agricultural writers, and if these men wrote autobiographical details

on the margins of their texts, it is because such details act as frames for the information contained therein.

The Book Speaks

In 1776, Scottish enlightenment thinker Henry Home, Lord Kames published *The Gentleman Farmer. Being An Attempt to improve Agriculture, By subjecting it to the Test of Rational Principles*, a treatise on both practical and theoretical agriculture. The book's epigraph, taken from Juvenal's *Satires*, reads: *Semper ego auditor tantum?*, which can be roughly translated as, "Must I always be only a listener?"—or in this case, a reader? Beginning at its title page, then, *The Gentleman Farmer* voices the impatience out of which it was created: impatience to cease being a passive consumer of knowledge and start producing knowledge. By the same token, it hints at discomfort with those who have already been speaking—that is, the new wave of books on British and European agriculture that were already circulating by the time Kames' book entered the market.

The Gentleman Farmer, which by all appearances was as widely-read and well-respected as any book on agriculture could hope to be¹, is also a perfect specimen of British agricultural discourse's anxieties. While Kames dedicated the book to Sir John Pringle—then president of the Royal Society—as a scientific work of national significance, his own scientific principles led him to mistrust other works in his field. In fact, he begins the preface by staging the book's encounter with its own potential buyer, who is equally mistrustful of all books on the same subject:

Behold! another volume on husbandry! exclaims a peevish man on seeing the title page: how long shall we be pestered with such trite stuff? "As long, sweet Sir, as you are willing to pay for it: hold out your purse, and wares will never be wanting."²

Kames carefully anticipates and guards against book-buyers' exasperation at what must have seemed like a market being flooded with new and reprinted books of agricultural prose. The peevish man's interlocutor, perhaps the book itself, confirms the view that for the most part books on agriculture

are mere business propositions. They will be written and sold as long as they turn a profit, whether or not there is new material to fill them. Or so it would seem. Stepping out from behind the persona of the eager-to-be-consumed book as the preface continues, Kames reveals that he shares the same peevishness with new books on agriculture. He admits that most of the “new” agricultural texts actually contain nothing new, but are simply “bookseller’s production[s]”: made up of passages literally cut out of old texts and pasted together.³ Those looking for information about agriculture are particularly vulnerable to these practices because “every thing is made welcome on that subject; and provided the title be new, it is to the bookseller of no great importance, how threadbare the contents be.”⁴

Given what seemed like the alarming number of books on all aspects of agriculture published in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (see below), with not a few of them smacking of intellectual charlatanism, each new book on agriculture created a small epistemological crisis for both its author and its readers. By its very appearance each book raised these questions anew: given the ever-expanding amount of agricultural data, experiments, and theories crowding the shelves of a bookseller’s shop, which authors are honest? which methods are valid? and how can the reader tell? For Kames, the answers to these questions center less on scientific method and more on the situation of the author himself⁵:

Writers on agriculture, very few excepted, deliver their precepts from a study lined with books, without even pretending to experience. Principles and propositions are assumed on the authority of former writers: opinions pass current from generation to generation; and no person enquires whether they wear the livery of truth.⁶

Like Joseph Warton’s poets who, having “dwelt for years in the Strand, [. . .] attempted to describe fields and rivers, and generally succeeded accordingly,” the inaccuracies bred by agricultural writers have to do with the embodied situation of the writers themselves. Sitting in a study to write about agriculture and drawing on knowledge taken from books, rather than direct experience with farming, makes for nothing more than old misleading information, deceptively repackaged and sold for

profit. If it truly is the case that most writers on agriculture follow this practice, it is no wonder that the sight of “another volume on husbandry” is enough to make a man peevish.

Having made the case against his fellow writers, Kames begins to build a case for himself by asserting that his book is the product of lived, practical experience:

So much I will vouch for myself, that I have not mentioned a single article as certain, but what I have practiced many years with success: the instructions contained in this book are founded on repeated experiments and diligent observation. In short, it will soon be perceived, that this is not a bookseller’s production.⁷

But it is not enough to assert the validity of his own experience. Rather, Kames has had to reinvent personal experience:

Agriculture is a very ancient art. It has been practised everywhere without intermission; but with very little attention to principles. In studying the principles laid down by writers, I found myself in a sort of labyrinth, carried to and fro without any certain direction. After a long course of reading, where there was nothing but darkness and discrepance, I laid aside my books, took heart, and like Des Cartes, commenced my inquiries with doubting of everything.⁸

These claims implicitly attest to the uniqueness of *The Gentleman Farmer* and its contents. Unlike most books on agriculture, this is neither a “bookseller’s production” nor delivered “from a study lined with books,” bolstered by “the authority of former writers.” Instead, it is the result of Kames’ own practice, experimentation, and observation—experience that cannot be replaced or reproduced, and derives from the deliberate exclusion of all prior written knowledge. While Kames might have been right to treat many of his fellow authors’ works with suspicion, his drastic Cartesian method also links agricultural knowledge to the very basic unit of personal identity. Instead of “I think, therefore I am” it is “I farm, therefore I am”—empiricism, the belief that valid scientific knowledge can only be conveyed through proper attention to one’s subjective experience.

Kames’ claims for the authority of his personal experience, taken by themselves, are convincing enough, since the reader is reassured that he or she is receiving the product of one man’s life and work. However, set in the context of eighteenth century British agricultural literature, both

Kames' preface and the booksellers' productions seem rather threadbare. Impatience with multiplying works on agriculture, fantasies of laying aside all agricultural writing to start from scratch, and paranoia about authors who write from their studies instead of their fields were standard features of discussions about agricultural prose long before and after the publication of *The Gentleman Farmer*. In fact, I chose to open this chapter with *The Gentleman Farmer* because its preface is a wonderfully articulate and well-written example of these clichés.

Significantly, complaints like Kames' about the validity of agricultural prose were not merely public shows for the sake of selling books, but also pervaded private conversation. For instance, in 1765, minister and agricultural author Walter Harte wrote to 24-year-old Arthur Young about a gargantuan collection of agricultural letters and essays which had just been published, the *Museum Rusticum et Commerciale*:

As to the Museum Rusticum (your writings in it excepted) I know nothing of the authors, but look upon it [. . .] as a blue-paper job. Books in this age are a manufacture as much as hats or pins. The bookseller chooses a subject and the author writes at 10s. a sheet. It is probable that one man in a garret, who does not know a blade of wheat from a blade of barley, writes half the letters from the 'Kentish man,' 'Yorkshire man,' 'Glocester man,' &c. And perhaps the same hand, in the notes, signs with all the letters in the alphabet.⁹

Like Kames' imagined authors who write from studies lined with books, the specter of Harte's man in a garret haunts each encounter with agricultural writing. It may also be no surprise that the editors and correspondents of *Museum Rusticum*, members of Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce, anticipated Harte's criticisms from the very title page of their publication, which reads: *Museum Rusticum et Commerciale*: OR, SELECT PAPERS ON AGRICULTURE, COMMERCE, ARTS, AND MANUFACTURES, **DRAWN FROM EXPERIENCE** and Communicated by **GENTLEMEN engaged in these Pursuits** (emphasis mine).¹⁰

In some sense, Kames' and Harte's anxieties were well-founded. Until 1793, when the Board of Agriculture and Internal Improvement was established, there was no centralized body for

collecting and distributing agricultural knowledge in Britain. And even after that, the Board was notoriously incompetent in its attempts to disseminate and standardize nationwide knowledge of agricultural techniques. There was no standard language for talking about soil, no breed standards for livestock, and the practices of farming varied greatly from one region of the country to another. Likewise, writers lacked standard methods for agricultural experimentation and recording their results. Consequently, they put a great amount of emphasis on what I call “hard subjectivity”¹¹: first-hand witnessing, conscious experimentation, and meticulous record-keeping. (See figures 1-5.) An author’s worth depended on the internal consistency of his own system, his records of dates, weights, prices, and acreage. The surest proof of his intelligence and honesty was in his arithmetic. But hard subjectivity is never an impersonal set of data; its validity depends on the fact that it was produced by a single person. In other words, to agricultural prose writers, data does not make sense unless it is grounded within the memory and narrative of a single life. The man in the garret is so unsettling not because what he says is necessarily wrong, but because he literally sits in a London garret while claiming to be on a farm in Kent. In other words, the author’s own life gives structure to thought and memory, orders facts and makes them meaningful.

While Kames gave *The Gentleman Farmer* philosophical legitimacy by drawing upon Descartes to articulate his approach, other agricultural writers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were unable or disinclined to think about their own methods in such lofty terms. Nonetheless, with the exception of the mythical man in the garret, agricultural writers starting in the mid-eighteenth century shared the same commitment to personal experience and record-keeping to combat inaccuracy and unreliability of information. Also like Kames, they preface their works with a disavowal of all, or almost all, previous agricultural writing, often accompanied by a fantasy of laying aside, ignoring, or even destroying the entire canon of British agricultural literature. In the place of this mass of supposedly useless books, each author offers his own, along with the assurance that it

derives from practical experience alone. However, claiming to write from experience alone did not protect any writer from having the charge of inexperience and bookishness leveled at him by others. The result is that agricultural prose became a discourse in which most interlocutors refuse to acknowledge one another. More important than the individual disavowals, however, is the fact that these writers show a commitment to the same scientific values of direct experience and hard subjectivity, even as that commitment caused them to mistrust one another's work. These scientific values, which Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison call "epistemic virtues," and their influence on how agricultural writers viewed themselves in relation to their works are the subject of this chapter.¹²

In this chapter, then, I am less concerned with the contents of books of agricultural prose than with the places where authors discuss their lives as the surest proof of their works: dedications, title pages, prefaces, and appendices, as well as private correspondence. Almost always, the periphery of the text is where they theorize knowledge-production and manage encounters with readers. Ultimately, I argue, the epistemic virtues of agricultural writing obliquely and directly theorized in these works are based in writers' understanding of subjectivity. The main subjects of this chapter will be three of the most prolific agricultural writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: Arthur Young, William Marshall, and William Cobbett, along with the authors they admire and condemn. In all the works examined here, subjective experience as recorded in journals, data tables, descriptions, and diagrams is the touchstone of valid knowledge. Young, Marshall, and Cobbett published dozens of books each over their decades-long careers, and their claims about their personal experience became a vehicle for theorizing knowledge and its relationship to self. However, for these three men, starting over like Descartes was simply not possible. As much as they insisted on the uniqueness of their own experiences, they nevertheless found themselves using other agricultural writers to bolster, not just their facts, but their sense of self.

The Body of Agricultural Writing 1760-1830

The period between 1760 and 1830 is what economic historian Joel Mokyr terms the “Agricultural Enlightenment”—a sharp rise of interest in “progressive” or scientific farming practices, beginning in the mid-18th century, which aimed to make Britain’s agricultural output as efficient as possible in the face of wars with France and the United States, Britain’s growing population, and several years of bad harvests nation-wide.¹³ While the actual economic impact of this movement is still being debated by historians, one of its most visible legacies is the number of books, pamphlets, and periodicals that flooded the marketplace. Although British agricultural writing in its modern form had emerged in the 17th century, influenced by Baconian scientific method, the number of publications on agriculture only made a noticeable upswing in the mid-eighteenth century. Historian Pamela Horn estimates that in the entire decade of the 1740s, only three to six books on agriculture were published in Britain. By the 1760s, that figure rises to 22-26 per decade, and to 90-100 by the end of the century. These figures do not include periodicals, reprinted editions, or multiple books by prolific authors, like Marshall and Young, who regularly published several books in a year.¹⁴ Diversity of genres also increased along with the number of texts. Agricultural prose in this period can be divided into: records of experimentation, especially concerning the produce of a single farm; county or regional reports on existing farming practices and economic conditions, often written in the form of tours; general how-to manuals on complete farm management; how-to manuals on specific subjects; and total farming systems based on theories of soil and plants.

One genre missing from this tally is georgic, which also enjoyed some popularity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This chapter, however, sets georgic aside because it is on the whole not preoccupied by the same epistemological problems that worried agricultural prose writers. Although georgic is a didactic genre, georgic poets do not seem to agonize about the truth

of their own or others' works. For instance, John Dyer's book length poem on sheep farming, *The Fleece* (1757), is accompanied with no preface and few notes; it provides instructions, but betrays no self-consciousness about their validity. The poet who comes closest to the mode of the agricultural prose writer is James Grahame in the preface to his long poem *British Georgics* (1809).¹⁵ Grahame carefully grooms his readers' expectations, claiming that his aim is "not so much to instruct as to amuse; not to teach a science, but to recommend the study of it."¹⁶ This claim is somewhat belied by Grahame's inclusion of a hundred pages of endnotes, many of which go into great detail about agricultural method. In the end, he positions himself on the line between adorning agriculture and acting as an authority on it.

That I am not a practical farmer, is a circumstance which must, no doubt, derogate from my authority as a writer on agriculture, and may even perhaps draw on my present attempt the imputation of presumption. In my justification, I would observe, that though I have never practised the business, I have studied it, both by much actual observation, and some reading. From my infancy, I have in general passed near the half, sometimes a greater portion of the year, in the country.¹⁷

As we will see from the writings of more irascible agriculturalists like Thomas Brace Stone, merely living a half a year in the country would indeed be a poor basis of authority for agricultural prose. But Grahame has more leeway than prose writers, as well: writing under the heading of georgic he can have his didacticism, but swear it off as mere amusement if challenged. It is important to note that Grahame, writing in 1809, comes after most of the works discussed in this chapter. Unlike Dyer writing in 1757, whose text is silent about issues of credibility or utility, Grahame seems to have projected the mistrust of agricultural writers like Kames and Harte onto his own works.

As we saw in Chapter Two, poets of this period could and did hold themselves to rigorous standards for making knowledge in their poetry. However, the important distinction between Charlotte Smith and John Clare on the one hand and agricultural writers on the other is that the poets held *themselves* to higher standards than their readers demanded, while agricultural writers demanded that *each other* rise to those standards. Even in Warton and Aikin's criticism of inaccurate

poetry, the stakes are no higher than preventing bad poems from being written. The lengths to which Smith and Clare went to in order to include scientific accuracy in their poems seemed to be unappreciated by most of their readers—Smith’s notes were, after all, of “no material value,” while Clare’s descriptions were simply the “delineation of mere exterior objects.” Therefore, my distinction between georgic like Dyer’s and Grahame’s versus prose like Kames’ is based largely in these works’ self-perceptions of their and others’ utility, rather than the distinction between poetry and prose *per se*.

I say “self-perceptions” because even though agricultural prose generally aimed to instruct farmers and estate owners, its influence on farming practices is still in doubt, let alone the question of its contribution to national progress in farming. Historians of agriculture and economics are still unsure about whether these texts reached an audience capable of putting them to good use, and, if so, whether the contents were of any help to farmers.¹⁸ They were, perhaps, more of an *outcome* of scientific agriculture than a cause. Despite these doubts, as Mokyr points out, one thing is clear: however useful or useless the texts themselves were, there was a growing market for them—someone found them interesting, worth buying, and worth reading.¹⁹ Therefore, I start from the assumption that it is not only worthwhile, but also necessary, to read agricultural prose by way of literary analysis. I do not say this because agriculturalists necessarily thought of themselves as literary writers, but rather, because scholars cannot mine these texts for historical data on agriculture and economics without understanding the texts’ own struggles with knowledge, method, and the meaning of authorship. If nothing else, we cannot understand the knowledge that these texts make if we do not understand *how* they make it.

However, I do not want to suggest that agricultural writing and agricultural writers were completely separate from the realm of what is more traditionally thought of as literature. William Cobbett’s influence on the press, his place as both a satirist and an object of satire, and his efforts to

bring literacy and knowledge of the rules of grammar (long restricted to those wealthy enough to attend a grammar school) to the poor have long earned him the attention of literary scholars. Arthur Young, Charles Burney's brother-in-law and Frances Burney's step-uncle, was a lover of the arts, particularly literature and music, and was a welcome member of intellectual circles prior to his Evangelical conversion at the age of 56. William Marshall's first book, *Minutes of Agriculture*, was published by none other than Robert Dodsley's younger brother James, who took the shop over upon Dodsley's retirement, and because of the Dodsley connection Marshall solicited and received pre-publication criticism about the book from Samuel Johnson. And Marshall also waded into the Picturesque Controversy of 1794-6 over the relationship between landscape painting and landscape gardening, devoting a book-length response to the squabbles of Uvedale Price, Richard Payne Knight, and Humphry Repton.²⁰ In practice, none of these men were divorced from literature or the arts, and as much attention has been given in recent decades to literary authors' interest in science in the decades preceding and following the turn of the nineteenth century, so too should we pay attention to the literary side of these works of scientific agriculture.

Between Modern Knowledge and Objective Methods

To understand the nature of agricultural knowledge as it was made in the texts I will discuss here, let us return to Kames' preface, and his undertaking of Cartesian method in doing away with everything already supposedly known about agriculture. Importantly, he prefaces the announcement of his method with the observation that "Agriculture is a very ancient art. It has been practised everywhere without intermission; but with very little attention to principles." Kames' frustration with existing agricultural literature, although aimed at his competitors in the book market, has its source in the nature of agricultural knowledge itself—the fact that it comes from an ancient practice and cannot readily be made into a new discipline. Unlike in newer experimental sciences, the

proponent of scientific agriculture was tasked with making knowledge about practices already deeply embedded in everyday life into a discipline. In other words, knowledge about agriculture must not be made anew, but made, to use Michael McKeon's term, modern. For modern knowledge, McKeon claims, is "Disembedded from the matrix of experience it seeks to explain, [and is] defined precisely by its explanatory ambition to separate itself from its object of knowledge sufficiently to fulfill the epistemological demand that what is known must be divided from the process by which it is known."²¹ The act of making agricultural knowledge by passing it down through generations of custom and practice is no longer viable in the eyes of writers like Kames—agricultural knowledge must be equipped with its own standards and methods for transmission, standards and methods which in themselves have nothing to do with farming, and which must be legible to people other than farmers.

It would seem at this moment—the transition from farming by tradition and custom to the written transmission of knowledge—would also be the moment when the standards of objectivity and the scientific method would first be applied to agricultural prose. But a read through Kames' work does not turn up any call for objectivity—that is, a call for agriculturalists to remove their subjective prejudices and experiences from agricultural experimentation. On the contrary, Kames' goal is to transform the reader's self by creating a new type of personal identity: the gentleman farmer. Likewise, in the dozens of agricultural works in the decades preceding and following Kames', we find systematic appeals to subjective experience, but no calls for increased objectivity. Rather, each author calls for the *right kind* of subjective experience—spent on the farm, not in the study or garret. These authors' repeated appeals to subjective experience as the basis for scientific method may be jarring to readers who have been taught to equate science with objectivity, and the temptation may be to see these works simply as science done badly. However, historians of science like Jan Golinski, Stuart Strickland, Lorraine Daston, and Peter Galison have shown that scientific

practices of this time were deeply involved with the making of the self.²² Daston and Galison claim that in post-Cartesian eighteenth century philosophy, which split knowledge from the knower, “continuity of consciousness and memory came to replace the soul as the definition and expression of the self, introspection seemed to reveal fluid, tattered, and even contradictory identities.”²³ As a result the self of the scientist became a collection of thoughts, memories, and images brought together more or less by chance, and thus a cause for great concern.

This scientific self, then, was so precarious that even living among the wrong sensory phenomena and engaging in the wrong kinds of habits could warp one’s ability to practice a science correctly. According to Thomas Brace Stone, a land surveyor and perhaps Arthur Young’s harshest contemporary critic, Young’s skills compare unfavorably with his own because Young had been apprenticed to a wine merchant as a teenager before taking up farming in his early twenties, while Stone had been apprenticed to a farmer from the beginning:

With deference to Mr. Young's judgment, I presume it must be one who, after having received an education best suited to agricultural pursuits, possesses taste for attaining perfection in the science, one who has been placed for four or five years, at that period of life in which you were apprenticed to a wine merchant, with a farmer of experience in some county where the art of tillage has made the greatest progress. At this time, the mind, not yet trained to professional habits of any kind, or involved with the cares of life, receives with readiness whatever instruction is conveyed to it; and, first impressions being the strongest, the seeds of knowledge take then the deepest root in the understanding, and mark the future direction of the man.²⁴

In other words, Young’s ability to practice agriculture has been hindered for the rest of his life because he did not receive the right impressions and instructions at the right time in his life. While we should take this argument with a grain of salt (Stone’s friend William Marshall also criticized Young and had also been apprenticed to a merchant before returning to farming in his early twenties), it also shows how deeply this tenuous notion of the self had influenced practical writers.²⁵

The effect of seeing the self as a compendium of thoughts, images, and memories at the mercy of circumstances made scientific work an act of exerting, rather than suppressing, the self. In

the late-eighteenth century view of the self, according to Daston and Galison, “it is memory that safeguards the unity of the self.”²⁶ A scientist had to muster all of his or her powers of observation, memory, and record-keeping in order to sort through data and isolate what was meaningful. But while the correct upbringing or apprenticeship might have formed an agriculturalist’s understanding correctly, record-keeping was the key to successful knowledge-production. In this view, memory and record-keeping are more deeply important than convenience or efficiency; they get to the root of what it means to be sound as a person and agriculturalist: “Just as moral responsibility for one’s past actions depended on remembering them—connecting past and present selves—scientific responsibility for one’s observations depended on recording and synthesizing them.”²⁷ I argue, then, that from the 1760s to the 1830s, agricultural writing became a medium for making the self: in some cases, an alternate form of life-writing. Only afterwards, in the mid to late nineteenth century did thinkers across Europe and America come to view the self as a unified identity whose will could interfere with the sanctity of data. Objectivity then came to prominence as a scientific virtue, and agricultural writing began a new phase.

However, the distinction between pre-objective assertions of self and objective suppression of self is not always as tidy as I have outlined here. A good example of a mixture of objectivity and hard subjectivity can be found in the introduction to one of Arthur Young’s earliest books on agriculture: *A Course of Experimental Agriculture* (1770). Near the beginning of the introduction, Young states that

My attention to form a register minutely genuine has been so great, that some experiments are inserted, from which scarce any conclusions can be drawn; owing to unlucky accidents, or other causes. I did not reject them, that my book might be the real transcript of my practice, and not the partial representation of experiments picked and culled to serve the purposes of a favorite idea, or upon which to found a brilliant hypothesis.²⁸

Young’s insistence on not tampering with his records to the point of not removing any looks like objectivity carried almost to madness. The deliberate inclusion of useless information proves the

point that Young's willful subjectivity is not interfering with the conclusions that may be drawn as a whole. Young's reason for doing so is that he saw "a too common delusion, [. . .] the adopting of a favourite notion, and forming experiments with an eye to confirm it" in the works of other writers.²⁹ On the other hand, while Young does not want his willful self to intrude, he finds his identity crucial to the work's credibility:

it is very necessary, in works of this nature, for the author to set his name to his labours, with that of the place where his experiments were made, that all who think it proper may make any inquiries as they please into the truth of his assertions; and though the degrees of his accuracy cannot be thus discovered, yet the world has at least the satisfaction of knowing that they read the composition of one who is a real farmer, and who made great numbers of experiments. It is upon this account that I prefix my name to these sheets, and very far from any vanity of being known as an author.³⁰

In "setting his name to his labors," Young does not believe that his readers will necessarily travel to his farm to verify his claims. However, they are able to imagine the author as a real person, and it is this idea—experiments performed and recorded by a unified self—that offers satisfaction of accuracy. In both of these cases, Young takes nothing for granted—he must justify both his objective and non-objective stances, perhaps because it is not clear which stance the reader will require. For the rest of this chapter, I will turn my attention from general epistemic virtues of agricultural discourse to the ways they manifested in the writings of Young, Cobbett, and Marshall. Although these writers insisted on the primacy of personal experience, they could never wipe away all knowledge and start over again. They found, despite themselves, that text is a kind of experience; discourse is a kind of life. What follows is a record of their attempts to reconcile their individual experiences with their places in the larger discourse.

Arthur Young's Shame: Epistemologies of Agriculture and Evangelicalism

Arthur Young was born in 1741, the second son of a gentry family which moved in aristocratic and literary London circles. Since he could not inherit the family estate under the laws of

primogeniture, there was some difficulty in selecting a profession that was suitable for him. When he was 22, after a failed attempt by his family to make him a wine merchant, his mother offered Young an inherited piece of land to farm. It was here that Young began a course of reading on agriculture and published his first agricultural essays in the *Museum Rusticum*. In 1767, Young married Martha Allen, Charles Burney's sister-in-law, and domestic strife between his mother and new wife forced him to leave home and rent a new farm. Around this time, he published his first successful book, *A Six Weeks Tour through the Southern Counties of England and Wales* (1768). Pressured by financial failures of his farms, he published several more tours in the following years, as well as experiments, essays, and books on economic policies relating to agriculture, in addition to founding the *Annals of Agriculture* in 1784, which ran until 1815. By the 1790s, Young had built up a reputation as Britain's foremost writer on agricultural experiment and practice. He made his experience as an agriculturalist into a well-paid career when he was elected the Secretary of the Board of Agriculture upon its creation in 1793 for £500 per annum. Young held this post until his last years, and died in 1820.³¹

Even among his contemporaries, Young had perhaps the most visible career of any agriculturalist in Britain. He was 67 years old in 1808, when London publisher John Joseph Stockdale the younger published *Pursuits of Agriculture*, a poetic satire on the foibles of the Norfolk Agricultural Society modeled on Thomas James Mathias' popular satiric poem, *The Pursuits of Literature*. In an extended footnote, the author—perhaps Stockdale himself—recounts a recent experiment of the Society's, in which they interplanted turnips and radishes in equal measure, hoping to use the radishes as a trap crop to lure insect pests away from the turnips. Subscribers who financially backed the experiment contended that the idea was “good as new”—“and I dare say, so it was,” the note quips, for it turned out to be neither good nor new.³² After the experiment failed,

It so chanced, that somebody fond of poring in obsolete and forgotten books, found the very same thing at page 239 of a *Six Weeks Tour*, published some forty years ago. I have heard the author of that tour (who was present at the subscription, if not himself a subscriber), a good deal laughed at for having forgotten it—very unfairly

indeed, in my opinion. It is surely as unreasonable to expect that a man is to remember the nonsense he wrote about turneps and radishes forty years ago, as that his palate is to retain at present, a distinct impression of the flavour of the turneps and radishes he ate in the same summer. Surely the one must be as fugitive as the other.³³

By G.E. Fussell's estimate, Young published around 250 volumes over the course of his life and travelled thousands of miles around Britain and Europe for the purposes of writing agricultural tours.³⁴ Of course he had written and seen more than the human mind could remember at any given time—a fact of human life which was nevertheless emphasized by the fact that his writings and tours were public knowledge. Any reader “fond of poring in obsolete and forgotten books” could unearth one of Young's long-forgotten memories, beliefs, or identities. The awkward turnip and radish experiment at the Norfolk Agricultural Society—67-year-old Young awaiting the results of an experiment that 27-year-old Young had written about—exemplifies the tenuousness of Young's scientific identity. His physical and print selves, both present in the same place at once, are still separated as if they were two different people—a kind of folding over of the forty years until the edges meet, like a piece of paper. The author of *Pursuits* puts his finger on the dilemma of the scientist and the limits of even the most meticulous record-keeping. Whether fairly or unfairly, the burden was upon Young to unify his career—to remember what he had written about turnips and radishes.³⁵ But if this was the scientific ideal expected by the members of the Norfolk Agricultural Society, Stockdale realizes that it butts up against the limits of hard subjectivity. Even written record, like taste, is a fugitive impression.

In private, Young did in fact make an attempt to trace his own career by writing reams of journals and, near the end of his life, an autobiography. These were later edited and published as *The Autobiography of Arthur Young* in 1898 by the novelist and writer of agricultural tours Matilda Betham-Edwards. Aside from letters and journal entries, most of the text was written in the mid-eighteen teens, a few years before Young's death. Most significantly, Young decided to undertake this task

after an Evangelical conversion brought on by the death of his favorite daughter, a 14-year-old girl the family called Bobbin, from tuberculosis in 1797. Young blamed himself for Bobbin's death because he had put her in a London school against her will, where she contracted the disease. Bobbin's death created an existential crisis for Young; in the following months he withdrew from society and began a course of obsessive religious reading, finally coming across William Wilberforce's *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians*, which had been published earlier that year. A chance letter from Wilberforce—then a total stranger—applying to Young for advice on agricultural matters prompted Young to correspond with Wilberforce on religious ones. Eventually, Young converted to Wilberforce's brand of Evangelicalism which came to be the prevailing force in Young's inner life for the next twenty-three years until his death.

Betham-Edwards sees the *Autobiography* as a document compromised by “religious melancholia of [Young's] later years.”³⁶ For her, the despondent tone of much of the writing, in addition the dogmatic, religious interjections of the later Young, seem disappointingly out of place in an account of a life so full of interest and action. Contrary to Betham-Edwards, I do not take Young's “religious melancholia” to mean that he was compromised at an intellectual level. Evangelicalism, taken as an ideology of knowledge, has much the same requirements for valid knowledge that Young himself brought to his agricultural texts. A true conversion must be an authentic, personal experience, usually also documented with the apparatus of hard subjectivity: first-hand witness and written record. While Young's early life is extensively documented in his letters to others, he only began to systematically apply hard subjectivity to his personal life when he began a journal during Bobbin's final illness. His religious fanaticism is, from an epistemological standpoint, much in keeping with his concerns about his public works. Perusing the journal in 1817, 20 years after Bobbin's death, Young inserted a note among these first entries:

Throughout many of the succeeding notes, several expressions occur not all consistent with true evangelical religion; but I would not afterwards alter them,

because I wished to ascertain, on the re-perusal of these papers, what was at the moment of my affliction the state of my mind and of my faith.³⁷

Like his decision to include inconclusive data in the *Course of Experimental Agriculture*, Young looks back on his life with the same kind of melancholy objectivity. This objective record of facts, however, is necessary to his understanding of his life story, which by 1817 hinged on his conversion.

Aside from the influences of Wilberforce and Bobbin's death, Betham-Edwards also speculates that this melancholia can be traced to "exaggerated condemnation for foibles of his youth"—a condemnation that can be difficult to explain.³⁸ Young's retrospective treatment of his earlier works—which veers between inflated self-importance and self-abnegating shame—is my focus here. For instance, in recollecting the publication of the *Six Weeks Tour*, Young claims it was the first account of a tour ever published to focus exclusively on agriculture. Young recognizes the publication of the *Six Weeks Tour* as a significant moment in agricultural history because, whether for better or worse, the tour became one of the most important genres of agricultural literature. He makes his claim for the importance of this new invention by displacing his attitude toward other texts onto an anecdote:

When a Lord Chancellor of England, amusing himself with husbandry, read the English works on that subject for information, and burnt them as affording him nothing but contradictions, without doubt he complained that these writers did not describe the common management of the farmers, and on that management founding their propositions of improvement. But the fact was, and it must be, in the nature of things, writers confined to their closets, or, at most, to a single farm, could not describe what it was impossible for them to know³⁹

Without citing his source, Young refers to an infamous anecdote about Sir Francis Bacon that Jethro Tull had published in his first edition of *The Horse-Hoeing Husbandry*:

Scarcely any Subject has more of the Ornaments of Learning bestowed upon it, than Agriculture has, by antient and modern Writers. But a late Great Man, who was the Cicero of the Age, having perused all their Books of Husbandry, ordered them, notwithstanding their Eloquence, to be carried upon a Hand-Barrow out of his Study, and thrown in the Fire. [. . .] He declared, that he could not, for his life, guess what those Authors would be at; for they treated of an Art wherein they formed no manner of Principles.⁴⁰

Hastily and without good cause, Young ascribes Bacon's frustration to the fact that earlier authors had not toured. But in fact, Bacon's frustration was with writers' lack of general principles, not with whether or not they had seen the farms of others. The discrepancy between the two passages, which must have been intentional on Young's part, shows how his epistemic virtues differ from Bacon's (or, at least, Bacon's according to Tull.) Valid knowledge, for Young, comes from the direct, embodied experience of travel alone, not through reading or even in working the same plot of land day-to-day. For Young, the new method of touring invalidates the entire canon of agricultural writing, although Young allows Bacon to do the dirty work of actually throwing the books on the fire.

Young's satisfaction with the *Six Weeks Tour* does not carry over to his other works, however. The *Course of Experimental Agriculture*, which we encountered above, troubled Young throughout his life. While in its preface, he expounds upon the necessity of signing his name to work in order to give his readers proof that these are real experiments carried out by a real man, Young's identity carries more weight than just that of an experimenter: "In numerous incidences, I have been a very bad farmer, and acted contrary to the dictates of good husbandry; but my faults are registered, and I hope condemned impartially."⁴¹ This confession shows that, at least for Young, a transcript of pure experience was far more important than a book about good agriculture. He confesses his inadequacies as if they were sins, and suggests that faults of knowledge accompany, or perhaps result from, faults of character. Most of the rest of the preface is a survey of other agricultural works, in which he turns the same destructive lens on them.

In the *Autobiography*, looking back from a distance of roughly 45 years, Young's confessional shame about the *Course* had not abated. In speaking of the time of life when he published the *Course*, he says:

And the circumstance which perhaps of all others in my life I most deeply regretted and considered as a sin of the blackest dye, was the publishing the result of my experience during these four-years; which speaking as a farmer, was nothing but ignorance, folly, presumption, and rascality.⁴²

How could publishing a perhaps less-than-useful book on agriculture be the greatest sin and regret of one's life? There is a gap here, between text and life, which is difficult to parse. Young represents the *Six Weeks Tour* in retrospect to be more unique or revolutionary than it actually was, but I do not think it is mere bragging. Nor do I think that his regret over the *Course of Experimental Agriculture* is unfounded. Rather, there is an emotional and moral dimension to agricultural writing that goes beyond the knowledge that is factually represented on the page.

Young's guilt over publishing the *Course of Experimental Agriculture* ran deep and was not a matter of public show. Late in his life he compiled a work—essentially an enormous commonplace book of agricultural quotations—called *The Elements and Practice of Agriculture*, which Young began nearly twenty years before his conversion.⁴³ In his introduction, he makes it clear that part of the reason for publishing such a work was to repent for the *Course*.

I felt it as a case of conscience, to make whatever reparation I could to the publication for the former publication of a work, purporting to be experimental; and containing what I called experiments, but published at a time in which real ignorance was to assume the place which should have been occupied by knowledge, the result of experience. ¹[May God forgive me the deep offence of such a work, and relative to which the only possible comfort I can draw, is, the neglect into which it fell. Long after the publication, and where I was in a measure, I trust, come to myself I made the requisite enquiries into the loss which might have been sustained by the publisher, meaning to repair it, but I found that none had been suffered; and I have not omitted the means of preventing any future revival of ~~that~~ [[^]those crude notions ideas], which from the bottom of my soul, I wish had never received existence.]⁴⁴

The manuscript from which this passage was taken is in fair hand, suggesting that Young decided to omit this public repentance fairly late in the writing process. Whether he omitted it because it was

¹ In the manuscript, the text in brackets is crossed out with a large loopy X that precisely denotes the beginning and end words of the canceled passage. I have done my best to render Young's corrections and cancelations, which become most intense as he deprecates the *Course* as, not just a failed work of science, but a sin.

too personal, or because he had doubts about the level of repentance the *Course* required is unclear. But in either case, here we have the surest, saddest proof that in Young's old age sins against God and sins against science were indistinguishable. For Young, the surest means of penance became, not simply destroying copies of the *Course* (although he did do that) but compiling works from other authors to replace it. His scientific sins could not be washed away by his knowledge alone, but could perhaps be washed away with the words and knowledge of others.

Young's life is the story of evangelism and Evangelicalism: zeal for agricultural improvement during the first half, mixed with zeal for Christianity in the second. While Young began farming and touring out of financial necessity, his early agricultural writings became the record of his life, both for himself and others, like the members of the Norfolk Agricultural Society. When he was an agricultural evangelist, the written record of his tours and experiments sufficed as documents and it was only during his existential crisis and subsequent conversion that he supplemented these records with a journal. In the next section, we will see William Cobbett using agricultural writings as testament to his personal life only beginning in his 50s, but he makes up for this lost time by appropriating the writings and careers of Jethro Tull and Young for himself.

William Cobbett: The New Tull and Young-with-a-Difference

William Cobbett did not have an agonized relationship with his own works on agriculture like Young did, but he did have a complex relationship with both Young, who began publishing around the time Cobbett was born, and Tull, who died the year Young was born. While Cobbett was not sparing in his condemnation of most works of agriculture, his relationship with them is different from Kames' or Young's. Instead of silencing other authors in order to emphasize his own experience, Cobbett appropriates others' works for his own use, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly. Cobbett accuses Young of not founding his claims upon personal experience, but remakes

silently his own career as an agriculturalist in the image of Young's. Likewise, Cobbett quietly hacks and mangles Tull's *Horse-Hoeing Husbandry* in order to make it conform to his own sense of epistemic virtues while giving Tull the credit for all the original ideas contained therein. Through Young and Tull, Cobbett deliberately constructs a lineage of agricultural ideas and methods. But he does so, I argue, because of his own late-start career, and his anxieties about the end of life. With the specters of the old, blind religious fanatic Young and the isolated, castigated Tull in front of him, Cobbett cautiously enters into a career as an agriculturalist. Through the careful refashioning of their works, he justifies his choice to come to agricultural writing late in life.

Cobbett was born a generation later than Young, in 1763, and to a much lower station in life. His father was an inn-keeper and small farmer in Surrey. At the age of 20, Cobbett ran away to London. His adventures led him into the army, and then into a career as first a conservative and then radical writer, and finally as an MP in the House of Commons before his death in 1835. Cobbett was credited by his contemporaries as single-handedly founding the cheap press in Britain, making it possible for printed material to be distributed to people of all social classes.⁴⁵ But it was not until later in his life that Cobbett's writing took an explicitly didactic turn, with a view to helping the poor educate themselves, grow their own food, and manage their households more economically. In the last fifteen years of his life, Cobbett published several books on agriculture: *A Year's Residence in the United States of America* (1819), *The Woodlands* (1825), *The English Gardener* (1829), and *Rural Rides* (1830). While the works of Kames, Young, and most other agricultural writers are by and large addressed to owners of large estates who had enough disposable cash to conduct agricultural experiments, Cobbett's works take a bottom-up approach. Cobbett looks to reform British agriculture household by household, giving families an understanding of how to use their small plots of land the most efficiently. His books, then, are about *gardening*, rather than *agriculture*,

although this is a difference of scale only: as a writer, he compares his works to books of agricultural discourse.

Cobbett's first book solely devoted to farming was the *Year's Residence*, partly a journal of his time spent on a small farm in New York and partly instruction for British farmers on how to benefit from American farming techniques. In the introduction, Cobbett states that though he had always practiced farming ("from the age of six years, when I climbed the side of a steep sandrock, and there scooped me out a plot four feet square to make me a garden"), it was not until his time in Newgate prison as a political prisoner from 1810-1812 that he began to read and write about agriculture.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, his authority comes from, not simply his life experience, but his meticulous recording and recounting of it. In order to effectively instruct others, "one of the best modes, if not the very best, is, to give them, in detail, an account of what one has done oneself in that same situation."⁴⁷ Cobbett makes himself the measure of agricultural experience for his readers: "The account, which I shall give," he says, "shall be that of actual *experience*. I will say what I *know* and what I have *seen* and what I have *done*."⁴⁸ The journal portion of the *Residence*, then, contains much detail that falls outside of the topic of agriculture. For instance, on June 16th, 1817, Cobbett writes: "Fine, beautiful day. Never saw such fine weather. Not a morsel of *dirt*. The ground sucks up all. I walk about and work in the land in shoes made of deer-skin. They are dressed *white*, like breeches-leather. I began *to leave off my coat* to day, and to not expect to put it on again till October. My hat is a white chip, with broad brims. Never better health." Again, on July 8th he writes: "Fine hot day. Wear no waistcoat now, except in the morning and evening."⁴⁹ The many intimate details like this, which fill a great deal of the journal, show his commitment to portraying agricultural work (and writing) as a rounded, complete, fully lived and embodied experience.

Given Cobbett's emphasis on direct experience, it is not surprising that he is skeptical about other agricultural texts. As we will see again in the writings of William Marshall, perhaps the most telling evidence of Cobbett's authority is not his reading, but his ability to *reject* most of what he read:

During my whole life I have been *a gardener*. There is no part of the business, which, first or last, I have not performed with my own hands. And, as to *it* I owe very little to *books*, except that of TULL; for I never read a good one in my life, except a French book, called the *Manuel du Jardinier*.⁵⁰

This is after, he claims, having read “all of our English books on these matters.”⁵¹ The *Manuel du Jardinier* (perhaps the 1765 book by Agostino Mandirola?) is never mentioned again, but we soon find that Jethro Tull's *The Horse-Hoeing Husbandry* has become one the most important books in Cobbett's life. Does this mean that Cobbett overcame his mistrust of other texts? I would suggest that Tull's book makes it into Cobbett's canon, not necessarily because of the information it contains, but because it fits into Cobbett's life narrative in a way that others do not—Tull was a turning point, perhaps Cobbett's own conversion to the writing of agricultural prose. After his course of reading in prison, Cobbett says,

I then, for the first time, read that Book of all Books on husbandry, the work of JETHRO TULL, to the principles of whom I owe more than to all my other readings and all my experience.⁵²

Cobbett's enthusiasm for Tull's ideas does not release him from the problem of other texts, given his strident rejection of all books (“I never read a good one in my life.”) Rather, I think Cobbett has made his reading of Tull a form of direct personal experience, comparable to touring or farming one's own land.

Tull (1674-1741) was an isolated Berkshire gentleman who was credited by the British with having invented the horse-drawn seed drill, which allowed seed to be sown precisely in rows. The principle behind Tull's system of agriculture was, as Cobbett described it,

that *Tillage will supply the place of manure*; and that his [Tull's] own experience shows, that, a *good* crop of wheat, for any number of years, may be grown, every year, upon the same land, without manure, from first to last.⁵³

This system, although Young condemned it as dangerous (and from my limited knowledge, I agree—it sounds like a recipe for soil depletion and disease), was attractive to Cobbett, not only because of what he learned from it, but because of what it retroactively *confirmed* in his own experience. In 1822, Cobbett republished *The Horse-Hoeing Husbandry* with a long preface that amounted to an account of his own experiments with the Tullian method in 1813-14. The experiments are less than conclusive, but Cobbett, as with the *Year's Residence*, apparently felt that the best way of conveying knowledge about Tull's system was to re-write it as a life narrative.

But Cobbett's motivations for republishing *The Horse-Hoeing Husbandry* surpass the simple wish for the diffusion of agricultural knowledge:

I have derived so much pleasure, and so much real advantage from the reading of this work, that I cannot help wishing to see it in the hands of others. I was born and bred amongst affairs of gardening and farming. I had read a great deal too about them; but, till I read TULL, I knew nothing of the principles. But what struck me most forcibly, when I came to read TULL, was, that all that I had read before, that had any thing like principle in it, had been stolen from him; shockingly disfigured indeed; but still, whatever there was of good was his.⁵⁴

Here we find an appeal to direct experience motivated by an unexpected bond of sympathy. Cobbett wishes to see the ideas of Tull treated fairly and honestly—to make his “shockingly disfigured” knowledge, the only knowledge that Cobbett had ever gathered from other texts, whole again. Cobbett claims Tull as a predecessor by appropriating Tull's works and making them a literal part of his own experience. But this also requires defending him from detractors and plagiarizers. While Cobbett actually cut much of Tull's original text that would seem incorrect or useless to his contemporary readers, he included all of Tull's notes and letters refuting criticisms and charges of plagiarism by Tull's contemporaries. Reprinting *The Horse Hoeing Husbandry* and spreading Tull's ideas, then, were just as much about the ideas themselves as saving Tull's personal reputation. One can see that Cobbett is anxious to champion Tull, and as we will see with Cobbett's reactions to

Arthur Young's works, this is probably because Cobbett worried about whether he, too, would have a champion after his own death.

In her chapter on Cobbett in *Rural Scenes and National Representation*, Elizabeth Helsinger discusses Cobbett's relationship to Young's earlier texts. By 1819, a year before Young's death, Cobbett published his first agricultural work, *A Year's Residence in the United States of America*, and, Helsinger claims, began to deliberately shape his career as "Young-with-a-difference."⁵⁵ Cobbett began agricultural tours in 1822, as Young had done nearly 70 years before; he switched the focus of his long-running newspaper, *The Political Register*, to mainly agricultural and rural affairs (Young was known for his own long-running periodical, *The Annals of Agriculture*); and Cobbett published his own *Cottage Economy* (1822) to match Young's *Rural Oeconomy* (1774), with the difference being that Cobbett's didacticism was aimed at the cottager, rather than gentleman farmer.

But what was the purpose of Cobbett's more or less replacing Young's publications with his own? For Helsinger, the answer lies in thinking about the two authors in a national, political framework. Young, in his role as the Secretary of the Board of Agriculture, advocated protective tariffs on imports and exports. He also published books about the state of agriculture on the Continent and the United States, in order to show how Britain's agriculture might be improved. Cobbett also, as Helsinger proves, *directly* links agricultural practices to politics.⁵⁶ And, of course, it was not until later in his career, when he was also publishing agriculturally, that he ran for, and finally won, a seat in the House of Commons. For Helsinger, Cobbett's Young-with-a-difference publications "[describe] a country that cannot be read for its national meanings according to Young's assumptions."⁵⁷ That is, Cobbett produces an England whose rural injustice and suffering cannot be downplayed, as Young often did; it cannot be alleviated by indirect means such as the protective tariffs Young proposed, but rather needed to be addressed directly through curbing inflated rents and making landowners share more of their agricultural profits with laborers.⁵⁸

While I agree with Helsingers about the similarity of Young and Cobbett's careers, and the certain political motivations behind Cobbett's appropriation of Young's publications for his own means, I want to suggest that Cobbett does not see himself as Young-with-a-difference in political terms only. I want to return to a long passage in the remarkable chapter on "Ruta Baga Culture" in *A Year's Residence*, which Helsingers reads in order to begin thinking about Young and Cobbett's literary-agricultural relationship, as Cobbett saw it. The mention of Young comes during a digression on the Board of Agriculture.

The Board has for its Secretary Mr. ARTHUR YOUNG, a man of great talents, *bribed* from his good principles by this place of five-hundred pounds a year. But Mr. YOUNG, though a most able man, is not always to be trusted. He is a bold asserter, and very few of his statements proceed upon actual experiments.⁵⁹

Young has been co-opted politically, but Cobbett's syntax suggests ("he has been bribed, *but* he is not always to be trusted") that the co-optation is not the reason why readers should mistrust him. Rather, it is Young's tendency to assert agricultural truths in his writing without founding them upon experimentation that makes his knowledge so suspect.

Cobbett then proceeds from Young's personal writings to those of the Board:

And, as to what the Board has *published*, at the public expense, under the name of *Communications*, I defy the world to match it as a mass of illiterate, unintelligible, useless trash. The only paper, published by this Board, I ever thought worth keeping, was an account of the produce from a *single cow*, communicated by Mr. CRAMP, the jail-keeper of the County of Sussex; which contained very interesting and wonderful facts, properly authenticated and stated in a clear manner.⁶⁰

Cobbett's gleefully satirical tone here may not provide the best reflection of his true thoughts on the Board and its publications, but this passage does begin to get at Cobbett's own criteria for trustworthy agricultural writing. *Facts*, even if they are interesting and wonderful, must be "properly" authenticated and "clearly" stated, although what Cobbett means by this is not entirely clear. Ten pages later, another digression introduces the topic of Mr. Cramp's cow again. This time, we find that the proper authentication includes meticulous records of the milk his cow produced over a five year period, as well as of the costs of keeping her. (See figure 5.)⁶¹

Despite the violence of Cobbett's rhetoric about the Board, and his antagonistic views toward Young, there exists nevertheless an imaginative sympathetic interest on Cobbett's side of the relationship. After his rant about the Board, Cobbett continues:

Arthur Young is blind, and never attends the Board. Indeed, sorrowful to relate, he is become a *religious fanatic*, and this in so desperate a degree as to leave no hope of any possible cure. In the pride of our health and strength of mind, as well as body, we little dream of the chances and changes of old age. Who can read the "*Travels in France, Spain, and Italy*," and reflect on the present state of the admirable writer's mind, without feeling some diffidence as to what may happen to himself!⁶²

While Cobbett distances Young's conversion by treating it as if were a type of physical (blindness) or mental (dementia) health condition—in which the patient has no choice—he is still unable to consider it disinterestedly. Being Young-with-a-difference carries the risk of becoming Young-the-same. Cobbett has established a link of sympathy by reading and writing agricultural texts; and if he attempts both to violently discredit the Board's publications under Young, and to even replace Young's texts with his own, he does so at the cost of being unable to disentangle himself from the writings of others.

If Cobbett needed to retroactively claim the experience of Tull in order to justify coming to agricultural writing so late in life, then the chilling prospect of replicating Arthur Young's old age seemed to goad him into writing more. Even if one's agricultural writing is free from defect, will that save one from blindness, isolation, and sad religious fanaticism? Will it save one's work from being plagiarized and disfigured after death? The anxieties that Cobbett's relationships with Tull and Young raise are so dismal in part because they are so personal. But as we look to the works of William Marshall, we will see if a wider scope of sympathy and appropriation can be more effective.

William Marshall and the Self-Practice of Agriculture

William Marshall was without doubt Arthur Young's greatest rival agriculturalist. Despite the fact that he is only read by specialists today, history seems to have come down on Marshall's side.

Young and his method of touring came under criticism in its own time. According to his contemporaries, Young would traverse each county very quickly, getting most of his information from local farmers and laborers, some of whom deliberately misled him.⁶³ The publications of the Board issued under Young's tenure—particularly the agricultural surveys of every county in England and Scotland, each called *A General View of the Agriculture* of that country—were also considered suspect documents, Cobbett's virulent rhetoric aside. The tours that the *General Views* were based upon were undertaken in just a few weeks, often by men who had no actual experience with farming.⁶⁴ Not all of the blame is to be laid at the feet of Young, however: although he may have invented the genre of the agricultural tour, it was mostly Sir John Sinclair who pushed it to this extreme. However, both Young and the Board found one of their most vocal opponents in Marshall. In general, county reports were suspect to Marshall, despite the fact that he had produced a few of his own. He saw no point in reporting on agriculture as if weather and soil were beholden to the arbitrary political boundaries of counties. While he was deeply interested in how the political economy of each county worked, he saw no use in touring a single county as if it provided a complete view of the conditions of agriculture in that part of the country. By the 1790s, he had come to the conclusion that reports should be undertaken by regions of climate and landscape, not political boundaries. His methods, as a result, are seen as more correct in the eyes of agricultural historians. Marshall's version of agricultural writing is closer to what we would consider a sound and thoroughgoing scientific investigation, whereas Young, by contrast, is usually viewed as a somewhat flighty improver whose main interest was in "progress" and who did not have the patience for the day to day business of farming.⁶⁵

Marshall was born in 1745 to an old family of yeoman farmers, in the Vale of Sinnington, Yorkshire. After trying out various trades as a teenager and young man, he returned home upon his father's death and made the decision to devote the rest of his life to the theory and practice of

agriculture. Marshall was forthright, stubborn, and often difficult to work with. Although his opinions about agriculture, landscape design, and estate stewardship were well-respected and highly sought-after, he usually had strained relations with colleagues, employers, and employees, even to the point of blows.⁶⁶ Marshall's writing has more in common with Cobbett's rhetorical style than perhaps any other agricultural writer—boldly convoluted, cantankerous, and peppered with aggressive italics and capitalized words. Marshall's entrance into the world of agricultural publishing was no exception to his combativeness.

Beginning with his first publication, the *Minutes of Agriculture*, Marshall differed with Young about methods for gathering agricultural knowledge. However, despite Marshall's emphasis on comprehensive knowledge that is gathered first hand, he still considered life-writing the appropriate place to begin, since anything by an agricultural writer, he claims, "will be credited or discredited in proportion to his education, his character, and connexions in life."⁶⁷ The "minutes" (that is, small memoranda) that form the first half of the book are both a form of life-writing and the basis for the more general conclusions that Marshall draws in the second part of the work, the "digest" of the minutes. (There is no evidence that Cobbett had read Marshall, but this structure is very similar to that of *A Year's Residence*.) This is why, after briefly recounting his life story, Marshall claims:

It may be necessary to observe, that this *long story* has not been to introduced to give the Writer an opportunity of talking of himself, but of telling the Reader that the HEAD of this DIGEST are taken from that Sketch; [. . .] and that this DIGEST comprehends the *whole* (be it much or little) of the Author's agricultural knowledge.⁶⁸

In other words, since Marshall's autobiography and his knowledge of farming are inseparable, it is necessary for the reader to know both. As a whole, Marshall presents the *Minutes* as one of the few authentic pieces of agricultural writing because they are the product of personal experience and observation, situated within the larger context of his life.

Even more revealing is Marshall's opinion on the usefulness of touring. For Young, the act of leaving one's closet or farm and transiently observing the practices of others constitutes sufficient

personal experience for gathering agricultural knowledge. Marshall, on the other hand, has a much more rigorous definition of what counts as personal experience:

How very little of that which is USEFUL, is to be acquired by *Touring!* I have rode *on horseback* four or five hundred miles; and, notwithstanding I have been incessantly observant, and frequently inquisitive, I have not picked up more than four or five ideas worth bringing home.

The *real state* and *present practice* of ENGLISH AGRICULTURE is devoutly to be wished-for.—But it is not driving post thro' any particular district; nor even riding *in an open chaise* twenty or thirty miles a-day, tho' ever so *inquisitive* among “spirited Farmers,” masters of inns, hostlers, and boot-catchers; that will gain the AGRICULTURAL KNOWLEDGE of that district. Perhaps, nothing but

TWELVE MONTHS' RESIDENCE,
ACTUAL OBSERVATION, and
SELF-PRACTICE, is equal to the task.⁶⁹

This passage is one of several less-than-subtle stabs at Young throughout the book. Nonetheless, residence, direct observation, and “self-practice” was indeed the standard to which Marshall held himself. Travel was not sufficient for him; only residence would suffice. He could not let himself count on the words of others, but must observe everything closely for himself. He also believed that good farming could not be carried out by proxy, which is why he began writing the *Minutes of Agriculture* only when “He had long been convinced of the imbecility of BOOKS and presently discovered the unfitness of BAILIFFS.”⁷⁰ It is in Marshall, much more so than in Cobbett and Young, that we see an ideology of knowledge that advocates the trappings of hard subjectivity and reliance on direct, embodied experience.

While Marshall began to build his reputation on early works like the *Minutes*, and a companion volume of *Experiments*, his life-goal was to produce a volume about the rural economy and farming practices of every region of England. He managed to publish volumes on Norfolk (1787), Yorkshire (1788), and Gloucestershire (1789), the midland counties (1790), and the southern counties (1799), always residing in each of these places for at least a year before allowing himself to publish the volumes. However, he ran out of cash eventually and could not find an organization that would provide him with funding. In the early 1790s, he began to think about institutional

agricultural education, and set about trying to form an agricultural college (an ambition he never fulfilled) and a national board of agriculture. It is this latter ambition that Marshall looked upon most bitterly in retrospect.

Marshall credits himself with having given Sir John Sinclair the idea of forming the Board of Agriculture and Internal Improvement (this claim is somewhat dubious, but it is easy to see how it seemed so from Marshall's point of view.) The idea for such a board was not unique to him, but he had discussed it with Sinclair several times. However, the Board was finally formed in 1793 with Sinclair as its president—a move that Marshall claims was done behind his back while Sinclair knew he was on the road between London and the highlands of Scotland for another agricultural trip. Marshall first heard of the Board's formation upon receiving a letter from Sinclair, asking him to write a *General View* of the central Scottish highlands.⁷¹ In the meantime, Arthur Young was elected secretary to the Board, a move which Marshall took as a personal slight. Although Marshall cooperated with Sinclair's request to publish a *General View* of the central Scottish highlands, he felt a personal enmity toward the Board, its president, secretary, and publications for the rest of his life.

As we have already seen, Marshall and Young—who oversaw the assembly and publication of the *General Views*, in addition to authoring several of them—had different notions about what qualified as the proper methods and conditions for the production of agricultural knowledge. Marshall's general distrust of books and dislike of the county-boundary system of surveying were sure to set him against the *General Views* in the first place.⁷² But instead of ignoring them, he took it upon himself to publish a digest and review of every single one—around 100 books. Over the last ten years of his life, he compiled this digest—cutting or ridiculing whatever was wrong or useless in a particular *General View*, and quoting whatever was correct or helpful. These ended up making five volumes of 500-600 pages each. He finished it not long before his death, and considered it the capstone of his life's work.

The reviews are a sleight of hand on Marshall's part. His first several publications prided themselves on being the result of first-hand experience, practice, and record-keeping. They were, in some sense, an agricultural autobiography: Marshall deliberately moved to different places with a view to publishing these volumes, and literally made a life out of these agricultural endeavors. In this sense, the man who focused so much on experience at the expense of text succeeded, far more than Young or Cobbett, in making his experience into text. But, more remarkably, when the *General Views* began to flood the marketplace and Marshall feared that buyers would consider his texts to be interchangeable with them, he decided to filter them through his own life and make his own experience and knowledge the standard by which they were judged. In the end, the *General Views* seemed to be merged with those texts he himself had written out of his own experience. In the "Advertisement" to the review of the Southern Department, the last book he published before his death, he says

The agents of the Board I have ever considered MY ASSISTANTS, and laborers in MY OWN FIELD.

Notwithstanding, however, this interruption into my original design, [that is, not being able to carry out the surveys himself]—which, during the last forty years, I have held constantly in view, as my leading object in life [. . .] I despair not to accomplish it. The most important, and by far the most difficult part of it,—the registry of the existing practices of England, at the commencement of the nineteenth century—IS NOW FINISHED.⁷³

On one hand, this declaration reaches the extremes of egotism. The authors of the reports to the Board, whose works Marshall has spent thousands of pages correcting, mocking, and decimating, appear here as no more than his assistants. Marshall even takes the role of the landowner and casts the reporters as laborers in his field. On other hand, this statement is a profound acknowledgment of the 72-year-old Marshall's limits as an agricultural writer and a human being. By digesting their works and subjecting them to his own knowledge and expertise, Marshall has made the works of others part of his own life. Like Young's *Elements and Practice of Agriculture* and Cobbett's edition of Tull, Marshall's *Reviews* make the case for their originality by pulling apart the works of others,

rearranging, and digesting them. The finality with which Marshall announced the end of the reviews reflects his own life, as well—he lived only less than a year after completing them.

Conclusion

WRITING and PLOUGHING are two different Talents; and he that writes well, must have spent in Study that Time, which is necessary to be spent in the Fields by him who would Master the Art of Cultivating them.

To write effectually of Ploughing, one must not be qualified to write Learnedly.

—Jethro Tull, 1731

The aim of this chapter is not to suggest that agricultural reform in eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain was a solitary endeavor. In fact, agricultural writers' insistence on the sole validity of personal experience and their refusal to acknowledge each other's work is strange, given the enormous cooperative effort by legislators, landowners, surveyors, and laborers to make the land as productive as possible. The number of agricultural societies appearing in the cities and towns of Britain mushroomed alongside the number of books on agriculture entering booksellers' stalls. While there were only a handful of local agricultural clubs in existence before the 1760s, Nicholas Goddard estimates that over fifty sprang up by 1820, not including national organizations like the Board of Agriculture and Internal Improvement and the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce.⁷⁴ Furthermore, agricultural science itself does not stand alone, as even its early practitioners recognized, but is a composite science made up of botany, geology, chemistry, zoology, and meteorology.⁷⁵ It is also easy to forget about those who actually did the work, and that while enthusiastic landowners and professionals may have been designing and writing up their experiments alone, their laborers were the ones who made the experiments possible to begin with.

Anyone who came to write about agriculture by the 1760s was already a late-comer. Late, as Tull suggests, because he had misspent his own life, taking too much time learning how to write rather than working his fields. And late because he arrived at the tail end of history, trying to correct and refine a practice that was thousands of years old. Or, as we might put it now, late because he spent too much time trying to transform an ancient practice into a body of modern knowledge. In the decades following the works I discuss here, agricultural science would be subsumed into chemistry, gaining more legitimacy.⁷⁶ But between the first conception of agriculture as a science in the 17th and 18th centuries and its transformation into a branch of chemistry in the mid-19th century—that is, in the gap between becoming modern knowledge and the prominence of objectivity—selfhood and personal experience were the surest proof of knowing for those who described and experimented with modern agricultural practice. The only recourse was, as Kames said, to take heart and begin again in the darkness with that slenderest thing: “I.” In the final chapter, we will see that “I” of the author disappear almost completely in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* and instead we will see narrative, not as the telling of a life story, but as the orchestration of knowledge-making from the novel’s characters’ perspectives.

The expence of an Ox twelve years.

	L. s. d.	L. s. d.
An Ox 4 years old purchased		
at		5 10 0
To grazing 24 weeks at 1 s. 6d.		
per week	1 16 0	
To shoeing and farrying one		
year	0 4 6	
To insurance against acciden-		
tal death	0 2 6	
	<hr/>	
Amount of one year's main-		
tenance	2 3 0	
Maintenance for 3 years	<hr/>	6 9 0
		<hr/>
Cost and maintenance		11 15 0
Deduce the price he can be sold at		7 10 0
		<hr/>
Total cost at the end of 3 years	-	4 9 0
		<hr/>
Total cost at the end of 12 years	-	17 16 0
		<hr/>
Subtract this sum from the expence of		
a horse during the same time,		92 0 0
		<hr/>
The balance against the horse is		74 4 0

By

Fig. 1: "The expence of an Ox twelve years." Kames, Henry Home, Lord. *The gentleman farmer. Being an attempt to improve agriculture, by subjecting it to the test of rational principles. The second edition, with considerable additions.* Edinburgh, 1779. British Library. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online.*

MINUTES OF AGRICULTURE.

27. A P R I L, 1775.

On transcribing the preceding Minute, he referred to the labour-account of the Division C, to see whether the breaking-up, and the succeeding stirrings, bore any parity to this cross-plowing. The account stands thus :

		Teams.	Men.
Nov. 23 to 29.	Breaking-up, - - - -	3.	
April 26 & 27.	Crossing, - - - -	4.	
May 10 & 11.	Stirring, - - - -	2½.	
June 10.	Harrowing, and spikey-rolling	1.	
11 & 12.	Re-stirring, - - - -	3¾.	
29.	Surfacing, - - - -	0½.	
July 1.	Harrowing, sowing with turnips and harrowing, - - - -	0½.	0¾.
Aug. 22 to 25.	Plowing in the turnips, - - -	3½.	
30.	Sowing 4½ bushels of wheat, -	—	0½.
30.	Covering it, - - - -	0½.	
Sept. 5.	Raking and picking, - - -	—	3.
		19½.	3½.

Thus it appears, that the five plowings cost sixteen teams and three-quarters; and therefore the teams, on a par, did not plow more than two-thirds of an acre a-day. Such is *one* of the curses of *untoward soils—small inclosures, and detached farms!*

The Writer has been attentive to this calculation, and he believes it to be very exact.—It is true, some of the teams were ox-teams; but he apprehends, this did not make one furrow's difference in the days works.

SOWING BARLEY. } 29. Began couching and sowing barley in
THE FLUTE. } O. I.

Three teams plowing—three harrowing; one rolling—and one fluting. Ripper all in an uproar!—eight teams (some of two; some of one horse)—sixteen men—six women, and two boys.

3

They

Fig. 2: "27. April, 1775." William Marshall. *Minutes of agriculture*. London, 1778. British Library. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*.

EXTENT OF ARABLE AND PASTURE LANDS. 111

extent of the different crops have been estimated, as follows:

The county is supposed to contain, in gross,	Acres.
1000 square miles, or	640,000
Deduct forest land, woods, and wastes . .	40,000
	<hr/>
Remains agricultural and grass land . .	600,000

Suppose this divided into four classes, as follows:

1. About 70 common fields remain, suppose	150,000
2. Modern enclosures, in alternate grass	
and tillage	150,000
3. Antient enclosures, much less tillage . .	150,000
4. Natural grass land, parks, paddocks, and	
plantations	150,000
	<hr/>
	600,000

The common field land supposed thus occupied.

	Grass or Turnips, &c.		Wheat.	Other Crops
	Enclosure or Fallow.			
	Acres.	Acres.	Acres.	Acres.
	45,000	50,000	30,000	45,000
Modern enclosures, thus	70,000	20,000	20,000	40,000
Antient enclosures	110,000	10,000	10,000	20,000
Class 4. Pleasure grounds included, 150,000				
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
Total . .	375,000	60,000	60,000	105,000

^a The grass land is supposed to include not only all pleasure grounds, but clover and seeds; the fallow ground is supposed equally divided between wheat fallow

Fig. 3: "Extent of Arable and Pasture Lands." William Pitt. *General view of the agriculture of the county of Northampton*, London, 1809. Kress Library of Business and Economics, Harvard University. *The Making Of The Modern World*.

PROFIT and LOSS.

					£.	s.	d.
Profit per acre of Experiment N° 2.	-	-	-	-	0	9	0
3.	-	-	-	-	0	12	7½
4.	-	-	-	-	0	7	0
6.	-	-	-	-	3	11	4½
7. (3)	-	-	-	-	0	8	1
10.	-	-	-	-	0	10	6½
13.	-	-	-	-	1	13	9
14.	-	-	-	-	1	4	2½
16.	-	-	-	-	0	17	1½
17.	-	-	-	-	4	14	1
					<hr/>		
					14	7	9½
					<hr/>		
Loss, Experiment N° 1.	-	-	-	-	0	5	6
5.	-	-	-	-	0	14	6½
7. (1)	-	-	-	-	0	8	10½
(2)	-	-	-	-	0	5	2½
8.	-	-	-	-	1	19	6½
9.	-	-	-	-	0	2	6½
11.	-	-	-	-	7	15	2
12.	-	-	-	-	0	6	9
15.	-	-	-	-	0	15	10
18.	-	-	-	-	0	10	5
					<hr/>		
					13	4	5½
					<hr/>		
Profit,	-	-	-	-	14	7	9½
Loss,	-	-	-	-	13	4	5½
					<hr/>		
					1	3	4½
					<hr/>		

Average profit, 1 s. 2 d.

PRICES of the PRODUCT.

					£.	s.	d.
In 1764.	-	-	-	-	1	12	0
1765.	-	-	-	-	1	12	0
1766.	-	-	-	-	1	6	0
1767.	-	-	-	-	1	6	0
Average, 11. 9 s.							
Vol. I.	N A			From			

Fig. 4: "Pease. Profit and Loss." Young, Arthur. *A Course of Experimental Agriculture*. Volume 1. London, 1770. British Library. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*.

No. VI.

The following is the fifth Year's Account of the Produce of Milk and Butter, &c. from a Cow, the property of Mr. William Cramp, of Lewes, in the County of Sussex, for this last Season, commencing the 3d day of April, 1809 (that being the day she calved), up to the 8th day of May, 1810, a Space of Time of 57 Weeks.

		No. of Weeks.	Pounds per Week.	Quantity of Butter.	Sold at per pound.	Total value.	
					s. d.	£	s. d.
BUTTER.							
Twin calves at 9 weeks old sold for six guineas each		9	-	-	-	12	12 0
From the 6th June to the 3d July		4	17	68	1 6	5	2 0
From the 4th July to the 18th Sept.		11	16	176	1 6	13	4 0
From the 19th Sept. to the 13th Nov.		8	14	112	1 6	8	8 0
From the 14 Nov. to the 25th Dec.		6	12	72	1 6	5	8 0
From the 26th Dec. to the 26th Feb. 1810		9	10	90	1 6	6	15 0
From the 27th Feb. to the 23d April		8	8	64	1 6	4	16 0
From the 24th April to the 30th April		1	7	7	1 6	0	10 6
From the 1st May to the 7th May left off milking		1	5	5	1 6	0	7 6
		57		594		57	3 0

MILK.

From the 6th June to the 3d July,	24	quarts per day	672
To the 18th Sept.	22	ditto ditto	1694
To the 13th November	18	ditto ditto	1008
To the 25th December	14	ditto ditto	588
To the 26th February, 1810	12	ditto ditto	756
To the 23d April	10	ditto ditto	560
To the 30th April	8	ditto ditto	56
To the 7th May	5	ditto ditto	85
			5369
The milk being measured when milked from the cow, there must be deducted for cream			594
			Total 4775
4775 Quarts of skim-milk at one penny, per quart,			19 17 11
			Carried over £77 0 11

Fig. 5: "The fifth Year's Account of the Produce of Milk and Butter, &c. from a Cow, the property of Mr. William Cramp." *Communications to the Board of Agriculture*. Parts I. and II. Volume 7. London, 1797. British Library. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*.

¹“Since the first publication of this work in 1776, the progress of Agriculture has been very great in almost every part of Britain, and particularly in Scotland. The improvements, so judiciously recommended by the practice and writings of Lord Kames, which were then in their infancy, have long since been firmly established and widely diffused.” (Preface to the 6th Edition, 1815 p. v)

² Henry Home, Lord Kames, *The Gentleman Farmer. Being an Attempt to Improve Agriculture, by Subjecting It to the Test of Rational Principles*. (Edinburgh, London: W. Creech, Edinburgh, and T. Cadell, 1776), ix.

³ *Ibid.*, xi.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vii.

⁵ I often use singular male pronouns in this chapter because I have not yet found a single agricultural text from this period written by a woman, even in cases where I have been able to identify the authors of unsigned publications. While women almost certainly read these works, it seems as if agricultural prose in this period is written by men to an assumed audience of men.

⁶ Kames, *The Gentleman Farmer. Being an Attempt to Improve Agriculture, by Subjecting It to the Test of Rational Principles*, vii–viii.

⁷ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁸ *Ibid.*, xiv.

⁹ qtd. in Arthur Young, *The Autobiography of Arthur Young*, ed. Matilda Betham-Edwards (Smith, Elder & co., 1898), 39–40.

¹⁰ *Museum Rusticum Et Commerciale: Or, Select Papers on Agriculture, Commerce, Arts, and Manufactures*, 6 vols. (R. Davis, 1764).

¹¹ I call it “hard” subjectivity in the sense that the sciences are “hard”—it relies on empirical data and transparent methods of communicating that data.

¹² For a detailed discussion of epistemic virtues, see Chapter Two.

¹³ Joel Mokyr, *The Enlightened Economy: An Economic History of Britain, 1700-1850*, *The New Economic History of Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 184.

¹⁴ Pamela Horn, “The Contribution of the Propagandist to Eighteenth-Century Agricultural Improvement,” *The Historical Journal* 25, no. 2 (June 1982): 318.

¹⁵ For more on James Grahame, see Chapter Two.

¹⁶ James Grahame, *British georgics* (Edinburgh J. Ballantyne, 1809), i.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, vi.

¹⁸ Heather Holmes, “The Circulation of Scottish Agricultural Books During the Eighteenth Century,” *The Agricultural History Review* 54, no. 1 (2006): 45–78; Horn, “The Contribution of the Propagandist to Eighteenth-Century Agricultural Improvement”; Nicholas Goddard, “Agricultural Literature and Societies,” in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, ed. G. E. Mingay, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 369–70.

¹⁹ Mokyr, *The Enlightened Economy*, 186.

²⁰ Marshall refused to entertain many of the philosophical niceties of the debate, instead cutting to the chase and insisting that “pictureskness is the child of deformity,” but he did, however, contribute some of the debate’s most amusing moments: “If we understand our Author [Uvedale Price] rightly, this would be his definition of the epithet ugly. *Ugly*—dead, heavy, squat, lumpish, humpish, bumpish, rumpish, glumpish, stumpish, or, in one word, *clumpish*.” William Marshall, *A Review of The Landscape, a Didactic Poem: Also of An Essay on the Picturesque: Together with Practical Remarks on Rural Ornament. By the Author of "Planting and Ornamental Gardening: a Practical Treatise*. (London: printed for G. Nicol; G. G. and J. Robinson; and J. Debrett, 1795), 143, 137.

²¹ Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), xix.

²² For instance, see Golinski, “Humphry Davy: The Experimental Self”; Golinski, *Science as Public Culture*; Stuart Walker Strickland, “The Ideology of Self-Knowledge and the Practice of Self-Experimentation,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 31, no. 4 (1998): 453–71.

²³ Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York : Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books; Distributed by the MIT Press, 2007), 223.

²⁴ Thomas Stone, *A Review of the Corrected Agricultural Survey of Lincolnshire, by Arthur Young Esq. Published in 1799 by Authority of the Board of Agriculture: Together with an Address to the Board, a Letter to Its Secretary and Remarks on the Recent Publication of John Lord Somerville, and on the Subject of Inclosures* (Cawthorn, 1800), 7–8. Stone became Young’s enemy when he did three surveys for the Board that was then rejected as inadequate. Only authors whose surveys were accepted were paid for their troubles.

²⁵ Stone may have also been influenced, consciously or not, by associationist epistemology. Associationism was the dominant theory of human cognitive development in eighteenth century Britain and held that Ideas (in this case, sensory experiences) that enter the mind at the same time create a literal or metaphorical impression in the brain and are linked together thereafter. Laurence Sterne parodied this idea in *Tristram Shandy* by theorizing that because Tristram’s parents had sex once a week on Sunday evening and Sunday evening was also the time when Tristram’s father wound the clock up for the following week, Tristram’s mother came to associate the act of winding a clock with sexual arousal. Associationism as the British knew it in the eighteenth century was first discussed in John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* as a fairly minor idea. By the 1740s, David Hartley had developed his theory that associations are literal impressions created in the brain. By the end of the century, associationism was popularized by works like Archibald Alison’s *Essays on the Nature and Principle of Taste*. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Roger Woolhouse (London: Penguin, 2004); David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations. In Two Parts. By David Hartley, M. A.*, 2 vols. (London and Bath: London : printed by S. Richardson; for James Leake and Wm. Frederick, Booksellers in Bath: and sold by Charles Hitch and Stephen Austen, Booksellers in London, 1749); Archibald Alison, *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste By the Revd. Archibald Alison, ...* (Dublin: printed for Messrs. P. Byrne, J. Moore, Grueber and M’Allister, W. Jones, and R. White, 1790.)

²⁶ Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*, 200.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 224.

²⁸ Arthur Young, *A Course of Experimental Agriculture: Containing an Exact Register of All the Business Transacted During Five Years on Near Three Hundred Acres of Various Soils [etc.]* (London: J. Dodsley, in Pall-Mall, 1770), vi.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, vii.

³¹ This thumbnail sketch is taken from John G. Gazley’s excellent biography. John Gerow Gazley, *The Life of Arthur Young, 1741-1820*, *Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society* ;v. 97, xvi, 727 p. (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1973).

³² *Pursuits of Agriculture: A Satirical Poem, in Three Cantos, with Notes* (John Joseph Stockdale, 1808), 141.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ G. E. Fussell, “My Impressions of Arthur Young,” *Agricultural History* 17, no. 2 (July 1943): 142.

³⁵ In all fairness to Young, he never proposed or tried the turnip and radish experiment. It was only described in a letter that the experimental agriculturalist Charles Baldwin had asked him to insert into a *Six Weeks' Tour* (239). Tellingly, Baldwin never wrote back with the results.

³⁶ Young, *The Autobiography of Arthur Young*, vi.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 289.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, vi.

³⁹ Arthur Young, *A Six Weeks Tour, Through the Southern Counties of England and Wales*. (London: W. Nicoll, 1768), 54.

⁴⁰ Jethro Tull, [*The New Horse-houghing Husbandry or, an Essay on the Principles of Tillage and Vegetation. Wherein Is Shewn, a Method of Introducing a Sort of Vineyard-culture into the Corn-fields, ...*] (Dublin: George Grierson, 1731), iii.

⁴¹ Young, *A Course of Experimental Agriculture*, vi.

⁴² Young, *The Autobiography of Arthur Young*, 30.

⁴³ On February 14th, 1806 Young wrote in his journal, "I work every morning on my 'Elements,' but [. . .] I have been near thirty years reading and making extracts for this work (but with long intermissions.)" That would put the beginning date of the *Elements* sometime around the late 1770s. *Ibid.*, 425.

⁴⁴ Arthur Young, "The Elements and Practice of Agriculture" n.d., vols. 1, pp. 8–9, Western MSS, British Library, accessed February 04, 2014.

⁴⁵ Leonora Natrass, *William Cobbett: The Politics of Style*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism ;11 (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3–5.

⁴⁶ William Cobbett, *A Year's Residence in the United States of America.*, Reprints of Economic Classics. (New York: A. M. Kelley, 1969), v.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, iii.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, ii.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 8–9, 25.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, v–vi.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, viii.

⁵² *Ibid.*, vii.

⁵³ Jethro Tull, *The Horse-hoeing Husbandry: Or, a Treatise on the Principles of Tillage and Vegetation, Wherein Is Taught a Method of Introducing a Sort of Vineyard Culture into the Corn-fields, in Order to Increase Their Product and Diminish the Common Expense* (W. Cobbett, 1822), x.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, xxi.

⁵⁵ Elizabeth K. Helsinger, *Rural Scenes and National Representation: Britain, 1815-1850*, Literature in History (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 113.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁵⁸ Cobbett seems to have ignored Young's attentions to the plight of the poor after his conversion. While Young still had a paternalistic attitude towards the poor, he advocated for agricultural policies and enclosure strategies that would not raise rents. He also gave regular suppers at his house for children from poor families. And perhaps most tellingly, he was a vocal opponent of Thomas Malthus' *Essay on the Principle of Population* in the *Annals of Agriculture* and elsewhere. For an in-depth discussion of Young's revised attitude towards the poor, see Gazley, *The Life of Arthur Young, 1741-1820*, 415–84.

⁵⁹ Cobbett, *A Year's Residence in the United States of America.*, 160.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 160–61. As it turns out, Mr. Cramp’s account of his cow appealed not only to Cobbett, but was a transatlantic phenomenon, being mentioned in agricultural literature as late as the 1930s.

⁶¹ Ibid., 171.

⁶² Ibid., 161.

⁶³ “As you wanted that useful and indispensably necessary information before you began your travels, you had it not in your power to correct what you heard by what you saw, and you became the dupe of every sly, artful knave who proposed to himself either interest or pleasure in misleading you. Hence the innumerable exaggerated accounts in all your tours and travels, of crops that never were reaped, and improvements in cattle that never existed.” (Thomas Brace Stone to Young, *Review* 21–22) A recent reappraisal of these claims can be found in Brunt’s “Rehabilitating Arthur Young.”

⁶⁴ Rosalind Mitchison, “The Old Board of Agriculture (1793–1822),” *The English Historical Review* 74, no. 290 (January 01, 1959): 49.

⁶⁵ See Fussell, Horn (*William Marshall*), Mingay, and Mitchison. More recently, Mokyr and Overton briefly touch upon this issue.

⁶⁶ Pamela Horn, *William Marshall (1745–1818) and the Georgian Countryside* ([Abingdon] (11 Harwell Rd., Sutton Courtenay, Abingdon, Oxon. OX14 4BN): Beacon Publications, 1982), 22.

⁶⁷ William Marshall, *Minutes of Agriculture, Made on a Farm of 300 Acres of Various Soils, Near Croydon, Surry: To Which Is Added a Digest Wherein the Minutes Are Systemized and Amplified, and Elucidated by Drawings of New Implements, a Farm-yard, &c. ; The Whole Being Published as a Sketch of the Actual Business of a Farm, Hints to the Inexperienced Agriculturist, as a Check to the Present False Spirit of Farming, and as an Overture to Scientific Argiculture* (Printed for J. Dodsley, 1778), i.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁹ Ibid., sec. Minutes entry for June 10th, 1777, unpaginated.

⁷⁰ Ibid., i.

⁷¹ William Marshall, *A General View of the Reports of the Board of Agriculture from the Northern Department of England: Comprising Northumberland, Durham, Cumberland, Westmoreland, Lancashire, Yorkshire, and the Mountainous Parts of Derbyshire* (pr. by Thomas Wilson and Son for Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808), xxii.

⁷² For Marshall, “the Board’s main idea still seemed to be: ‘Make books: good ones if you can: if not, make books.’ As Marshall sourly declared, the institution should have been named the ‘Board of Bookmaking’” (Horn *William Marshall* 31).

⁷³ William Marshall, *A Review (And Complete Abstract) of the Reports to the Board of Agriculture from the Southern and Peninsular Departments of England* (York and London: Thomas Wilson and Sons; Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1817), i.

⁷⁴ Nicholas Goddard, “Agricultural Literature and Societies,” in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, ed. G. E. Mingay, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 375.

⁷⁵ Sarah. Wilmot, *The Business of Improvement: Agriculture and Scientific Culture in Britain, C.1770 - C.1870*, Historical Geography Research Series ;no. 24 (Bristol, England: Historical Geography Research Group, 1990), 22–23; 31–34.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 25; Edward J. Russell, *A History of Agricultural Science in Great Britain, 1620–1954*, 493 p. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966), 66–110.

CHAPTER FOUR

Mansfield Park's Grounds of Knowledge

The literary methods of knowledge-production we have seen so far arose from the assumption that the task of writing is to represent the world from a coherent set of beliefs about how knowledge is made. These methods, whether employed by poets, philosophers, natural historians, or agriculturalists, differ in the needs they stemmed from and the effects they produced, but they are all characterized by forging a link between verisimilitude, beliefs about knowledge, and aesthetic or generic expectations. Thus in Chapter One, through the transition from the poetry of the 1740s to the 1770s and beyond, we saw the “natural” poetic style of Collins and the Wartons concerned with the question of whether or not the material world can be represented in poetry. In Chapter Two, we saw two different finely honed methods of representation emerge out of this new tradition: Charlotte Smith’s notes and John Clare’s descriptions. In both of these methods we can see, however, that Smith and Clare were less concerned with representation *per se*, but how those methods conveyed a sense of direct experience to the reader. In Chapter Three, agriculturalists constructed data not only in the form of facts and figures, but also in memoir and detailed witnessing in order to gain admission into agricultural discourse. In all of these cases, the changing representational practices we have seen are a reflection of not only beliefs about how real environments, animals, and plants *should* be rendered, but about how the mind of the reader can recognize them.

All of these pieces of literature have another commonality, until now unspoken: a single focal point for the dissemination of knowledge, whether it is an agriculturalist telling his life story or the solitary voice of descriptive, lyric, and didactic poetry. The transmission of knowledge in these cases, however it is accomplished, passes directly from a single-voiced text to the reader. But how do practices of knowledge production function in literature whose environments and the subjects who move in them are avowedly *umreal*, and in which each of those subjects has his or her own stake in making knowledge? The task of this last chapter is to understand the representation of environment as a knowledge making practice in an important, if idiosyncratic novel: Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814.) By the end of the eighteenth century, the novel as a genre self-consciously adopted a representational aesthetic which carried its own set of philosophical problems and possibilities.¹ But *Mansfield Park* is a stubborn novel in that it refuses to play along with many of the conventions of fiction. By means of its unappealing heroine and boring storyline, the novel draws attention to itself as a piece of fiction, rather than allowing the reader to seamlessly enter the world of its characters. In doing so, the novel both upholds and exposes the workings of narrative in representing the "real" and conveying knowledge about it.

As the well-educated daughter of a farming clergyman, Austen lived in a world not that different from, say, Charlotte Smith or Arthur Young.² Like other authors I have discussed, she draws on picturesque and other discourses of landscape description, natural history, natural theology, and agricultural writing throughout her novels.³ However, the way in which these systems of making knowledge function in her fiction differ from any of the works we have read so far. In this final chapter, we will turn to a mode of knowledge-production where knowledge of the environment most often passes from character to character without direct reference to the reader's edification. Environmental knowledge in *Mansfield Park* exists not in the well-trodden pathways of character development and plot, but in the unswept corners of narrative.

In this chapter, considerations of method are more salient than considerations of genre. I do not read *Mansfield Park* as an exemplar of its genre. To do so would be to gloss over its un-novel-like qualities, the places in which it frustrates the expectations of fiction readers and seems more interested in toying with its own conventions than telling an interesting story with interesting characters. *Mansfield Park* is the most appropriate of Austen's novels for thinking about environment and the knowledge of it but not because landscape gardening and aesthetics are more important to its plot than that of any of her other novels. Rather, it is because of how environmental details are rendered by the novel's narrative style. Despite the great amount of detail about vegetation and agriculture included in the novel, *Mansfield Park* is not interested in land or landscape itself, but is interested in how characters see and know it. This is a reflection of Austen's most consistent artistic problem: how does knowledge about people and things pass through the channels, not of official information or private conversation, but through of, observation, and movement in the world? Much has been said about environment and landscape as they appear thematically in *Mansfield Park*, although this focus usually leads back to irresolvable questions about the novel's ethical and political commitments.⁴ I am looking to Austen, then, not for moral endorsements, but to understand how environmental knowledge works in a representation of multiple viewpoints and consciousnesses, a representation in which the narrator calls upon the reader's attention in some places and at other times compels us to look away.

My treatment of the actual, thematically environmental scenes will dwell less on *Mansfield Park*'s more famous moments and will focus on details incidental to the plot: Dr. Grant's apricot tree, a few parsonage hedges, the roads between Mansfield and Sotherton, and the thing that underlies them all: soil. I will first look at some circumstances surrounding the writing and reception of *Mansfield Park* before moving on to the distribution of knowledge within the story itself. Then I will look at two episodes in the novel that show how the reader is allowed to gather information

about Mansfield Park's environs—that is, indirectly through the conversation of characters.

Afterward, I will specifically examine the strange incidences of soil being mentioned in the novel and read them alongside contemporary agricultural reports about the soil in Northamptonshire, the county in which *Mansfield Park* is set.⁵ By doing so, I am not simply setting the mentions of soil in their historical context but showing the stakes of making knowledge in fiction versus public scientific works.⁶

Novel-writing, Fact-gathering, and “good Sense”

On the eve of *Emma*'s publication, Austen wrote to James Stanier Clarke, the Prince Regent's librarian, to confirm that an advance copy would be sent to the royal household. She also responded to and politely declined his suggestion that in a future novel she include the character of a clergyman who is “Fond of, & entirely engaged in Literature—no man's Enemy but his own.”⁷ Austen claimed to be “quite honored” by his proposal, but as to being able to execute it,

I assure you I am *not*. [. . .] Such a Man's Conversation must at times be on subjects of Science & Philosophy of which I know nothing—or at least be occasionally abundant in quotations & allusions which a Woman, who like me, knows only her own Mother-tongue & has read very little in that, would be totally without the power of giving. [. . .] And I think I may boast myself to be, with all possible Vanity, the most unlearned, & uninformed Female who ever dared to be an Authoress.⁸

Those who knew Austen knew that she liked to both assert and exaggerate her ignorance.⁹ While her “boast” to Clarke is obviously tongue-in-cheek, she offers no correctives to it, allowing it to end the letter. Clarke has no choice but to acquiesce and ask for “an English Clergyman after your fancy.”¹⁰ Austen's tactical use of real or pretended ignorance gives her the power to disoblige herself from Clarke's request, which, coming from someone connected to the royal household, might have otherwise been difficult to refuse.

However, despite its practical use in this context, the ignorance of science, philosophy, and literature that Austen wields has its basis in the belief that fiction and characterization must be

founded on real, recognizable knowledge. In the words of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, although I am putting them to very different use here, “ignorances, far from being pieces of the originary dark, are produced by and correspond to particular knowledges and circulate as part of particular regimes of truth.”¹¹ What Austen does not know is controlled by what she does know, and by accepted means of making and disseminating knowledge. Fiction is indeed embedded in “regimes of truth.” Within the narratives themselves, the knowledge that Austen’s characters profess must be controlled by the act of storytelling. It would not do for a fictional clergyman to speak of things that Austen herself, or her narrator at least, would be “without the power of giving.” While well-read gentlemen and highly accomplished women do appear in her fiction, Clarke’s clergyman is impossible because by the rights of probability in human behavior, a man “Fond of, & entirely engaged in Literature” must always be talking of it. Austen’s sense of the probability of character is what allows her to see how such a character must be rendered, and her probability of learning leads her to believe she could never render him convincingly. Austen’s refusal to include Clark’s clergyman for want of knowledge is much like Charlotte Smith’s omission of Henrietta O’Neill’s poem from the 5th edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* on the grounds of its natural historical errors. (See Chapter Two.) In both cases, aesthetic successes must be sacrificed to correctness of facts. Correctness was certainly a concern for Austen as it related to novelistic probability. But while much has been said about probability and possibility as they relate to people and social structures in her work, less has been said about the probability of what these people *know*, not only from books, but about the environments in which they live.

Contrary to what Austen’s refusal of Clarke’s advice suggests, however, she did not limit herself to writing about what she already knew. From a January 1813 letter to her sister Cassandra, we know that she was using her network of personal connections to obtain information about at least two factual matters while she was writing *Mansfield Park*: the process of ordination in the Church of England and the agricultural status of Northamptonshire, where the novel is mainly set.

After comparing the lengths of *Sense and Sensibility* with the soon to be published *Pride and Prejudice*, she changes the topic to the novel she was currently writing, eventually to become *Mansfield Park*.

—Now I will try to write of something else;—it shall be a complete change of subject—Ordination. I am glad to find your enquiries have ended so well.—If you c^d discover whether Northamptonshire is a Country of Hedgerows, I sh^d be glad again.¹²

We do not know the exact outcome of either of Cassandra's inquiries, but as we will see below, *Mansfield Park* contains several incidental details about hedgerows. In her attention to land use, Austen has filled *Mansfield Park* with consistently imagined details, giving the effect of reality similar to Smith or Clare's. But the novel is selective in what it portrays—while fields, roads, gardens, and landscaped grounds appear often and the Portsmouth seaside and the stars are briefly described, there are almost no animals but game birds and horses; very little in the way of detailed landscape description; and no clearly defined flowers or trees except Lady Bertram's roses and the Grants' apricot tree. This is not a novel that concerns itself with natural history, or with portraying anything like a complete ecosystem. For better or worse, Austen's novel is not concerned with the kind of biological and geological diversity we see in Smith and Clare, who take it upon themselves to describe and catalogue the many types of life forms within their purview whether their readers wanted them to or not.

At the time of *Mansfield Park*'s composition, Austen was thinking of the different purposes of fiction in not only entertaining but edifying her audience. In writing to Cassandra a week later, Austen spoke of her dissatisfaction with *Pride and Prejudice*, which had just been published and was circulating among the periodical press as well as among families in her neighborhood.

The work is rather too light & bright & sparkling;—it wants shade;—it wants to be stretched out here & there with a long Chapter—of sense if it could be had, if not of solemn specious nonsense—about something unconnected with the story; an Essay on Writing, a critique on Walter Scott, or the history of Buonaparté—or anything that would form a contrast [with] the playfulness and Epigrammatism of the general stile.¹³

What Austen means by “sense” is ambiguous—does she mean a kind of religious or moral seriousness? Does she mean less outlandish characterization? Useful models for female conduct? It is hard to say, but it is telling that the second-best alternative to sense, “solemn specious nonsense,” is nonfiction: instruction, literary criticism, and history. That Austen never seriously entertained the idea of inserting nonfiction into her novels is apparent to anyone who has read them. But she was clearly thinking about the relationship between fiction and nonfiction, and the latter’s usefulness to the former. Later on in this chapter I will read *Mansfield Park* alongside a particular genre of nonfiction—contemporary agricultural reports—but the important thing to note here is that Austen’s projected inclusion of nonfiction would be primarily for aesthetic effect rather than the edification of the reader. So was *Mansfield Park* a book of sense? Austen herself seemed to think so. She corrected the “too light & bright & sparkling” nature of *Pride and Prejudice* with the more solemn and serious *Mansfield Park*, and *Emma*, it seems, was an effort to steer a middle course between the lightness of the one and the gravity of the other. At least this is how it appeared to her when she confessed to James Stanier Clarke, in the same letter quoted above, her anxiety about having done so: “I am very strongly haunted by the idea that to those Readers who have preferred P&P. it will appear inferior in Wit, & to those who have preferred MP. very inferior in good Sense.”¹⁴

Story, Character, and Narrative Method

The plot of *Mansfield Park* is a fairly simple one, and it may be helpful to ground ourselves in the larger arcs of the story before focusing on the details. The novel begins when the 9-year-old Fanny Price is taken from her crowded family home in Portsmouth to live with her wealthy relatives, the Bertrams of Mansfield Park, Northamptonshire. The family includes Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram, Lady Bertram’s scolding, busybody sister Mrs. Norris, and four children: Tom, Edmund, Maria, and Julia. Timid and trampled-upon, Fanny grows up alongside and falls in love with

Edmund despite the caution that the Bertrams have taken to prevent her rising above her station to marry either son. When Fanny is eighteen, Henry and Mary Crawford, a rich and fashionable brother and sister, move into the neighborhood. Edmund, oblivious to Fanny's feelings, falls in love with Mary, who gives him mixed signals because as a clergyman and second son he will not have a fortune large enough to support her lavish lifestyle. Meanwhile, Henry begins to dally with the feelings of both Bertram sisters—even though Maria is already engaged to the rich and stupid Mr. Rushworth—and unequivocally rejects both when he loses interest. The jilted Maria marries Rushworth and takes Julia to London with her for the social season. Henry then decides to amuse himself by returning to Mansfield Park and making Fanny fall in love with him. Fanny, still in love with Edmund and disgusted with Henry's behavior toward her cousins, refuses his advances. But in the process of pretending to favor Fanny with his attentions, Henry actually falls in love with her and makes a serious proposal of marriage which she rejects. Sir Thomas, unaware that Henry had been toying with his daughters and angry that Fanny would reject a proposal by a wealthy man, sends her to Portsmouth for an extended family visit for the first time since she arrived at Mansfield. Fanny returns to her family only to be distressed at how dirty, noisy, and uncouth they are. While she waits out her time at Portsmouth, news of the Bertrams' great scandal breaks: Maria has run away with Henry and Julia has eloped with a foppish friend of her brother Tom's. Mary Crawford, who sees the incident as "folly," rather than "sin," disgusts Edmund enough that he breaks off all contact with her. Fanny, vindicated in her rejection of Henry, vastly favored by Sir Thomas over his own two daughters, and without a rival in love, returns home. In time, Edmund falls in love with her and they marry happily.

Despite its fairy tale ending, *Mansfield Park* is notoriously the least favored among readers of Austen's novels, and for this fact the blame has usually been laid at the feet of Fanny Price. Fanny lacks the wit and charm of other Austen heroines, particularly the "light & bright & sparkling"

Elizabeth Bennett of *Pride and Prejudice*. Instead, her defining characteristics are her close observation of other people and fully-formed ethical sense, which make her able to discern the motives of others with a quickness that no one else in the novel shares. She combines this acuity with traits that nearly undermine it at every turn, and which in themselves do not endear her to most: timidity, self-doubt, and passivity, even when resisting the urgings of others to abandon her principles.¹⁵ But readers' dislike for Fanny may have less to do with her personality itself, than what her personality reveals about her place in the book's narrative and social structures. Fanny, upon arriving at Mansfield Park as a child, was "too little understood to be properly attended to" by the wealthy, handsome, and well-adjusted Bertram family; at the same time, she herself "could not cease to fear, [but] began at least to know their ways, and to catch the best manner of conforming to them."¹⁶ Edmund soon proved to be the only person who cared enough to learn about her inner life, and this pattern changes little over the years of her residence at Mansfield.

While Fanny's thoughts and feelings remain opaque to those who have nothing to lose through their ignorance, her place in the Bertram family is dependent upon knowing and conforming to its expectations. Therefore, her extraordinary powers of observation stem from years of fearful conformity and complete dependence upon others. In Fanny, we see a kind of double consciousness, a reminder that those on the margins of a society are ultimately its knowledge-bearers.¹⁷ While Fanny's consciousness is not fused with the narrator's, she is our focalizer for much of the novel, and therefore reading it can be as painful of an experience for us as living it is for her. We are often left, like Fanny, to observe the most unpleasant and uninteresting goings-on, to hear conversations that are not meant for her benefit, and barely for ours. And, like Fanny, we see things that her ultra-sensitivity reveals but to which the other characters are oblivious. This chapter, then, is also arranged according to these narrative situations. The first half focuses on two episodes which are lengthy but incidental to the plot, the kind of talk that one would be forced to overhear at dinner

and card parties: the Grant/Norris argument about an apricot tree, and Henry Crawford's account of his discovery of Thornton Lacey. In the second half, I will turn to accounts of Fanny's own thoughts and feelings, about the environment around her, evident in her attentiveness to soil and landscape.

Secondhand Landscapes

Despite the lack of ecological diversity in *Mansfield Park*, land use and landscape gardening are among the few reliable subjects of polite conversation among the Mansfield social circle. This makes sense for political reasons, given that the wealth and interests of the characters are land-based, but unlike many other critics I find discussions of landscape gardening to be resistant to easy political interpretation. This resistance to interpretation has to do both with how details about the land are narrated, and the fact that the substance of conversations about landscape is mostly about modes of knowledge, intelligence, and inquiry. The most famous scenes having to do with landscape in the novel—Mr. Rushworth's tentative plans to hire Humphry Repton, Fanny's long-distance view of Mary Crawford riding her mare, and the scene at the Sotherton haha—can all be read in this light, but I would instead like to draw attention to two conversations about landscape that bring problems of knowledge to the forefront.

It makes sense to begin with Henry Crawford, the only character who combines enthusiasm for landscape and estate improvement with enough taste, intelligence, and funds to manage it. We know that he has already made improvements to his own estate in Norfolk: "I had not been of age three months before Everingham was all that it is now. My plan was laid at Westminster—a little altered perhaps at Cambridge, and at one and twenty executed."¹⁸ Upon learning this, Mr. Rushworth, before quite realizing that Henry is his love rival, invites him to his 700-acre estate Sotherton Court as a consultant. The trip ends badly for most involved as Henry's mission evolves

into a flirtation with Maria Bertram in front of her fiancé and on her fiancé's land. But if Henry fails to come through when asked for his advice, he is more than happy to give it when not asked.

Later in the novel, after Maria and Rushworth are out of the picture for the moment, Henry takes up the topic of improvement again, which no one had dared to discuss since the day at Sotherton. While playing cards, Henry casually mentions to Edmund what had happened on their hunt the day before:

They had been hunting together, and were in the midst of a good run, and at some distance from Mansfield, when his horse being found to have flung a shoe, Henry Crawford had been obliged to give up, and make the best of his way back. "I told you I lost my way after passing that old farm house, with the yew trees, because I can never bear to ask; but I have not told you what with my usual luck—for I never do wrong without gaining by it—I found myself in due time in the very place which I had a curiosity to see. I was suddenly, upon turning the corner of a steepish downy field, in the midst of a retired little village between gently rising hills; a small stream before me to be forded, a church standing on a sort of knoll to my right—which church was strikingly large and handsome for the place, and not a gentleman or half a gentleman's house to be seen excepting one—to be presumed the Parsonage, within a stone's throw of the said knoll and church. I found myself in short in Thornton Lacey."¹⁹

This, the novel's most aesthetically and visually complete piece of landscape description, comes from Henry and not the narrator. Henry's description is tightly visually controlled and his terms are specialized. The "steepish downy field" is a good example—in the *OED* there are only three examples of the use of each adjective (downy, in this case, meaning of the nature of downs) and Henry's use of "steepish" is the first.²⁰ Even when describing views from carriages or from the ramparts at Portsmouth, the narrator is never as particular in her language or exact in her placement of details as Henry is here. Austen's narrators are certainly capable of such description—think of the description of Pemberley in *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance—so why is Henry Crawford is our great landscape descriptor?

Edmund seems to have a similar skepticism of Henry's role as descriptor—as if Henry's place in the social circle makes him an inappropriate disseminator of knowledge about Thornton

Lacey. After Henry delivers his triumphant description and gives Edmund room to reply, it becomes clear that before Thornton Lacey itself can become a topic of discussion, they must establish between them the means by which one can know it:

“It sounds like it,” said Edmund; “but which way did you turn after passing Sewell’s farm?”

“I answer no such irrelevant and insidious questions; though were I to answer all that you could put in the course of an hour, you would never be able to prove that it was *not* Thornton Lacey—for such it was.”

“You inquired then?”

“No, I never inquire. But I *told* a man mending a hedge that it was Thornton Lacey, and he agreed to it.”

“You have a good memory. I had forgotten having ever told you half so much of the place.”²¹

Edmund is not so ready to be swept up into Henry’s visual language: it may *sound* like Thornton Lacey, but that is no guarantee that it looks like, or is, Thornton Lacey. A verbal description, even one as aestheticized and well-constructed as Henry’s is not enough for Edmund to cede any ground. His cageyness is well-founded, since Henry’s arrogant declamations soon extend from definite fact into speculation as he follows with a torrent of radical and expensive landscape design suggestions: “The house must be turned to front the east instead of the north—the entrance and principal rooms, I mean, must be on that side [. . .] And *there* must be your approach—through what is at present the garden. You must make you a new garden at what is now the back of the house[.]”²²

Like his method of giving landscaping advice which brooks no dialogue or alteration, Henry’s mode of acquiring and disseminating knowledge does not allow for either asking or answering questions. Nonetheless, Henry is right—at least in knowing he found Thornton Lacey, if not his landscaping ideas. He tells both the man mending the hedge and Edmund that the place is Thornton Lacey and the narrator offers no greater authority than his. In his ability to understand that he has seen Thornton Lacey, Henry is superior to Edmund both in memory and intuition—“I had forgotten having ever told you half so much of the place.” It is important to remember that the reader never sees Thornton Lacey directly, even after Fanny moves there at the end of the story. We

may just as impotently put “irrelevant and insidious questions” to the novel about his description of it because we will never get a straight answer from the book. And while Henry’s refusal of inquiry is of a piece with the vanity of his character, it is impossible to fit his method of knowing landscape into any kind of moral schema of the book. In Henry Crawford, moral depravity is combined with probably the sharpest intellect and powers observation of any character, with the possible exception of Fanny.

Importantly, it is only after a break in this exchange that the narrator interposes and provides us with knowledge of what Thornton Lacey even *is*. Once Edmund acquiesces, we learn: “Thornton Lacey was the name of his impending living, as Miss Crawford knew well.”²³ “Living” means, in this case, the parsonage that Edmund will inhabit upon being ordained. The reader is the last one to know. In this order, we see Crawford’s description of Thornton Lacey’s situation and picturesqueness, find out that it has been the subject of previous, unrecorded conversations, and at only at last do we understand that it is Edmund’s future home. Our knowledge of landscape in this scene is not only mediated by the words of Crawford, but by the narrator, who sets it from us at several removes.

A similar dispute and reversal of narrative order occurs at the book’s first dinner party, in which the subject of landscape improvement initially appears. This is the scene in which Humphry Repton is mentioned and the Sotherton scheme is hatched, but of more interest to me is Dr. Grant’s and Mrs. Norris’ spat about the Moorpark apricot tree. Amidst the general talk of improving Sotherton Court, Mrs. Norris gives a long speech about the improvements that she and her late husband had done, or intended to do, when they lived at Mansfield parsonage, ending with a self-serving compliment to Dr. Grant, the new incumbent.

“We were always doing something, as it was. It was only the spring twelvemonth before Mr. Norris’s death that we put in the apricot against the stable wall, which is now grown such a noble tree, and getting to such perfection, sir,” addressing herself then to Dr. Grant.

“The tree thrives well beyond a doubt, madam,” replied Dr. Grant. “The soil is good; and I never pass it without regretting that the fruit should be so little worth the trouble of gathering.”

That the apricot tree thrives, and that the soil it grows in is good are the two agreed-upon articles here (as we will see, the quality of the parsonage’s soil is a matter of common knowledge, or at least agreement, among the inhabitants of Mansfield.) However, a great amount of ambiguity and dispute can grow from these earthly matters of fact. Mrs. Norris takes offense at Dr. Grant’s assessment of the fruits and responds, not with a defense of their taste, but with the matter nearest her miserly heart:

Sir, it is a moor park, we bought it as a moor park, and it cost us—that is, it was a present from Sir Thomas, but I saw the bill, and I know it cost seven shillings, and was charged as a moor park.

Mrs. Norris does not attempt to dispute Dr. Grant’s taste—she does not even allow that differences of taste could occur, or that taste itself is a significant factor when considering the worth of the tree. Instead, she resorts directly to name and price, literal worth. If the tree *is* a Moorpark, and it certainly *is* because it was *charged* as a Moorpark, then the worth of its fruit cannot be disputed. Dr. Grant, on the other hand, considers his own taste to be, not only the arbiter of whether or not the fruit is good, but whether or not Mrs. Norris got Sir Thomas’ money’s worth. In a twist on the eighteenth century debates about the standard of taste, Dr. Grant seems to have solved this philosophical problem by assuming the universality of his own.²⁴

“You were imposed on, ma’am,” replied Dr. Grant; “these potatoes have as much the flavor of a moor park apricot, as the fruit from that tree. It is an insipid fruit at the best; but a good apricot is eatable, which none from my garden are.”

“The truth is, ma’am,” said Mrs. Grant, pretending to whisper across the table to Mrs. Norris, “that Dr. Grant hardly knows what the natural taste of our apricot is; he is scarcely ever indulged with one, for it is so valuable a fruit, with a little assistance, and ours is such a remarkably large, fair sort, that what with early tarts and preserves, my cook contrives to get them all.”

Following this stalemate between Dr. Grant’s appeal to his taste and Mrs. Norris’ appeal to price, Mrs. Grant interposes with her own “truth”: that apricots are valuable “with a little assistance,” that

whether or not the apricot tree is a Moorpark, the fruit from it is “a remarkably large, fair sort,” and that Dr. Grant does not know their true taste because they are made into tarts and preserves before he can eat any fresh. This intervention does not invalidate Dr. Grant’s account of the fruit, but is complimentary enough toward the tree that it preserves Mrs. Norris’ self-congratulations on the notion of the tree being a decided improvement to the property. While Dr. Grant and Mrs. Norris have no other recourse than forthrightly appealing to the authority of their choice, only Mrs. Grant has enough tact to make the truth effective—the fruits are valuable, but only when cooked with sugar, not for eating fresh.

Mrs. Norris, who had begun to redden, was appeased, and, for a little while, other subjects took place of the improvements of Sotherton. Dr. Grant and Mrs. Norris were seldom good friends; their acquaintance had begun in dilapidations, and their habits were totally dissimilar.²⁵

Again, the narrator provides the reader with information necessary to fully understanding a conversation only after the conversation has passed. Mrs. Norris speaks for nearly two thirds of a page on the numerous improvements she and Mr. Norris had made to the parsonage grounds because in reality she had been forced to pay Dr. Grant dilapidation sums for damages incurred to the parsonage while the Norrises were resident.

The little apricot argument, then, has its roots in two philosophical problems: the problem of the standard of taste and the problem of how truth claims are warranted. Furthermore, these two problems are lodged both in character and narrative situation. Given that the tree was planted a year before Mr. Norris died and Mrs. Norris left the parsonage, Mrs. Norris has never personally experienced the taste of the apricots, since it often takes young transplanted fruit trees one or two years to bear fruit. Therefore, she relies too much on written knowledge (literally, the bill of sale) to make claims about something she has never experienced. Dr. Grant, on the other hand, knows what the fruit tastes like but relies too much on his own experience to make greater claims about the worth of the tree and whether or not Mrs. Norris was imposed on. And while the authority to

which each party implicitly appeals during the dispute is the cause of the conflict, its root is that both Dr. Grant and Mrs. Norris are tactless know-it-alls. Only Mrs. Grant, “with a temper to love and be loved,” can tell the truth in an effective manner.²⁶

“The soil is good”

So Dr. Grant claims. But how does he know? And how would Austen or her readers know? While Austen never directly records the results of Cassandra’s inquiry about whether Northamptonshire is a country of hedgerows, she shows a remarkable acuity on the subject. Hedges are a common feature of property in the Northamptonshire of the novel. Thornton Lacey is surrounded with hedges, and Mrs. Grant’s shrubbery has been transformed into its current state from an old hedgerow. However, while hedges exist, the county has not been entirely and systematically enclosed, for Mansfield Common still exists, which we know because the young people excepting Fanny take a day trip to the Common early in the novel.²⁷ In asking Cassandra about Northamptonshire’s hedgerows, Austen was after a clear picture of what the county is like agriculturally. Soil is mentioned twice more in the story, in each case connected with observations about the difference in interest and temperament between Fanny and Mary Crawford. First I want to look at each of these scenes, and then read them alongside James Donaldson’s *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Northampton* (1794) and agriculturalist William Pitt’s 1809 volume of the same name.

On a chilly fall afternoon Fanny and Mary are sitting in the shrubbery outside Mansfield parsonage, where Mary lives with the Grants, her sister and brother-in-law. Much like Dr. Grant and Mrs. Norris, Fanny and Mary are “seldom good friends,” although Mary has little idea of Fanny’s antipathy toward her. Given the fact that they have nothing in common, their walks together feel

like a duty to Fanny and their conversations tend to be one-sided. On this occasion, Fanny muses aloud:

Every time I come into this shrubbery I am more struck with its growth and beauty. Three years ago, this was nothing but a rough hedgerow along the upper side of the field [. . .] and perhaps in another three years we may be forgetting—almost forgetting what it was before. How wonderful, how very wonderful the operations of time, and the changes of the human mind!²⁸

Fanny's attention quickly jumps from the hedgerow-turned-shrubbery itself to her and others' mental faculties in perceiving it. In thinking about the shrubs further, she states, "My uncle's gardener says the soil here is better than his own, and so it appears from the growth of the laurels and evergreens in general" and marvels "that the same soil and the same sun should nurture plants differing in the first rule and law of their existence."²⁹

Fanny's abstruse musings aside, from this passage we learn that there is a distinct difference between the soil of the main house and the parsonage, although they are very close together. But later on, we find that Fanny does not have to rely on her uncle's gardener's opinion, but can discern differences in soil with her own eyes. During the ill-fated trip to Sotherton, she had seen the soil from a moving carriage much as an agriculturalist would:

Their road was through a pleasant country; and Fanny, whose rides had never been extensive, was soon beyond her knowledge, and was very happy in observing all that was new and admiring all that was pretty. She was not often invited to join the conversation of others, nor did she desire it. Her own thoughts and reflections were habitually her best companions; and in observing the appearance of the country, the bearings of the roads, the difference of the soil, the state of the harvest, the cottages, the cattle, the children [. . .].³⁰

Fanny's observations, however delightful to her, do not offer much pleasure or information to us, particularly since we do not know by what criteria she is judging the soil to be "different." The things she sees are as mundane as the narrator's mode of describing them. As in Joseph Warton's *Enthusiast* or John Clare's descriptive poems, these observations are not arranged into a scene or vista; nor are they chronologically narrated as a set of particular encounters—two modes of natural

description found in much fiction of the period. Rather, they seem to have been removed from the site of Fanny's perception and rearranged into classes. Because of this, Fanny's observations, though odd, pass quickly and leave little impression. They seem, in fact, to be there for one purpose: to show the contrast between the thoughts of Fanny and those of Mary Crawford, who has nothing in common with her except a romantic interest in Edmund Bertram:

[Fanny] found entertainment that could only have been heightened by having Edmund to speak to of what she felt. [. . .] [I]n everything but value for Edmund, Miss Crawford was very unlike her. She had none of Fanny's delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling; she saw nature, inanimate nature, with little observation; her attention was all for men and women.³¹

The narrative here, even as it sympathizes with Fanny, seems to replicate Mary Crawford's attitude toward the world—that is, it depicts nature as a boring, rote list of words and immediately directs our attention back to social interactions. While the narrator gives depth to Fanny's character in this scene, the mundane list of observations does not present an appealing or sympathetic alternative to Mary Crawford's social mindset. In fact, the things Fanny observes seem to have no purpose at all. Why is the reader presented with this information, then? I want to suggest that we may have a different understanding of landscape in Austen if we consider, not how it contributes to plot and character, but how it functions at the level of knowledge production. What does Fanny learn now that she is “beyond her knowledge,” and what, if anything, do her thoughts convey to us? Nothing very specific—just the quite needless information that there are such things in the Northamptonshire countryside as cottages, cattle, and children; and that the harvest is in progress, the countryside has an appearance, and the roads have bearings. “The difference of the soil,” which also appears among this offering of non-information, strikes one as a strange thing for a young, upper-class woman to notice. After all, how does Fanny know that the soil is different? For the rest of the chapter, I want to think through this strange instance of knowledge production and what it might mean for larger epistemological questions relating to the novel.

Taking some time out to understand what agricultural discourse was like in Austen's time will help us understand the stakes of making practical knowledge about the real—the agriculturalists' goal—and creating an effect of the real, the novelist's goal, at least in part.³² In the last chapter, we saw how agricultural writers in Austen's time turned to various forms of life-writing to substantiate their scientific claims. In doing so, they drew not only upon the power of personal testimony, but also the power of narrative. Whether intentional or not, then, there is a cross-current between fiction and non-fiction here as they trade methods of knowledge production back and forth. While we have no direct evidence that Austen read agricultural writings, it is telling that the practical-minded John Martin of *Emma* “read the Agricultural Reports” but not Gothic novels, although many farmers would have probably thought of reports like the *Communications to the Board of Agriculture* or any of the *General Views* to be fanciful reading in themselves.³³

It is possible but not provable that Austen's source of information came from one of the two *General Views* of Northamptonshire published by the Board of Agriculture and Internal Improvement. What she says about the soil and agriculture of Northamptonshire in the novel is entirely consistent with what these two books report, so she must have had a reliable source in any case. The first edition of the *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Northampton* (1794) was authored by the Scottish agriculturalist James Donaldson, about whom we know nothing except what can be gathered from his agricultural writings. Donaldson's report on the soil is as follows: “There is great variety in the soil of this district, and several very distinct kinds are found in almost every parish or lordship.”³⁴ He then goes on to sort the different kinds of soil into five classes, differentiating them by depth, color, and texture, and whether they are clayey, loamy, or sandy. Although Donaldson does not reveal his method of gathering information, it is likely that he followed the fashion of other agricultural writers of the day and surveyed the countryside from a carriage, in addition to consulting with locals. At any rate, the speed with which the Board published

the first set of reports prevented any reporter from an extended stay in the area on which he wrote about.³⁵ We must conclude, then, that, to Donaldson, the soils of Northamptonshire are different enough to be readily separated and identified, even on cursory survey.

After Donaldson's *Northamptonshire*, the Board requested a second edition in 1797 and commissioned agricultural writer William Pitt to do the work. Pitt made two tours of the county and combined his own findings with direct quotes from Donaldson.³⁶ The work was not published, however, until 1809 and, unlike most of the other General Views. Pitt's first remarks on the soil of Northamptonshire are as follows:

Mr. Donaldson has observed upon "the great variety in the soil of this district," in which I cannot at all agree with him. The nature of the upland-soil is more uniform than I have ever before observed over so large an extent of country, so much so that it is impossible, by colouring a plan of the county, to discriminate the varieties.³⁷

Pitt corrects himself two pages later, saying that on his second tour, "I had observed several districts of lighter soil than I had generally noticed before. [. . .] The soil of the country has, therefore, a considerable variety, but seldom changes abruptly."³⁸ He then spends five pages describing the different kinds of soils and where they might be found in the county.

The contradiction between Donaldson's and Pitt's accounts of the soil is, to say the least, unsettling. The quality and variability of soil, after all, should be a verifiable, positive scientific fact—and yet here, their accounts can hardly be reconciled. Pitt's explicit dialogue with Donaldson's text brings the problems of knowledge in agricultural writing to the forefront. For the reporters to the Board, was there ever a method of gathering facts that did not turn out to be faulty? For the readers of these reports, the question of knowledge is just as fraught: since we know nothing about Northamptonshire soil to begin with, how can we ever trust the senses and writings of others?

The naming and classification of soil at this time was non-standardized. In his *Minutes of Agriculture*, William Marshall enters into a discussion of how one might term soils, and as precise as

Marshall would like to be, we can see that there is still a great amount of room for vagueness here. (See Chapter Three for more on soil and William Marshall.)

Soils are infinitely various; no two distinct portions being identically the same, in matter and state.

All culturable Soils are Compounds, and consequently the ordinary distinctions are in some degree arbitrary; there being no such thing, in reality, as a cultured field of *Clay*, *Sand*, or *Gravel*: these terms are, nevertheless, very useful in Agriculture; as they convey strong ideas of *very clayey*, *very sandy*, and *very gravelly* Soils.³⁹

Marshall offers his own table of soil types, which includes fifteen names.⁴⁰ But the methods of naming soil—particularly unimproved soil—were, even decades after Marshall wrote this, still complex. Here are just some of the names for different types of soil that are to be found in Volume 4 of *Communications to the Board of Agriculture*, 1805: “a thin-skinned cold soil,” “a yellow brick earth,” “wet, sour, and very tender,” “thin skinned warren,” “stone brush and light loam,” “Strong surly Clay Soil,” “clay land of a poorish, sterile sort.” These terms are used alongside more straightforward descriptors like, “clay,” “sand,” and “loam.”⁴¹ In either case, these terms are scientific after their own fashion—descriptors like “strong,” “wet,” “sour,” “cold” had largely agreed-upon meanings among farmers and agriculturalists. But there is one article in this volume that differs: Humphry Davy’s “On the Analysis of Soils, as connected with their Improvement.”⁴² Davy was invited by Arthur Young to give many papers at Board meetings, and Davy’s discussion of soil in this case is quite prescient. Unlike his fellow correspondents, he limits himself to spare soil terminology: the basic types of soil and the chemicals and minerals they contain. Davy’s article was only one of several that Arthur Young invited him to prepare for the Board during the first two decades of the 19th century, and in the sharp contrast they form with the writings of the other agriculturalists, they are a fore-taste of soil-science’s subsumption into chemistry by the 1840s.

Whether Austen would have read any of the available reports on Northamptonshire is impossible to know, but in any case Fanny’s observations read more like the table of contents to such a report than the detailed landscape description of eighteenth century poetry and fiction. And

whether or not Austen deliberately echoes agricultural discourse in this moment, I contend that agricultural writing is nevertheless relevant to our reading of this passage. Reading the novel alongside agricultural reports allows us to take the soil on its own terms, and rather than read Fanny's recognition of the soil's difference as a minor point of characterization, to recognize it as a place where the novel's mechanisms of knowledge production become visible.

For Donaldson and Pitt, problems of knowledge center on empirical collection of data—that is, how to perceive and report on the landscape in front of them with accuracy. Nobody questions that there is soil in Northamptonshire, or that it is a relevant topic of discussion for an agricultural report, but we do want to know its precise nature, rendered in terms as clear as possible. The problem for Austen is exactly the opposite—as I said above, *Mansfield Park's* status as fiction frees it from nearly all expectation of empirical validity. However, it is difficult to understand why the soil is relevant to the novel at all, since it has such a small part in plot and characterization. Facts like these do not fit into a novel; they seem at odds with narrative style. The list of Fanny's observations in which the soil is included has never been of much interest to critics, who often skip over it to the next sentence, which asserts Fanny's "delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling" in comparison to Mary's social interests. Next to such a seductive and convincing statement about character, the landscape Fanny sees pales in comparison. Nevertheless, I want to resist jumping to the conclusion that the list simply exists to show Fanny's virtuous, if boring, love of nature as compared to Mary's unreflecting obsession with people.

The soil feels so out of place because it is a surplus of knowledge whose origin and use are unknown. When we ask how Fanny has come to know about the soil, or how she can perceive its difference, we find that there is no answer. That is, the soil is evidence of learning, perception, and recognition for Fanny that nevertheless lies beyond the reach of our knowledge as readers. It shows us that our knowledge of the world of the novel is not commensurate with either that of the

narrator or of the characters. This is not to say that Mansfield Park's soil is useless or irrelevant—on the contrary, it performs the important task of letting us know the limits of what we know as readers. Rather than forming part of the “background” that sets off the book's plot and characters, the things Fanny sees in the countryside are part of a fully formed world of knowledge which the characters inhabit but into which the reader can never entirely assimilate. Our experience of the novel, then, is less like being fed factual information than inhabiting a situation of knowing (a moving carriage, perhaps?) whose horizons are clearly marked.

The practice of reading across genres—or rather, holding the considerations of genre in suspension while we examine the philosophical problems attendant on textual production—is, I think, a necessary practice for reading Austen. I have attempted to do so, not simply to historicize or contextualize both Mansfield Park and Donaldson and Pitt's reports (although they are important practices as well), but to throw the problems of fictional and empirical knowledge production into relief. Even if Austen is not burdened with representing the “real,” we can and should still attend to how she produces fictional knowledge and what we might make of fictional knowledge that seems otherwise useless. The contradiction in the writings of Donaldson and Pitt shows that we cannot afford to accept their agricultural writings—or perhaps those of anyone—without question. But, Fanny's notice of the difference of the soil—made in passing with no elaboration or qualification—demands that we take the difference of the soil for granted in a way that is not possible in real life. And even if we, as readers, know we must come to terms with our ignorance and take Fanny's observation for granted because we have no other options, we still may know what kinds of knowledge *Mansfield Park* keeps over the horizon, just out of our sight.

Conclusion

In his essay “Jane Austen and the Enclosures,” Robert Clark asks: “Is it not strange that we never get to know what Austen’s characters see out of the carriage window?”⁴³ Clark asks this question as a way of making visible what is generally absent from the carriage rides and landscapes in Austen’s novels: agricultural enclosures and the social upheaval they created. But his question rests upon two assumptions that *Mansfield Park*, as we have seen, works to wedge apart: first, that literary characters can see like real people if only their authors would let them, and second, that what the reader knows and what the characters see are tantamount to the same thing. The truth is that while we often see out of the carriage window in Austen’s novels, what we see may not always lend itself to our use. Just as not everything in Austen’s fiction, in the words of William H. Galperin, is “subject to that narrator’s acts of containment and interpretation,” not all the information in her novels is subject to *our* interpretation or understanding.⁴⁴

Mansfield Park is a novel that explicitly refuses to make environmental knowledge—that is, it refuses to give us detailed descriptions or natural historical detail—even as it engages with the question of what goes into making that knowledge. Unlike Smith and Clare, or Young, Cobbett, and Marshall, Austen shows us her sense of epistemic virtues, not in order to convey environmental knowledge to us, but to show us the limits of narrative in making that knowledge. “Let no one presume,” the narrator states in the novel’s concluding pages, contemplating Fanny’s happiness, “to give the feelings of a young woman on receiving the assurance of that affection of which she has scarcely allowed herself to entertain a hope.”⁴⁵ Deft evasions such as these pepper *Mansfield Park*’s pages and chastise us for grandly assuming what it is that the novel presumes to convey, or the reader presumes to know. It is this check on presumption—ours and her own—that sets Austen apart from the other authors in this dissertation. For others, the presumption of knowing, however unfulfilled, forms the cornerstone of their translation of epistemic virtues into print. For Smith and

Clare, the seeming immediacy of their natural historical detail was in fact conditioned by complex understandings of what it means to mediate knowledge of the environment in a text. For Young, Cobbett, and Marshall, gaining credibility by making narratives out of their life experiences always led them back to the texts of others. But Austen, in her narrative twists and the unknown provenance of her characters' knowledge, is explicit in her refusal to pretend at an unmediated encounter with environment through her novel. In her tentative explorations of how environmental knowledge can be represented in fiction, she comes closest to Collins and the Warton brothers' working out what it means to represent our material world in poetry. While we may never presume to know the hedgerows and soil of Northamptonshire through the pages of *Mansfield Park*, Austen does something far more valuable in giving us a spacious field in which to contemplate the limits of our own environmental representations.

¹ One of the most astute meditations on the relationship between the novel and the representation of the real world is Walter Scott's review of Austen's *Emma* (1815), the novel she published after *Mansfield Park*. In this review, Scott not only discusses *Emma*, but uses the novel as an opportunity to work through the challenges and rewards of fiction "composed of such common occurrences as may have fallen under the observation of most folks" (193). Tellingly, he also remarks, "Upon the whole, the turn of this author's novels bears the same relation to that of the sentimental and romantic cast, that cornfields and cottages and meadows bear to the highly adorned grounds of a show mansion, or the rugged sublimities of a mountain landscape," although he seems to be completely unaware of *Mansfield Park*'s existence (200). Sir Walter Scott, "Art. IX. *Emma; a Novel*," *The Quarterly Review*, October 1815, 188–201.

² The classic discussion of Austen as a rural author writing about life in country society is Raymond Williams' chapter, "Three around Farnham." Raymond Williams, "Three around Farnham" *The Country and the City*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 108–119.

³ Select works on this topic: Rosemarie Bodenheimer, "Looking at the Landscape in Jane Austen," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 21, no. 4 (October 01, 1981): 605–23, doi:10.2307/450229; William H. Galperin, *The Historical Austen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Robert Clark, "Jane Austen and the Enclosures," in *Green and Pleasant Land: English Culture and The Romantic Countryside*, ed. Amanda Gilroy (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2004), 105–24; Celia Easton, "Jane Austen and the Enclosure Movement: The Sense and Sensibility of Land Reform," *Persuasions* 24 (2002): 71; Jonathan Finch, "Entangled Landscapes and the 'Dead Silence'?" Humphry Repton, Jane Austen and the Upchers of Sheringham Park, Norfolk," *Landscape Research* 39, no. 1 (January 02, 2014): 82–99, doi:10.1080/01426397.2013.848848; Colin Jager, "Mansfield Park and the End of Natural Theology," *Modern Language Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (2002): 31–63.

⁴ The two main strains of this criticism have their source in the works of Alistair Duckworth and Edward Said. Duckworth's argument is that the estate in Austen's works, particularly *Mansfield Park*, symbolizes tradition and authority, which she strives to uphold, making her novels ultimately conservative in nature. Said reads *Mansfield Park* as a novel that plays a complex role in both critiquing and upholding proto-imperialism—not simply a direct response to slavery and colonialism, but a novel which makes those things impossible to ignore. It is difficult to understate the influence that these two works have had on later criticism. Alistair M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate; a Study of Jane Austen's Novels* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971); Edward Said, "Jane Austen and Empire," in *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 80–97.

⁵ It is also worth noting that John Clare is from what was at the time Northamptonshire and was introduced as "John Clare, A Northamptonshire Peasant" on the title page of his first book of poems. (His native village of Helpston has since become part of Cambridgeshire upon the re-drawing of county lines.) While Austen's personal knowledge of Northamptonshire was slim, the agricultural reports mentioned in this chapter are relevant to Clare's life. William Pitt's *General View . . . of Northamptonshire* being published in 1809, the year that Helpston parish began to be enclosed. By 1813, the year before *Mansfield Park*'s publication, the enclosure of Helpston was complete and Clare began to write poetry about its dislocating and disorienting effects. For more on Clare and enclosure, see John. Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840; an Approach to the Poetry of John Clare*. (Cambridge [Eng.]: University Press, 1972); Jonathan Bate, *John Clare: a Biography* (Macmillan, 2003); John Clare, *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (Taylor and Hessey, 1820).

⁶ The scholar who comes closest to my approach is Janine Barchas in her *Matters of Fact in Jane Austen*. Barchas shows the ways that Austen represented details of current history and celebrity scandal in her works—details which were a matter of common knowledge to her contemporary readers, but are virtually invisible to us now. For Barchas, it makes sense to think of Austen as being closer to the "the stout historical novels of her contemporary Sir Walter Scott, or even the encyclopedic reach of modernist James Joyce, than to the narrow domestic and biographical readings that still characterize much of Austen studies." (1) That is, Barchas thinks of Austen as a historical novelist selectively and deliberately conveying facts, rather than a woman directly conveying the reality of her experience. Ultimately, however, Barchas' project has different stakes from mine, given that what Austen refuses to engage here is not a transcript of domestic life, but the conventions of landscape description that came down to her through poets like Thomson and Cowper. Janine Barchas, *Matters of Fact in Jane Austen: History, Location, and Celebrity*, xiii, 317 pages (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/>.

⁷ Jane Austen, *Selected Letters*, Reissue (Oxford University Press, USA, 2009), 274 n. 191.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁹ James Edward Austen-Leigh and Kathryn Sutherland, *A Memoir of Jane Austen: And Other Family Recollections*, Oxford World's Classics, lxii, 276 p. (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 95.

¹⁰ Jane Austen and Deirdre Le Faye, *Jane Austen's Letters*, Correspondence, xxv, 667 p. (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 320. This, however, does not keep him from annoyingly hinting in his next letter that, since *Emma* has been well-received by the nobility at court, that she might want to dedicate her next novel to Prince Leopold, and that, "any Historical Romance illustrative of the History of the august house of Cobourg, would just now be very interesting." Austen is more positive in her refusal of him this time, famously saying, "No—I must keep to my own style and go on in my own Way" (*Jane Austen's Letters*, 325, 326.)

¹¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (University of California Press, 1990), 8.

¹² Austen and Le Faye, *Jane Austen's Letters*, 210. Vivien Jones points out that, although it seems like Austen is saying *Mansfield Park* itself will be a complete change of subject from her earlier novels (she had been discussing *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* in the previous sentence) the change of subject actually refers to the letter itself. By January of 1813, Austen was already well underway in composing *Mansfield Park*. (Austen, *Selected Letters*, 258-59)

¹³ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 319.

¹⁵ See Troost and Greenfield for an account of Fanny's legendary controversy. It is worth pointing out, however, that what may be personally unappealing to readers—scholarly and otherwise—Fanny's passivity and (to some) deformity of personality has become fertile grounds for scholarly analysis. See: Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield, "A History of the Fanny Wars," *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal* 36 (2014): 15–33; Anne-Lise François, *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Stanford University Press, 2008); Nina Auerbach, *Romantic Imprisonment: Women and Other Glorified Outcasts*, Gender and Culture, xxiv, 315 p. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

¹⁶ Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2008), 11, 14.

¹⁷ Although double consciousness is the term used by W.E.B. Du Bois to describe the African American experience, it applies well to a figure like Fanny Price. "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." "Of Our Spiritual Strivings." William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Penguin, 1996), 5.

¹⁸ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 49.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 188.

²⁰ "Downy, Adj.1," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed February 06, 2015, <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/57316>; "Steepish, Adj.," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed February 06, 2015, <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/189596>.

²¹ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 189.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ For eighteenth and early nineteenth works that directly debate the possibility of a standard of taste, or that try to solve problems that arise from this debate, see, for instance: David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," in *Four Dissertations*. (London: printed for A. Millar, 1757), 203–40; Archibald Alison, *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste By the Revd. Archibald Alison*, (Dublin: printed for Messrs. P. Byrne, J. Moore, Grueber and M'Allister, W. Jones, and R. White, 1790); Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips, World's Classics (Oxford [England]: Oxford University Press, 1990); Richard Payne Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste.*, 3rd ed. (London: T. Payne [etc.], 1808).

²⁵ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 43–44.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 368.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 55. In their reports on Northamptonshire, both Pitt and Donaldson give accounts consistent with what Austen portrays here: there has been much enclosure in Northamptonshire (the enclosure of John Clare's parish was one of the last and commenced in 1809) but each parish still retains a common field.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 163.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 164–65.

³⁰ Ibid., 64.

³¹ Ibid.

³² In his essay on *l'effet du réel*, Barthes distinguishes the reality effect—details given with no apparent purpose in the larger structure of the work—in nineteenth century realist fiction from the rhetorical tradition that has legitimized description as “aesthetic verisimilitude” (144.) While the reality effect is the presence of superfluous detail that, scandalously, cannot be assimilated into the narrative structure, aesthetic verisimilitude is a set-piece allowed by literary conventions to exist apart from considerations of narrative. While Barthes’ essay should not be made answerable to eighteenth and nineteenth century British literature since it was written to articulate the modernist backlash against realist fiction, it is nevertheless useful for thinking about Austen’s novels. Particularly in *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*, Austen includes a number of superfluous details that cannot be incorporated into the larger arc of the plot, like Dr. Grant and Mrs. Norris’ argument about the apricot tree discussed in this chapter, or, in *Emma*, Miss Bates’ long paragraphs about apples and neighborhood gossip. The soil discussed later in this chapter is one of *Mansfield Park*’s best, if most often ignored, examples. Roland Barthes, “The Reality Effect,” in *The Rustle of Language* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 141–48.

³³ Jane Austen, *Emma*, ed. James Kinsley and Adela Pinch, Reissue ed. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 23. Also, see Chapter Three, particularly the comments of William Marshall, Thomas Brace Stone, and William Cobbett, for their views on the inefficacy of the Board of Agriculture as an organization.

³⁴ James Donaldson, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Northampton* (Edinburgh: Adam Neill & Co., 1794), 6.

³⁵ The Board, founded in 1793, printed reports for all Scottish and English counties by the next year. Mitchison, “The Old Board of Agriculture (1793-1822),” 49.

³⁶ William Pitt, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Northampton* (Printed for R. Phillips, 1809), ix.

³⁷ Ibid., 6.

³⁸ Ibid., 8–9.

³⁹ Marshall, *Minutes of Agriculture, Made on a Farm of 300 Acres of Various Soils, Near Croydon, Surry*, vols. 2, 24.

⁴⁰ They are: clay, clayey loam, loam, sandy loam, sand, gravelly loam, gravel, pebbly loam, slaty loam, chalky loam, chalk, flinty loam, flint, ragstone loam, and limestone loam. Ibid.

⁴¹ Great Britain Board of Agriculture, *Communications to the Board of Agriculture, on Subjects Relative to the Husbandry and Internal Improvement of the Country* (W. Bulmer, 1805), 9, 83, 69, 75, 62.

⁴² Ibid., 302–317.

⁴³ Clark, “Jane Austen and the Enclosures,” 105.

⁴⁴ Galperin, *The Historical Austen*, 59.

⁴⁵ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 370.

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Knowing Real Nature in Contemporary British Culture

Austen's refusal to suggest that the landscapes of *Mansfield Park* are transcripts of the real is a reflection of long-standing and ongoing problems in British environmental thinking and writing. The question of whether and how works of writing and art represent the material world, far from being solved in the two hundred years between *Mansfield Park*'s publication and the present, have come to seem as urgent as ever. Despite the pleasantly landscaped estates of her novels, Austen lived in a time where human beings made drastic changes to the natural environment including the destruction of forests, draining of wetlands, and introduction of invasive species. Fanny's whispered lament as she hears of Mr. Rushworth's plans to cut down the oak avenue on his estate shows that environmental elegy was already a too-familiar genre of writing: "Cut down an avenue! What a pity! Does it not make you think of Cowper? 'Ye fallen avenues, once more I mourn your fate unmerited.'"¹ Even so, Austen only saw the very beginning of the Industrial Revolution, on the other side of which we mourn the fate unmerited of far more than avenues of oak trees. While environmental concerns have only grown in scale since Austen's time, the epistemological concerns raised in *Mansfield Park* still persist. In this final section, then, I want to discuss the main ideas of this dissertation through their presence in two different examples of contemporary British culture.

A Disappearing Real in the "New Nature Writing"?

In June of this year, English nature writer Mark Cocker published an essay, "Death of the Naturalist: Why is the 'New Nature Writing' So Tame?" in the *New Statesman*.² Using Helen

MacDonald's bestselling memoir *H is for Hawk* (2014), which describes how raising a Goshawk for falconry helped her regain her bearings after her father's death, Cocker discusses the recent autobiographical turn of nature writing in Britain. The "new nature writing" he refers to is the renewed popularization of nature writing over the past decade. Writers like Richard Mabey, Robert MacFarlane, and Cocker himself, who dominate the genre, are serious naturalists but write about the environment by weaving natural history, ecology, and conservationism into personal narratives often centered on local landscapes and diminutive ecosystems, much in the tradition of Gilbert White's *Natural History of Selborne*. Tim Dee, another English nature writer, describes this new trend by saying that

New nature writing is modest. It has become apprehensive in both senses of the word. A cautious but knowing approach and retreat seems *de rigueur*. The new nature writer is personal and intimate and the opposite of the self-aggrandising big game hunter or summiteer. Recent books take various forms: memoirs, anthologies, essays, anthropologies, cultural geographies, travelogues and natural histories. Many of them combine several of these modes within their pages. They are commonly feral in feel.³

The (often white, male, middle-aged) new nature writer presents him or herself with humility, allowing natural historical knowledge to leak out through the cracks of personal narrative, rather than present it explicitly. For Cocker, writers must strike a balance between memoir and natural historical fact.

However, nature writing is threatening to lapse into tameness by the simple fact that there may not be much true nature left in Britain to write about—memoir with nature as its excuse. "[I]n so many of the new books," Cocker complains, "nature and culture have been replaced by landscape and literature." In other words, the balance between memoir and knowledge in these new books move between, not the human and the non-human, but written representations of environment and landscape, which may be "as much an imagined as it is a real place." Landscapes, Cocker claims, can be stripped of biodiversity and still remain aesthetically pleasing; landscapes can lose wildness and unpredictability but remain open for self-indulgent naturalists' attempts to "re-enchant" them for a

mass readership through prose. The project of re-enchanting the landscape, then—a project that many nature writers take upon themselves—may not be possible when the ecosystem is stripped completely of its wild elements.

The problem with this formula [re-enchantment] is that landscapes readily persist when all that makes a place enchanting – the filigree of its natural diversity – has long since vanished. [. . .] The real danger is that nature writing becomes a literature of consolation that distracts us from the truth of our fallen countryside, or – just as bad – that it becomes a space for us to talk to ourselves about ourselves, with nature relegated to the background as an attractive green wash.⁴

Cocker questions the integrity of British nature writing at a moment when all Britons are fast losing access to wild creatures and environments. Furthermore, since no one likes to hear bad news (and it is difficult to sell a memoir based on bad news only, unlike MacDonald's *H is for Hawk*, which offers a narrative of redemption), the harsh truths of disappeared British wildlife and poisoned ecosystems may disappear from nature writing as well. In order to maintain its integrity, the new nature writer must not be willing to describe sanitized landscapes, but must be ready to bear witness to wildness—and to note when such wildness is absent.

What is at stake for Cocker, then, as it was for Joseph Warton, is a literature of the “present and real.” Cocker calls for a new nature writing that does not merely balance portrayals of literature and landscape—both of which are only representations of real environments—but nature and culture. To this end, he cites the writer Richard Mabey, whose work “could be summarised as a movement along a single axis between culture – land practice or literature, science, the visual arts, sculpture, whatever – and nature. It is metaphorically and actually rooted in a soil of real, living things.” But Mabey's *Nature Cure* (2005), which Cocker specifically cites as a progenitor of the new nature writing, puts more of an emphasis on literature and landscape than Cocker suggests. Mabey is one of the most widely-read British nature writers living, with over thirty books on ecology and natural history to his name. Mabey's memoir begins with his leaving his lifelong home in the Chiltern Hills for the flat, fenny landscape of Norfolk. He is forced to leave because an episode of

severe depression has left him unable to financially support himself, so he must leave to live rent free in a run-down building on his friends' property. Over the next couple of years, Mabey meets a new partner, Polly, who inspires him to start writing again, after which he slowly begins to find work as a writer and commentator, finally reconnecting with his old passions of bird watching, foraging, and being outdoors. Finally cured and financially independent, he resettles nearby, having adopted the new landscape as his home.

Throughout *Nature Cure*, there are several extended discussions of John Clare's life and poetry (although only one or two mentions each of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats.) Appropriately, literature and writing are the keys to the cure of Mabey's depression that no amount of time spent outdoors could lift. ("I was blind to the swifts for the first time in my life. While they were *en fete* I was lying on my bed with my face away from the window, not really caring if I saw them again.")⁵ Well-meaning friends' attempts to get Mabey outside failed to lift his spirits, but he began to truly heal when Polly suggested that he write his autobiography. At the end of the book, Mabey muses on his own path to health in light of the title of his book. "The idea of a 'nature cure' goes back as far as written history. If you expose yourself to the healing currents of the outdoors, the theory goes, your ill-health will be rinsed away."⁶ But for Mabey, it was not being out in nature that cured him, but the act of writing about himself in nature.

What healed me, I think, was almost the exactly opposite process, a sense of being taken not out of myself but back *in*, of nature entering me, firing up the wild bits of my imagination. If there was a single moment when I was "cured" it was the flash of loving inspiration by Polly that sat me down under the beech tree in my old home, and made me pick up a pen again, it was those first stumbling imaginative acts that reconnected me, more than the autumn breeze through the trees.⁷

Mabey writes that later he did re-connect with nature at a physical level, but that connection came after he started to heal through writing. Mabey, in his honesty, shows that the act of being a nature writer might have less to do with being out in nature than Cocker assumes. These two men, who are

now literally neighbors, are carrying on the question that has persisted since the time of Joseph Warton: what do written representations of environment actually represent?⁸

Andy Goldsworthy and the Place of the Real in Environmental Art

Since the late 1970s, British sculptor Andy Goldsworthy has been working with the medium of the earth. Although he has made many large, semi-permanent outdoor sculptures, such as earthworks and dry stone walls, he is probably best known for his ephemeral sculptures which may last only a few minutes, hours, or days. These sculptures are made out of ice, snow, and water; leaves and flowers; thorns, twigs and the stalks of weeds; snow and sand thrown into the air, pigment thrown into the water; stones delicately balanced on each other. For the most part, Goldsworthy does not work in public and so these sculptures would never be seen unless they were recorded by some means. After the practice of ephemeral sculpture endangered his standing as a student at Preston Polytechnic, Goldsworthy began recording his sculptures through photography.⁹



Fig 6. Andy Goldsworthy. *Two stones / America and Scotland / laid yellow leaves in one / and red in the other / STORM KING, NEW YORK, OCTOBER 1995 / PENPONT, DUMFRIESSHIRE, NOVEMBER 1995* 1995. Cibachrome print, (each) 127 x 81 cm. Princeton University Art Museum. Available from: ARTstor, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed October 10, 2015)

In the early 1990s, Goldsworthy published two short statements about the place of photography in his work, one as a preface to *Hand to Earth* (1990) and one as a postscript to *Stone* (1994), both simply entitled “The Photograph.” In the first, he begins by stating that “My approach to the photograph is kept simple, almost routine. All work, good and bad, is documented.”¹⁰ Despite this simplicity of use, however, photography is not unimportant, nor is it simple in itself. He goes on to say,

There is an intensity about a work at its peak that I hope is expressed in the image. Process and decay are implicit in that moment. A drawing or painting would be too defined. The photograph leaves the reason and spirit of the work outside. They are not the purpose but the result of my art.¹¹

While the photographic image plucks the ephemeral work out of time, the laws of nature come with it: we not only see the sculpture, we also see it about to melt, collapse, or blow away. Drawing or painting, on the other hand, would be “too defined” because images fixed on paper are not subject to heat, gravity, or wind like we imagine photographed objects to be.

Goldsworthy also hints here, and states more clearly later, that the photograph is his chosen medium of representation *because* it can never be a complete representation of the sculpture. A photograph leaves “the reason and spirit of the work outside” its boundaries. A drawing or painting can stand on its own as an object, but a photograph is a reminder of a real, long-gone thing. Thus, Goldsworthy’s photographs do not exist only for the sake of documenting the sculpture but add a philosophical dimension to his work. Photography is an interpretive process, but as Goldsworthy makes clear, the photograph also allows for the appearance of elements in the piece that go beyond his short-sighted interpretation of it in the moment. In the photograph, a sculpture is unmoored from his will. In *Stone*, he elaborates:

I construct the image after the work’s completion. During the making I become aware of the relationship with the surroundings . . . a nearby tree, rock, mountain . . . which needs to be explained in the photograph. Sometimes it is a particular movement, light or moment with which the work aligns that is important. I have laid work in wait to be activated by time and light [. . .] These elements often determine how and when the photograph is taken.¹²

The image is a carefully constructed one, and while Goldsworthy does not make sculptures for the purposes of photography, he nevertheless makes them with the eventuality of their being photographed in mind. Without being able to see the work as a photograph, his work could become short-sighted. “I have a social and intellectual need to make photographs,” he continues,

Photography is my way of talking, writing and thinking about my art. It makes me aware of connections and developments that might not otherwise have been

apparent. It is the visual evidence which runs through my art as a whole and gives me a broader, more distant view of what I am doing. On the occasions when film has not come out, that work feels dislocated – like a half-forgotten memory. The rigorous test which the photograph gives my sculpture confirms its success or failure.¹³

However, he ends this paragraph by pushing back against the too easy question of which is the “real,” or more important: the sculpture or the photograph? “To interpret the relationship between the work outside and its image by deciding which is the art is too simple.”¹⁴ For in the answer to this simplistic question is the possibility that aesthetic value—the status of “art”—will be given over wholly to the sculptures or the photographs. The latter is an interpretation of his work that he has foreseen. Clive Adams, in his introduction to the *catalogue raisonné* of Goldsworthy’s photographs up to 1989, notes that “The term ‘photowork’ was first applied to this work [ephemeral, photographed sculptures] in *Rain sun snow hail mist calm*, published in 1985, but Goldsworthy prefers to simply refer to all his work as ‘sculpture.’”¹⁵ “Photowork” is a term that implies that the essence or purpose of the work lies in the photos. Even though it seems that some of his critics have persistently disagreed, Goldsworthy refuses to allow his work to be equated with, or reduced to, photographs.

The photograph is incomplete. The viewer is drawn into the space between image and work. A bridge needs to be made between the two. It is necessary to know what it is like to get wet, feel a cold wind, touch a leaf, throw stones, compress snow, suck icicles. . . often reaching back into childhood to when those experiences were more alive.

If the photograph were to become so real that it over-powered and replaced the work outside, then it would have no purpose or meaning in my art.¹⁶

The art critic William Malpas takes a rather cynical view of the place of the real in Goldsworthy’s work. Acknowledging, but quickly leaping over “the space between image and work” that Goldsworthy intends, he says: “Goldsworthy has to face up to the fact that most people know about his art (and love his art) from photographs. [. . .] For the punter [UK slang: “a customer”] who consumes art in books and printed material (or on TV or radio or the web) the ‘real’ art object doesn’t need to exist: what counts is the media representation or simulation of it.”¹⁷ In fact, Malpas

continues, despite the art public's need to know that Goldsworthy's works are "real," they need not be so to be consumed with the same avidity: "Goldsworthy could have faked everything" and it wouldn't make much of a difference to consumers, even lovers, of his art.¹⁸

While suggestions like these may shield us from the apparently frightening territory of earnestness and imaginative involvement in encounters with art, they ultimately do so by trading aesthetic experience and philosophical engagement for a poor sort of skepticism. A strength of Goldsworthy's art is that it abides in, rather than resolving, the question of where aesthetic experience resides. Malpas says that Goldsworthy's two statements on photography "reveal a confusion and ambiguity regarding photography and art."¹⁹ But to me, Goldsworthy's statements are well aware of the irresolvable complexity and ambiguity of aesthetic encounters already present in his work, and seek to foreclose simplistic interpretations by the viewer.

Barbara Hurd's nonfiction piece "Stones" elegantly arrives at an understanding of the tension between the real and the represented in Goldsworthy's work, in which Hurd recognizes the tension between the fully known and the unknowable. Imagining that Goldsworthy is on the beach with her building one of his sculptures, she writes, "I would be able to see his entire structure, could even circle it, examine it from all angles, have some confidence that there's nothing, visually at least, that's eluding me." However, the fantasy of knowing is just that: a fantasy. "But he's not here and what most of us know of his work is through photographs." Rather than seeing the photographs as limiting, however, she sees in them a call for exploration. "In them the sea stretches the eye sideways, up, and out toward the horizon. Their invitation is to distance, expansion, which reminds us how limited our vision is, how vast the sea and sky are, how impossible it is, as my mother might have said, to know even a fraction of them."²⁰ The gap between image and work is an indeterminate space; it is a place where we are uncertain, where we are made to know what we don't know; where we in fact realize that our ideas about nature and art have nowhere to land. This art asks us to keep

roving, seeking beauty and seeking answers, rather than retreat into the refuge of stale, mechanical skepticism about what is “real” and what is “fake.”

Goldsworthy’s works have a texture of the real while at the same time refusing to allow themselves to be conflated with the real, much like Clare’s descriptions, Smith’s notes, Austen’s isolated environmental details, and the charts and journals of agricultural writers; the photograph is his method of achieving it. With the visual arts, we arrive at the end of a long list of methods for capturing our living, material environment: autobiographical prose, poetry, memoir, tables, charts, and notes. In all of these, authors we have read struggle with the relationship between the represented and the real and find their own, if only stopgap means of accounting for the truth in their works. Rather than a cynical dismissal of the material world, this struggle reflects ongoing engagement with the non-human. This struggle is a refusal to let landscapes become wallpaper or let books replace flowers. Novels may not let us fully know hedgerows and agriculturalists’ charts may never let us fully know the field, but the works I have discussed here remind us that we can only deeply invest in the real environment if we are also invested in our means of knowing it.

¹ Ibid., 44.

² Mark Cocker, “Death of the Naturalist: Why Is the ‘New Nature Writing’ so Tame?,” *New Statesman*, June 17, 2015, <http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2015/06/death-naturalist-why-new-nature-writing-so-tame>.

³ Tim Dee, “Super Natural: The Rise of the New Nature Writing,” *The National*, August 22, 2013, <http://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/books/super-natural-the-rise-of-the-new-nature-writing>.

⁴ Cocker, “Death of the Naturalist: Why Is the ‘New Nature Writing’ so Tame?”.

⁵ Richard Mabey, *Nature Cure* (University of Virginia Press, 2005), 4–5.

⁶ Ibid., 223.

⁷ Ibid., 224.

⁸ Ibid., 46.

⁹ William Malpas, *The Art of Andy Goldsworthy: Complete Works*, Sculptors Series, 326 p., [66] p. of plates (Kent, U.K.: Crescent Moon, 2007), 28.

¹⁰ Andy Goldsworthy et al., *Hand to Earth: Andy Goldsworthy Sculpture, 1976-1990*, 196 p. ([Leeds, England]: Henry Moore Centre for the Study of Sculpture, 1990), 9.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Andy Goldsworthy, *Stone* (London, UK: Thames & Hudson, 1994), 120.

¹³ Ibid.

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- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Goldsworthy et al., *Hand to Earth*, 169.
- ¹⁶ Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 120.
- ¹⁷ Malpas, *The Art of Andy Goldsworthy*, 186.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 187.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 184.
- ²⁰ Barbara Hurd, "Stones: Turning Points," *River Teeth: A Journal of Nonfiction Narrative* 9, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 4.

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