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James Peacock

Who was John Bartram? Literary and Epistolary Representations of the Quaker¹

John Bartram was the pre-eminent figure in eighteenth-century American botany, appointed botanist by royal appointment to George III in 1765. ‘John Bertram’ is the figure who inhabits the pages of letter eleven of Hector de Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer*. What is happening in the tantalising alteration of the single vowel? Although it is unlikely to reveal repressed memories of colonial violence, as the ‘Bedloe – Oldeb – Bedlo’ configuration does in Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘A Tale of the Ragged Mountains’, I would argue that far from being mere ‘typographical error’,² it self-consciously highlights the move from biographical mimesis into the precincts of fiction. In so doing, it advertises a traditional Quaker problem: the imperfect transmission of the self and its spiritual ideas through the debased language of man.

In his journal, John Woolman succinctly expresses the problem:

I found it safest for me to live in private, and keep these things sealed up in my own breast. While I silently ponder on that change wrought in me, I find no language equal to convey to another a clear idea of it.³

For the Quaker, this linguistic difficulty is an enduring one. If the still, small voice within speaks to us in the primitive, Edenic language by which ‘all things

1. This article grew out of a paper given at the British Society of Eighteenth-Century Studies annual conference at St. Hugh’s College, Oxford on 4 January 2004.

2. Edgar Allan Poe, *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1985), 401.

3. John Woolman, *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 29.

had their names given them according to their nature and virtue... through the openings of that divine Word of wisdom and power by which they were made',⁴ it is inevitably impossible to translate this into the public, 'carnal' or 'natural' language of everyday interaction. The radical Quaker publishers of truth in the seventeenth century reserved the 'incantatory' language of inner revelation for their journals,⁵ evangelical outbursts and spontaneous contributions to meetings, but faced with what they perceived as the degraded communication of the world, frequently found it difficult to convey to their fellow men an inchoate inner truth founded on individual testimony.

Thus perceived Quaker radicalism stemmed partly from a *representational* crisis, that is, how to reveal the private publicly, or reconcile words and the Word. One attempted solution in the seventeenth century was the Quaker 'sign performance', a phrase coined by Richard Bauman:⁶ in order to by-pass the difficulties of natural language, Quakers would appear in public, smashing pots, or 'going naked as a sign', the idea being that the passing populace might find their inner lights stimulated. More often than not, these happenings resulted in persecution or arrest, notoriously when James Naylor entered Bristol in 1656 doing a passable impression of Jesus. In short, the private invariably lost something in public translation.

In the eighteenth-century age of Enlightenment both in Britain and America, the problem of representation would have become more acute, as a dissenter would have been torn between his public responsibility to his fellow man (a moderate Enlightenment position) and his personal responsibility to God (a more pietistic position). For the Quakers, a growing conservatism emerged during this period, brought about by a desire to avoid further persecution or to make progress in bourgeois business. This move can perhaps be traced to 1672, and George Whitehead's meeting with Charles II, after which imprisoned Quakers were released. William Penn's more rational ethos and the codification

4. George Fox, *The Journal* (London: Penguin, 1998), 28.

5. Jackson L. Cope, 'Seventeenth-Century Quaker Style,' *Seventeenth-Century Prose: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. Stanley E. Fish (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 208.

6. Richard Bauman, *Let your words be few. Symbolism of speaking and silence among Seventeenth-century Quakers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), ch. 6.

of Quaker thought laid down by the Calvinist-influenced Robert Barclay in his 1678 work *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity* may also have contributed to the change. Most importantly, with the establishment of the Second-Day's Morning Meeting in 1673, early radical Quaker texts, including the works of Fox and Naylor, began to be revised to make them more palatable. Clearly, there was an appreciation of the importance of textual representation, the power of words themselves, in establishing a balance between private and public voices.

Yet Quakers had no control over how they were represented by others, as the literary texts of the period demonstrate. Eighteenth-century English literature tended to focus on the external signifiers of Quakerism, turning visual and verbal tics into stereotypical portrayals. Daniel Defoe's *Roxana* reduces Quakerism to a useful costume for disguise. In Charles Shadwell's play *The Fair Quaker or, the Humours of the Navy*, first published in 1769, the titular heroine's name, Dorcas Zeal, would suggest *at best* a stereotypical portrayal of the Quaker sect. Her flat cap, unostentatious dress, incessant use of 'thee' and 'thou' and eschewal of all frivolous activities reinforce this impression. Yet it becomes apparent that Dorcas's honour, integrity and fidelity to her sailor fiancé Captain Worthy characterise not just her Quakerism, but also her femininity and a national ideal of a dependable and immutable Protestant Great Britain. This in turn stands in polar opposition to the detestable fop Mizen, whose desire to turn the navy into a collection of well-dressed, guitar-playing fellows ('mere Italians' as Captain Worthy exclaims)⁷ represents a minatory, incipient Catholicism.

Stereotypical Quaker tropes are therefore appropriated for ideological ends in Shadwell's work while sanitizing radicalism and consigning it to the past. No attempt is made to access an inner truth. Indeed, one might suppose that the doctrine of the inner light necessarily confers upon Quakerism a sense of ineffability in representations by others. The emphasis on the immanent and the individual makes the Quaker essence inherently *unrepresentable* barring a set of superficial signifiers, in the same way that the spontaneous urgings which constitute Quaker worship preclude representation by ministers.

7. Richard Shadwell, *The Fair Quaker or, the Humours of the Navy* (London, 1768), I.i.

In the America of Benjamin Franklin, the tension between individual testimony and civic responsibility assumes arguably a greater importance in the foundation of a new society. John Bartram, the renowned Quaker botanist and inveterate letter writer, epitomizes this tension. We are privileged in having access to two representations of the man: first, Hector de Crèvecoeur's portrayal, described by Thomas Slaughter as 'a reverie, an oasis in his parched indictment of the nature of man',⁸ and secondly, the Bartram available to us through his own correspondence. I wish to compare the fictional portrait of 'Bertram' and the 'real' Bartram of the letters, focussing on his epistolary relationship with the English Quaker Peter Collinson, in order to illustrate that the Quaker influence on early American society's foundational metaphors may be more significant than has previously been imagined, and to highlight the problems of Quaker literary and self-representation touched on previously. Crèvecoeur's Bartram, I shall demonstrate, is manufactured (like Shadwell's Dorcas Zeal) to promulgate certain political viewpoints, such that his Quakerism inevitably becomes a textual effect of representation in the service of an ideological impulse. Thus how we interpret him theologically must overlap with a theoretical analysis of how we read 'character' as a highly problematic literary formulation. My subsequent comparison of the Bartram of the *Letters* and the man revealed to us through his correspondence with Collinson, may help to elucidate his character and his position as simultaneously Quaker and progressive Enlightenment American, whilst revealing the problematic interaction of public and private in Transatlantic exchange.

Topographically, *Letters from an American Farmer* situates itself in a mediating position between the western frontier beyond which lie wilderness and savagery, and the east in which the trumpery of old Europe is found. Implicated in this middle way is the farmer or gardener who, as Leo Marx has asserted, cannot admire nature in its purest state, but is obliged to conquer and cultivate, to inscribe nature with the marks of civilizing man.⁹ It is, as Marx

8. Thomas P. Slaughter, *The Natures of John and William Bartram* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1996), 44.

9. Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 112.

indicates, a middle way espoused by Hugh Blair in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*,¹⁰ and by Rousseau, who warned against taking the urge for perfectibility too far (Marx 102). The Russian visitor to Bartram's home on the banks of the Schuylkill attests to the Quaker's ability to strike the necessary balance between perfectible nature and unpretentious landscaping:

His house is small, but decent ... Every disposition of the fields, fences, and trees, seemed to bear the marks of perfect order and regularity, which in rural affairs, always indicate a prosperous industry ... After a little time I perceived the Schuylkill, winding through delightful meadows, and soon cast my eyes on a new-made bank, which seemed greatly to confine its stream.¹¹

Though restricted and ordered, nature is not banished entirely: this is not the 'purely formal style of garden which ... embodies a purely aristocratic, leisure-class ideal of conspicuous waste' (Marx 93), thus divorcing beauty from work.¹² Neither is it the garden as symbol of cosmopolitan literary culture, as exemplified by Annis Stockton's replica of Pope's Twickenham garden at Morven, New Jersey.¹³ There are ten men at work along this bank, including Bartram himself. A harmonious aesthetic whole is achieved only through labour.

Clearly, the house and garden of 'the first botanist' (Crèvecoeur 259),¹⁴ as eulogised by Iwan the Russian, participates in a vision of an agrarian idyll in which nature, artisanship and art combine to produce a microcosmic model of

10. Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres*, ed. S. Michael Halloran and Linda Ferreira-Buckley (Carbondale, IL.: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), III.

11. J. Hector St John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997), 259–60.

12. Ernest Earnest also mentions the eighteenth-century backlash against manicured gardens in *John and William Bartram: Botanists and Explorers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1940), 36.

13. Catherine La Courreye Blecki and Karin A. Wulf, ed., *Milcah Martha Moore's Book: A Commonplace Book from Revolutionary America* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 25.

14. Actually, Bartram's was not strictly the first botanic garden in the States. That honour is likely to belong to a group of German mystics led by Kelpius, who built a botanic garden on the banks of the Wissahickon around 1694. Bartram expresses his misgivings about mysticism in a letter to Peter Collinson June 11, 1743 (Darlington 164).

the compact farm unit and the husbandman intent, as Jefferson in Chapter 19 of his *Notes on the State of Virginia* mythopoeically describes, not on competitive economic growth but on rural self-sufficiency. From the Puritans' new Eden to the Jacksonian common man to the canonical American critical discourses of Leo Marx and Henry Nash Smith, the various manifestations of the philosopher farmer 'who united all the simplicity of rustic manners to the most useful learning' (Crèvecoeur 277) have been central to an understanding of American culture and literature as a foundational symbol and, in the eighteenth century, as a guarantee of moral and political integrity. For example, John Dickinson opens his *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania* with a declaration of his credentials which allies the arguments of the lawyer to the honest demands of the farmer in order to render them more palatable or persuasive:

My dear Countrymen,

I am a Farmer, settled, after a variety of fortunes, near the banks of the river Delaware, in the province of Pennsylvania. I received a liberal education, and have been engaged in the busy scenes of life; but am now convinced, that a man may be as happy without bustle, as with it. My farm is small; my servants are few, and good; I have a little money at interest; I wish for no more.¹⁵

John Bartram, as undoubtedly the most celebrated gardener in early America, surely plays a vital part in the emergence of the persistent garden figure.

In so much as the domestication of the wilderness mirrors Bartram's inner peace, we might want to interpret this space as peculiarly Quaker, a place where truth can be revealed through the landscape and the animate and inanimate objects contained therein. George Fox's richly symbolic, incantatory writing frequently deploys botanical and horticultural imagery in the rush of revelation induced by the inner light. For instance, in his autobiography he remarks upon arrival in Scotland, 'I felt the Seed of God to sparkle about me, like innumerable sparks of fire. Not but that there is abundance of the thick, cloddy earth of hypocrisy and falseness above, and a briery, brambly nature, which is to be burnt up with God's Word, and ploughed up with His spiritual plough, before

15. Quoted in Leonard Kriegel, ed., *Essential Works of the Founding Fathers* (New York: Bantam Books, 1964), 23.

God's Seed brings forth heavenly and spiritual fruit to His glory. But the husbandman is to wait in patience' (*Journal* 254). Later, in hortatory mode, Fox has this to say to the American Quaker colonists:

My friends that are gone and are going over to plant ... keep your own plantations in your hearts, with the Spirit and power of God, that your own vines and lilies be not hurt.¹⁶

The seeker as husbandman; the seed as immanent God;¹⁷ the soil as necessary obstacle to be cultivated in the pursuit of truth: letter eleven of the *Letters* ostensibly paints a picture of an archetypical Quaker landscape, the visible rendering of God's Word by those fully equipped for the nurturing process. The Quaker, as one who has heard the voice of God, can be seen as epitomizing 'the one who received the seed that fell on good soil ... the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown' (Matt. 13.23). Peculiarly influenced by the prophet Isaiah, and by the parable as a literary form which self-reflexively refers to the inherent difficulties of communication and representation, the Quaker botanist stands as a living parable, the sowing of the material seed enacting the dissemination of God's word in a language other than our own imperfection.

But in letter eleven, aside from the reiteration of typical Quaker tropes—use of the egalitarian pronoun 'thee', the jettisoning of elaborate toasts and 'tedious cant' in prayer (261), the plainness but plenty of the fare—traditional metaphors of Quaker spiritual truth are instead appropriated for ideological ends. When our Russian visitor proclaims 'I view the present Americans as the seed of future nations, which will replenish this boundless continent' (262), it is clear

16. George Fox, *George Fox Epistles*, ed. Arthur Windsor (Gloucester: George Fox Fund, 1992), no. 379.

17. The seed is an image picked up by both Emerson and Thoreau, both of whom were undoubtedly influenced by Quakerism to differing extents. Thoreau says in *Walden* (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1882), 91: 'All that I could say, then, with respect to farming on a large scale, (I have always cultivated a garden,) was, that I had had my seeds ready.' For an extended investigation of the influence of Quakerism on nineteenth-century American literature, see James Peacock, 'What They Seek for is in Themselves' Scotland's Transatlantic Research Project. (STAR), <http://www.star.ac.uk/Archive/E-texts.htm>

that the image of the seed has been commandeered in the service of a programme which stipulates that landscape participate in a specifically *American* metaphorical scheme. Thus the garden here is less representative of a consonantal middle way than of what Eric Cheyfitz envisages as a designated space in which ‘eloquence’ and the ‘power to make metaphors’ are deployed in order to plant a dominant, colonial discourse based on individual ‘property’.¹⁸ Iwan’s deliberate metaphor-making participates in this discourse, whereas the Quaker seed is delivered, as we have seen, via a parable which, although an analogous figure, does constitute ‘plain speaking’ for the initiated such as the Quaker and therefore avoids the man-made rhetorical constructs Quakers distrust.

What we must return to is the fact that John Bartram is here presented as ‘Bertram.’ In other words, despite the likelihood that much of the readership of the novel would have been more or less familiar with the work and reputation of the real botanist, our attention is deliberately drawn to a fictionalised character. In Thomas Slaughter’s words, ‘the story is a source for what John Bartram could be in Crèvecoeur’s hands, but not always reliable for what the man or the home ever was’ (40). Quakerism is, by virtue of the repetition of its familiar verbal and visual tics and the re-appropriation of its spiritual metaphors, reduced, along with its representative protagonist, to a comforting fiction which is complicit with and subservient to a profoundly political agrarian utopianism.

David Carlton has persuasively argued that *Letters from an American Farmer*’s central opposition is between an ideal of freeholdership, of personal governance and ownership, and an insidious if irresistible spirit of constitutionalism and black letter law. With this dichotomy in mind, he suggests that the retreat from legalism into a holy experiment narrated in the Nantucket chapters actually serves to place an ironic distance between the reader and farmer James, as it is patently obvious from the smell, the consumption of opium and the poverty, that we are supposed to interpret this Quaker experiment as discreditable.¹⁹ Carlson also mentions the extratextual reasons why readers may have rejected the Quakerism on offer, in particular the ‘failure of the Quaker

18. Eric Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from The Tempest to Tarzan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 29–31, 55.

government of Pennsylvania in the early and mid-century to handle violent conflict between English settlers and Indians on the frontier' (269). I would argue that Bertram's lifestyle, as attractive as it seems, is similarly ironically distanced: it is a myth which James's subsequent flight in letter 12 exposes as unviable. Functioning merely as a digression into what Carlson dubs a 'zone of negative liberty' (263), a retreat into a home divested of social or imposed political influence where the soil is sacralized, Crèvecoeur's version of Quakerism loses its power of personal testimony and stands instead for a misplaced ideal of individual land law.

This has consequences in terms of the concept of character. 'Bertram' as a kind of eighteenth-century stereotype follows William Craig's model of a character constructed from external actions, an excess of which would prevent the reader from fully participating in the process of character development.²⁰ In mock-Theophrastan terms, he is a figure who might be dubbed 'the farmer' or 'the philosopher rustic.' His represented character as good Quaker is evidently not intended to be consubstantial with John Bartram as a living, breathing individual. Rather he participates in Deidre Lynch's 'pragmatics of character' in the eighteenth century, in which 'people used characters ... to renegotiate social relations in their changed, commercial world, to derive new kinds of pleasure from the changes, to render their property truly private, to cope with the embarrassment of riches'.²¹ Lynch's arguments owe something to Ian Hunter, who outlines a move from eighteenth century literary characterisation based on sets of rhetorical strategies applied to dramatic representation to a nineteenth-century mode of characterisation bounded by accepted, external moral codes.²² Clearly a Quaker individual *as such* is not presented in letter eleven, but rather a historically-situated portrait of a moribund set of practices and significations in a changing socio-political climate, which allows the author to negotiate his

19. David Carlson, 'Farmer versus Lawyer: Crèvecoeur's *Letters* and the Liberal Subject,' *Early American Literature* 38.2 (2003): 268-9.

20. William Craig, 'Character.' *The Mirror and the Lounger, Complete in One Volume* (London: Jones & Co., 1825), 51.

21. Deidre Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 4-5.

22. Ian Hunter, 'Reading Character,' *Southern Review* 16 (July 1983): 228-230.

highly ambiguous position within that climate.

So much for Bertram, but what about Bartram? How does he represent himself through his extensive correspondence and travel journals? In what ways does he resemble and in what ways does he differ from Crèvecoeur's fictional creation? I wish to focus on the letters he exchanged with the English Quaker Peter Collinson from 1733 up to his death in 1777, partly because they make up the majority of his correspondences, and partly because they provide fascinating insights into John Bartram as a Quaker, a botanist, and most importantly an American keen to define himself in amicable opposition to his English counterpart. Whereas Bertram's Quakerism appears secondary to his Americanism, the Bartram of the letters more subtly negotiates the transformations of Quakerism from old Europe to the New World.

Bartram and Collinson never actually met, so their relationship was, significantly, textual in nature. As Lynch argues, the letter in the eighteenth century was not merely a means of achieving 'psychological verisimilitude', but a reinforcement of the notion of the person as a 'body of writing.' Importantly, character was revealed in a system oriented toward 'semantic coherence and social homogeneity', of exchange, not secrecy (Lynch 42–3). So the epistolary form assumed responsibility for exchanges in a wide variety of discursive fields—personal, spiritual, botanical, economic and political. Notwithstanding the difficulty in revealing their inner selves through the fallen, carnal language of human correspondence, the two Quakers were attempting to reveal something of their characters and the characteristics of their nations through their letters, by as it were opening up the private into the public in the transatlantic sharing of words. This is particularly interesting in relation to Quakerism, traditionally distinguished by (and derided for) its interiority and individualism. In the externalization of their thoughts and feelings, in the transactional nature of their relationship and the projection of their characters, it is extremely doubtful that Bartram and Collinson are obeying the same deep inner impulses which inspire John Woolman to write his spiritual journal.²³

23. Indeed, if a Quaker regarded himself, in the context of writing a journal or standing up to speak in meeting, merely as a mouthpiece for Gnostic revelation, it could be argued that he does not actually have a 'character' in the traditional sense in relation to God.

What is implied in their exchanges, I shall demonstrate, is an instinctual self-consciousness, an innate awareness of the textual possibilities for self-promotion or self-allegorization in portraying themselves as representatives of their respective countries. Culturally and economically involved in their writers' botanical endeavours, by virtue of the samples, descriptions and namings of plants that were swapped, Bartram and Collinson's letters simultaneously reveal fascinating insights into eighteenth-century natural history, and into the culturally and politically-inflected discursive practices by which that history came to be narrated. As Christoph Irmscher observes:

Located at the crossroads of Linnean taxonomy and belles-lettres, wavering between the demands of precise description and the seductions of narrative, American natural history ... only superficially avoids what it very often becomes—a form of autobiography.²⁴

And, as John Bartram's writing connotes, a form of national tale.

In a long-distance relationship in which personality was necessarily inseparable from questions of orthography and rhetorical style, both Collinson and Bartram appear to have been acutely aware of their linguistic differences. Replying to a letter in which the Englishman rather pedantically alludes to his grammatical errors, Bartram writes:

I received thy kind letter of July the 30th. Good grammar and good spelling, may please those that are more taken with a fine superficial flourish than real truth; but my chief aim was to inform my readers of the true, real, distinguishing characters of each genus ... and if you find that my descriptions are not agreeable with the specimens, pray let me know where the disagreement is, and send my descriptions back again that I may correct them.²⁵

Character is, ironically, only revealed in interaction with others, and is therefore perhaps a product of carnal language.

24. Christopher Irmscher, *The Poetics of Natural History: From John Bartram to William James* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 8.

25. John Bartram to Peter Collinson, 3 November 1754, in William Darlington, ed., *The Memorials of John Bartram and Humphry Marshall* (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1967), 196. Hereafter referred to in the text as 'Darlington'.

This passage is remarkable in disclosing a passion for simplicity which results partly from Bartram's hard-earned, autodidactic education, partly from a Quaker hankering after 'plain speaking', and partly from a desire to align himself with the recognizable American character of the straightforward farmer. Describing himself in another letter as '[a] plain countrey fellow [who] is for using freedom & sincerity',²⁶ Bartram intimates that Collinson may be partial to the 'superficial flourish' while he, the humble American, is more concerned with a mimetic form of language which attempts, Garden-of-Eden-style, to fix signifiers to their referents in an 'agreeable' manner.²⁷ This is a concern echoed in much American literature. For example, although it is complicated by its generic inconsistencies, its leaping from spiritual autobiography to pastoral to jeremiad, Thoreau's *Walden* (which as I have noted evinces a strong Quaker influence) hankers after this same Adamic language 'which all things and events speak without metaphor, which alone is copious and standard'.²⁸ Evidently, Bartram has a habit of speaking as an American Adam in contrast to Collinson's patrician citizen of the Old World.

The petulant and competitive tone of the aforementioned exchange reappears throughout the correspondence and leads to some peculiar and revealing episodes. There are times during these exchanges when Bartram and Collinson engage in what appear to be lovers' tiffs. As Christopher Irmischer illustrates, a recurring source of disagreement was the Englishman's acquisitiveness: he was very impatient to receive specimens from the New World for his own garden (ch. 1). Collinson in particular has a tendency to shift from the second person to the third person when he wishes to emphasize a particular point or

26. John Bartram to Peter Collinson, 27 April 1755, Edmond and Dorothy Smith Berkeley, ed., *The Correspondence of John Bartram 1734–1777* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1992), 384. Hereafter referred to in the text as 'CJB'.

27. Compare with Benjamin Franklin's assertion: 'I shall not attempt to amuse you with Flourishes of Rhetorick, were I master of that deceitful Science because I know ye are Men of substantial Reason and can easily discern between sound Argument and the false Glosses of Oratory' in 'On the Providence of God in the Government of the World' (1730), *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin at The History Carper* <http://www.historycarper.com/resources/twobf2/provdnc.htm>

28. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1882), 121.

emotional state, including the hurt he sometimes feels at his friend's insensitivity. For example, on July 19, 1753 he writes: 'If my friend John Bartram knew better my affairs, my situation in life, my public business, my many engagements and incumbrances, – instead of being in a pet, that I answer not the letter he sends by one ship by the next that sails – he would wonder I do so well as I do, though he thinks it so ill' (Darlington 192). The shift to the third person has the effect of placing Bartram's character on trial or on stage, standing before the interlocutors at sufficient distance that they can view and comment on his wrongdoings (whilst serving to emphasize, in a metaphorical way, the geographical distance). This is a familiar technique in the eighteenth-century representation of character, exemplified by James Boswell in his various journals, where the temporal or pronominal displacement of the self in question serves to effect its *projection* into a space of perusal and judgement: 'WEDNESDAY 11 APRIL. Yesterday you got up as miserable as a being could be. All was insipid and dreary. But, blockhead that you are, have you not experienced this five hundred times? And can you not, as Sir William Temple says, 'let such fits pass and return to yourself?' Remember this'.²⁹ If, as Adam Smith formulated in 1759, 'we either approve or disapprove of our own conduct, according as we feel that, when we place ourselves in the situation of another man, and view it, as it were, with his eyes and from his station, we either can or cannot entirely enter into and sympathize with the sentiments and motives which influenced it',³⁰ then Collinson appears to be offering his friend the opportunity to assess his behaviour through the eyes of the ideal spectator.

We should note that in attempting to prick the conscience in this way, Collinson might be seen to exploit the dialogic nature of the letter-writing relationship to take the place of the Quaker's most important ideal observer: the voice within, equivalent to the Calvinist's conscience. What might appear to be a trivial misunderstanding concerning the delivery of some plants does in fact serve to emphasise the self-consciousness of the correspondents' processes

29. James Boswell, *The Heart of James Boswell: Six Journals in One Volume*, ed. Mark Harris (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), 107.

30. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), III, 1.

of reciprocal characterization and has ramifications for a Quakerism which, I shall argue, is necessarily to a large extent split and partially secularized within the economic framework of the letters.

A similar competitiveness is revealed in the correspondents' disquisitions on nature. Despite their mutual fascination for each other's native lands, one suspects that their observations on the differences in climate and vegetation between England and America are not without qualitative judgments, as the following example, taken from one of Collinson's letters, shows:

The difference is very remarkable between our country and yours; for I have heard thunder but once this year – and that at a distance; whilst you have had it so terrible all over your continent, – as our friend Clayton writes me from Virginia ... In England vegetation may be said to never cease; for the spring flowers tread on the heels of the autumn flowers, that the ring is carried on without intermission. (Darlington 189)

Elsewhere he pithily observes, 'We think our weather very inconstant; but yours is much more so' (Darlington 204). He in particular is inclined to depict England as a land of harmony and fruitful tranquility, whereas he seems to view America as something wilder, more chaotic.

Certainly Bartram's anecdotal observations on the struggles of the Native Americans and the 'grievous distressed condition' which results from their 'barbarous' attacks (Darlington 205), even if they are severely tainted by the palpable prejudices stemming from the Indians' murder of his father, give the impression of a country in at best transition, at worst turmoil. Lamenting the unrest which opposition to British rule has inflamed, Bartram fantasizes about the polite, rational, enlightened society he supposes Collinson and his other metropolitan correspondents to patronize, placing *himself* in the third person this time in order to elicit sympathy from his interlocutor. 'While thee art diverting thyself with the generous conversation of our worthy friends in Europe', he writes in a letter to Benjamin Franklin, 'and adding daily new acquisitions to thy former extensive stock of knowledge ... thy poor, yet honest friend Bartram, is daily in mourning for the calamities of our provinces. Vast sums spent, and nothing done to the advantage of the King or country. How should I leap for joy, to see or hear that the British officers would prove by

their *actions*, the zeal and duty to their prince and nation, they so much pretend in *words*' (Darlington 402). Note again the typically Quaker acknowledgement of the fissure between word and deed, how language is corrupted before it reaches its referent. Such sentiments, expressed by Bartram in moments of anguish, represent some of the rare occasions when he echoes John Woolman, whose journal, as we can see from the quotation which begins this article, touches upon the inadequacy of carnal language.

What emerges from the correspondence is actually a desire for a harmony which assumes various metaphorical configurations, including harmony between word and deed. Indeed, following Deidre Lynch it could be argued that the economy implied in the exchange of letters presupposes such a desire, concerned as it is with social homogeneity and the self as defined in relation to the other rather than in isolation (Lynch 42–3). Man's harmony with nature, which can be regarded as essentially *unequal* in Bartram's eyes, given that it is based on naming and control, corresponds to what, despite the intermittent petulance and jovial sparring of the letters, can be perceived as a need for harmony between the two lands. Christoph Irmscher expresses it succinctly. Bartram's garden, he states, is

a work of art rather than of nature, a site of *transplantation*, an 'enhancement' of nature and therefore as much an invention of 'America' as Collinson's garden in England. (23, original italics)

The key word here is 'transplantation': we might more accurately say 'hybridization.' Just as Bartram's house blended European architectural styles with American strength and simplicity (Slaughter 38), so the exchanges of botanical samples and information between the two Quakers assumes a cultural and even a political significance by metonymically and metaphorically linking the two lands in a reciprocal economic relationship. The ideal if untenable American embodied by Crèvecoeur's Bertram is in reality a loyalist reliant on British patronage, and the grateful recipient of the post of botanist by appointment to King George III in 1765. Bartram's garden contains British plants as well as native ones—it is consequently a more ambiguous symbol of an invented new Eden than even Crèvecoeur's letter eleven provides us with.

Hybridization characterises his Quakerism, too. As his disgust for the native

Indian indicates, as well as an attitude towards his ‘lusty’ negro slaves in no way as progressive as that portrayed in the *Letters*,³¹ Bartram seems in many ways an untypical Quaker. (Indeed, his refusal to believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ led to his being drummed out of the Darby Meeting in the 1750s.) Not only are his prejudices distressingly powerful, but, as William Sullivan has amply demonstrated in chapter one of his thesis, his emphasis on meticulous empirical observation and his desire to become involved in the learned Philadelphia society exemplified by Franklin makes him more of an Enlightenment figure than his son William, whose heightened spiritualism and artistic bent influenced both the Transcendentalists and the Romantic poets.³² (It is possible that the taxonomic and mapping impulses evident from his many explorations in Maryland in 1738, the Great Lakes in 1743 and the Carolinas in 1760, link Bartram senior to the democratic lists in the poetry of Walt Whitman.)³³ There is sufficient evidence in the correspondence that his spirituality is really a melding of Quakerism and Enlightenment rationality, a blend of old and new discourses, and therefore an addressing of the Quaker representational problem of private and public.

Collinson, perhaps concerned about his friend’s religious eccentricity, posts a copy of Robert Barclay’s *Apology* in 1742, upon receipt of which Bartram replies, ‘I have little respect to *apologies* and disputes about the ceremonial parts of religion’ (Darlington 159). Twenty years later he declares ‘[i]t is through that telescope I see God in his glory’ (Darlington 243). Bartram is unusual in trusting sense impressions, traditionally an unreliable source of truth for Quakers, to reveal wisdom and beauty in nature. On the rare occasions when his language aspires to something resembling ecstatic poetry, it is tempered by a scientist’s need for empirical precision. In a letter to the aptly named Doctor Garden in March 1762, he proclaims, ‘I am much affected every time that I

31. For a good example of Bartram’s acceptance of the black man as commodity, see his letter to William Bartram in *CJB* 662.

32. See John Livingston Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination* (London: Pan Books, 1978), 332–35.

33. These writings are to be found in *John and William Bartram’s America: Selections from the Writings of the Philadelphia Naturalists*, ed. Helen Gere Cruickshank (New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1957).

often read thy pious reflections on the wonderful works of the Omnipotent and Omniscient Creator. The more we search and *accurately examine* his works in nature, the more wisdom we discover' (Darlington 398, my italics). On examination of the evidence, the portrait of a deeply pious man William Bartram paints in his *Travels and Other Writings* appears rather disingenuous.³⁴

So who *was* John Bartram? Crèvecoeur depicts an American individual who seems somehow to be strangely unassimilable into an increasingly constitutional post-independence society. This characterisation prefigures Walter Scott's *Redgauntlet*, in which Joshua Geddes, again replete with stereotypical Quaker signifiers, represents a kind of ideal which ultimately cannot be adhered to if the hero is to take his place among the polity. Such portrayals are given increased significance and are partially contradicted in the light of a study of Bartram's correspondence. Here we have found a man who in tempering his Quaker spirit with Enlightenment ideals, is tacitly acknowledging that an increasingly politicised American society requires not isolating dissent, but the knowledge necessary to assimilate. 'Bertram' is a type, an ideal, limited to a set of external literary sign performances. Bartram is in many ways a *split* self by necessity: constructed dialogically in his correspondence, thereby divided between private and public, first person and third person, between England and America and between a problematic Quakerism based on individual testimony and an Enlightenment dedication to empiricism and the public sharing of knowledge. Likewise his hybridized garden participates in Bartram's characterization by externalising an inner commitment to revealed truth in a social landscape. It is as much a symbol of his pragmatism in a changing world as of nature's beauty. An apt symbol for early America after all, then: a place of endless potential, of new beginnings, of individuality and freedom, yet also of union. That is, the union of all living things under God, and the inextricable link to the Old World.

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34. William Bartram, *Travels and Other Writings*, ed. Thomas Slaughter (New York: Library of America, 1996), 577.