

*Fields of Vision: Essays on the Travels of William Bartram.* Edited by Kathryn E. Holland Braund and Charlotte M. Porter. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, c. 2010. Pp. [xviii], 273. Paper, \$29.95, ISBN 978-0-8173-5571-5; cloth, \$50.00, ISBN 978-0-8173-1682-2.)

The eighteenth-century naturalist William Bartram is often remembered as the author of one of the first American natural histories, which inspired

romantic poets, early American novelists, and transcendentalists alike. Yet, as many of the contributions to *Fields of Vision: Essays on the Travels of William Bartram* attest, Bartram was also a remarkably insightful observer of the late-eighteenth-century South, and his texts have much to teach readers beyond botany and natural history. This anthology edited by Kathryn E. Holland Braund and Charlotte M. Porter offers a fresh perspective on this familiar figure by drawing together fourteen wide-ranging papers originally presented at meetings of the Bartram Trail Conference.

The volume is divided into five parts. Part 1 keeps the focus squarely on Bartram the traveler and naturalist. In one of the strongest essays, Braund reminds readers of the potential riches that Bartram's *Travels Through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida . . .* (Philadelphia, 1791) holds for the careful and creative scholar. Her essay "William Bartram's Gustatory Tour" suggests how the foodways of the eighteenth-century South reveal the syncretic nature of colonial cultures, the transformations wrought on the landscape, and even the reach of the consumer revolution in the southern backcountry. In a particularly revealing example, Braund notes that African slaves owned by Creek Indians served Bartram coffee in imported china cups. Robert Scott Davis and Robert J. Malone use Bartram's texts as a window on the development of the southern frontier in Georgia and West Florida, respectively. Edward J. Cashin's essay urges scholars to consider the gap between Bartram's lived experience and its representation. While *Travels* portrays the South visited by the naturalist between 1773 and 1777 as a vast garden full of natural delights, Cashin points out that it was also a place of violence and turmoil, particularly during those Revolutionary years.

Part 2 highlights Bartram's legacy as an author. Stephanie Volmer compares the textual form of Bartram's *Travels* with that of his lesser-known "Report to Dr. Fothergill" (1774–1775) to reveal how Bartram experimented with rhetorical conventions. In "Before Bartram: Artist-Naturalist Mark Catesby," Arlene Fradkin and Mallory McCane O'Connor compare Bartram with his predecessor and fellow naturalist of the American South, Mark Catesby. While drawing a useful comparison, the essay unfortunately reviews familiar material rather than offering new conclusions.

Parts 3 and 4 of the collection are linked by a common concern with how recent discoveries in archaeology, history, and botany offer new insights into Bartram and his world. Essays by Jerald T. Milanich and Craig T. Sheldon Jr. compare the findings of modern archaeology with the written descriptions and drawings of William and his father, the naturalist John Bartram. As Sheldon concludes, such comparisons confirm "the relative accuracy" of William Bartram's representations, if perhaps the reality was a bit less orderly than the naturalist tended to suggest (p. 160). Joel T. Fry's fascinating essay tells the story of the image that graces the volume's dust jacket, William Bartram's drawing, later engraved, of *Oenothera grandiflora*. This rare image of a plant that Bartram described as "the most pompous and brilliant herbaceous plant yet known to exist" was only included in a few presentation copies of *Travels* (p. 183). Although Bartram sent drawings and descriptions of the plant to his contacts in London, European science largely ignored Bartram's work at the insistence of Joseph Banks, president of the Royal Society of London. Instead,

Bartram's patron, Dr. John Fothergill, was credited with the introduction of the plant to Europe. Fry's work challenges previous scholarship that has explained the long delay between Bartram's journey through the Southeast and the publication of *Travels* as reluctance on the part of the naturalist to publish his work. Instead, Fry convincingly argues that the postcolonial politics of the last decades of the eighteenth century offer a more compelling explanation. In the process, Fry's essay serves as a reminder that sometimes the most revealing episodes in the history of science are its failures.

The two essays in the volume's final section consider Bartram's legacy for the twenty-first century. Stephanie C. Haas, Kent D. Perkins, and Michael Bond argue that recent efforts by natural history museums, botanic gardens, and herbariums to digitize their collections offer new research opportunities for historians as well as for botanists. A University of Florida Digital Library Center's project, *The Bartrams' Florida*, suggested the possibilities of such digital archives. The project linked text, maps, aerial photography, specimen images, and transcriptions of relevant manuscripts to provide "an integrated digital portal to the Bartrams' travels in Florida" (p. 214). Concluding the volume, Porter reflects on how William Bartram's *Travels* reveals "a value system recognized today as environmental" (p. 221).

Beyond the common concern with Bartram, his legacy, and the American South that he described, it is difficult to discern what questions or conclusions unify the volume. The collection would have benefited from a strong introduction or concluding chapter that considered the themes tying the miscellaneous essays together. Such an addition might also have drawn on the contributors' collective expertise to highlight for the reader what these essays add to the already copious scholarship on Bartram. Yet the diversity of the contributions in many ways reflects the eclectic nature of Bartram's own intellectual interests. As such, readers from equally diverse backgrounds will find material of interest here.

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