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**Beasts of Burden and Other Beasts:  
William Bartram's Traveling  
Humane Persona**

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In a well-known passage from his *Travels Through North & South Carolina, Georgia, East & West Florida*,<sup>i</sup> William Bartram introduces animals in benign fashion: "When travelling on the East Coast of the isthmus of Florida, ascending the South Musquitoe river, in a canoe, we observed numbers of deer and bears." But by evening, observation leads to deadly pursuit, with Bartram and his hunter on the trail of two of these bears, a mother and cub. By boat, and in the shade of a small island, they stealthily approach the opposite coast, close enough for the hunter to fire a fatal shot at the mother. The cub, "in agony," appears to mourn the loss, exchanging glances with the two men and crying "like a child," as the hunter begins to reload his gun. Bartram, "affected . . . very sensibly," fails to dissuade his guide

from killing the cub, as he has become "insensible to compassion." Now, only a few yards away, he takes aim, fires, and the cub falls dead atop his mother (1791, lvii).

Far from merely demonstrating the bear's capacity for mourning, this narrative places readers in Bartram's position. His empathetic experience becomes ours. We feel the cub's loss as Bartram does, but, as is common in *Travels*, we also experience Bartram's failure to make those who accompany him feel it too. For the hunter, "habit" prevails. In an anecdote invoked to argue against the philosophical position that nonhuman animal behavior is merely instinctual, Bartram demonstrates that humans may also be represented as possessing a "mere mechanical impulse . . . we term instinct" (1791, lvi). The story marks the first of many in *Travels* where the sensible traveler finds himself caught between the "insensible," merciless human world and the potent, hypersensitive natural world.<sup>ii</sup> And it tells us much about how Bartram rhetorically positioned himself concerning questions of animal reason,

emotional capacities, and protection. Bartram moved fluidly from being an agent of, or accessory to, much of the animal death and suffering that abounds in *Travels*, to embodying the sole voice of sympathy or resistance.

The early American natural historical expedition was not an endeavor undertaken with animal welfare in mind, wild or domestic. And Bartram's travels in the American South were no exception. Yet, from the time of his expedition between 1773 and 1777, to the eventual publication of *Travels* in 1791, Bartram seemed to be expanding his sphere of moral consideration—namely, his written expression of his sympathies toward animals—in ways that would have made the animal suffering in *Travels* retroactively improbable. It would appear that around the time of the publication of *Travels*, Bartram was struggling with how to articulate the inherent value of nonhuman animals without utterly disrupting the hierarchy of life he was taught. These emerging sympathies—due in part to his own developing ideas about animal intelligence—left something to atone for in his own history with animals. In this sense,

*Travels* itself became a place where these struggles played out rhetorically, where Bartram developed a humane persona for his character in a fashion similar to his more familiar personas of Puc Puggy, ally to the Southeastern Indians, or Bartram the traveling philosophical pilgrim.<sup>iii</sup>

Several ethical perspectives toward animals drive this humane persona: there is Bartram the protectionist, the animal rights advocate, and the proto-ethological scientist. As a protectionist, Bartram often conceded to the condition of human dominion over animals. But, as we see in a deleted passage from the draft manuscript of *Travels*, he suggests that the fulfillment of God's will for human dominion should involve "peaceble familiar, & mercifull conduct towards them" rather than humans acting "like Tyrants & Demons in the opinion of the animal creation." Human "superiority" to animals, as Bartram describes it, is paradoxically conditional on the ability to show mercy and "demean" oneself (1783, 277–78).<sup>iv</sup> Like that of the *noblesse oblige* or the benevolent enslaver, this perspective in isolation may seem to reinforce hierarchies like

the Great Chain of Being, preserving humans' superior position over animals. But in his stance as an animal rights advocate, Bartram openly opposes the concept of human exceptionalism: in a 1792 letter to Benjamin Smith Barton, he criticizes "Great men and Philosophers" who "seeme to put invention to the Rack in endeavouring" to deny animals the "power & use of *Reason*." In the same letter, he playfully counters that birds make excellent naturalists in the sense that their migratory behaviors help effectively communicate weather patterns: "But why should the movements of these creatures afford us any Admonition, or instruction; do they understand any thing of Metaphysics, Astronomy, or Philosophy? Why not, I say they are ingenious little Philosophers, & my esteemed Associates" (2010, 168–69).<sup>v</sup> Rather than counter the theory of American degeneracy with lists of the comparative sizes of North American and European species,<sup>vi</sup> and rather than dispute creole degeneracy with accounts of his benevolence toward animals, Bartram simultaneously opposes the speculative character of European natural philosophy and the

hypothetical degeneracy of North American humans and animals. For Bartram, animals do not need to be larger than those in Europe if their minds can be shown to be extremely complex. And Americans should not be considered wild, savage, or degenerate for living closer to nature since this intimacy with animals can produce tangible scientific knowledge. Such is the context for Bartram's scientific—or proto-ethological—arguments for animal reason, morality, and emotion. And examples of this class abound,<sup>vii</sup> typically incorporating, as Kerry Walters has noted, the use of "careful empirical observation and logical analysis" (1989, 172).<sup>viii</sup> In Bartram's hands—and mind—animals transform: brute instinct becomes an "intellectual system . . . divine and immortal" (1791, lvi), and, unlike humans, nonhuman animals use language, complex artifice, dissimulation, and education with dignity rather than abusive disgrace (1737–1805, 83).

Critical attention to Bartram's sensibility toward animals has evolved along with new approaches to the literary-historical study of natural history. For Pamela Regis, Bartram's

“exaltation and sentimentalization of animals” is superficial (1992, 53). His “creatures, plants, and inanimate things yearn upward,” but he remains firmly committed to a hierarchical conception of the Great Chain of Being with humans secure at the top (48). Laurel Ode-Schneider, on the other hand, acknowledges Bartram’s inversion of the Great Chain of Being—in his essay on “The Dignity of Human Nature”—describing it as “derivative of an underlying spirituality juxtaposed with elements of moral philosophy” (2010, 341). While the confluence of Bartram’s Quaker spirituality and moral philosophy cannot be ignored when examining his compassion for animals, the influence of decades of rigorous examination of animal behavior must also be given due consideration. As Walters notes, “Bartram’s methodology . . . was more empiricist and less theological (166). If, as Walters claims, Bartram replaces “Quietist/reformist Quakerism’s regard for the benevolent treatment of animals,” with a belief in the inherent value of nonhuman animals, it was not out of dissatisfaction with Quaker theology as much as a strong belief in the value of emerging scientific methods and

discoveries. Indeed, Christoph Irmischer’s exploration of how Bartram and other American naturalists “felt the need to relate *themselves* to the collections they made,” seems especially useful here (1999, 3). Beyond Irmischer’s claim that American naturalists wrote themselves into their natural histories in order to mediate and mollify their uncertain relationship to a strange new world (3), I would add that Bartram does so in an attempt to expand the boundaries of what counts for natural science, namely the embodied study of animal behavior and the scientific value of our emotional responses to animals, and theirs to ours. Over the last fifty years, ethologists—who study animal behavior in natural contexts—have commonly begun to address this dimension of their research, here articulated by primatologist Frans de Waal:

Closeness to animals creates the desire to understand them, and not just a little piece of them, but the *whole* animal. It makes us wonder what goes on in their heads even though we fully realize that the answer can only be approximated. We employ all

available weapons in this endeavor, including extrapolations from human behavior. Consequently, anthropomorphism is not only inevitable, it is a powerful tool. (2001, 40)

It is no surprise that embodied and anthropomorphic ethological methods, and their findings, have inspired a new strain of scientifically informed animal protectionist rhetoric characterized by scientist-activists like Jane Goodall and Marc Bekoff.<sup>ix</sup> It is also doubtful that animal studies as an interdisciplinary field of study would have emerged without the surge of ethological research in the second half of the twentieth century among ethologists who often continued to refer to themselves simply as *naturalists* (Tinbergen 1958, 8).<sup>x</sup>

Keeping in mind the complexities of Bartram's animal protectionist perspective, I explore his construction of a humane persona in *Travels*, a persona that is deeply yet playfully concerned with the contradictions between natural historical practices of animal killing and emerging forms of sensibility toward animals resulting

from naturalists' observations of animals. Unable to escape complicity in the former, Bartram nevertheless attempts to rewrite himself on the leading edge of the latter movement, as an earnest voice who seeks new ways of knowing animals without wholly turning away from their pain and suffering. In what follows, I discuss two episodes from *Travels*: One where he treats animals well and one where he does not. I first discuss the famous example of Bartram's battle with alligators on the St. Johns River—and its development from an initial report to the draft manuscript to the 1791 edition of *Travels*—for the potential evolution it suggests in Bartram's sympathies for alligators. Then, I discuss the humane persona Bartram crafts for himself around his interactions with horses, embedding this discussion within the longer tradition of natural historical equine sensibility. On the surface, these stories reinforce common theories about human sensibility toward domesticated mammals and revulsion for free-living reptiles. But despite these two charismatic megafauna occupying dissimilar positions on the scale of phylogenetic relatedness,

Bartram renders both animals as agents of natural historical field research. Horses become associates in the pursuit of scientific knowledge. And alligators, though objects of scientific study, are intelligent subjects in their own right with a knack for diverting the expedition itself and altering the tone of the scientific narrative.

### **How to Kill an Alligator**

Bartram's commonly anthologized encounter with alligators on the St. Johns River is a rare example of a single episode described in all three extant written accounts of his travels in the American South: The 1791 Philadelphia publication of *Travels*; an earlier, incomplete, and significantly different manuscript written around 1783, and edited by an uncertain second hand sometime thereafter; and the 1775 *Report to Dr. John Fothergill*,<sup>xi</sup> which Bartram sent along with several drawings to his sponsor during the expedition. While it would be convenient for the three texts to unambiguously reveal Bartram's ethical development from animal killer to animal lover, each text represents its own unique rhetorical situation that obscures this method of reading the

textual history of *Travels*. The published text of 1791 offers readers a highly mediated and painstakingly constructed representation of an accurate and linear travel diary. The goal of much recent scholarship on Bartram's *Travels* has been to restore or complicate the true perspective of Bartram through comparison to the incomplete draft manuscript of 1783. This way of reading illuminates the partially visible and partially invisible editorial process that translated Bartram's vision into a public document. I nevertheless attempt to read this textual history for evidence of Bartram's ethical development, characterized by fits and starts of uncertainty and conviction, in part colored by his own scientific discoveries and observations. But this reading is always held in tension with the realities of animal death on the expedition, Bartram's own textual reconstruction and revision of himself, and the editorial process whereby his excursions and ideas about animals were translated into a public text for a diverse popular and scientific audience.

Bartram's encounter with alligators offers an ideal case study, as it

demonstrates his attempts to write and rewrite how and why he sometimes kills certain animals. Nancy Hoffman has done much to point out the changes in narration of Bartram's battle with the alligators on the St. Johns River.<sup>xii</sup> Essentially, Bartram condenses two trips on the river in the spring and fall of the same year into one trip, picking and choosing certain elements from each to heighten the dramatic tension of the fictionalized single episode (1996, 53). Most notably, Bartram condenses one trip, where he is alone and not attacked by alligators, with another trip, where he is not alone and is attacked, into a single trip where he is both alone and attacked (53). The result is a solitary adventure packed with aggressive alligators, appearing and reappearing at an exhausting, almost humorous pace. Bartram is constantly endangered, on constant guard, and constantly in awe. Here, as Hallock describes, "the stock sublime (where every other sentence begins with 'Behold!') accompanies a relinquishment to the nonhuman world. . . . Raw nature casts the pilgrim into a tumult that he cannot order" (2003, 166). Nevertheless, Bartram prevails, though not as the characteristic

"advocate or vindicator of the benevolent and peaceable disposition of animal creation in general" (1791, 168). Here, he kills to survive. This highly fictionalized episode paradoxically demonstrates the ability of Bartram—the idealist advocate for the inherent value of animal life—to function in a natural world that includes humans, with all of its messy interspecies relationships. Part of the narrative construct here involves his ability to succeed within a realistic portrayal of a natural world, to kill predators when necessary but to do so humanely, maintaining an appropriate degree of respect for and control over some of nature's supposedly more deadly animals.

Though, in a fictionalized demonstration of his real world prudence, Bartram does not need to kill as many alligators as he and his companions possibly did. The original *Report* includes several more descriptions of killed or wounded alligators. In one popular scene from *Travels*, "an old daring" alligator, "twelve feet in length," with designs on Bartram's fish comes ashore near camp and stares boldly at Bartram until,

"resolved he should pay for his temerity," Bartram kills him with a single gunshot to the head. Shortly thereafter, another "very large alligator" catches Bartram by surprise, swiping several of the fish he is preparing with his tail, at which point a disturbed Bartram figures his life is probably at risk (1791, 77). Comparing the three versions of this episode reveals how Bartram made alterations in the construction of his humane character.

The earlier *Report* begins with countless "River monsters" chasing Bartram and his companion ashore "where they lay threaten[ing] with terrible roaring." Bartram then races to their nearby camp, still pursued, to fetch his "Fussee loaded with buck shott." When he returns, the alligator, having withdrawn slightly, "pusht up towards" Bartram who "being within about 5 or 6 Yards" fires "the whole load into his body just behind his fore leg." The alligator writhes and dies almost immediately. With the army of alligators withdrawn, they begin to scale and clean their fish. But, the alligators shortly return "assembled in prodigious numbers, some rising their

huge bodies out of the water, & roaring like terrible thunder & lashing the waters with mighty bodies." One alligator unsuccessfully attempts to sweep away several fish with his tail, when Bartram fires a bullet into his head, and "he plunge[s] in the water, in a dreadful maner." The gator retreats, wounded but alive, and Bartram fires several more times before concluding their "situation very disagreeable & under an absolute embargo" (1775, 151–152).

From the *Report* to *Travels* we see several major alterations, and, consulting the intermediate draft manuscript, some of the process and logic of these alterations. Bartram heavily deemphasizes the initial chase scene in *Travels*, noting that he returned to camp with "but little trouble" and "not closely attacked" (1791, 77). By the time he comes ashore in *Travels*, the army of "River monsters," a pejorative only present in the *Report*, has been reduced to one surly old alligator. Thus, Bartram effectively transforms a large battle between humans and an army of alligators into an anecdote concerning a few hungry and bold alligators. The



draft manuscript actually reveals a transitional stage in this representation, more closely resembling *Travels* but with the small inclusion marked for deletion that Bartram “knew nothing of” the old gator’s pursuit (1783, 169). This revision demonstrates that when drafting *Travels*, Bartram made a considerable effort to diminish any suggestion of a full-blown interspecies battle.

Focusing on individuals also allows Bartram to emphasize animal personality and mind. Bartram’s description of his encounter with the old alligator as he surfaces undergoes a telling change. In the *Report*, he is one of many alligators lined up at the surface who “lay threatning with terrible roaring” (1775, 151). Bartram retrieves his fusee and shoots the old alligator because he has begun to approach him. Absent is the mention in both the draft and *Travels* of his face-to-face encounter with the alligator where, in the draft, “he lay looking me in the face” (1783, 169) and, in *Travels*, “he . . . lay there for some time, looking me in the face” (1791, 77). However long “some time” happens to be, the revision suggests

less urgent danger and more time for Bartram to interpret the attitude and personality evident in the face of the old gator. In the draft, he reasons that “[t]his impudent fellow I resolved should suffer for his temerity” (1783, 169). Here, what sounds brutal actually serves to embellish his motive for killing the alligator beyond generalized fear and fish theft. Bartram reads an abnormal degree of audacity in this alligator and “resolves” to act accordingly, or at least attempts to justify the necessity of his act by drawing a logical connection between the facial expression of the alligator and the inner workings of his mind. In the draft, Bartram even notes that he had “leisure to consider what was the best to be done,” explaining that the gator “seem’d determined upon unprovoked mischief against me to rob me at least & perhaps he or some of his tribe intending to fall upon me in the Night I was convinced that it was the least criminal & every way the best to make an example of him which would perhap [sic] terrify the rest” (1783, 170). This reasoning is silently excluded from *Travels*.

Another subtle alteration from draft to *Travels* further emphasizes Bartram's desire to seek a humane execution. In the draft, the alligator must "suffer," while in *Travels* he must "pay" (1791, 77). Malice is crafted into justice. Tellingly, the alligator is killed in the *Report* with a buck shot "behind the fore leg," a seemingly less humane tactic than discharging the full load of his gun, consisting of "a bullet and 6 or 8 swan shot . . . within a few inches of his head . . . which killed him instantly" (1783, 170). The irony of this revision is that in the original *Report*, Bartram's shot behind the foreleg results in instant death while his bullet to the head of the next alligator attempting to steal several fish with his tail only stuns the animal, sending him plunging and reeling away (1775, 152). It would appear that by the draft manuscript, Bartram has condensed these two attempted executions, one successful behind the foreleg and the other botched to the head, into one successful execution to the head, giving himself the appearance of a humane shooter in technique and outcome. Indeed, by the draft, there remains no mention of the second alligator

suffering from any form of armed retaliation.

Though undoubtedly the construction of a narrative, the alterations made to this passage in *Travels* seem to sacrifice the scale of the adventure, which partially contradicts prevailing theories about Bartram's self-conscious construction of a natural historical adventure. At the very least, the diminished scale of the adventure demonstrates the degree to which Bartram was willing to forgo some of the action in order to better represent his humane character under extreme conditions. In this sense, it is reasonable to view Bartram's *Travels* as an attempt to reconstruct himself and his experience as a way to atone for the culture of animal killing in which he participated.<sup>xiii</sup> But this culture did not only concern wild animals.

### **"my horse, my faithful slave and only companion"**

Horses are strange but peculiar animals for thinking through the problem of naturalist animal protectionist discourse. They became a core concern during the birth of the modern political animal advocacy movement in the

nineteenth century, with many early laws focusing on domestic animal cruelty, yet their status according to these laws tended to hover somewhere between property and person, their value not clearly utilitarian or inherent. For naturalists, they had little novel scientific value, mostly use value. But Bartram's interest in horses belies the assumption that his established interest in wild animal protection has more to do with scientific utility and more fully connecting with the world of his creator than it does with his interest in the inherent value and rights of nonhuman life. For Bartram, horses offered the opportunity for interspecies empathy and a lens for viewing nonhuman animals as co-agents in scientific study.

While Bartram and company are transporting a pack of "young and untutored" horses on a flat across, again, the St. Johns River, several become restless and plunge into the water. Bartram jumps in after them and grabs hold of the dock of one horse's tail, hitching a ride to a nearby island where the entire party reconvenes for another attempt (1791, 193). The scene highlights the trouble with horses on natural historical

expeditions. First, it was a constant challenge to satisfy horses' large appetites, the purpose of this particular river crossing being to transport the horses to feed in a large meadow. Food itself was a major burden. Horses were often left to graze freely and wander in search of the best food, leading to many morning search parties, something Bartram often humorously refers to as "horsehunting" (1775, 158). The feeding of horses alone consumed much time and human resources, which is to say little about the actual logistics of this particular scene.

On the surface, it plays out like an animal rescue operation, but it is not clear whether Bartram is attempting to rescue the horse or keep track of a wayward commodity. The incident makes clear an additional problem, that horses, so large and fragile, were often fresh stock, and therefore only partially trained members of the expedition party. In this case, Bartram is partly motivated out of a sense of self-preservation, voluntarily leaping into the water "to avoid being beat over and perhaps wounded" (1791, 193). Indeed, Bartram would have been well

aware of his father's injuries and painstaking remedies for "being thrown and kicked by a vicious horse," as Pehr Kalm describes in his *Travels into North America* (1773, 99), so it would make added sense for him to take calculated risks to avoid serious injury. The risk associated with horses escalated further because—as an exhaustible form of transport for people and supplies, as well as a commodity for trade—horses often outnumbered humans on expeditions. Finally, horses were not the most nimble or thick-skinned of pack animals, especially given the demands and annoyances of the American terrain.<sup>xiv</sup> In sum, the inability to endure or resist the mental and physical tolls of a long expedition often resulted in a protracted death for these horses of natural history.

How naturalists addressed the ultimate fate of their horses—or whether they addressed it at all—can tell us much about how they valued their relationships, whether for sheer utility, as laborers, as political collateral, or as companions. For a counter to Bartram's style, and as a notable example of common practice, I turn to William Byrd's *The History of the Dividing Line betwixt Virginia and*

*North Carolina*. With his trademark unsentimental humor, Byrd often notes his party's abandonment of exhausted horses during their 1728 survey of the contested boundary between Virginia and North Carolina: "Tho' as merciful as we were to our poor Beasts, another of `em tired by the way, & was left behind for the Wolves & Panthers to feast upon" (2013, 177). As the horses became exhausted, they were abandoned on the trail, left for dead, and soon to be so. And whether this abandonment involved mercy killing is made intentionally unclear.<sup>xv</sup> So begins Byrd's entry on the first of November, which is followed the next day by a long screed on the inconveniences of maintaining horses, and detailed prescriptions for how to "be deliver'd from the great Care and Concern" that attends horse maintenance (181). The entire discussion relies on a logic of utility and a familiar American ideal of simplicity. Instead of horses, Byrd claims, they might cover more territory on foot, or with donkeys (181–82). But, as pragmatic as Byrd's position may appear, it is haunted by the compulsion to care for these horses. Byrd's prescriptions are not only about efficiently traversing the frontier; they

are about avoiding the need to feel the horses' pain.

This mercy and concern surfaces more in Byrd's companion text, *The Secret History of the Line*, the more playful and literary of the two versions of the expedition. In the same scene, Byrd—or *Steddy*, as he calls himself in the *Secret History*—remarks not only on leaving the horse behind, but also on the condition of the other horses, "so weak they stagger'd under their Riders . . . & had they been able to speak . . . would have bemoan'd themselves very much" (418–19). And rather than reinforce his lack of sentiment through a humorous statement about abandoning the horses to the wolves and panthers, he suggests a present reality where their horses have "grown so lean & so weak, that the Turkey-Buzzards began to follow them" (419). Over the next week, the horses stagger and topple over with or without riders, and at least three more are abandoned. Unlike in his other narrative, Byrd does not transition to an argument for abandoning the use of horses. Instead, he focuses on the men's attempts to comfort and preserve their welfare. For example, they leave their heavy bear

meat behind, a cherished foodstuff on Byrd's expedition, in order to avoid overburdening the horses, and they often walk their horses "in Compassion to the poor Animals . . . notwithstanding the Path was very rough, & in many Places uneven" (418). As a demonstration of his honor and sensibility, Byrd misses no opportunity to mention his willingness to spare the horses, one Sabbath day attempting (though failing) to persuade the whole party to permit the horses a day's rest (419), and another day walking "the great part of" 14 miles on foot (421). Though much like in the *History of the Dividing Line* where Byrd appears more concerned about offending his own sensibility than he appears genuinely concerned for the well-being of the horses, here Byrd's primary goal is self-flattery. Even so, his ability to empathize with the suffering of the horses is a significant component of this self-portrayal, which places his text in conversation with an emerging literary interest in the nobility, intelligence, and sensibility of horses.<sup>xvi</sup> Byrd's histories are a singular example of eighteenth-century natural history casting significant light on the well-being of horses, where horses, as

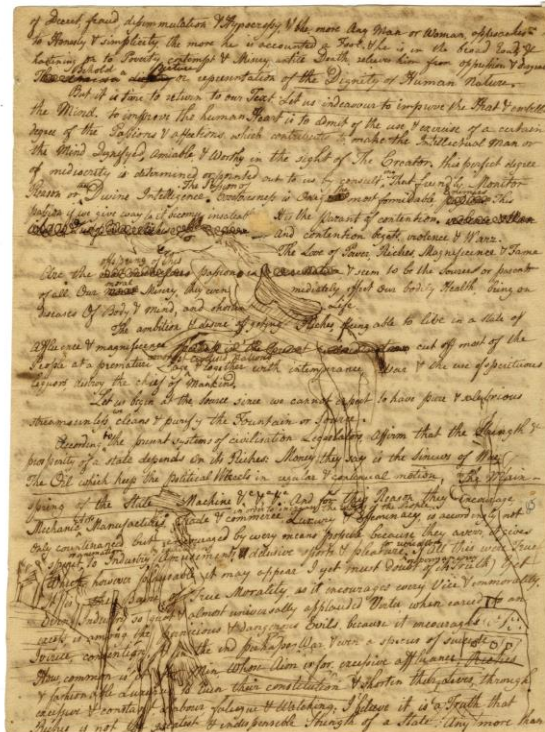
domestic animals, occupied the paradoxical role of animals who were not necessarily fauna for classification but, rather, domestic animal laborers of no immediate scientific concern.

In *Travels*, Bartram, much like Byrd, constructed a persona highly concerned with the well-being of horses who not only attempts to reduce their suffering, but also repay them for their pain and labor. In *Travels*, Bartram does eventually have to leave his horse behind, but, unlike Byrd, he does not simply mention it and move on. He sentimentalizes his relationship to the horse, then carefully explains and addresses the problem, all the while dropping critical details leading up to the event. As noted in the above alligator encounter, readers familiar with the variations across Bartram's written accounts of his travels in the American South note how he often fabricates the image of himself as lone traveler-adventurer. It is no surprise, then, that his horse figures as his "faithful slave and only companion" (1791, 216). Despite the scale of Bartram's expedition, this construct recalls his travels south ten years previous with his father where they

endured the wilderness with the barest necessities and, as Francis Harper notes, "but one horse apiece" (1942, 1).<sup>xvii</sup> The designation of the horse as Bartram's "only companion" extends the lone traveler construct, but also works on a figurative register where we understand the horse as his only true companion among many people. In either sense, horse and man are cast as codependent. They share a cooperative and personal relationship. The horse is not portrayed as a mere beast of burden, but as a companion who depends on the benevolence of his hyper-attentive and empathetic human companion.

Still, the reference to slavery is troubling. Thomas Slaughter has suggested that Bartram—who, in his later writings, vehemently opposed slavery—at this time, still viewed human slavery as natural and "equated the institution across species lines" (1996, 205). But this argument assumes little or no distinction between domestic and free-living animals. For Slaughter, all nonhuman animals are simply part of the natural world, regardless of how managed or manufactured they are by human

cultures. By this logic, keeping humans as slaves or any animals as laborers would have seemed equally natural to Bartram. And under these circumstances, Bartram, no doubt, would have imagined himself a benevolent master. However, since his *slave* is a horse, and not a human, he appears to argue against the naturalness of slavery as an institution because to him there is nothing natural about committing horses to lives of servitude. As he writes of wild horses on the Alachua Savanna in his *Report*: “What an extensive prospect! what an unconfin’d display of liberty & freedom[!] . . . squadrons of f[!]eet Seminole horse, who never yet felt the weight of the Coller or the galling Chains of servitude” (1775, 154–55). When compared to this state of nature, working horses would appear to be subjected to unethical and fundamentally unnatural conditions. Bartram did not accept human slavery or animal labor as natural facts. He acknowledged only that they existed, and, at least with horses, he endeavored to actively improve the conditions of their forced labor.



**Figure 1.** Detail. William Bartram, Drawing from manuscript of “The Dignity of Animal Nature.” Bartram Family Papers. Courtesy of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Additionally, in an essay likely written in the mid-1790s, Bartram contrasts “The Dignity of Animal Nature,” with the “Deceit, fraud, dissimulation & Hypocrisy” of human nature (1737–1805, 83).<sup>xviii</sup> This essay mainly refutes the philosophical claim that humans possess certain intellectual, moral, and cultural capacities that other animals lack, further demonstrating how nonhuman animals actually use these capacities for their betterment whereas humans abuse them. But on one page,

Bartram has scribbled his essay over a curious drawing, seemingly also in his hand.<sup>xix</sup> In the drawing (see fig. 1), a man with a cane walks away from a small house toward the forest. Soaring above him, Laurel Ode-Schneider notes, is “a saddled but riderless horse” (2010, 356). What is especially curious about the drawing is how Bartram has fashioned the text around the drawing so as to maintain some of the image’s visual integrity, as if he saw it as a graphic complement to his argument. This is one of a mere three of Bartram’s extant drawings actually depicting a human subject. And what a subject is this feeble man—perhaps it is Bartram himself—inching his way back to nature when all of a sudden he is swiftly overtaken by a great horse in flight, in a state of literally unbridled ecstasy. Perhaps this is the same horse from his travels south, the horse who carried him over 6000 miles in three years. Either way, the sketch certainly complements Bartram’s visions of equine liberty and dignity.

In *Travels*, when his own horse finally becomes too exhausted to continue, Bartram describes his options, “either to leave my horse in the woods, pay a

very extravagant hire for a doubtful passage to the Nation, or separate myself from my companions, and wait the recovery of my horse alone” (1791, 279). Unsatisfied with any of these options, Bartram settles a deal with a nearby trader to take his “old servant” with the promise “to use him gently, and if possibly, not to make a pack-horse of him” (278–80). What actually comes of Bartram’s horse, we cannot know. We only know the future he attempts to secure for the horse and the picture he paints for readers of leaving his “old slave behind, to feed in rich Cane pastures” until he is claimed by his new owner and hopefully used “gently” in his quasi-retirement (280). Despite this uncertainty, Bartram clearly contrasts his compassion with current cultures of natural history where insensitive brutes ride their horses into the ground and then abandon them to the wolves, panthers, or cruel packhorsemen and their weighty burdens.

And in case readers were not aware of the lives of packhorses, Bartram has already left a trail of hints in passages leading up to the retirement of his horse. In one scene, he describes a



cruel form of discipline packhorsemen used "to reduce wild young horses to their hard duty" (1791, 238). After failing with verbal threats, whipping, "and other common abuse," the horse is haltered, and the pack-horseman bites his ear until he trembles and holds still in order to take his load (238-39). In another scene with his own horses, Bartram notes "the heat and the burning flies tormenting our horses to such a degree, as to excite compassion even in the hearts of pack-horsemen" (243). It seems important to Bartram that readers be made aware of the cruelties of packhorsemen in order for his own act of benevolence to fully resonate. In a scene following closely after his horse's retirement, he gives readers one final reminder of the benevolence of his deed, when he encounters two large parties of packhorsemen who drown six horses while attempting to cross the Ocmulgee River (289). In meticulously heroic fashion, Bartram and company then lead their party of horses over the "rapid gulph" without any coming to harm, in stark contrast to the reckless, inhumane style of the packhorsemen (290).

It would appear to readers that Bartram has learned a great deal about protecting and caring for horses since the accident on the St. Johns River nearly a year earlier. As for all of the other animals of the American South, much like Bartram's horses and his own ethical trajectory, their welfare would remain a work in progress.

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#### Notes

<sup>i</sup> Future references will abbreviate the title as *Travels*. For all texts and manuscripts, Bartram's original spelling, punctuation, and mechanics have been preserved.

<sup>ii</sup> For other examples in *Travels*, see Bartram's plea for the lives of deer "prancing like young kids" (127), his disgust for the "barbarous sport" his men exhibit in murdering a young wolf (252), and several instances of Bartram and his father pleading for the lives of rattlesnakes (167–72). For a discussion beyond Bartram, see Gordon Sayre's analysis of Claude Lebeau's *Avantures de Sr. C. Le Beau* (1738) in his chapter on "The Beaver as Native and Colonist" in *Les Sauvages Américains* (1997).

<sup>iii</sup> See Thomas Slaughter, *The Natures of John and William Bartram* (1996); Nancy Hoffmann, *The Construction of William Bartram's Narrative Natural History* (1996); and Thomas Hallock, *From the Fallen Tree* (2003). Hallock's research is especially relevant in that he emphasizes the contradictions in Bartram's worldview, most evident in the variety of narrative personas he dons in an attempt to hedge his pastoral

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nostalgia against the imperialist and environment-appropriating ambitions of the new American republic of which he counted himself a member (2003, 172–73).

<sup>iv</sup> All excerpts from Bartram's draft manuscript were transcribed from the original held at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Bartram Family Papers, volumes 2–4. Page numbers correspond to Bartram's. Hoffmann's transcriptions in her dissertation, *The Construction of William Bartram's Narrative Natural History*, and in *William Bartram: The Search for Nature's Design* were heavily consulted. For readability, editorial suggestions and crossed out words have been silently excluded. For a genetic transcription, see Hoffmann's *Construction*.

<sup>v</sup> William Bartram to Benjamin Smith Barton, December 25, 1792. Letters cited from Hallock and Hoffmann's *William Bartram: The Search for Nature's Design* unless noted otherwise. Originals consulted at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>vi</sup> See Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785).

<sup>vii</sup> Because of the frequency of Bartram's proto-ethological research, including in *Travels* itself, here I list only select examples: Bartram to Barton, December 25, 1792 (2010, 168–69); Bartram's notes on the back of Barton to Bartram, September 14, 1795 (2010, 175); Bartram to Henry Muhlenberg, November 29, 1792 (2010, 413); Bartram's unpublished essay on the "The Dignity of Animal Nature" (1737–1805, 81, 83); and Bartram's bird biography "Anecdotes of an American Crow" (*The Philadelphia Medical and Physical Journal*, ed. Benjamin Smith Barton, Philadelphia: 1804. 89–95.).

<sup>viii</sup> Walters' essay is one of the only studies of Bartram's animal advocacy that takes this work seriously as scientific practice. Walters notes how Bartram's interest in animals moved beyond eighteenth-

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century Quaker theology by moving “the center of analysis away from human obligations to God to human responsibility to animals” and onto the stage of the proto-ethological through rigorous observation. However, Walters ends up more interested in Bartram’s influence on “Quaker ecological sensibility” than his actual accounts of animal interaction or scientific practice (1989, 172). This is perhaps a reminder of a time in our own critical history when environmental science was often framed in familiar theological-philosophical debates viewed as more germane to the humanities, rather than as a subject of critical or rhetorical analysis in its own right.

<sup>ix</sup> For further discussion of the role of interspecies empathy in ethological science, see Marc Bekoff, *Minding Animals: Awareness, Emotions, and Heart* (2002); Dian Fossey, *Gorillas in the Mist* (1983); Jane Goodall, *Through a Window: My Thirty Years with the Chimpanzees of Gombe* (1990); Konrad Lorenz, *King Solomon’s Ring* (1952); and Barbara Smuts’s reflections on J.M. Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals* (1999).

<sup>x</sup> As an interdisciplinary field of inquiry with fluctuating baselines depending on the discipline—but generally concerned with the study of animals as subjects in their own right—animal studies does not lend itself to a single, authoritative origin story. Some core influences, however, include the early research of ethologists Niko Tinbergen and Konrad Lorenz, who shared the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine with Karl von Frisch in 1973; the utilitarian philosophy of Peter Singer and his book *Animal Liberation* in 1975; the embodied study of great apes by primatologists Jane Goodall and Dian Fossey beginning in the 1960s, and their eventual emergence as scientist-activists for animal and environmental protection; John Berger’s call to pay closer attention to animals in

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media and culture in his 1980 essay “Why Look at Animals”; the growth of human-animal studies, or the study of the human-animal bond, in the social sciences in the 1970s and 1980s; the historical study of animals as cultural-historical subjects and objects, as in Harriet Ritvo’s 1987 *The Animal Estate*; and emerging theoretical inquiries into interspecies community, nonhuman agency, and “the question of the animal” in science studies and deconstructionist theory, perhaps best characterized, respectively, by Donna Haraway’s 1989 *Primate Visions*, Bruno Latour’s *Reassembling the Social* (2005), and the late lectures of Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (1997). As this history begins to suggest, ethical orientations toward animals among animal studies practitioners (where and when they actually exist) can vary greatly. Lately, in the environmental humanities more generally, persistent focus on climate change has caused animal studies to reemerge, as animal suffering is both a major cause of climate change (factory farming) and effect (species extinction and loss of habitat). With this conceptual turn, animal studies scholars face a renewed challenge to reaffirm the individual subjectivity of animals, as climate change has brought necessary focus to the value of sometimes thinking of animals as species rather than individuals, a shift that includes humans, with concepts like the anthropocene and “species thinking” (Chakrabarty 2009, 213).

<sup>xi</sup> Future references will abbreviate the title as *Report*.

<sup>xii</sup> Hoffmann has noted a second hand in the draft manuscript, an uncertain editor who mostly provides substitutions and marks off passages for deletion (2010, 282). See her dissertation for some detailed conjecture on possible editorial contributors (1996, 43–46).

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Many of these revisions hold potential significance especially because they ask Bartram to curb his penchant either for endowing animals with human capacities or noting the kinship between humans and other animals.

<sup>xiii</sup> In other instances, Bartram is willing to completely suspend his linear narrative in order to justify or make atonement for the animals he has killed. This is most clear after he describes reluctantly killing a rattlesnake in a Seminole camp and then takes a long detour in the following chapter to outline several past instances in which he or his father spared, or attempted to spare, the lives of these “generous serpent[s],” complete with a description of the vow Bartram made in his youth to “never again be accessory to the death of a rattle snake, which promise I have invariably kept to” (1791, 169–170).

<sup>xiv</sup> See Pehr Kalm’s account of his journey from Pennsylvania to Canada with John Bartram, *Observations on the Inhabitants, Climate, Soil, Rivers, Productions, Animals, and Other Matters Worthy of Notice Made by Mr. John Bartram on his Travels from Pensilvania to Onondago, Oswego and the Lake Ontario, in Canada*, for a familiar example of horses toppling over on the rough hillside (1751, 69). Also see William Byrd’s *The History of the Dividing Line betwixt Virginia and North Carolina*: “And one may foretell without the Spirit of Divination, that so long as Woodsmen continue to range on Horse-back, we shall be Strangers to our own Country, and few or no valuable Discoveries will ever be made” (2013, 182). For an early opposing viewpoint, see John Lawson’s remarks on the “Beauty and Strength” of Carolina horses in *A New Voyage to Carolina* (1709, 81).

<sup>xv</sup> In the corresponding entry in Byrd’s *The Secret History of the Line*, Byrd describes *dropping* this horse, which is possibly a

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euphemism for killing though still ambiguous (2013, 418).

<sup>xvi</sup> A popular example would be Jonathan Swift’s Houyhnhnms in *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726). The extensive reliance on classical and literary allusion in the *Secret History* is a testament to how well read Byrd was in contemporary English literature. For studies of the horse in eighteenth century literature and culture, see Donna Landry, *Noble Brutes: How Eastern Horses Transformed English Culture* (2008) and Richard Nash, *Wild Enlightenment: The Borders of Human Identity in the Eighteenth Century* (2003).

<sup>xvii</sup> Indeed, John Bartram notes in his diary that even their horses abandon them at one point, running off “with another horse” (1766, 36).

<sup>xviii</sup> Hoffmann and Ode-Schneider prefer the title “The Dignity of Human Nature” for this piece because of its reference to Hume and other eighteenth-century moral-philosophical texts, which use some variation of this title. This is in spite of its contextual irony and Bartram’s underlined emphasis of the phrase “The Dignity of Animal Nature” on the second page of the manuscript (1737–1805, 81). Later, Bartram does emphasize the phrase “The Dignity of Human Nature” three times: First, when suggesting that humans are unwilling to admit the existence of “reason Or Intelligence” in animals “because forsooth it will detract from the *Dignity of Human Nature*.” He goes on to ask, “But where is the proff of this Dignity of our Nature . . .” (83.2). Second, when referring to “the Epithet of the Dignity of Human Nature” since “A Man as viewed in the chain of Animal beings . . . Acts the part of an Absolute Tyrant” (83.3). Third, when summarizing this “Dignity” as “a continual Series or practise of Deceit, fraud, dissimulation & Hypocrisy” (83.1, 3).

<sup>xix</sup> Though Ode-Schneider claims the

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artist is unknown, it bears a strong resemblance to Bartram's style of sketching. For comparison, see Bartram's drawing of a man on the inside front cover of his *Pharmacopaeia* notebook as well as his drawing of John Bartram with a cane on his map of Bartram's Garden. Furthermore, there is strong evidence that the drawing predates the text, which is evident in several areas of overlap, especially in at least two instances where the text seems deliberately spaced to accommodate the head and body of the horse.