CONTESTED STRUCTURES:

NATURE AND CULTURE IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY WRITING

By

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Dissertation Abstract

The two terms "nature" and "culture" can suggest a binary or oppositional structure. The general objective of this doctoral dissertation is to investigate the historical conditions under which the nature/culture opposition was produced in eighteenth-century British writing. I examine a set of specific configurations taken by the historical nature/culture dichotomy, but I also investigate the connections and continuities between formations of nature and culture that this dichotomy, understood as an oppositional structure, would seem to disavow. The concrete points of intersection thus revealed between constructions of nature and culture at times threaten to disrupt the entire dichotomy. As I undertake this critique, I ask how we may rethink the boundaries of this structure.

In separate chapters of this thesis, I select art, natural history, and health practices as topical sites in terms of which the boundaries between nature and culture are being delineated, often quite provisionally, during the eighteenth century. Art is particularly relevant to my aim of exploring the boundaries between nature and culture, as a central question in eighteenth-century debates about art was whether or not the art object should be considered an expression of human fashions or natural forms. I also examine natural history, for its subject matter typically bridged normative boundaries between human and natural; many naturalists who wrote general histories of particular regions not only investigated natural phenomena such as animals, their environments, and the weather, but also incorporated descriptions of human social and economic relations into their

accounts. Finally, I investigate practices of health that mediated a complex set of relations between leisured people in search of better health, certain cultural conceptions of healthy bodies, and the natural environments that these practices depicted as a primary source of good human health. In practical terms, each of these sites produces a different form of the nature/culture dichotomy, and so provides a unique perspective from which to consider its general structure and limits.

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A Note on the Text

In passages from uncorrected early manuscripts, I have changed the form of specific letters to conform to modern typographical conventions. When citing passages, I have occasionally ignored diacritical marks used to indicate notes, including superscript numbers and asterisks.

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Introduction
Nature and Culture

From one important perspective, the two terms "nature" and "culture" can suggest a binary or oppositional structure. In *What is Nature?* (1995), Kate Soper provides a conceptual map of particular variations of the nature/culture opposition, even as she addresses a significant issue arising in its interpretation:

> In its commonest and most fundamental sense, the term 'nature' refers to everything which is not human and distinguished from the work of humanity. Thus 'nature' is opposed to culture, to history, to convention, to what is artificially worked or produced, in short, to everything which is defining of the order of humanity. I speak of this conception of nature as 'otherness' to humanity as fundamental because, although many would question whether we can in fact draw any such rigid divide, the conceptual distinction remains indispensable. (15)

There is now a widespread theoretical position that the nature/culture dichotomy does not strictly reflect a division between two spheres or states of existence as such, but is better understood as a historical construction. In addition to Soper, Jacques Derrida (1978), Neil Evernden (1992), Donna Haraway (1992), Judith Butler (1993), Bruno Latour (1993; 2004), William Cronon (1996a), Terry Eagleton (2000), and several other scholars have challenged the status and normativity of the nature/culture binary. Most of these scholars explicitly suggest that we may contest this opposition by exploring its historical foundations, although a few have also argued that it is not possible in practice to divest ourselves of the conceptual and discursive structures that this opposition affords.[1]

The general objective of this doctoral thesis is to investigate the historical conditions under which the nature/culture opposition was produced in eighteenth-century British writing. In the chapters that follow, I examine a set of specific configurations taken by the historical nature/culture dichotomy, but I also investigate the connections and continuities between formations of nature and culture that this dichotomy, understood as an oppositional structure, would seem to disavow. The concrete points of intersection thus revealed between constructions of nature and culture at times threaten to disrupt the entire dichotomy. As I undertake this critique, I ask how we may rethink the boundaries of this structure.

Theorizing nature and culture

When attempting to assess the form and limits of the nature/culture opposition, one immediately encounters a problem of definition. The two terms that compose this opposition may be understood in a surprisingly broad range of senses. In *Keywords* (1983), Raymond Williams suggests that both words are among, as he says here of "culture," the "most complicated words in the English language" (87, 219). There has been considerable scholarly debate about how to adequately define such words, a point that Eagleton emphasizes in his own insightful ruminations on their meanings and entanglements (see *Idea of Culture* 1-50, 87-111, and passim).[2] The primary complication for this thesis is that the separate meanings of these two terms interact in unique ways with each other,

producing multiple relations and oppositions between them. It becomes exceedingly difficult as a result to identify a single nature/culture binary; it seems more correct to say that there are several distinct (albeit interconnected) oppositions, each of which displays its own history of development. We need to examine the distinct dichotomies that specific meanings produce when paired together.

In several of his later works, Williams provides substantial histories of the meanings of nature and culture.[3] For instance, he identifies three primary senses of nature: "(i) the essential quality and character *of* something; (ii) the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both; (iii) the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings" (*Keywords* 219). These meanings, according to Williams, had all emerged by the seventeenth century. Williams points out that a concept of "civil society" existed before the eighteenth century, as did a sense of culture as "a noun of process: the culture *of* something—crops, animals, minds" (*Marxism* 13). But the emergence of a notion of culture that may be understood as a social formation really belongs to the eighteenth century itself (*Marxism* 11-17). At that time, culture was first associated with "civilization" viewed as an "external" force, then came to refer to "inner" cultivation and its product in "the arts," and finally acquired the sense of "whole ways of life," the latter emerging tentatively, and not necessarily in English usage, by the end of the eighteenth century (*Marxism* 14-17). While the word "culture" is now often understood in terms of what Williams

describes as "the *signifying system* through which necessarily (though among other means) a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored" (*Culture* 13), it still actively denotes most of these earlier senses.

I am less concerned in this thesis with the meanings of these terms considered in isolation than I am with the ways in which different meanings of the terms relate to each other in specific circumstances.[4] It is precisely in such situations that the problem of meaning becomes most complex. We see upon investigation that the various senses Williams attributes to the two words interact in complicated ways. One common form of the nature/culture dichotomy that I examine in some depth in this thesis is often projected between the second meaning of nature that Williams elaborates (which incorporates a sense of a human nature) and a notion of culture understood as both human civilization and as human ways of life. Each of these meanings of culture is related to what Williams, in his comments on Giambattista Vico, calls the "general social sense of 'culture'" (*Marxism* 16-17). By this I mean that both senses imply that humans are not defined by an intrinsic human nature, but rather produce themselves through social relations. The distinction I am mapping out, then, positions culture as a defining or normative frame against a nature that is likewise viewed as defining or normative. Williams outlines a similar distinction when he points out that a variation of his third sense of nature as "discoverable laws" with a rational basis could be "contrasted with what had been made of man, or what man had made of himself" (*Keywords* 223). In both of the distinctions that I present here,

a notion of culture as that which determines or at least shapes what human beings do, say, and think (and thus, what we are) is opposed to a nature that is equally determining. The difference is that in the first instance nature is internal to human beings, whereas in the second it is understood as the external nature of the world itself.

The other important dichotomy that I consider in this thesis consists of a division between nature as material or pre-existent world system and culture understood as a product or artefact of human ingenuity (i.e. "the arts") (see Soper 37-38). When the arts themselves are viewed not as an expression of our nature but as social and cultural forms, this sense of culture as human production may also be opposed to nature understood as human nature. In each of these specific dichotomies and those that I describe above, the meanings of the two terms appear to be opposed. When we probe some of the ambiguities presented by nature/culture dichotomies, we see that this is not always the case. For these two words often develop startling entanglements, and even overlap each other in particular situations. For instance, culture may be defined as the creation of intrinsic human ingenuity, which could imply that human civilization proceeds from a natural capacity within us to make meaning. Culture would then become indistinguishable from nature in this restricted sense.

To reveal such connections and relations helps to demonstrate that the nature/culture opposition is not a simple, unambiguous, or self-evident structure. Several scholars have begun to consider the complex relations between "nature"

and "culture" at great length. In his landmark study *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), the sociologist Bruno Latour suggests that the division between an undifferentiated material "nature" and diverse human "cultures" is the core structure in modern society and discourse (*Modern* 96-106; see also *Politics* 33, 48). Nature and culture themselves are historical constructions that are produced relationally; since each category is produced *as* the opposition of the other, a dichotomy between them is absolutely fundamental to way in which the two categories are constructed in the first place (*Modern* 104).[5] Latour's aim is sociological and is directed toward diagnosing social relations and conceptions. One of Latour's most important conceptions is the "collective," a schema that allows him to begin rethinking the interrelations between sets of categories that are normally represented as oppositions: objects and subjects, humans and non-humans, and importantly, natures and cultures (*Modern* 90, 103-9; also *Politics* 28-30, 45). As a substitute for the division between one nature and various cultures, Latour posits a collection of interrelated "natures-cultures" (*Modern* 7, 103-6). As Latour notes in *Politics of Nature* (2003), his general theoretical position, which remains fairly consistent in much of his recent work, is a critique of *both* "realism and constructivism" in modern social thought about nature and culture (see *Politics* 32-41; also *Modern* 85, 94-95). In place of the nature/culture binary understood as a "real" division between separate spheres *and* the nature/culture binary understood as an arbitrary, largely constructed distinction,

Latour offers a model of multiple material collectives in terms of which distinctions between nature and culture have no meaning.[6]

In order to develop a working understanding of collectives, Latour argues that "we shall have to avoid *both the notion of culture and the notion of nature*" (*Politics* 48). It is important to observe that by this Latour does not mean that we need to discard entirely the convenient terminology that is offered by "nature" and "culture," but rather that it is necessary to evaluate critically how we understand and use such terms; to accomplish this task, we must consider the political and social effects and hierarchies these concepts make possible (*Politics* 49). In making use of terms such as "collectives," Latour is seeking to discover a new vocabulary that will allow him a means to approach the problem of evaluating and contesting categories that, like the nature/culture dichotomy, are entrenched in modern thought and discourse. But Latour also would seem to acknowledge that we may continue to use such terms as nature and culture if we remain careful to not presume their normative meanings (hence his new term "natures-cultures").

The problems involved in critically examining how we use the terminology of nature and culture have also been raised by Kate Soper, who pointedly observes that "we cannot be asked to construe a conceptual distinction in this way rather than that, to adjust, undermine or collapse it altogether, unless we already in some sense observe it" (39). Soper suggests that critiques of the nature/culture dichotomy tend to preserve the basis of the dichotomy. This

occurs because, in place of the original division, such critiques typically settle for a determining nature or culture, each of which always already presupposes the opposing term:

> When anti-realists insist upon the relative and arbitrary character of the nature-culture antithesis they are implicitly assuming what they purport to deny: that both terms have reference to distinguishable orders of reality.
>
> But the same point must apply conversely to those who would emphasize human communality with nature, since they too necessarily presuppose the difference they might appear rhetorically to deny. Those who insist on human affinities with other animals, or would have us view humanity as belonging with the order of nature, must admit that they are speaking of an affinity or continuity between two already conceptually differentiated modes of being. (39-40)

Soper maintains, then, that it is impossible to deconstruct the nature/culture dichotomy in such a way that we may then entirely do away with it or move beyond it. She therefore shifts her emphasis to a consideration of the structure of the dichotomy itself: "at issue in the humanity-nature division is not the positing of the distinction itself, but the way in which it is to be drawn, and importantly whether it is conceptualized as one of kind or degree" (41). In asking whether there is "an absolute difference of realms or modes of being, or ... a totality or continuum within which no hard and fast delineation can be drawn between the human and the natural" (41), Soper is well aware that she has not dispensed with the nature/culture distinction, even though one of the situations she posits above does imply that nature and culture are continuous and related. In this thesis, I explore not only the differences between nature and culture, but also their connections and the many ways in which the division that they imply seems to

disappear under even casual scrutiny. My goal is not to undermine the nature/culture dichotomy, which might suggest that we can somehow do away with it entirely, but rather to understand how the dichotomy is produced and how its limits are formed.

In her discussion of the methodological problems involved in critiquing the nature/culture dichotomy, Soper reassesses the work contributed to this issue by Jacques Derrida, who points out that the paradox of historical analysis is that it always requires for its effective operation the same terms and concepts being investigated. In "Structure, Sign, and Play" (1978), Derrida suggests that we must invariably use such terms and concepts in any effort to critique them, and reveals the folly of assuming that it is somehow possible to transcend or otherwise conjure away the "structures" that we inherit from our collective past:

> There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language—no syntax and no lexicon—which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest. (280-81)

The "problem" now confronted by scholars engaged in assessing the legacy of history is the apparent necessity of using "a discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself" (282). Derrida suggests, however, that being dependent on a heritage is not a problem at all insofar as we are capable of critically examining the past with the "resources" that are available to us. We must, then, use the very tradition in which we normally work if we would have any expectation of critiquing that same

tradition because the possibility of critique is mediated by the conceptual structures that allow us to think it. It is fortunate that our capacity even to imagine this "problem" in the first place is contingent on having available those terms and concepts that potentially allow us to dissect it as a problem.

What are such concepts, and how may we critique them in practice? It is significant that Derrida analyzes the nature/culture dichotomy as his primary example of "structure" in modern thought and discourse. Admittedly, from the moment in the essay when he introduces this dichotomy, Derrida is assessing the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, for whom the effort to reassess the relationships between nature and culture was a major intellectual turning point. This structure is fundamental to Derrida as well, and so he gives it a close treatment in an essay largely devoted to questions of method (282-85). In setting up his own discussion of the nature/culture dichotomy, Derrida summarizes the problems that it had earlier presented for Lévi-Strauss:

> in the very first pages of the *Elementary Structures* Lévi-Strauss, who has begun by giving credence to these concepts, encounters what he calls a *scandal*, that is to say, something which no longer tolerates the nature/culture opposition he has accepted, something which *simultaneously* seems to require the predicates of nature and of culture. This scandal is the *incest prohibition*. The incest prohibition is universal; in this sense one could call it natural. But it is also a prohibition, a system of norms and interdicts; in this sense one could call it cultural... (283)

Derrida uses the writings of Lévi-Strauss, and the example of the nature/culture dilemma in particular, to suggest how we might successfully challenge the coherence of some fundamental constructions of Western metaphysics:

"Obviously there is no scandal except within a system of concepts which accredits the difference between nature and culture. By commencing his work with the *factum* of the incest prohibition, Lévi-Strauss thus places himself at the point at which this difference, which has always been assumed to be self-evident, finds itself erased or questioned" (283). There are, according to Derrida, two approaches that one might take to the problem of critiquing very fundamental structures such as the nature/culture binary. The first is more purely negative: "Once the limit of the nature/culture opposition makes itself felt, one might want to question systematically and rigorously the history of these concepts" (284). The second approach is not the mere negation of a structure, but rather involves its incorporation into the process of critique itself: "The other choice (which I believe corresponds more closely to Lévi-Strauss's manner), in order to avoid the possibly sterilizing effects of the first one, consists in conserving all these old concepts within the domain of empirical discovery while here and there denouncing their limits, treating them as tools which can still be used" (284). Derrida is suggesting that the history of language and thought is the condition of possibility for our critiques of this same history. So although the "traditions" in which we work impose limitations on the claims we are able to make, these traditions provide us with the means to critically evaluate our discourses and practices.

In *The Idea of Culture* (2000), Terry Eagleton devotes an entire chapter to considering the basis of and the problems associated with the nature/culture

dichotomy. Eagleton never denies that nature and culture exist as separable entities nor that they are categorically different from each other. What Eagleton seeks to do is refine our understanding of the many connections that exist between these two categories, which he depicts as the twin categories of human existence—as distinct but fundamental elements of what it means to be human. The importance of Eagleton's work lies in its ability to consider seriously both of these categories simultaneously. So Eagleton debunks both "naturalism" ("culture as a mere outcropping of nature") and its apparent opposite, "culturalism" ("Nature as a mere construct of culture") (*Culture* 104). But despite using the terms to designate actual categories, Eagleton also refuses to differentiate these categories definitively. For while he seems to accept that nature—and not only material nature as such, but also *our* nature—is "prior to culture," Eagleton also suggests that it "is always in a sense simultaneous with ... [culture] too, since we can identify it only by reading if off from culture itself" (*Culture* 107). If nature and culture are literally "simultaneous," then the notion of a gulf between them is not particularly accurate. Instead, culture and nature would seem to be integrated and continuous. Eagleton claims that the human

> capacity for culture and history is not just an addition to our nature, but lies at its core.... Culture does not simply supplant nature; instead, it supplements it in a way which is both necessary and supererogatory. We are not born as cultural beings, nor as self-sufficient natural ones, but as creatures whose helpless physical nature is such that culture is a necessity if we are to survive. (*Culture* 98-99)

Eagleton dismisses the notion that culture replaces nature, in effect becoming what was in the eighteenth century called our "second nature."[7] What really happens is that culture extends or "supplements" nature, which implies that nature and culture co-exist and form an uneasy relationship.[8] Eagleton is suggesting that both states are part of our composition, and yet both are subject to modification and remaking. According to Eagleton, human beings "are cusped between nature and culture" (99). We are produced at their intersection. The real virtue of Eagleton's position is that it does not peremptorily close down opportunities for critique and reassessment by immediately privileging either nature or culture; the point here is rather to bring both terms into a new and dynamic relationship.

The plan of the thesis

In separate chapters of this thesis, I select art, natural history, and health practices as topical sites in terms of which the boundaries between nature and culture are being delineated, often quite provisionally, during the eighteenth century. By considering how nature/culture dichotomies are produced in the context of these sites, I attempt to establish the limits of such dichotomies at a specific moment in their historical development. Art is particularly relevant to my aim of exploring the boundaries between nature and culture, as a central question in eighteenth-century debates about art was whether or not the art object should be considered an expression of human fashions or natural forms. I

also examine natural history, the close study of natural organisms and their environments. The subject matter of natural history typically bridged normative boundaries between human and natural, and many naturalists who wrote general histories of particular regions not only investigated natural phenomena such as animals, landforms, and the weather, but also incorporated descriptions of human social and economic relations into their accounts. Finally, I consider practices of health that mediated a complex set of relations between leisured people in search of better health, certain cultural conceptions of healthy bodies, and the natural environments that these practices depicted as a primary source of good human health. In practical terms, each of these sites produces an interconnected set of variations of the nature/culture dichotomy, and so provides one perspective from which to consider the general structure of this opposition.

My first chapter specifically examines connections between "nature" and "custom" as these concepts are articulated by Joshua Reynolds in *Discourses on Art* (1797) and two essays that he wrote for *The Idler* (1759). In this chapter, I consider the methodological problem that Soper and Derrida introduce: the structure of the nature/culture dichotomy makes possible but also limits the conditions under which we critique it, which suggests that to evaluate the dichotomy, we must initially posit the two terms in the same sense as they are projected by the traditions that sustain them. I first investigate what "nature" and "custom" mean for Reynolds, not in order to transcend the oppositions between them that Reynolds presents in his writings on art, but rather to evaluate their

boundaries and interrelations. In exposing the relations, limits, and ambiguities of these concepts, I evaluate how they function and where their power lies. To accomplish this end, I show that these concepts have coherent features, and that they are arranged in Reynolds's work into a series of identifiable nature/custom dichotomies. At the same time, I deconstruct these dichotomies by examining how Reynolds connects and conflates nature and custom in many, often subtle ways.

My method in the first chapter is adopted from Derrida's reading of Lévi-Strauss's practical ethnology. Derrida's analysis is characteristically limited to a close reading of the texts in which Lévi-Strauss recorded his findings. In focusing on texts, is Derrida then necessarily limiting himself, as often may seem to be the case, to interpreting "concepts" solely, or can he also in this way talk about "real situations"—or is this an entirely arbitrary distinction? These are relevant questions for my project to the extent that I, too, produce a reading based almost entirely on the close interpretation of passages drawn from a select set of texts. I make only a few references in the chapter to general historical conditions and other kinds of "contextual" evidence that one might use to interpret Reynolds (such as the writings of other well-known authors at the time).

How do we evaluate "nature" and "culture" by means of texts? Can we presume that these formations exist outside language, discourse, and text? Would it be more correct to say that there is no "real" as such, at least in the sense of an unmediated reality that exists independently of the terms that posit

it? Derrida's notion of "structure" unites considerations of materiality and discursive or cultural formation: the structure is its own mediation, in that it is the material historical condition that it presents, but is also the means of our understanding it. This process is similar to that which is at work in what Williams calls the "positive" meaning of "mediation": "all active relations between different kinds of being and consciousness are inevitably mediated, and this process is not a separable agency—a 'medium'—but intrinsic to the properties of the related kinds" (*Marxism* 98). In the case of my own analysis, the emphasis of the first chapter on close readings is a deliberate choice, for my intention is to consider concepts of nature and custom as they are developed in isolation from material relations that may be said, however problematically, to exist beyond in the texts I select. The benefit of limiting my subject matter in this manner is that it allows me to bracket off and then focus on a set of purely "conceptual" interactions, but I am not unaware of certain methodological problems that arise in this approach.

Whereas in the first chapter I examine conceptual relationships between nature and culture, in the second chapter I consider nature and culture as material systems that are directly mediated in language and texts. The problem now becomes to assess the extent to which a text can access historical processes as mediated by discursive structures as well as the perceptions and opinions of the text's author(s). In addressing this problem, I focus on the writings of the late eighteenth-century naturalist Gilbert White, with special emphasis on White's depiction of his parish in his famous book *The Natural*

History of Selborne (1789). A great many scholars have interpreted *Selborne* as a scientific record of White's observations on the natural history of his parish and its human inhabitants. In an attempt to provide a corrective to interpretations of *Selborne* as a scientific text, Lucy Maddox (1986) evaluates the "ideological" content of White's book (45-46). Maddox implies that many scholars who emphasize the book's status as a scientific record of objective facts are assuming that White's scientific statements are categorically distinct from the book's ideological content, an assumption that she makes as well (46). These positions both presume that a distinction may be posited between the historical parish of Selborne, the ideological and political conditions at work in it, and also the book that records this material and ideological evidence. Consistently ignored are the interrelations that exist between putatively different kinds of content in the book, and between the book itself and the place that it "describes."

An integrative approach that allows us to examine such relations is the methodology of what is usually referred to as "historical materialism" in the Marxist tradition. One implication of historical materialism is that ideological and material relations cannot be isolated into separate analytical categories. As is well known, the "base" and the "superstructure" are two central terms of analysis in Marxist social thought. Whereas the former corresponds to the economic conditions of production, including the immediate extension of these conditions in class society and the social distribution of wealth and labour, the latter signifies the ideological content of social life, which, according to Williams, can be

understood to include "(a) institutions; (b) forms of consciousness; [and] (c) political and cultural practices" (*Marxism* 77). As Louis Althusser argues in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1971), the point of using the base/superstructure model is not to posit a differential hierarchy between its two terms, but is instead to reveal that production shapes and is shaped by ideology and consciousness:

> It is possible to say that the floors of the superstructure are not determinant in the last instance, but that they are determined by the effectivity of the base; that if they are determinant in their own (as yet undefined) ways, this is true only insofar as they are determined by the base.
>
> Their index of effectivity (or determination), as determined by the determination in the last instance of the base, is thought by the Marxist tradition in two ways: (1) there is a 'relative autonomy' of the superstructure with respect to the base; (2) there is a 'reciprocal action' of the superstructure on the base. (135)

The value of historical materialism is that it illustrates the interdependence and contingency of all categories and formations in modern society. For there is always a mutual interaction between base and superstructure, and this suggests that the two "categories" are actually related and integrated—a point that Friedrich Engels stressed repeatedly in his efforts to clarify the model during the 1890s (see 395-412). Perhaps the best recent statement of the import of historical materialism as a paradigm that eschews detached categories is Etienne Balibar's (1994) definition of "*the real as relation*, as a structure of practical relations" (92). Working from a similar position, some recent Marxist critics have denied altogether the separate existence of base and superstructure, of material social life and ideology, and even of life and thought. These critics

have instead asserted that the whole base/superstructure paradigm was never intended to describe anything other than a "relation" or set of relations, and that it should not now be (mis)taken as the simple description of a division between disconnected categories (Williams, *Marxism* 77-81; Balibar 92).

Indeed, Engels warns against making the assumption that ideological formations have histories that are independent of all other historical conditions, a situation that, if it were true, would imply that the ideological content of life is produced by historical conflicts arising solely between structures of ideas. In a letter to Franz Mehring (July 14, 1893), Engels suggests that the histories of, for example, "theology, philosophy, or political science" should be understood as histories of the "actual conditions" that have produced these formations, and that determine how they interact with other formations (409). It is incorrect to suppose that material and ideological relations can be legitimately separated in the context of a critical analysis of historical texts. These two conditions are always linked, both in terms of the text and in history. In any valid investigation of history and its constitutive processes, these conditions need to be considered in conjunction.

The contingent distinction between the categories of the material and the ideological can be associated with the nature/culture dichotomy itself. While it is typical to depict nature as the ultimate material reality existing beyond human communities, culture is very often conflated with an ideological realm, as if culture were equivalent, not to material social relations and practices, but to

ideologies misunderstood as systems of belief. From the perspective of historical materialism, the physical countryside as described by White, the ways of life that he records, and his political or ideological beliefs are all component parts of an integrated whole. In the context of *Selborne*, "nature" and "culture" are equivalent, and can only be said to "exist" in the sense that they define a relation.

The third and final chapter of this thesis is devoted to an investigation of texts recommending practices by means of which leisured people in the eighteenth century could improve and maintain their health. These health practices generally consist of exercises intended to be undertaken in the countryside, in parks, and in gardens. The principles legitimating such practices derive from ideologies of health and the healthy body, in terms of which nature and certain natural places are viewed as sources of good health. My emphasis in the chapter is on examining how a notion of practice can unite seemingly opposed terms like ideas and material sites, or culture and nature. I examine a variety of texts endorsing such health practices, including the medical writing of George Cheyne, works on aesthetics by Edmund Burke and Uvedale Price, natural histories by Thomas Pennant and other writers, the poetry of William Cowper, and essays by Erasmus Darwin. I do not reduce either nature or human interactions with it to considerations of materiality, but I suggest that cultural practices are material in much the same sense as the natural world is material.

How are we to recover material practices of health from the discursive representations of these practices that are contained in eighteenth-century texts

offering advice on personal healthcare? As already suggested, there are theories of practice according to which the effect of practical situations is to collapse divisions between ideal and material. Such theories suggest that distinctions between the text in which a practice is transcribed and the material social world in which it is performed are arbitrary. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J.D. Wacquant (1992) argue that a practice is not a "mechanical reaction" to a stimulus event, nor is it "the deliberate pursuit of a conscious intention" (121). Practices do, however, conform to a "logical" or "interested" rationale. It is this logic that explains why a practice occupies a specific position in the "economy of practices" that structures the possibilities of social life (115-21). The implication is that practices are best conceived as courses of action for negotiating situations and producing outcomes. Althusser notes that practices are "material" and can be examined objectively (165-70). We may recall his famous dictum that the "ideas" of a person are synonymous with that person's "actions," given that ideas are "inscribed in the actions of practices governed by rituals defined in the last instance by an ideological apparatus" (169-70). It must be emphasized that the schema described by Althusser always takes place "in an ideology" that is itself a material relation (165, 170). As a means of understanding practices of health, the model of material practice that I am describing here suggests that contact with natural environments takes place within material ideologies of the healthy body and of a nature that works to maintain good health. Although these practices are prescriptions for potential actions, they are also material and so are

not categorically different from the active behaviours that they have the potential to generate. It follows that there is no substantial difference between ideas about health and behaviours considered healthy, or between ideas and behaviours and the healthy bodies that they produce and govern. It is not my intention in the chapter to investigate histories of the interrelations between cultural conceptions of human health and natural environments. Instead, I explore how conceptions of health, bodies, and environments converge in the context of specific practices.

In order to better account for the history of this convergence, I invoke the concept of the "network" as it has been defined by Latour in *We Have Never Been Modern*.[9] Latour uses the network as a spatial metaphor for any complex group of relations, concepts, and things. Networks traverse and intersect the boundaries that supposedly isolate their component parts, and are to this extent the linkages from which "collectives" are formed. The purpose of using the network as a methodological framework would seem to be that it allows us to concurrently study what might, in a different context, be called material and ideological relations; it is clear from Latour's examples that most networks have both kinds of relations as constituent elements (see *Modern* 1-7, 11, 20, 94-96). Since even relatively simple practices could be considered "mediating" linkages in these networks, such practices do not, from this perspective, have a unitary or independent being in themselves, but rather always exist as parts of larger groups (*Modern* 78, 89). And just as any network almost certainly will incorporate elements from both nature and culture, so, too, might a practice that

links the parts of this network together. The practices I describe in the third chapter demonstrate this tendency. These practices cannot be classified easily as productions of a culture, nor may they be collapsed into nature: they have a relation to both of these categories, and so tend to undercut the position that such categories are independent.

I give at least some credence to positions claiming that we need at times to distinguish between nature and culture, despite the obvious arbitrariness of such a distinction. We should bear in mind that any perspective that would deny the nature/culture dichotomy, or that would replace a division with a continuity, is itself an obvious construction, and so is arbitrary in its own right. All positions that we may choose to take on the issue of nature and culture can only and ever be artefacts of our own thinking. By this I do not mean to deny the validity of overturning hegemonic constructions like the nature/culture dichotomy. The ongoing critique of this construction will continue to provide new insights into the ways in which it has been used for centuries to tacitly, or even quite openly, legitimate social and political hierarchies, and dominative effects of power.[10] Certainly this form of critique has a political dimension. The effort to overturn or rewrite the history of entrenched conceptual structures is often enough understood as its own reward—a means of working, however subtly, to repeal those aspects of both our past history and our current social and political situation that are empowered by the very historical structures under investigation.

Bruno Latour is quite right to emphasize that although there often appears to be a profound division between nature and culture, this difference has been produced to answer specific political ends, and that we need to be aware of these ends and the reasons for them if we are to revise how we understand the structures that produce our world. The nature/culture dichotomy is not a collective phantasm brought about by incorrect thinking. Hence my aim is never merely to overturn the nature/culture dichotomy in order to replace it with a supposedly more accurate explanatory structure. In exploring connections between nature and culture that are often overlooked, I offer new ways of understanding how and why the dichotomy has been historically produced. A history that would seek only to deconstruct the nature/culture binary and venture no further is purely negative. What is needed now is a consolidated effort to redefine these terms and their mutual interrelations.

Chapter One
Natural and Customary Relations in Theories of Art

The objective of this chapter is to simultaneously explore and complicate certain historical forms of the nature/culture dichotomy that Joshua Reynolds produces in *Discourses on Art* (1797), fifteen lectures delivered to the Royal Academy between 1769 to 1790 when Reynolds was its president, and some earlier essays on painting that Reynolds published in *The Idler* (1759).[11] Reynolds does not use "culture" to designate a sphere or concept of human activity that is opposed to nature understood as pre-existent reality.[12] Instead, he draws on several related words, including "custom," "fashion," "habit," and "prejudice"; all of these terms suggest a concept of the human, and each may be posed in opposition to specific formulations of "nature." Scholars have typically focused on the ways in which Reynolds defines forms of nature and custom in opposition to each other, and how he uses these oppositions to legitimate political and aesthetic ideologies.[13] In investigating the political implications of Reynolds's theories on aesthetic perception, John Barrell (1986; 1990) describes the basis of the conceptual dichotomies at work in the *Discourses* in the following terms:

> because we ... discover that human nature is, always and everywhere, essentially the same, the language of the *Discourses* repeatedly attributes value to what is fixed, settled, permanent, solid, as opposed to whatever is floating, fluctuating, fleeting, variable. The range of the applications of this opposition in the *Discourses* is very extensive... (*Political Theory* 80)

Barrell points out, for instance, that it can take the form of an "opposition between the *prima forma* of human nature as against what custom has made of it..." (*Political Theory* 80). More recently, Günter Leypoldt (1999) has described "general nature" and "custom" as "diverging and fundamentally incommensurable discursive formations" in eighteenth-century philosophical thought (332), and he suggests that "Reynolds's aesthetics is characterized by the intensified clash of these two discursive tendencies..." (333). Barrell and Leypoldt offer valuable readings of the relations between forms of nature and custom in Reynolds's writings on art and its practice, but because neither scholar consistently examines how Reynolds invariably undermines the same conceptual dichotomies that he produces, they tend to present the oppositions as normative and fixed.[14]

Both the oppositions and interrelations that Reynolds develops between nature and custom have specific functions and an explicit logic in his writings on art. Although Reynolds opposes these terms at certain times and collapses distinctions between them at others, these two conditions do not result from inconsistencies in his thought, but are each essential to particular ways in which he articulates his ideas about art and its practice. An examination of the *Discourses* and other writings may also help us to understand the position of nature/custom dichotomies in the aesthetic theories of Reynolds's time, for he was both a famous painter and a prominent theorist of painting; his writings were widely distributed, and so were influential in the development of general ideas about art and aesthetics during the second half of the eighteenth century.[15]

Reynolds's theories about art suggest that the nature/custom dichotomy is fundamental to eighteenth-century aesthetic discourses, but they also imply that the opposition functions as only one strategic choice among many that were available for articulating aesthetic concepts. Reynolds never uses this dichotomy in a manner that would suggest that it is normative; in his work, the opposition between nature and custom takes many forms, and often provides the means of undermining itself.

This chapter will examine in chronological sequence the second and third of the essays on painting that Reynolds published in the *Idler* (late 1759), the third discourse (1770), the seventh discourse (1776), and lastly, the thirteenth discourse (1786). Long periods of time separate the composition of these writings, and, not unexpectedly, there are some pronounced differences among them. By considering these selected writings in turn, I am better able to focus precisely on specific issues that arise in them. It is notable that much scholarship on Reynolds has ignored chronology. Such an approach has certain advantages for the critic, since it allows passages from different essays and discourses to be brought together when it seems germane or expedient to do so. But David Mannings (1976) has cautioned against "the temptation to look for 'doctrines' on this or that topic, and to cut out from the *Discourses* scattered remarks which are then pieced together to form 'Reynolds's Theory of Taste' or whatever" (355). From this perspective, an approach that ignores chronology can be symptomatic of an assumption that a series of writings produced over a long period of time

may nonetheless be envisaged abstractly as a unified whole. This can be a problematic assumption given the wide variety of views and positions presented in Reynolds's collected opus—a consequence of the fact that he produced his main writings on aesthetics steadily over a period of more than three decades.

There has been considerable debate regarding the uniformity of the *Discourses* as a whole, and the degree of relative congruence between the *Discourses* and the earlier *Idler* papers. Walter Hipple (1957) observes that "writers who do not emphasize outright contradictions in Reynolds' theory usually escape this conclusion only by discovering a progressive development of his thought" (*Aesthetic Theory* 135).[16] It is certain that Reynolds produces different formulations at different moments in his career as a writer. This is not to say that there is a "development" in Reynolds's work, but it still seems inappropriate to match statements from different discourses and essays, particularly if a length of time separates the passages under consideration. The particular writings that I examine in this chapter constitute a series of unique moments in Reynolds's thought and work; each of these writings has its own character and objectives, and we risk effacing this uniqueness if we do not consider them separately. At the same time, I follow a chronological order because Reynolds's later writings do indeed build on what he had written earlier. Even though I do not believe that it is useful to approach Reynolds as if there is always a direct influence from his earlier to his later writings, it is still the case that in his later work Reynolds often

takes up topics that he had previously investigated. Reynolds's earlier efforts establish a context for his later work, but are not necessarily the foundation of it.

The second *Idler* paper: the two natures

In his earliest published work, Reynolds lays out some of his general ideas about painting and its practice—ideas that he returns to often in later writings. At the end of 1759, Reynolds contributed three short dissertations on painting to *The Idler* (c.1758-60), the series of weekly essays published in *The Universal Chronicle* by his close friend Samuel Johnson.[17] In the second of these essays, which appeared in issue #79 (Oct. 20, 1759) of *The Idler*, Reynolds introduces a conceptual dichotomy that is vital for understanding how he uses the terms "nature" and "custom." Although the basic dichotomy is usually described by Reynolds scholars in terms of a distinction between "general" and "particular," Reynolds presents it in issue #79 specifically as an opposition between the "superior," "universal," or "general," and the "lower," "deformed," or "common." In this particular essay, Reynolds applies the distinction to two distinct categories of nature, but he associates it in later writings with other subjects, including custom.

Reynolds does not define these two categories of nature in great detail in issue #79; this is a task that he postpones until his next *Idler* essay. But he does, in discussing the relative merits of the painting styles of the Italian and Dutch masters, take some initial steps towards sketching out the features of these two natures and the basis of the distinction that, he maintains, exists between them.

Reynolds opens his discussion in the essay by suggesting that a significant problem now confronts artists and those who, in publishing their views on painting, influence how it is appreciated by others. He critiques the belief that painting should "imitate" external nature as it immediately appears to the senses:

> Amongst the painters, and the writers on painting, there is one maxim universally admitted, and continually inculcated. 'Imitate nature' is the invariable rule; but I know of none who have explained in what manner this rule is to be understood; the consequence of which is, that every one takes it in the most obvious sense, that objects are represented naturally when they have such relief that they seem real. (246)

Reynolds declares that the aim of art, or at least that of all *good* art, should always be to produce the best representation possible of the "general" form of the object, and to avoid rendering a copy of the form of the object as it merely appears to the eye.

Reynolds asserts that the paintings of the Dutch masters, to the extent that they merely produce a copy of the apparent forms of objects, are less perfect than the paintings of the Italian masters, whose techniques allow them to represent general forms in their art:

> The Italian attends only to the invariable, the great and general ideas which are fixed and inherent in universal nature; the Dutch, on the contrary, to literal truth and a minute exactness in the detail, as I may say, of nature modified by accident. The attention to these petty peculiarities is the very cause of this naturalness so much admired in the Dutch pictures, which, if we suppose it to be a beauty, is certainly of a lower order, which ought to give place to a beauty of a superior kind, since one cannot be obtained but by departing from the other. (247)

Reynolds criticizes strict imitation in painting because it involves bringing to canvas this "lower" form of nature. So what is involved in the apparent distinction between "superior" art (the Italian) and "lower" art (the Dutch), between "superior" (or general) nature and "lower" (or particular) nature? Until recently, the accepted view among Reynolds scholars was that the distinction between general and particular was an inevitable reflection of influential philosophical positions in existence when he wrote.[18] Brian Grafton (1972) puts it clearly when he asserts that "Reynolds is obviously aligning the nobler works with an ideal vision of art described in neo-platonic terminology, while the lesser school is characterized by terms expressive of the empirical method" (89). I want to suggest that there were other and more compelling reasons why Reynolds felt it necessary to condemn the practice of imitating external nature in favour of a practice that seeks to represent an "ideal" form of nature in art. Barrell argues that an entrenched class hierarchy underlies many of the conceptual distinctions put forward in Reynolds's writings: "The principle, that it is the function of art to create and to confirm a republic, or at least a community, of taste, is ... the main principle of unity among the writings produced by Reynolds over a period of more than thirty years" (*Political Theory* 70). According to Barrell, Reynolds's goal is to discover a guide rooted in the practice of the arts that can then serve to distinguish who shall be admitted to, or excluded from, a new "republic of taste":

> The principles of taste, like those of politics, are abstract principles, and the qualifications for membership of the republic of taste and of the political republic are therefore the same. Both will exclude the practitioners of mechanical trades, who by synecdoche come to

> represent the vulgar of every condition of life, all those who either do not have the leisure, or will not use the leisure they have, to cultivate the ability to frame general ideas. (*Political Theory* 79)

Reynolds deplores strict imitation because it carries no mark of distinction, for even the "vulgar" can imitate. According to Barrell, Reynolds conflates vulgarity with the "state of nature," and it is the people in such a state who have a high regard for the imitation of particular nature, and, presumably, for this nature itself (*Political Theory* 77-78, 84). It is cultivation or refinement that allows one, by a process of "abstraction from particulars," to perceive the general in nature, and so enter the republic of taste: the state of being cultivated (*Political Theory* 86, see 76-87). Closely associated with the division between general and particular is an analogous distinction between *general* and *local*—the latter term one that Reynolds does not use in the *Idler* essays, but relies on increasingly in his *Discourses* (see *Political Theory* 143-50; "English Art" 164-65). If the general signifies whatever is universal and permanent, either in nature as external system or in human nature, then the local is particular and temporary. Considered in these terms, cultivation is associated with a perspective that can grasp universality, whereas vulgarity is equivalent to a perspective attached to the local.

The conceptual structure that Barrell provides can help us to understand the basis of Reynolds's distinction between the two forms of nature. In setting up his distinction between general and particular in terms of a second distinction between Italian and Dutch styles, what Reynolds condemns in the case of the

lower or imitative art of the Dutch masters is a style of painting that is too literal: too fixated on rendering details. In the superior style of the Italians, the painter does not imitate the minute details of what he sees in nature, but rather purifies nature of "detail" and "accident," instead representing the invariable forms of nature. In effect, the superior or universal form of nature is a purified version of the lower or local form of nature, and so Reynolds is imagining the superior form in direct opposition to this lower form. The first step, then, to understanding how the overall distinction works is to clarify what Reynolds means by "lower" nature.

We are not given much specific information at this point about the lower kind of nature other than that it is "modified by accident," is formed of "petty peculiarities," and is associated with "detail" or visible appearances. Hazard Adams (1978) observes that Reynolds's use of "accident" as a way of describing lower nature "implies that the local details of our experience are hardly real at all and that we are always seeking, like Aristotle's nature, for an ideal form. That ideal form is *there* and is the reality. As Reynolds presents it, it has a substantial quality that it lacks in Aristotle. It appears to be more like a Platonic idea" (130). This suggests that the distinction is not so much between a palpable nature and an abstract nature, but rather between appearance and substance, both of which are then parts of nature in some sense. But this is not an entirely adequate explanation precisely because there is at the same time a decidedly palpable quality to lower nature. After all, Reynolds states that it is comprised of much tangible detail, and that to imitate it in painting is an act of "minute exactness."

Neil Evernden has noted that, in one of its important senses, nature can be defined as "the *material* given, nature as everything-but-us," and also as "the realm of external stuff" (23). This version of nature is what, in the context of eighteenth-century natural philosophy, might be referred to as the world of "sense" or "sense experience" (see Bourdieu 485-94). There is some indication that Reynolds equates the lower nature, comprised of appearances and details, with sensible experience.

That Reynolds associates lower nature with sense experience will become important to my analysis of this essay at a later point, but for the moment I want to consider more directly how Reynolds depicts, without ever explicitly defining, the superior or universal kind of nature, which, he suggests, is the object of great art. There is considerable ambiguity to this depiction. We get a sense of how Reynolds would like his reader to perceive this higher form of nature by the way he describes the superior kind of painting—that style which has the capability to bring a representation of universal nature into being. Reynolds notes that "the highest style has the least of common nature" (248). Recall that Reynolds had previously suggested that the lower style of painting has about it an appearance of "naturalness," a word which is being used to describe a copy or imitation of the external nature that we see all about us. So "common nature" is the visible form of nature, about which Reynolds has particular reservations. But what then is universal nature? The comparison specified here suggests, by implication, that it is *un*common in the sense of being "refined," but does this also mean that it is

"rare" or even "unusual," perhaps like the natural oddities that would be on display in a collector's cabinet? For their collectors, such oddities could signify exceptions to the uniform processes of nature, yet this does not seem like an appropriate way to describe Reynolds's *un*common but universal nature, which he deliberately contrasts with the "accidents" and "petty peculiarities" that deform the common variety of nature.

Reynolds establishes a way of understanding universal nature that initially seems equally ambiguous when he claims that "the painter of genius .... studies nature, and often arrives at his end, even by being unnatural in the confined sense of the word" (247). Underlying this assertion is the implication that human beings in general are not, strictly speaking, "natural," and that what we do—our practices and our actions—are manifestly unnatural in at least some cases. Some practices would seem to be more natural than others, for otherwise there could be no distinction between natural and *un*natural styles of painting. Given the explicit connections that are being drawn from two styles of painting over to two kinds of nature, to be natural (or not) in this context is not simply a comment on two practices of painting, but also on the kind of nature that each of these practices is supposed to represent. If the painter must engage in an "unnatural" practice in order to properly represent universal nature, then it would seem that the nature thus represented is "unnatural *in the confined sense of the word*" (italics mine). A clue about how to interpret this paradigm of an "unnatural" nature is provided by that passage already cited in which Reynolds complains

about the high regard for imitation, particularly his claim that "*every one takes it in the most obvious sense, that objects are represented naturally when they have such relief that they seem real*" (italics mine). Reynolds deliberately uses "nature" here to indicate common or lower nature, and he implies that the word is normally understood in this sense: that is, as the phenomenal world that we might now describe as "the real." By depicting universal nature as unnatural, Reynolds is not suggesting that it lacks identity with itself, but is merely emphasizing its difference with common nature; for the universal is the true "real," even though most people, according to Reynolds, would not consider it as such.

So to be natural in this "confined sense" is to be unrefined and even common. At the same time, the natural attitude, which holds that imitation is a fine practice, is apparently what the majority of people believe to be the case. It is the common attitude, and not just in the social sense, but also in the sense of being widespread among a population. It is, then, what might be called the *customary* opinion of the common people. There is thus already a basis in this early essay for understanding how Reynolds will come to think about matters of custom in his later discourses: in this case, a form of custom that is associated with a lower form of nature. This lower nature is rooted in appearances and detail, and is opposed to universal nature and to the educational refinements necessary for properly perceiving and understanding universality. Barrell observes that universal nature is presented by Reynolds as being "common to us

all" (87). In a different sense, Reynolds portrays the lower form of nature as a common nature as well.

Reynolds implicitly defines the lower nature, then, in relation to an idea of the human and human activity. The same is the case for universal nature, which Reynolds conflates, if not necessarily deliberately, with high culture. To explain why this happens, I want to draw on Pierre Bourdieu's work in *Distinction* (1984) on eighteenth-century (particularly Kantian) aesthetics (see 485-500). Bourdieu notes that the task of art, as understood by Kant, is to produce a "second nature," a created nature to replace the first nature. Nonetheless, Kant also could, according to Bourdieu, view artistic production in opposition to nature: "The world produced by artistic 'creation' is not only 'another nature' but a 'counter-nature', a world produced in the manner of nature but against the ordinary laws of nature" (491).[19] This "world" that art creates is synonymous with bourgeois high "culture," and it is produced by means of a "negation" of a sensuous nature that is associated, as it is in the work of Reynolds, with the unrefined "pleasures" of the "vulgar"—a negation, then, that results in a more "purified" form (486-91). Bourdieu's account of the production of culture in Kantian aesthetics is not unlike Reynolds's description of the best practices for representing universal nature in painting. Certainly, both Kant's bourgeois high culture and Reynolds's universal nature are explicitly defined in opposition to a putatively lower nature that is being equated with sensible experience.

The third *Idler* paper: custom as nature

In his essay in *Idler* #79, Reynolds provides only a latent notion of the meaning of customary practice. How does he explicitly conceive of custom? Defining this term is a task that he undertakes in the third and last of the essays on painting that he contributed to the *Idler*, published in issue #82 (Nov. 10, 1759).[20] Here Reynolds describes a sense of custom quite unlike that to which he alludes in his second *Idler* essay. For in *Idler* #82, Reynolds very deliberately defines custom in a working relationship with universal nature. As a starting point, Reynolds suggests that universal or general nature is "beauty" (254-55). In making this claim, Reynolds is running counter to the common opinion that beauty is an empirical property intrinsic to the sensible form of things—to what he would call "common" nature. Reynolds is effectively suggesting that there is no empirical beauty as such; beauty is merely the signifier that we universally apply to our perceptions of general nature. The primary subject of the essay is the customary basis of perceptions of beauty, and Reynolds is ostensibly attempting to find a means of distinguishing between custom and general nature: specifically, between their respective effects on the observer. What Reynolds would like to do is make visible a concrete dividing line between these two apparent opposites. This is not quite the end that he accomplishes.

Reynolds defines general nature specifically as the invariable or ideal form of any particular class: "Every species of the animal as well as the vegetable creation may be said to have a fixed or determinate form towards which nature is

continually inclining, like various lines terminating in the center" (255). The lower kind of nature—the world of sensible forms—is, in terms of this metaphor, analogous to the points on each of these lines. General nature is the invariant form of a class—its very basis in nature. Does this mean that general nature, to continue the metaphor above, is an absent centre, or is the implication that general nature exists in the world of common nature? At least one of Reynolds's analogies appears to suggest that the latter is the case. Reynolds notes at one point that "the line that forms the ridge of the nose is beautiful when it is strait; this then is the central form, which is oftener found than either concave, convex, or any other irregular form that shall be proposed" (256). From this we might assume that any straight nose is an instance of the general form—the ideal made substance. Or perhaps even among straight noses there are degrees of relative perfection. For is any nose truly straight, such that its form could be said to constitute the ideal of the class "nose," in comparison to which all other noses are mere shadows? The wording of the example, unfortunately, is ambiguous, but Reynolds provides a separate example with more definitive implications: "amongst the blades of grass or leaves of the same tree, tho' no two can be found exactly alike, yet the general form is invariable..." (255). Whereas all actual instances of a class differ in their imperfection, the general form remains absent. It exists in nature as a general structure, but does not coincide with any *particular* instance of a class.[21]

Hence it is initially puzzling that Reynolds invokes a version of what he calls "custom" to explain why beauty, and not something else, is universally admired. Reynolds claims that "beauty" is preferred to "deformity" because the beautiful "is oftener produced by nature than deformity; I don't mean than deformity in general, but than any one kind of deformity" (255-56). Putting aside for the moment certain problems that arise in these assertions, I want to address how Reynolds justifies the general preference for beauty over deformity with his contention that the beautiful form occurs more frequently than any other unique form of a class. Why does greater frequency generate a preference for beauty? Reynolds suggests that such preferences are caused by the *customary* attachments humans invariably form to experiences that are frequently repeated:

> As we are then more accustomed to beauty than deformity, we may conclude that to be the reason why we approve and admire it, as we approve and admire customs, and fashions of dress for no other reason than that we are used to them; so that tho' habit and custom cannot be said to be the cause of beauty, it is certainly the cause of our liking it: and I have no doubt but that if we were more used to deformity than beauty, deformity would then lose the idea now annexed to it, and take that of beauty; as if the whole world should agree that 'yes' and 'no' should change their meanings; 'yes' would deny, and 'no' would affirm. (88)

Since the general form of a class is more frequent in nature than any of the myriad other forms that make up the class, the general form is more familiar to observers. The observer thus accepts the general more readily than other forms, and consistently makes the leap to favouring it over all other forms of that class.

What I want to suggest is that Reynolds ultimately conflates the idea of custom he produces here with particular ideas of nature. In developing his

theories about beauty, Reynolds tend to complicate the implication, developed in his previous *Idler* essay, that general nature is opposed to common nature. The problem manifests itself when Reynolds attempts to refute the value of "novelty" and "rarity" as qualities that contribute to the beauty of an object: "Novelty is said to be one of the causes of beauty: that novelty is a very sufficient reason why we should admire, is not denied; but because it is uncommon, is it therefore beautiful?" (257). Reynolds then suggests that rarity is one of many qualities that do not necessarily make objects beautiful, but certainly add, at least in the eyes of many people, to their value: "When we apply the word beauty, we do not mean always by it a more beautiful form, but something valuable on account of its rarity, usefulness, colour, or any other property" (258). Although he does not strictly "oppose" novelty or rarity to beauty, Reynolds implies that beauty is neither rare nor uncommon, which reinforces the claim being developed in the essay that the general form of a class in nature is more common, in the sense that it is more widespread or frequent, than any of the unique or "accidental" forms of the class (255).

And yet Reynolds seems unwilling, given some of his other presuppositions, to fully support his assertion that general forms are more common in nature. It is useful to recall that there were in eighteenth-century discourse, as there still are at present, some overt connections between the two senses of "common" or "uncommon" as indications of both frequency and value. In this context, to be rare is also to be prized as valuable, whereas to be ordinary

is, often enough at any rate, taken for a certain lack of value. It was partly due to the close proximity of these two senses that novelty could be considered a marker of value in eighteenth-century aesthetic theories, as Reynolds observes. It is for this reason that Reynolds seeks to undercut any implication that novelty is a direct cause of beauty, for he is trying to show that there is something quite "common" about the beautiful. But the proximity of the two meanings of common and uncommon continuously works against Reynolds's claim that beauty is common (widespread) in one sense and uncommon (valuable) in a different sense.

The argument that beauty (or "general" nature) is more common than deformity (or "common" nature) is a particularly ambiguous one, especially given the general implication in the essay that universal nature is an absent form—a form that one can conceptualize and speak about without necessarily being able to perceive directly. Are all forms in nature, with the exception of those of a general kind, to be considered deformities? Reynolds's definition of general nature tends to consign the natural world that we experience on a daily basis to the status of "accidental blemishes and excrescences" (255). But to get back to the initial problem, if "beauty *is* oftener produced by nature than deformity" (italics mine), why is it that the refined sensibility has the advantage in perceiving it? Reynolds asserts that a cultivated discernment is necessary to perceive beauty:

> a naturalist, before he chose one [blade of grass or leaf] as a sample, would examine many, since if he took the first that occurred it might have, by accident or otherwise, such a form as that it would scarce be known to belong to that species; he selects,

> as the painter does, the most beautiful, that is, the most general form of nature. (255)

The naturalist or artist should be a person of refinement precisely because only such a person is capable of discerning general nature. For Reynolds suggests that general nature is no more common than a greatly prized natural specimen of some rarity. He also implies that general nature is just such a prize in itself: a specimen, to use the analogy already established, that is worthy of the naturalist's cabinet for displaying curiosities, and is just as difficult to discover in practice.

The traditional authority of custom is explained in the same terms as general nature here. Reynolds suggests that customs exist as stable *social* forms because people have become "used to them," which says nothing at all about how custom works, any more than it explains how and why beauty is admired. Does this mean custom has its sway precisely because it is customary? The circular reasoning points to the tenuous definition of custom itself. Reynolds invokes custom as a means of explaining the consistent reverence for general nature, which could imply that custom is *active* where nature is *passive*. To paraphrase the passage cited above, beauty defined as such certainly exists in the world, but custom explains why we find it beautiful. In this way Reynolds maps his versions of nature and custom onto a familiar spectrum that differentiates the natural world from the human world, elevating the latter above the former.

Reynolds also equates custom and nature, and he does so by splitting custom off into two separate forms that are similar in some respects to the two forms of nature. For when Reynolds claims that "we approve and admire customs, and fashions of dress for no other reason than that we are used to them," he is speaking of a range of manifestly social practices: the customs, for instance, of a group or locality. It is notable that in one of its senses, "custom" was generalized to refer to the "usual practice .... of a community" by at least the eighteenth century (*OED* 4.167). But Reynolds is also claiming that the basis of this attachment is a customary one; and this second version of custom is not the same as the first. Instead, it is a process of habituation that explains how people form customary attachments. The reverence for custom and nature are now both explained as resulting from these customary attachments. In suggesting that the same process is responsible for the attachments we form to nature *and* custom, Reynolds tends to collapse any distinction that might otherwise be expected to exist between them. Custom and nature are not here separate orders of existence, but are in this limited sense subjects of our knowledge, existing in our minds. More interesting is that the axiom Reynolds proposes to explain our veneration for such objects has much about it that is seemingly natural. People tend to "approve and admire" beauty and develop a fondness for certain customs because they have become "accustomed" to such customs. And yet this process of habituation is not itself explained in social or practical terms, or as an outcome of, for instance, human history. It is depicted as inevitable, almost as if it were

built into the structure of the encounter. The analogy would be to the way natural principles govern events in the world. It is as if custom functions like a kind of natural selection (to use a deliberately intended pun). The term "custom" would then become shorthand for the way in which general principles of nature determine, or at least influence, the actual content of human thought and social life.

Given that an individual or community will invariably come to find the most general forms in nature beautiful given time and sufficient exposure to them, the principle of "custom" that Reynolds describes in *Idler* #82 operates in a manner that is analogous to a principle of the system of nature. Perhaps this explains why Reynolds implies that to develop preferences for non-general forms is contrary to nature:

> it is custom alone determines our preference of the colour of the Europeans to the Aethiopians, and they, for the same reason, prefer their own colour to ours. I suppose nobody will doubt, if one of their painters was to paint the goddess of beauty, but that he would represent her black, with thick lips, flat nose, and woolly hair; and, it seems to me, he would act very unnaturally if he did not: for by what criterion will any one dispute the propriety of his idea? (257)

Although Europeans and Africans (each considered here as an arbitrary whole) may appear to have formed entirely separate attachments to divergent forms of beauty, Reynolds is suggesting that their societies have responded to whatever universal forms have been available to them in their respective situations. Significantly, scholars often interpret the idea of "custom" presented in this passage as if it were essentially equivalent to a determining cultural formation

(see Simon 235; Leypoldt 343-44). Such interpretations assume that custom understood as an outward appearance is always opposed in Reynolds's work to general nature as true essence; they also tend to impose onto his thinking a notion of cultural differences that was still unfamiliar during the period. Reynolds uses "custom" in a manner that remains consistent throughout the essay, even if his use of the term does change considerably in his later writings. He is not appealing to a cultural formation in order to explain why separated communities develop different preferences for beauty; an arbitrary, human-centred custom has little to do with the production of sentiments of true beauty. By "custom," Reynolds effectively means an extension of general nature.

The third discourse: custom as second nature

In his third discourse (1770), Reynolds revisits the problem of beauty and of the means, particularly customary, by which it may be perceived. Reynolds again claims that the artist should not merely imitate lower or common nature, but should rather strive to compose a good representation of the general forms of nature, for it is these forms which constitute true beauty. Reynolds's particular concern is now to debunk the widespread belief that it is possible to gain some insight into this ideal by virtue of a native "taste" or "genius" (42-44). Instead, Reynolds suggests, as we would expect, that these two abilities "operate in proportion to our attention in observing the works of nature, to our skill in selecting, and to our care in digesting, methodizing, and comparing our

observations" (44). To gain a proper awareness of the general or universal in nature therefore requires a deliberate and methodical act of mind. The artist must learn how to distinguish those aspects of nature that are general from those that are not, and so it is only through familiarity and practice—learning by doing—that the artist will eventually achieve this knowledge:

> There are many beauties in our art, that seem, at first, to lie without the reach of precept, and yet may easily be reduced to practical principles. Experience is all in all; but it is not everyone who profits by experience; and most people err, not so much from want of capacity to find their object, as from not knowing what object to pursue. This great ideal perfection and beauty are not to be sought in the heavens, but upon the earth. They are about us, and upon every side of us. But the power of discovering what is deformed in nature, or in other words, what is particular and uncommon, can be acquired only by experience; and the whole beauty and grandeur of the art consists, in my opinion, in being able to get above all singular forms, local customs, particularities, and details of every kind. (44)

In laying out these concerns, Reynolds provides a clear statement of his views on the interrelations between custom, nature, and art. Reynolds suggests that experience and observation are the means of discovering the "ideal perfection and beauty" of nature. Barrell has pointed out that Reynolds, in his earlier work, views "local customs" as an impediment to the perception of ideal beauty (*Political Theory* 71, 141; "English Art" 161). Given that experience is something one acquires continuously, and not always as a function of conscious deliberation, it might at first glance appear that "experience" in this passage is similar to, and operates much like, custom as defined in *Idler* #82: as an essentially automatic process by which one acquires a knowledge of beautiful

forms, a process that is based in natural principles of perception. But this is not the case. It is "local customs" that are now equated with "particularities" and "details," which are words that Reynolds had previously used to describe the lower form of nature. At the same time, Reynolds presents experience in direct opposition to custom.

But in the third discourse, Reynolds reveals that custom is involved in the perception of beauty. Reynolds suggests that the artist who would develop an ability to distinguish "a just idea of beautiful forms" must do so by means of "a long habit of observing" (44). It is now "habit," or regular practice, that allows the artist to discern and then represent general nature. The competent artist, who has successfully derived an ideal of perfection from close observation of nature, is able to represent this ideal on canvas, which means that nature can be *perfected*, with all that this would seem to imply about the ability of art in particular and human activity in general to deliver what nature is itself incapable of supplying. It would appear that from a practice of long habit, the artist can accomplish what nature cannot do alone—produce a tangible instance of its own perfect state.

Like the experience that Reynolds also invokes to explain how one can acquire knowledge of beauty, it seems that this "long habit" is not identical with that version of custom described in issue #82 of the *Idler*. So given that instances of habit and custom are, at various moments in Reynolds's *oeuvre*, being presented as the keys to unlocking the source of the general aspects of

nature, what is the significance of Reynolds's warning, which concludes the passage cited above, that the artist should disavow "local customs" (among other things) in the effort to achieve what he later calls a "just idea of beautiful forms" (44)? Why does Reynolds claim that a long habit leads the artist down the path to the ideal in nature while simultaneously maintaining that local customs can potentially hinder the artist in coming to this recognition? At least in the third discourse, words such as "custom" and "prejudice"—and even, to some extent, "fashion"—all refer to socialized forms that, through the overpowering inertia of a tradition, normalize the actions and conduct of individuals in communities.[22] Whereas communal customs force themselves on those living in the community, the habit is a patterned behaviour that one accepts as part of a free and deliberate choice to govern oneself.[23] The difference is unmistakable. Reynolds maps out these issues in terms of a distinction between what people do with conscious intent, and what they do, without ever fully considering the implications of their actions, as an essentially automatic response to their heritage and history.

We should also be sensitive to the deeper implications of Reynolds's choice to group these local customs, which figure so negatively in the third discourse, together with "singular forms," "particularities" and "details of every kind." For this choice literally suggests that local customs, to the extent that they are directly associated with the "deformed" nature of appearances, are somehow "more natural" than regular, individual habits. Reynolds is, then, invoking two

kinds of habit or custom at this point in his third discourse.[24] One kind is very close to the lower form of nature, and is indeed almost identical with it. Reynolds depicts the second kind as essentially the opposite of the first, and unlike the first kind, the second can allow one access to a form of nature that is barred to the first. There is then a sense in which long habit, implying a rigorous practice that Reynolds sees as so intrinsic to the training and activities of the successful painter, is unrelated to custom and its cognates. It is notable that, in the fourth discourse, Reynolds will speak of "particular customs and habits" as if these words are synonymous with each other and with "a partial view of nature" (that is, a perspective that is limited and so cannot provide any useful insight into general nature) (73). In this passage from the fourth discourse, habit is depicted as being so much like custom that both imply an inability to think or act outside a framework limited by tradition. What is interesting is that this form of custom is now viewed as a barrier to the perception of general nature when, in an earlier essay, a different form of custom—one conflated with nature—was presented as the sole means by which communities come to recognize ideal beauty in nature.

Later in the third discourse, Reynolds develops the concept of a custom that inhibits, works against, or conceals one kind of nature at least. Here, strangely, the emphasis is initially on the common form of nature that was earlier conflated with this same form of custom. The structure now being opposed to nature is identified as "fashion," a word that Reynolds often uses interchangeably with "customs" and "manners" (see 48-49). Reynolds imposes on all of these

terms a pronounced sense of the temporary, as if he intends to use them only to describe trends of the moment (as opposed to more longstanding patterns of behaviour that might come under another name, such as "tradition"). Reynolds suggests that the manner in which people typically hold their bodies is an accumulated outcome of education, and hence is not a natural predisposition:

> Perhaps I cannot better explain what I mean, than by reminding you of what was taught us by the Professor of Anatomy, in respect to the natural position and movement of the feet. He observed that the fashion of turning them outwards was contrary to the intent of nature, as might be seen from the structure of the bones, and from the weakness that proceeded from that manner of standing. To this we may add the erect position of the head, the projection of the chest, the walking with straight knees, and many such actions, which we know to be merely the result of fashion, and what nature never warranted, as we are sure that we have been taught them when children. (48)

I would like to consider this important passage in some depth. We are given an explanation in the passage of how such fashions come about. Although normal in a social sense, the fashion is contrary to the principles of universal nature as manifested in the design of human beings. Reynolds is suggesting that there is a relation between certain kinds of conduct and the natural form and function of the body. The human body is *formed* to be carried in a certain way, and so it may be assumed that the body, if left to its own devices, will naturally conform to this standard in most cases. Deviations from this standard occur as a result of the demands and restrictions placed on individuals in social life. Social forms force themselves on individuals and shape behaviour in ways that are "contrary to the intent of nature." It is significant that Reynolds is speaking here about form. It is

the given form of the body that imposes certain requirements on action; human conduct in a state of nature would then be an extension of human form. Fashion causes behaviour, understood again as form, to take a different shape; and so fashion, too, is being understood here largely in terms of outward form or appearance.

Indeed, Reynolds often represents custom and nature in terms of form in his writings. It is evident, for instance, that Reynolds imagines fashion and nature largely as form in the following passage, in which he maps out a set of working distinctions between the specific variants of these terms revealed herein:

> When the Artist has by diligent attention acquired a clear and distinct idea of beauty and symmetry; when he has reduced the variety of nature to the abstract idea; his next task will be to become acquainted with the genuine habits of nature, as distinguished from those of fashion. For in the same manner, and on the same principles, as he has acquired the knowledge of the real forms of nature, distinct from accidental deformity, he must endeavour to separate simple chaste nature, from those adventitious, those affected and forced airs or actions, with which she is loaded by modern education. (47-48)

Reynolds's use of the phrase "genuine habits of nature" is potentially confusing, and would seem almost to point to a further confusion in his thought between custom and nature.[25] Nonetheless, the word "habit," which could at that time, in a sense now obsolete, indicate the "outward appearance" of the human body (*OED* 6.993), is here applied to external form in general.[26] Nature and fashion are thus both being described in terms of appearance or form. It should be clear that defining the customary in terms of form provides certain advantages for Reynolds in his attempt to discredit custom as a largely meaningless distraction

in the artist's pursuit of true beauty. He is, after all, presenting form as if it were secondary to essence or content. Reynolds can then complain that nature is hidden from our view by "forced airs," a phrase that we would expect to have a derogatory usage.

In describing his method for revealing beauty in nature, Reynolds alludes to a personified nature that is gendered female. Reynolds compares this nature directly to a "chaste" woman who suffers under the *forced* airs that keep her locked away from view. Airs and affectations are then equated metaphorically with a kind of rakish masculinity that forces itself on nature as woman. The artist is cast in the role of the helpful rescuer, who, rising to the defence of Lady Nature, frees her from her captor. According to Bourdieu, the principles of Kantian aesthetics were founded on the rejection of both the gross pleasures of "the people" and the venal pleasures of "the court"; Kantian aesthetics thus positioned the cultivated person between two social extremes (492-94). Reynolds would seem to be establishing effectively the same position for the artist.

So Reynolds distinguishes between general nature and human fashion on the basis of form, and he appears to be reluctant to imagine the ideal other than as form. In the first half of the passage, there is a loose identity between nature and fashion in that both are represented as forms. This identity immediately breaks down, however, in the second half of the passage, in which "simple chaste nature" is described not as form, but as a content or essence that is

obscured or "loaded" by "affected and forced airs or actions." It would appear that social forces, here understood as a body of learned behaviours and denoted by the term "airs," exert pressures on general nature, superimposing particular forms onto it and changing its external appearance in the process. The literal implication is then that nature remains waiting, to all intents and purposes intact and whole, underneath this added surplus.[27] It is unclear how we should read this situation in light of the fact that general nature (or ideal beauty) is usually described by Reynolds in terms that suggest it does not exist as such. Can the ideal in nature exist and yet *not* exist? Or is this apparent contradiction an outcome of the normal limitations of descriptive language to capture its intention?

The same dichotomy described above between form and content is reproduced in descriptions of general nature from other passages in this discourse, although its explication seems least ambiguous in the passage just cited. In that instance already mentioned in which Reynolds discusses factors that determine the positioning of human feet, we are presented with a far more complicated version of it. For if the manner in which the feet are positioned is a matter of form, it should be obvious that the feet themselves, understood as physical objects that are ordered in particular way, are a part of material nature. Here form is represented as a direct outgrowth of a kind of material content, and to precisely the extent that the position of the feet is naturally limited by their structure. It seems almost certain, however, that by the "natural position and movement of the feet," Reynolds means one more instance of general nature: an

ideal arrangement of the feet as distinct from any conceivable practice of materially positioning the feet in space. We may also surmise that just as the forms of all feet that we actually observe belong to lower nature, there are also ideals of the feet that correspond to general nature. If we follow the logic of the ideal that was presented in *Idler* #82, then a manner of placing the feet that follows "the intent of nature" should not, in theory, be something that exists in external nature as such; it is not as if one could ever position one's own feet precisely in this ideal fashion. But the notion that the feet are positioned in space seems to imply that they are material, whether or not they are technically ideal feet.

The term "nature" is also used by Reynolds to indicate a normative state of affairs. To return to Reynolds's analogy of the natural manner of positioning the feet, nature not only describes the physical structure of the feet themselves, but also corresponds to the *normal condition of the feet*, or, to put the matter in somewhat circular terms, the intrinsic nature of the feet. We should also keep in mind that in the current discourse "nature" normally means "general nature," evidence of which can be gleaned from the fact that throughout the discourse nature is opposed explicitly to custom and its cognates, which are associated quite consistently here with the common, the local, and thus, in a distant if still tangible way, with common or lower nature. But nature is also frequently used to mean the nature of things, and in a sense that would seem to render it different from common nature, or the nature of the local, the particular, and the deformed.

For the problem with common nature is that it is not meant to represent the actual commonality of existence. It was clear in the essays published in the *Idler* that ideal nature was understood by Reynolds as the common point connecting all of the various forms of a thing. If nature understood as the nature of things is not some new sense of the word, then it would seem to have more in common with—and might to some extent be conflated with—general nature. Yet understood as the nature of things, the concept of nature has significant points of contact with certain conceptions of custom, and this is a relation that Reynolds develops quite explicitly:

> to retain the true simplicity of nature, is a task more difficult that at first sight it may appear. The prejudices in favour of the fashions and customs that we have been used to, and which are justly called a second nature, make it too often difficult to distinguish that which is natural, from that which is the result of education; they frequently even give a predilection in favour of the artificial mode; and almost every one is apt to be guided by those local prejudices, who has not chastised his mind, and regulated the instability of his affections by the eternal invariable idea of nature. (49)

In describing "fashions and customs" as "second nature," Reynolds is literally suggesting that social forms can often, if left unchecked, govern thought and action in civil society much as innate principles were thought to do in a state of nature.[28] For Reynolds reveals that we become "used to" customs over time, and thus develop "prejudices" for them. Up to a certain point, this is not unlike the logic Reynolds had used in his third *Idler* essay in order to describe how custom determines preferences for beauty. There seems to be no other way, given the kinds of statements that Reynolds has previously made, to explain how

these prejudices are acquired than to say that we come to favour certain customs because they are the most common social forms that we normally encounter. Again, when speaking of customs and similar topics, Reynolds often gives the impression that they are acquired automatically, as if they are part of a social background that one cannot choose to resist nor even interrogate until, at the very least, one has successfully "chastised his mind, and regulated the instability of his affections."

Barrell has argued that, by the time Reynolds wrote the later seventh discourse, he had come to regard second nature as essentially equivalent to universal or general forms of custom, and, to this extent, as opposed to the local customs that he tends to associate with lower or local people (*Political Theory* 143, 155; "English Art" 164-65).[29] It is certain, however, that Reynolds equates second nature in the passage cited above with these same local customs, which he refers to in the passage as "local prejudices" and as the "artificial mode." Indeed, Reynolds depicts second nature in decidedly negative terms, and the implication is that he regards second nature in this context much like he does all other aspects of the local: as a hindrance to the perception of universal nature.

Although Reynolds directly contrasts second nature with nature, I want to suggest that second nature functions in ways that are analogous to nature understood as a determining material system. Here second nature replaces the state of nature in which the lower or uncultivated people exist. In the structure that is being created here, the notion of a state of nature is supplanted as a way

of accounting for the normal reactions of people who have not cultivated their minds and imaginations. Whereas "state of nature" implies a sense of generality, as if it applied to every uncultivated person, Reynolds describes "second nature" as a manifestation of local prejudices and customs. The concept of second nature also carries the implication that, to all intents and purposes, human life does not take place outside customary relations. Second nature thus presents a more nuanced version of the basic idea implied by a state of nature, which is that of a system that can override and determine the content of human thought and action.

So whether inadvertently or not, Reynolds equates custom and fashion with a version of nature by depicting the customary as a normative background state from which one must emerge in order to live authentically. Indeed, he substitutes custom for human nature in cases in which he refers to human self-development; this fact alone indicates that Reynolds often views custom as if it were analogous to a social or communal nature.[30] That Reynolds is not claiming in the third discourse that custom is a universal form is revealed by the fact that he consistently links custom with the local. For Reynolds is not presenting custom as a general condition of all societies, except insofar as local societies will presumably make their own customs in accordance with local conditions. It is this local quality that explains why Reynolds seems to view custom negatively in the third discourse. A localized custom can never provide one with a means to attain any real insight into general nature. Reynolds is not suggesting that the

erstwhile artist should seek to escape social life entirely, but he does imply that the prevailing sentiments in a society unable to rise above its own local prejudices will always hamper the efforts of its artists who wish to acquire true insights into nature.

Although Reynolds is discussing the improvement of *art* in the third discourse, we should not overlook his warnings against deviating from nature. Reynolds observes that fashions can "frequently even give a predilection in favour of the artificial mode," and his tone suggests that he finds the idea shocking. For Reynolds, art must not be "artificial" in any sense that would imply either a lack of genuineness or a false representation of nature. Indeed, the mark of good art is always its fidelity to nature. But since Reynolds is suggesting that prevailing social attitudes are the main obstacle to the perception of ideal beauty in nature, the reform of art would appear to require either the reform of society itself, or, for the individual, an alternative relation to society. Reynolds focuses on promoting the second of these alternatives, since he considers the presence of "limited" fashions and customs to be an inevitable part of modern social life. Yet he praises Classical civilization as a possible model for the artist, and argues that the "Ancients" existed in harmony with general natural principles:

> Here then, as before, we must have recourse to the Ancients as instructors. It is from a careful study of their works that you will be enabled to attain to the real simplicity of nature; they will suggest many observations, which would probably escape you, if your study were confined to nature alone. And, indeed, I cannot help suspecting, that in this instance the ancients had an easier task than the moderns. They had, probably, little or nothing to unlearn, as their manners were nearly approaching to this desirable

> simplicity; while the modern artist, before he can see the truth of things, is obliged to remove a veil, with which the fashion of the times has thought proper to cover her. (49)

We see again the use of gendered language: now "the fashion of the times" is a "veil" hiding Lady Nature from those who would look upon her true beauty. The operative difference between the ancients and moderns is expressed in the notion that the former had "little or nothing to unlearn," which suggests that they had not yet developed artificial or local fashions and customs that then concealed general nature from them. But in the "modern" times in which Reynolds is writing, nature and social life have diverged. The social has been separated from nature, and the natural has been ejected—out of "manners" and out of life—into its own domain, to languish in near invisibility, hidden by the "fashion of the times." It is then significant that Reynolds returns here to the imagery of fashion as an appearance or "veil" that effectively obscures the genuine nature underneath it. It is not as if nature has literally gone away. It is no great jump from this sense of custom as a covering or veil to the position that custom also, like a veil, changes the appearance of nature. So that which lies underneath the veil of custom can only be seen through it in skewed forms. This is really the first point at which Reynolds introduces a concept that will eventually become familiar in theorizations about culture: culture or custom as a construction that mediates all human interaction with what is then represented as the "real" world of nature (Eagleton, *Culture* 91-95; Evernden 22-25; Soper 32-34). The actual metaphor Reynolds uses to structure the relation between custom and nature is one of

spatial levels: custom sits on top of nature, and human beings stand above custom, which then serves as our foundation.

Assuming that humans need a determining epistemological frame that serves to tell us our place in the world, custom becomes for us what nature was formerly, in that imagined historical epoch before we entered modernity and left nature behind: the *world* as we know it. As Reynolds presents it, custom not only mediates the world, but also acts as that world for us. In his discussion of "culturalism," according to which "everything in human affairs is a matter of culture" (*Culture* 91), Terry Eagleton points out that this position "tends to decry the natural while reproducing it. If culture really does go all the way down, then it seems to play just the same role as nature, and feels just as natural to us" (*Culture* 94). Although we should not forget that the terminology Eagleton uses is marked by its recent origins, his discussion of culturalism provides one context for interpreting the concepts of custom and second nature that Reynolds develops in the third discourse. It is perhaps from such a perspective that we may best understand why Reynolds describes custom as a kind of *second* nature; for his idea of custom has the capacity to act as a substitute for the first nature.[31]

In a general sense, Reynolds presents custom and its cognates as images of the nature in opposition to which he defines them. Throughout the discourse, nature is depicted as the way things are, or as the proper state of things. Custom is *like* nature and it is in some sense an image of it, but it is still *not*

nature as such. Since the conditions of modern life have separated us from our intrinsic natures, we come to exist in a world of our own making—a state, not of nature, but of custom. What really distinguishes custom from nature is the lack of authenticity that Reynolds attributes to the former; custom, then, is imitation incarnate. In serving as our lived world, custom paradoxically becomes our second nature, but even so it is still, according to Reynolds, only a pale image of a more authentic original.

I previously noted that the word "habit" seems to be used in the third discourse predominantly to denote form or appearance. We are now in a better position to understand the actual complexities of this term. For it is quite possible that by "habits of nature" Reynolds may be obliquely referring to "habit" as "the way in which one holds or has oneself," here understood specifically in terms of the "outward appearance" of the body (see *OED* 6.993). Since Reynolds is speaking of ideal situations, he would seem to have in mind a kind of form. It is also apparent that the ideal carriage of the body—the perfect manner of carrying the body as intended by nature—may also be understood as a matter of form. The important question is whether these habits of nature refer to personal conduct understood in a universal sense (a sense corresponding to Reynolds's interest in the positioning of subjects in portraiture), or whether these habits might also suggest idealized forms of social life: a general or universal rubric of custom. Reynolds does tend to focus on the external appearance of the body precisely because he is largely speaking about portraiture and sculpture. Yet his

reference to the more natural manners of the ancients suggests that he may have been trying to envision in ancient civilization a social order in which customs, manners, and similar formations continue to remain close to idealized "habits of nature."

Working behind this discussion is a tacit narrative of the birth of society—of that moment when humans emerge from nature for the first time and enter into social relations with others in communities. Reynolds is implying that this transition from nature to society, which is accompanied by the development of customary relations that compel our perceptions and attitudes, occurs essentially by happenstance; it is not as if communities make a deliberate choice to be constrained by customary structures of belief and perception.[32] Although we had already brought ourselves out of nature at a moment in history before the founding of ancient civilization, the members of that civilization were still close enough to general nature that their actions continued to bear some relation to a set of putatively more natural behaviours. One effect of Reynolds's introduction of this narrative of social origins is to further undermine any distinctions that he otherwise projects between nature and custom. For if customary forms of social life are to be understood in terms of a transition from a more natural state, these forms are then not necessarily categorically different from that state, but rather may be different, to use the formulation provided by Kate Soper, only in "kind or degree" (41). We who now inhabit complex societies have moved some considerable distance away from nature, but at some point—or so Reynolds

would seem to insinuate—we must have straddled both realms, and this situation would not have been possible if nature was always an entirely different order, a phantasmal ideal that does not exist in a sense that would have meaning for us.

The seventh discourse: custom as social nature

Although the idea that custom is nature—or is at least analogous to it—is never again raised in the *Discourses* quite as explicitly as in the third discourse, Reynolds continues to develop it to some extent in his seventh discourse (1776). The question of the relations between custom and nature is mentioned in the seventh discourse primarily in connection with "taste." It is in this discourse that Reynolds first considers in depth the problem of taste and its sources. The seventh discourse has some aspects in common with other treatises on taste from the same period, including David Hume's *Of the Standard of Taste* (1757), Edmund Burke's *Of Taste* (1759), and Alexander Gerard's *An Essay on Taste* (1759; 1780).[33] All of the writers in this group, for instance, are to some degree concerned with the problem of discovering the real basis, whether natural or customary, of the rules of art and the "standard of taste," the latter understood primarily as a guide for differentiating good from bad art. In describing his purpose in the seventh discourse, Reynolds observes that "[e]very art, like our own, has in its composition fluctuating as well as fixed principles. It is an attentive enquiry into their difference that will enable us to determine how far we are influenced by custom and habit, and what is fixed in the nature of things"

(134). Hence Reynolds suggests that he will try to rigorously distinguish between the natural and customary underpinnings of taste. If this is the objective that Reynolds sets out to accomplish, it is nonetheless characteristic that he frequently ends up conflating the very terms he overtly attempts to differentiate.

Reynolds goes to great lengths to demonstrate that there are indeed fixed principles in art, and that such principles are natural. But it becomes apparent that he is really more interested in customary attributions of value and beauty. For Reynolds approaches the customary basis of taste with a sense of urgency, revealing that customs continually intrude onto our perceptions and even have a significant impact on our judgments about art and beauty on a day-to-day level; we must, then, or so Reynolds would seem to be suggesting, form a coherent theory of custom and its influence on taste so that we will then know how to account for it, and will be better able to discern the precise extent to which taste is actually "fixed in the nature of things." Insofar as Reynolds is attempting to find a way in this discourse to define and then exclude customary attributions of beauty, he appears to presume a clear demarcation between custom and nature.

As an example to focus his arguments, Reynolds refers again and again to a range of factors that surround the disposition of the body: styles of dress, hairstyles, deportment, and so forth. To Reynolds, it is clear that such factors change radically in different places and eras. But if fashion is always a question of attributions of beauty, then does this extreme variability indicate that there is no rationale for making sound judgments about beauty in any context? To

differentiate between the natural and customary foundations of taste, and to formulate a reliable means of showing that nature constitutes the true basis of taste and value, Reynolds again invokes the distinction between general (or invariable) and transitory: "The component parts of dress are continually changing from great to little, from short to long; but the general form still remains: it is still the same general dress which is comparatively fixed, though on a very slender foundation; but it is on this which fashion must rest" (136). Although Reynolds does not say so explicitly, there is in this passage a tacit sense that one could make valid statements about what is good or bad in dress and in other matters of fashion, even if such statements would necessarily be general and abstract. That element of fashion corresponding to general principles is open to our judgments.

But Reynolds wants to show that preferences for fashion are largely the effects of custom. So he suggests that the different preferences for styles of dress and for the external adornment of the body that are expressed by Europeans and non-Europeans respectively are equally valid; this is so precisely because neither fashions nor our preferences for particular fashions over others derive from determinate principles in universal nature. We are then left with the impression that those aspects of social life involving the production and exchange of signs and images in the context of fashion are based firmly in custom:

> taste in dress ... is certainly one of the lowest subjects to which this word is applied; yet, as I have before observed, there is a right

> even here, however narrow its foundation respecting the fashion of any particular nation. But we have still more slender means of determining, to which of the different customs of different ages or countries we ought to give the preference, since they seem to be all equally removed from nature. (137)

It is notable that Reynolds alludes to a way of determining which customs are closer to nature—to universality—than others. It is significant, then, that he refuses to make such a determination. According to Leypoldt, the passage shows Reynolds positing "that some objects and practices are exclusively cultural..." (342). I suggest that we need to remain sceptical of attempts to impose such an obviously modern conception onto Reynolds's thought without careful consideration. Does his sense of "custom" coincide with a modern definition of the "cultural," as Leypoldt implies? What, after all, does Reynolds mean by "customs of different ages or countries" in practice? Reynolds effectively answers this last question himself when he provides an example of such customs, and makes it clear that he is referring to the external disposition of the body:

> If an European, when he has cut off his beard, and put false hair on his head, or bound up his own natural hair in regular hard knots, as unlike nature as he can possibly make it; and after having rendered them immoveable by the help of the fat of hogs, has covered the whole with flour, laid on by a machine with the utmost regularity; if, when thus attired he issues forth, and meets a Cherokee Indian, who has bestowed as much time at his toilet, and laid on with equal care and attention his yellow and red oker on particular parts of his forehead or cheeks, as he judges most becoming; whoever of these two despises the other for this attention to the fashion of his country, which ever first feels himself provoked to laugh, is the barbarian. (137)

By suggesting that the expression of identity through images and the negotiation of rank in terms of badges and totems are matters of custom or fashion, Reynolds returns to the position that custom and fashion constitute a human social nature, one that effectively defines us in given social situations. For it is custom that identifies a particular badge, or even, presumably, a particular idiom, with a position in the social network; and so it is custom that makes social relations meaningful. Reynolds is thus describing custom as if it plays a determinate role in regulating social expression and identity. More importantly, if everything we do and say in social situations is a reflection of custom, and if all of the many images we see around us encode customary imperatives, then custom effectively comes to stand in place of nature as the force that shapes humanity.[34] Nonetheless, Reynolds is still speaking of the disposition of the body and its external decoration, which indicates that he limits custom and fashion to appearances. In this particular passage, Reynolds suggests that custom has the power to shape human identity only in terms of a restricted context. The model of custom he presents is quite unlike what we would now refer to as "culture."

Reynolds actually implies throughout the *Discourses* that universal nature is always the determinate factor in the form of things, even in situations in which the general form is not particularly evident, such as in dress, the carriage of the body, and personal grooming. That we can readily bring to mind any number of such situations does not then indicate that custom is ultimately determinate, but merely that, in these particular situations, the limited or imperfect forms of

things—and these *are* determined by fashions—are most apparent or representative. Of course, as Reynolds acknowledges all along, the imperfect forms are *always* most apparent in a given class, since general nature is notable precisely for its lack of visibility. In the realm of human social life, we are surrounded on all sides by custom, and there is little we can do to escape it:

> Opinions generally received and floating in the world, whether true or false, we naturally adopt and make our own; they may be considered as a kind of inheritance to which we succeed and are tenants for life, and which we leave to our posterity very nearly in the condition in which we received it; it not being much in any one man's power either to impair or improve it. The greatest part of these opinions, like current coin in its circulation, we are used to take without weighing or examining; but by this inevitable inattention many adulterated pieces are received, which, when we seriously estimate our wealth, we must throw away. (120)

Custom, like nature, imposes a set of constraints on human life. The general impression produced by the seventh discourse is that custom is, or is at least akin to, a second nature; custom is, in effect, a kind of social nature that humanity has made for itself. It is because custom is essentially unavoidable that Reynolds can suggest, as he does directly elsewhere but only implicitly here, that it functions much as nature does in other circumstances. But this is not to say that there is no choice but to accept custom. Reynolds points out that although we are subject to customary relations, given that we cannot escape from them unless we remove ourselves totally from society, it is possible through careful deliberation to gain some awareness of the limitations that they impose.

If custom is a limiting condition, it is also a shaping condition; custom structures our attitudes and our conduct in ways we cannot imagine. It is this

shaping feature that leads Reynolds to describe custom as an "inheritance to which we succeed and are tenants for life...." The metaphor being used thus suggests that custom should perhaps be understood in much the same terms as *place*. This is a significant metaphor, for it implies that custom as social nature provides the boundaries that, like the walls of a house or the markers around a field, establish who we are by setting us apart from the rest of the world. It is our home in the world. Custom is a part of our identity, for, like the places we inhabit, custom is incorporated into our perceptions of ourselves, and into our acts of self-understanding. Custom, then, carries with it a sense of limitation, but also of fulfillment.

The thirteenth discourse: artifice as nature

In his thirteenth discourse (1786), Reynolds returns to some of the issues that had preoccupied him since he first published his ideas about art and the practice of painting. The overall aim of the discourse is to establish how art relates to nature, both general and particular, and why art pleases the senses if it is indeed a form of artifice, and so might well be considered the unnatural product of human hands. For in the seventh discourse, Reynolds had suggested that "whatever pleases has in it what is analogous to the mind, and is therefore, in the highest and best sense of the word, natural" (127). In other words, the human pleasure response is a symptom, as it were, of the normal functioning of the mind when it encounters particular sensations. But if it is "natural" for the

mind to feel pleasure, does this not mean that the mind is most pleased when contemplating phenomena that are equally "natural," as opposed to that which appears artificial?

In engaging such problems directly, Reynolds reaffirms his longstanding argument that good art should not depend on the imitation of lower or common nature:

> Painting is not only not to be considered as an imitation, operating by deception, but ... is, and ought to be, in many points of view, and strictly speaking, no imitation at all of external nature. Perhaps it ought to be as far removed from the vulgar idea of imitation, as the refined civilized state in which we live, is removed from a gross state of nature; and those who have not cultivated their imaginations, which the majority of mankind certainly have not, may be said, in regard to arts, to continue in this state of nature. (232-33)

Barrell has pointed out that Reynolds in this way limits the ability to make judgments about the best art to the best classes of people (*Political Theory* 78). To claim that the "majority of mankind ... continue in this state of nature" is a criticism, a declaration that those belonging to the majority lack whatever finer accomplishments a knowledge of "refined" culture—of civilization—brings with it. Reynolds posits an essentially incommensurable divide between this "state of nature" and "the refined civilized state" in which *he* lives. The implication is that art should have no relation at all to common nature, and, moreover, that one can only gain a knowledge of universal nature—effectively the sole legitimate subject of good art—through the possibilities that are afforded by education and cultivation.

Reynolds initially suggests that the effect of good art on the senses can be only partially explained as a natural relation between the art object and the observer, which suggests that we should refrain from attempting to reduce good art directly to nature:

> It is the lowest style only of arts, whether of Painting, Poetry, or Musick, that may be said, in the vulgar sense, to be naturally pleasing. The higher efforts of those arts, we know by experience, do not affect minds wholly uncultivated. This refined taste is the consequence of education and habit; we are born only with a capacity of entertaining this refinement, as we are born with a disposition to receive and obey all the rules and regulations of society; and so far it may be said to be natural to us, and no further. (233)

If good art affects the senses by causing pleasure, it generally does so only in the case of observers who have been able to develop their potential for sustaining such a response. Reynolds is suggesting that we must learn to enjoy good art; the ability to appreciate a fine painting does not come naturally, but is instead an acquired aptitude. But is Reynolds dismissing the naturalistic basis of art appreciation, or is he covertly attempting to incorporate nature back into the appreciation of good art? The latter would seem to be the case. For despite arguing that the best art never imitates nature, Reynolds is unwilling to do away with the position that good art affects the senses through a natural process. If reactions to art cannot be explained in natural terms, then there would appear to be no certain foundation for making aesthetic judgments about art in the first place. Rather than being true conceptions rooted in the structure of the human senses, aesthetic judgments would then be mere reflections of customary biases.

Despite advancing significant discussions of custom, habit, and art in his writings, it is striking that Reynolds is so often unable to refrain from speaking about nature. Although much of his work on aesthetics is devoted to exploring how that newer concept of custom accounts for human social behaviour independently of nature, it is still nature, considered as a standard, as an ideal, and as a universal connecting all human beings, that consistently holds his attention. Reynolds frequently returns to nature in order to provide explanations for his assertions about art, its practice, and its appreciation. It is fair to say that Reynolds cannot do without specific ideas of nature, since they are the model for many of his conceptions of custom, art, society, and the human world in general.

This predilection for modelling concepts on nature may partially clarify why Reynolds affirms that the effect of good art on the senses should be understood as a natural response, but even so, Reynolds now qualifies this assertion by suggesting that the best art pleases the senses precisely because it is an artifice:

> Poetry addresses itself to the same faculties and the same dispositions as Painting, though by different means. The object of both is to accommodate itself to all the natural propensities and inclinations of the mind. The very existence of Poetry depends on the licence it assumes of deviating from actual nature, in order to gratify natural propensities by other means, which are found by experience full as capable of affording such gratification. (234)

Reynolds may be unwilling to do away with nature as such, but his unwillingness can be interpreted as a symptom of his reliance on such conceptions. Poetry is, strictly speaking, a form of artifice, and yet it is able to satisfy "natural propensities" in the human mind and senses. What is the significance of an art

that can "accommodate itself" to the nature of human beings? Such a model of artistic perception tends, in subtle ways, to call into question the whole distinction between art and nature that Reynolds seeks elsewhere in his writings to keep firmly in place. For if art has an intrinsic capacity to accommodate itself to human nature, a possible implication is that art is less a tool for manipulating nature than it is an extension of nature. Eagleton has observed a similar structure in the meanings of "culture," a word that in its origins as a verb of agricultural activity

> suggests a dialectic between the artificial and the natural, what we do to the world and what the world does to us. It is an epistemologically 'realist' notion, since it implies that there is a nature or raw material beyond ourselves; but it also has a 'constructivist' dimension, since this raw material must be worked up into humanly significant shape. So it is less a matter of deconstructing the opposition between culture and nature than of recognizing that the term 'culture' is already such a deconstruction.
>
> In a further dialectical turn, the cultural means we use to transform nature are themselves derived from it. (*Culture* 2-3)

Eagleton's statements about culture can be equally applied to the conceptions of poetry and art that Reynolds develops.[35] Why can poetry "accommodate itself" to human nature, if not because it bears a trace of human nature within itself? This is so precisely because, in Reynolds's thought, art may be understood as an outgrowth of nature—as a product of the work of cultivating and shaping nature. This model of an art that, in "deviating from actual nature" is still able to "gratify natural propensities," is "dialectical" in the exact sense intended by Eagleton. This is not to say that Reynolds's notion of art bridges or transcends distinct

concepts of nature and artifice, but rather that it combines them within itself and so partially undermines the differences that are often projected between them.[36]

In a discussion of landscape gardens, Reynolds provides an excellent illustration of what he means by an art that satisfies nature while diverging from it. Reynolds observes that a typical landscape garden of his time, despite the appearance of naturalness that is the typical outcome of its design, cannot be considered a natural space in any sense that would exclude design or human intentionality: "So also Gardening, as far as Gardening is an Art, or entitled to that appellation, is a deviation from nature; for if the true taste consists, as many hold, in banishing every appearance of Art, or any traces of the footsteps of man, it would then be no longer a Garden" (240). The landscape garden is what it is because it mixes artifice and nature, human design and material system. Reynolds is well aware that there is considerable ambiguity involved in the attempt to cultivate a natural space as art, and it is significant that he does not minimize this ambiguity by depicting gardens as either nature or art, but not both at once. Indeed, this is a fallacy that Reynolds attributes to those who see gardens as purely natural spaces containing no "traces of the footsteps of man."

In his comments on gardens, Reynolds provides some indication that he is attentive to the ways in which certain distinctions that he makes between human and natural in his writings are a product of conceptual schemas. In answer to the familiar definition of art as artifice and hence as entirely separate from nature, Reynolds offers the notion of an art that modifies nature, and so merges with it in

the process of design and production. Reynolds observes that distinctions between nature and artistry are provisional and shifting in the context of the garden. For Reynolds is aware that the concept "garden" is a classification, which describes a garden broadly as a human contrivance that contains the traces of both artistry and nature: "we define it, 'Nature to advantage dress'd,' and in some sense it is such..." (240). A particular garden might reveal much evidence of artistry in its construction and less of nature, another relatively less evidence of art but more of nature, and yet both could still be defined as gardens.

Although he never dispenses with the premise of a separated art and nature, Reynolds very deliberately undermines the boundaries between these concepts in his discussion of the structure of landscape gardens. There is a lesson here for understanding Reynolds's theorizations of nature/custom binaries. Reynolds's thinking on the subject of the boundaries between nature and art, or nature and custom, is always systematic; he produces distinctions between categories at various moments while effacing them at others because doing so allows him in any given instance to advance his theoretical aims. In attempting to contest the nature/culture binary, we must avoid simply leaping to the equally problematic assumption that the *true* reality is a homogenous one in which categories remain undifferentiated. Instead, we should recognize that all theorizations are conceptual models, and so are necessarily bounded by the conditions of their production. In his own approach to nature and custom in his writings on art, Reynolds demonstrates this principle in action. For in producing

particular relations between nature and custom as the situation of writing demands, Reynolds reveals his awareness that they are less "real" categories than they are conceptual structures, with values that are to some extent based on the purposes for which they are used.

Chapter Two
Place and the English Agricultural Landscape

Gilbert White's *The Natural History of Selborne* (1789) is often presented as the classic account of a specific kind of "place" in English country writing. According to a range of scholars over the years, including Cecil Emden (1956), Anthony Rye (1970), W.J. Keith (1974), Richard Mabey (1977; 1986), Donald Worster (1994), and Edward Hoagland (1997), the main impression conveyed by *Selborne* is its portrait of a quiet, harmonious parish, miraculously untouched by the profound and often disturbing changes associated with the development of agricultural capitalism during the eighteenth century.[37] This scholarly tradition describes White, who was Selborne's curate, as a benign and trustworthy patriarch on good terms with his parishioners, and it asserts that the people of Selborne, including the working poor, enjoyed a social and economic autonomy unknown in less fortunate places. Also central to this tradition is the notion that *Selborne* was one of the first texts to incorporate genuine attitudes of love and respect for animals.[38] This widespread representation of White, his parish, and *Selborne* is the result of a concerted process of selection, and there are two factors that explain its persistence.[39] The reverence for White often felt by admirers of the book has contributed to a predictable outcome: scholars have emphasized stability over crisis and harmony over conflict in their accounts of White, his writings, and the parish he inhabited; to suggest otherwise might well appear to impugn the man who lovingly watched over Selborne. It is also easy to

overlook the evidence of crisis in *Selborne*, a text remarkable for its continuous focus on the minutia of the physical world, as the following description reveals:

> The village stands in a sheltered spot, secured by the Hanger from the strong westerly winds. The air is soft, but rather moist from the effluvia of so many trees; yet perfectly healthy and free from agues.
>
> The quantity of rain that falls on it is very considerable, as may be supposed in so woody and mountainous a district. (16)

With language that is so simple and unaffected, it is small wonder that the parish depicted in *Selborne* has come to be interpreted as a place immune to history and historical crisis. There are, however, numerous signs in White's writings of conflict, crisis, and privation. Indeed, scholars who tend to emphasize the benign aspects of *Selborne* have also noted that the working poor in White's parish suffered certain hardships (see Keith 58-59; Worster 11). Nonetheless, no studies of *Selborne* systematically consider the abundant evidence in the text that challenges traditional scholarly interpretations of White's parish and his depictions of it.[40] My objective in this chapter is to select such evidence from *Selborne* and White's other writings in order to assemble a more balanced and nuanced assessment of his depiction of Selborne and its inhabitants. For White often describes an ongoing and multi-faceted crisis in his parish in the form of conflicts over land use, over the distribution of wealth and local resources, over "correct" knowledge of the natural world, and even over certain words and their histories.[41]

Selborne purports to be a natural history of one parish, a record of its author's consistent practice of observing flora, fauna, weather, and geography

over a period of more than 20 years. It is as a treatise on natural history that *Selborne* is most often celebrated. But White's book is also a cultural history of lived relations in the parish during the period in which it was compiled.[42] The book contains observations and commentary on local culture broadly conceived, including detailed discussions of the dwellings and occupations of the poor, their folk beliefs, their usage of Anglo-Saxon words, and extensive general information about political, social, and economic relations in the parish. White's other extant writings provide additional information about not only natural history, but also local culture and social relations. In particular, *The Antiquities of Selborne*, a historical account of the buildings and notable inhabitants of the parish that was originally appended to *The Natural History of Selborne*, provides substantial commentary on past and contemporary social relations, and even contains a few scattered observations on select aspects of the natural history of White's parish.

In assessing the meaning of eighteenth-century Selborne, I will be examining what we might call, for the purposes of analysis only, the separate "natural" and "cultural" components of that place, with emphasis on how these components interact and combine as they produce the parish. To develop a different understanding of how people lived in Selborne, it is necessary to examine how their circumstances were determined by a range of heterogeneous factors: not only their occupations, land-use practices, beliefs, and the local social and political relations they inhabited, but also their access to essential commodities such as agrarian and marginal land, food, sources of fuel, and

building materials for housing, and even the influences of weather conditions. One general implication of Marxist theories of historical materialism is that it is problematic to divide such factors as, for instance, "land" and "land-use practices" as if each belonged to the isolated categories of nature and culture respectively. The import of materialism is that supposedly discrete categories always compose an integrated whole.[43] In this chapter, I do not attempt to divide such subjects as land use and social hierarchy, vegetation and attitudes to its deterioration in the parish, or a great oak and its value to those who congregate around it. My aim is explicitly to consider these and other subjects together, for I believe that only in this way will the most complete accounts of the parish of Selborne be derived.[44]

Investigating living conditions in eighteenth-century Selborne

What were living conditions like, particularly for the working poor, in the parish of Selborne during White's lifetime? Were they generally benign, as many White scholars maintain? As J.V. Beckett (1990) has pointed out in his recent reinterpretation of the Agricultural Revolution, it is still largely accepted that the development of agrarian capitalism in Britain resulted in a certain amount of economic and social dislocation for the poor as existing agricultural practices were modernized, resulting in less work and lower wages, and as land previously held by the poor or in common was enclosed and redistributed (1-4, 25-28, 34-44). The fact that White was instrumental in forestalling a proposal in 1793 to

enclose the Selborne Common by an Act of Parliament has been interpreted as an indication that not only did White actively support common rights, but also that the economic conditions in the parish were hospitable for those who depended most on these rights: the working poor (see Holt-White 258-61; Mabey, *White* 213-14; Rye 155-56). What evidence is there in *Selborne* that economic and social relations then existing in the parish could work to the disadvantage of the poor?

Such speculations are useful if we are to develop a balanced interpretation of the situation in the parish. We can find examples of disenfranchised villages, and then in hindsight call attention to the problems, the inequity, and the hardships that resulted wherever the effects of eighteenth-century capitalist expansion and integration were felt firsthand. Yet our understanding of this historical process must remain incomplete if we neglect to examine localities that may at first glance appear to have escaped the worst disturbances. No reasonable argument can now be made that places existed in England that somehow escaped ultimate integration into the nascent capitalist economic and socio-political order. Nonetheless, even if we acknowledge that the least benign outcomes of the development of agricultural capitalism did not directly impact the parish of Selborne, this awareness does not then indicate that the parish was a living manifestation of the pastoral ideal, untouched by and existing outside of history. The social and material effects of capitalist expansion were felt even in Selborne.

Given that many scholars have described White as the embodiment of the fatherly parson who lovingly cares for his neighbours, it thus may be fair to say that traditional scholarly reconstructions of eighteenth-century Selborne can be symptomatic of the yearning for an imagined patriarchy that was benevolent and open-handed. It is somewhat paradoxical, then, that certain scholarly accounts seek to reinforce White's benign reputation by claiming, as Mabey has put it, that the village over which he ministered was "an independent even if not particularly prosperous community..." (*White* 29). Mabey's argument for an "independent" Selborne is largely based on the fact that the parish had no actual squire or other *local* landowner who could exercise any substantial influence over the social and economic relations in the parish, and so effectively determine the lives of the people inhabiting it (Mabey, *White* 29, 182; Rye 74-76). Oxford University's Magdalen College held most of the land in the parish manor, and the College was far away, both as a fact of geography, and, so the reasoning goes, as an overriding political and economic authority in Selborne parish and the surrounding region (Mabey, *White* 10, 28-29; Rye 74). Working behind such assertions is the recognition that patriarchal social relations in eighteenth-century Britain could be harshly exploitative towards the poor. This recognition is largely suppressed by making White represent a patriarchal order that provided for the material and spiritual needs of its inhabitants.

In *The Country and the City* (1973), Raymond Williams cautions against the nostalgia for what has been an enduring image in agricultural and social

history: the harmonious, open-field village before enclosure (100-7). Williams acknowledges that it was entirely possible for people on the fringe of such villages to eke out a life of "marginal independence" (101). These people at the borders of the socio-economic order were for the most part, according to Williams, the "unpropertied poor" (102). Their lives were sustained on the basis of common rights and the use of "mainly uncultivated land" (101). Williams observes that this marginal existence was not a very stable one, and it never quite managed to exist outside of hierarchical class relations in any true sense, despite its location at the periphery. Williams speculates that such an existence would have benefited from the absence of a big landowner (106). In the case of Selborne, it is very likely, as White scholars have often argued, that the lack of a parish squire and the remoteness of Magdalen College affected the character of the place for the better, allowing freedoms that would not otherwise have been possible. But too much can be made of these circumstances, as Williams's general discussion implies. We should still ask if there were other people, perhaps identifiable groups of them like the bigger farmers and tenants, whose property and social standing gave them a certain measure of power over the rest of the parish population. Perhaps no conflicts existed between a single powerful individual and the bulk of the parish's inhabitants, but there may well have been disputes and a degree of wrangling between different groups in the parish with interests that were at times opposed. What I am suggesting is that the absence

of a local squire in the parish does not rule out the possibility of class oppression and conflict.

White himself was a landowner of some means in the parish. According to Mabey, White held approximately forty acres of good agricultural land, a figure that seems not to include the extensive grounds immediately attached to his house in the village. Mabey also remarks that the portion of the average landholder was "between ten and twenty acres" (*White* 29). Mabey takes these relatively modest holdings as proof that "[n]o single landowner determined the pattern of farming locally, or was able to institute widespread changes in the landscape" (*White* 29). If by this we mean only the kind of power to dominate that very large landowners exercised on their estates and in the regions that surrounded them, then so much is true. But it needs to be emphasized that forty acres would have been no inconsiderable amount of land in Selborne or in any comparable parish, especially when contrasted with the lot of those who had no land at all. The absence of a single political authority in the region must have given even more prominence to those more important individuals and families who collectively held much of the parish's land. These larger landholders were essentially a loose class of leading farmers, and it takes little imagination to see just how decisively they could influence the lives of even the smaller landholders in the parish, people who moved in the orbit of the larger owners despite having some means of their own. More significantly, the class of proprietors together would have exercised great power over that far larger portion of the population

living in various degrees of disenfranchisement: the smallest tenants with very little land, farm labourers and servants, cottagers, and the destitute poor who depended absolutely on the larger landholders for incidental work and occasional charity.[45]

I want now to consider how some of the local social hierarchies in the parish were composed, as this information can be gleaned from White's writings. The vicar was a considerable person in Selborne parish. As Rye puts it, "in Selborne the Vicars were the nearest thing they had to a resident Squire" (74). White notes that the living associated with the parish was regarded as "a respectable piece of preferment," for it bestowed the rights to all tithes in the parish and a fair amount of arable land besides (*Antiquities* 372, 386). Another influential person in the parish was Lord Stawel, who lived only a short distance to the east and was on familiar terms with White. Lord Stawel had substantial holdings in Selborne, including Chapel farm and the royal forest of Wolmer, a vast expanse of open heath that comprised much of the land in the parish's eastern half (White, *Selborne* 29-30; *Antiquities* 432n2; qtd. in Holt-White 2.241). His influence seems not to have been particularly evident in the village of Selborne itself, which lay at the parish's western end, but it must have been more pronounced in Oakhanger hamlet near his own holdings in the eastern part of the parish. The remains of the old Selborne manor, a total of twelve acres scattered around the village, was in the possession of Norton Powlet, a squire in nearby East Tisted, until it was later acquired by Magdalen College in 1785 (*Antiquities*

386; Johnson 436n3 for 1772). Norton farm was owned by Sir Simeon Stuart and was worked by a succession of his tenants, including farmers named Young and Knight (qtd. in Holt-White 2.260-61).[46] There were also very large farming estates at Temple and Blackmoor. These two estates, as well as Norton and Chapel, were all "manor farms and freehold" (White, *Antiquities* 440), and so were held directly by their owners, rather than under a more limited form of tenure from Magdelen College.[47] Their importance in the agricultural system of the parish was considerable. The Priory and the Grange, both of which were farms leased from the College for a set period of years, were at some point held by farmers named Lassam and Spencer respectively (White, *Antiquities* 440; *Journals* 2.474). These were all people who, by virtue of their landholdings, exercised influence over the poorer inhabitants of the parish on a daily basis.

Below these larger proprietors were the copyholders, a group that included White and all remaining proprietors in the parish, and these copyholders could also, like White, accrue fairly large holdings in the parish. The copyholders held their lands from Magdalen College under "copyhold of inheritance" (*Antiquities* 440), a form of tenure that bestowed on "the farmer a stake in the property almost equal to a freehold" (Mingay 28; also 17, 39; see Hammond and Hammond 22-23; Hasbach 35-39, 72-73). Although copyholders technically did not own their land in the same way as the holders of the great manor farms, this form of tenure allowed parcels of land to stay in the possession of families at the death of the current tenant, and so it provided a means for families to accumulate

larger allotments over successive generations (Chambers and Mingay 46). The White family did just this, buying up the rights to all of the land behind their house in Selborne in order "to extend its grounds, until ... they could all look over the ha-ha through the vista ... and view one long park-like expanse..." (Rye 89). In this way the family managed over time to consolidate an extensive plot in the centre of the village.

The accumulation and consolidation of land over time in rural communities was one outcome of the development of agricultural capitalism (Chambers and Mingay 20, 42-43, 92-93; Beckett 45-53). Evidence of such accumulation in the parish is a reminder that Selborne, like many rural communities at the time, was exposed to the effects of agricultural capitalism as it transformed the British countryside. We might ask, then, how land was distributed in the parish. Walter Sidney Scott (1950) has described Selborne as a fairly typical open-field village, with several large fields farmed in common on a rotation system during the growing season and then opened to pasturage after the late-summer harvest ("Account" 200-1). There was also a large expanse of common waste land on top of the hill immediately to the west of the village. White's journals provide an ongoing record of the common sowing and harvesting practices, including the various crops that were planted in the fields. Walter Samuel Scott (1985) points out that "the slow process of the purchase of strips by the owners of other strips or by outsiders gradually made inroads on the common field system" as it existed in the parish (235). Hence those farmers with capital and influence could acquire

numbers of strips, and so could establish more substantial farms. Although this process does not appear to have immediately resulted in a parallel farming system to supersede the common field system, it was a form of agrarian capitalist accumulation, from which only farmers with sufficient capital could benefit.

The immediate holders of land in the parish could rent out portions of their property to people who then became their tenants. White himself had tenants on several of his farms, and much of his annual income derived from their rents.[48] In all such relationships, it seems likely that whatever tenancy conditions were normally adopted could not have been particularly secure, as a more permanent tenure would impose undesirable restrictions on the actual property holder. These small tenants were thus to varying degrees dependent on the good will of the people who owned their land. Disputes between tenants and the owners of the land did arise in the parish. White reveals that, after Magdalen College acquired the title to the old Selborne manor estate, it began consolidating the land as the leases of the pre-existing tenants expired when their holders died; for since the manor included three acres of land attached to the parsonage, it was seen as a desirable addition to the parsonage holdings (*Antiquities* 386, 440). The real danger that the family of a deceased tenant might not be able to renew the lease on their land because the owner desired it for some other purpose was, as G.E. Mingay (1990) observes, the main predicament under this type of tenure (17, 38-39). It is significant that White had disapproving things to say about the

prospect of dealing with small tenants on a regular basis, as is revealed in a letter in which he discusses a decision by one of his nephews, a clergyman with the usual benefices attached to his living, to shift the focus of his landed interests from farming to leasing:

> Nephew Edm[d], for which I highly commend him, is parting with all kinds of farming whatsoever: he lets all his tithes, and all his glebe; reserving only to himself three or four fields for his horses and cows. He will now know what he has to depend on: whereas both his late uncles were much imposed on; and were subject to all the rabble and hurry of common renters. (qtd. in Holt-White 2.156-57)

Instead of farming his holdings himself, which might require having to allot portions to small renters on temporary terms, White's nephew would presumably lease his lands henceforth to some farmer, probably under a fairly limited tenancy agreement; this tenant would then bear the responsibility for agricultural production, including the management of any sub-leases on portions of the holdings.[49]

At least the small tenants had holdings in the parish that would protect them from the worst kinds of conditions. What might be said of the lot of cottagers with little or no land, or of servants and farm labourers? White remarks, in a phrase often repeated by commentators, that the parish "abound[s] with poor; many of whom are sober and industrious, and live comfortably in good stone or brick cottages, which are glazed, and have chambers above stairs: mud buildings we have none" (*Selborne* 17). White also notes that "many scattered houses" were situated "along the verge of the forest" (*Selborne* 17), and it is likely these houses that were the cottages of the poor. Much has been made of

the first of these passages, which notably contains the revelation that the poor were indeed numerous in Selborne. It is significant that these passages furnish important information about how land and property in the parish was distributed.

If we think about what these kinds of distributions tell us, we can see that there was a geographical dimension to the social hierarchies in the parish. It is likely that the cottages White is referring to had at least some land attached to them. G.E. Fussell (1949) has pointed out that several Parliamentary Acts passed during the sixteenth century were intended to ensure that cottages would normally have at least a few acres of land. In practice, cottage holdings could be much smaller than this minimum, but it was the rare cottage that entirely lacked "a minute area of land ... a trifle of garden or such..." (4). The existence of such cottages in Selborne would have been instances of those "continuous small encroachments on the wastes" that had been occurring throughout rural England since the early-modern period (3), in the process of which people moved to marginal land on the peripheries of settled areas and their attached agricultural zones. It is also significant that Fussell describes the average cottage of the time as "stone, brick or half-timber, with one or two rooms upstairs, and some glazed, if unopened, windows. Thatch or tile was the usual roof, or sometimes local stone or slate slabs" (50). Ultimately, White's account implies that the housing conditions of the poor living in Selborne were hardly exceptional by the standards of rural society during the latter part of the eighteenth century.

Perhaps even more informative about the living conditions of the poor in Selborne are the incidental details of disputes over natural resources that White occasionally mentions in his text. For instance, White provides the following account of a dispute over wood rights in Holt forest that pitted the poor of several nearby parishes against Lord Stawel:

> A very large fall of timber, consisting of about one thousand oaks, has been cut this spring (viz., 1784) in the Holt forest; one-fifth of which, it is said, belongs to the grantee, Lord Stawel. He lays claim also to the lop and top: but the poor of the parishes of Binsted and Frinsham, Bentley and Kingsley, assert that it belongs to them; and, assembling in a riotous manner, have actually taken it all away. One man, who keeps a team, has carried home, for his share, forty stacks of wood. Forty-five of these people his lordship has served with actions. (*Selborne* 30)

Disputes over who possesses greater entitlement to use or profit from such commodities as land, timber, fuel, and animals are a particularly vexing problem for White. The stakes at the time were very high indeed, as White's account of the wood riot in the Holt reveals. Lord Stawel's desire to secure what he considers to be his legal right to a valuable commodity was at odds with both the needs of the parish poor for timber and with their sense of customary entitlement to a portion of the wood in question. It was a conflict between landed and subsistence interests. The scene gives an indication of just how dependent some of the poor may have been on such sources of timber, given that they would risk defying the local landowner in order to obtain it. Although White describes the poor as "riotous," and thus would seem to position himself in favour of the rights of the landed interest as represented by Lord Stawel, it is notable

that he does not raise any overt objections to the fact that the poor are taking wood that may not strictly belong to them, but only complains that some of the people are taking too much wood. As Rye observes, this may suggest that he does not deny the principles of common rights asserted by the poor in this case, but that he was scandalised when certain people attempted to rise above their station by claiming more than was traditionally allocated in the rural economy to members of their social class (157).

Conflicts over land and its uses in the parish

W.J. Keith has suggested that White's description of the houses of the poor implies that their living conditions were "fairly good," but that his account of the conflict over wood rights in Holt forest reveals that often "conditions left much to be desired" (58-59). Hence Keith concludes that "[t]he situation of the poor, though apparently stable, seems in fact to have been precarious..." (59). This is a defensible assertion given the circumstances, but more problematic is Keith's contention that "White was an honest and conscientious man, and, if any extreme hardship had existed, we can be sure that it would not have passed unrecorded" (58-59). The circumstances of Selborne's poor were always uncertain, as Keith rightly observes. A workhouse had stood in the village since at least 1780 (Scott, "Account" 213), and was the recourse of those who had no means of support. It is unreasonable to expect that there were no cases of "extreme hardship" in the parish for White to chronicle, nor is it particularly

accurate to suggest that his writings lack overt evidence of the effects of hardship and crisis. Depending on how it is interpreted, White's comment that "many" (but, significantly, not "all") of the poor in his parish are "sober and industrious," and are quite comfortable in their cottages, could also imply that some, or perhaps even *many* of the poor are in his judgment neither hard-working nor all that comfortable. White's anecdote about the conflict over wood in Holt forest is not the only revealing portrait of the crisis of rural life that at times exposed numbers of the labouring poor to conditions of hardship; there are many such direct statements in his writings.

White, for instance, devotes considerable attention to poaching in the private parks and royal forests in the neighbourhood of Selborne, and tends to depict game poaching as an illicit activity:

> At present the deer of the Holt are much thinned and reduced by the night-hunters, who perpetually harass them in spite of the efforts of numerous keepers, and the severe penalties that have been put in force against them as often as they have been detected, and rendered liable to the lash of the law. Neither fines nor imprisonment can deter them... (30)

Here White once again describes a situation in which the local poor, in their efforts to obtain a resource necessary to them, are apparently willing to engage in activities that bring them into conflict with the legal owners of that resource—in this case, the landholders who use game parks for hunting. White points out that poaching had been widespread in the region until it was curtailed by the Black Act of 1723, which outlawed the activities of local poachers who, according to the definition of the Act, stole not only game but also fish and timber, and who

caused particular consternation for the grant holders of Royal forests such as Wolmer and the Holt (White, *Selborne* 22-23; see excerpt from Act qtd. by Mabey in *Selborne* 270n16; Landry 6). The Black Act restricted a variety of activities that supplemented the resources of people existing at the base of the subsistence rural economy. Poachers were motivated to risk criminal sanction because they needed access to commodities that they could not otherwise obtain, and so widespread poaching in the region may be symptomatic of periods of hardship.

White himself attributes the high incidence of poaching to that same passion for "sporting" usually associated with the privileged strata of British society. He observes that "[u]nless he was a *hunter*, as they affected to call themselves, no young person was allowed to be possessed of manhood or gallantry" (*Selborne* 23). But it is significant that he offers no similar criticism of the sporting activities of the landowning classes.[50] On the contrary, White gives an impassioned account of a famous royal stag hunt that had taken place in Wolmer forest years before (*Selborne* 22-23), and in his journals is a record of a more recent hunt (3.246). White typically associates these illicit sporting activities with "idleness" (*Selborne* 23). Such a reaction to poaching may be explained in part as the attitude of a landowning curate for those among his own parishioners who should be spending their time in the sorts of productive activities that might be expected of the labouring classes. On the other hand, he

looks approvingly on what he considers the legitimate use of waste lands by the poor for traditional marginal activities:

> Such forests and wastes, when their allurements to irregularities are removed, are of considerable service to neighbourhoods that verge upon them, by furnishing them with peat and turf for their firing; with fuel for the burning their lime; and with ashes for their grasses; and by maintaining their geese and their stock of young cattle at little or no expense. (24)

White reveals how important such places were to the poor as sources of basic materials. Donna Landry (2001) observes that access to "rights of common" in a localized "subsistence economy" allowed the rural poor in Britain to survive on a daily basis (78-79). The local inhabitants in Selborne had longstanding rights to the use of marginal land in the parish (Mabey, *White* 30), but could such rights compensate for the general state of disenfranchisement in which the poor lived?

In *The Subsistence Perspective* (1999), Marcia Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen argue that we should not presume that subsistence implies poverty or hardship: "dependence on the world of necessity is not to be seen as a misfortune and limitation, but as a good thing and a precondition for our happiness and freedom" (20). Williams, in similar fashion, observes that marginal subsistence rights in rural villages could offer some means of supplementing one's existence and livelihood. He asserts, however, that these rights at best served as a buffer against total loss, allowing the poor a measure of security against exploitation on highly contingent terms (*Country* 101-2). Mabey has pointed out that "comparatively few people were receiving Parish Relief" in Selborne in White's day (*White* 32). On the basis of this piece of information, he

suggests that "the diversity of land-work available—picking hops, barking timber, as well as more orthodox farming tasks—and the marginal income from the commons kept most people above the real poverty line and maintained a spirit of enterprising self-sufficiency in the community" (*White* 32).[51] It needs to be said that many of the parish poor in Selborne had no other choice but to accept these conditions as given; marginal rights thus marked out the absolute extent of the resources available to them.[52] It is also important to recognize that a state of continuing subsistence, bolstered by various marginal measures and the prospect of relief bestowed by the parish, with the final recourse of the local workhouse looming close at hand, does not exclude moments of profound crisis.

Marginal rights were part of an economic system that provided for those who worked in a productive capacity while never allowing them to move away from a general dependence on such rights. Forms of charitable relief may be seen as a practical extension of this system. There is a long tradition of White himself being very "liberal to his poorer neighbours" (Holt-White 1.53). White's account books provide a reliable indication of his charitable expenses to those in need in the parish.[53] The sums recorded are ample but not exorbitant, the usual amount given usually being one shilling per person. White's accounts also reveal, as is to be expected, that he employed various people in the village on occasion, and such arrangements might be regarded as another form of traditional relief. In October 1752, White records donating thirteen shillings to an unspecified number of the parish poor ("Account-Book" 323). It is interesting to

note, however, that White reports spending slightly in excess of this amount on "[e]ntertaining the Gentry of Waltham exclusive of Port wine" ("Account-Book" 346). As White's records indicate, he used charity as a measured response to poverty in the parish. The effect of parish relief was to provide the poor with only so much as would allow them to survive in a state of continuing and generalized dependency.

Under such circumstances, even slight disruptions in the economic system of the parish could lead to negative consequences for its poorer inhabitants. Rural parishes were vulnerable to many kinds of shocks and disturbances, and even at the best of times, the stability of living conditions in Selborne had to be constantly maintained in the face of endemic pressures. One such danger to the community with often profound effects was unpredictable weather.[54] For example, an extended bout of wet and cold weather in early 1774 from mid-January until March caused a general crisis in the community (White, *Journals* 2.22-27). The rains were almost continuous from February 15th until March 9th, resulting in considerable damage to local agriculture. In a letter from *Selborne* dated February 14th, White remarks with trepidation that "our wheat on the ground, by the continual late sudden vicissitudes from fierce frost to pouring rains, looks poorly; and the turnips rot very fast" (162). On February 19th, we see White writing in his journal that the "rains retard the preparations for a spring crop" (*Journals* 2.24). On the 26th, he notes again that "[m]uch wheat [has] rotted on the ground…" (*Journals* 2.25). The bad weather of that winter culminated on

the night of March 8th when a large wooded slope in the nearby parish of Hawkley collapsed from the incessant rains, with damage to at least fifty acres of land and several buildings (*Journals* 2.26-27; *Selborne* 221-24; qtd. in Holt-White 1.246-48). As a consequence of this disaster, "an arable field [was] so broken and rifted by the chasms as to be rendered, for a time, neither fit for the plough or safe for pasturage, till considerable labour and expense had been bestowed in levelling the surface and filling in the gaping fissures" (*Selborne* 223-24). Summing up the inclement weather conditions after they abated on March 10th, White makes this observation about their impact on the South Counties: "This rain & snow, coming on the back of such continual deluges, occasioned a flood in the S: of England beyond any thing ever remembered before" (*Journals* 2.27). Given the general importance of weather in agriculture, periods of severe rain such as White describes could have a significant impact on a farming community like Selborne.

The farmers themselves were immediately exposed to the effects of these weather conditions on local agriculture, but at least their property, stock, and other holdings afforded them some measure of protection from unforeseen events. The working poor, on the other hand, could be affected more directly by events or conditions that impeded the general supply of labour and resources in the parish. During the cold summer of 1784, White noted that the bad conditions in the parish were causing hardship for the poor, some of whom resorted to theft:

> We have had a sad, cold, wet wheat-harvest: much wheat is housed in a poor cold state. The poor steal the farmers (sic) corn

> by night: the losers offer rewards, but in vain. My quantity of fruit is very great: but nothing ripens. Much of the wheat of Selborne will be bad, especially what was smitten by the hail: a great proportion of it will never be ripe. (qtd. in Holt-White 2.131)

Even in a community that is able to withstand adverse circumstances year by year, some of its members will always feel the brunt of these conditions more than others, for whatever resources are available in such a place are inevitably shared out according to one's position in the social and economic hierarchies at work in it.

It was cause for concern when negative conditions persisted for any length of time, becoming an endemic part of the experience of life in the parish. During the wet winter of 1774, White observes that excessive rains had already been a problem for more than a decade. He points out that "for these ten or eleven years past.... there [has never] ... been known a greater scarcity of all sorts of grain, considering the great improvement of modern husbandry. Such a run of wet seasons a century or two ago would, I am persuaded, have occasioned a famine" (*Selborne* 161-62). White's brief reflection on the state of agricultural practices in the parish is enlightening, given that his remarks provide direct evidence of the capacity of agricultural capitalism to regularize and improve production, and so offset many of the uncertainties associated with large-scale agriculture. In the early 1780s, White recorded in his journals that new agricultural practices in the parish during the preceding two decades had resulted in an overall increase in agricultural yields (2.385). This rise in production, along with the ensuing expansion in supplies of food and other

commodities, was the great achievement of the development of agrarian capitalism (Beckett 55-66; Kerridge 326-48; Chambers and Mingay 34-36). It is precisely the beneficial outcomes of this heritage that any opposition to capitalist development must inevitably confront.

The average population of England expanded over the course of the eighteenth century, albeit unevenly in the short term (Kerridge 335; Wrigley 54), and the demographic in Selborne shared in this general trend. According to parish statistics supplied by White for the period from 1720 to 1779 inclusive, the population of Selborne grew by approximately thirty-five percent from the early part of the century up to the early 1780s (see *Selborne* 17-19).[55] On this evidence, White scholars have suggested that the parish was growing steadily and strongly throughout the eighteenth century (see Mabey 31; Foster 7-8). The patterns revealed by the data lend credence to the premise that the parish benefited from general improvements in its agricultural productivity. For the period from 1730 to 1759, birth rates in the parish remained almost flat, but increased dramatically over the next two decades. Not coincidentally, this period of great increase in population growth roughly corresponds to that during which Selborne, as already noted, enjoyed significant improvements in agricultural production. The number of burials, however, also spiked alarmingly in the 1760s, and this circumstance occurred despite the existence of a substantial drop in burials only two decades before. How do we explain this evidence of high mortality at a time of great increases in birth rates and improvements in

agriculture? What unseen historical factors contributed to these often profound variabilities? White was also curate of the neighbouring parish of Faringdon between 1761 and 1784 (Mabey, *Introduction* xii), and the statistics that he compiled for that community and its population suggest that conditions in it were similar to those experienced in Selborne. Over twenty years, White recorded more births than deaths at Faringdon, but he also notes in a journal entry for late 1777 that he had "buried many very old people there: yet of late several young folks have dyed (sic) of a decline" (2.201). Taken as an average over time, the population of each parish certainly expanded, but periodic incidences of higher mortality are an indication that there were pressures on this general population increase.

A tendency towards growth in the population and agricultural output of a relatively isolated rural village also suggests that increasing demands were placed on the natural environment. Taken together, White's writings offer an interesting if provisional account of the effects of environmental change in the parish during the second half of the eighteenth century. Included in *Selborne* and White's journals is considerable evidence that the daily activities of people in the parish were resulting in substantial damage to vegetation and the loss of certain animal species in the region. Several commentators, for instance, have noted that White is often preoccupied with the depletion of beech trees on the great hill to the west of the village; he also registers his concerns about the excessive cutting of peat in Wolmer forest (Rye 157; Mabey, *White* 197-98, 213).

White implies that the loss of beech trees had been occurring for quite some time, perhaps as far in the past as the early decades of the eighteenth century. On the testimony of an old man with a long view of the parish's history, White asserts (he is writing in the year 1784) "that fifty or sixty years back, ... the beechen woods were much more extensive than at present..." (*Selborne* 103). White cites evidence from a report on Crown lands (c. 1787) according to which, as he puts it, Holt forest "is shamefully abused by the neighbouring poor, who lop it, and top it as they please; ... there is no succession because all the bushes are destroyed by the commoners around" (qtd. in Holt-White 2.241). White also claims that vast sections of Wolmer forest had been burned out by accident when fires that were intended to clear patches of the heath had gotten out of control:

> in this forest, about March or April, according to the dryness of the season, such vast heath-fires are lighted up, that they often get to a masterless head, and, catching the hedges, have sometimes been communicated to the underwoods, woods, and coppices where great damage has ensued. The plea for these burnings is, that, when the old coat of heath, etc., is consumed, young will sprout up, and afford much tender browse for cattle; but, where there is large old furze, the fire, following the roots, consumes the very ground; so that for hundreds of acres nothing is to be seen but smother and desolation, the whole circuit round looking like the cinders of a volcano; and the soil being quite exhausted, no traces of vegetation are to be found for years. (*Selborne* 25)

Revealed in the passage is a set of competing opinions about the proper uses of such heaths. White notes that those lighting the fires do so in order to clear heath for cattle grazing, which was a prominent part of the local agrarian economy. But it is significant that White begins this passage by calling attention to the statute prohibiting such heath burnings, and just after remarks that such

burnings "much annoy this village" (*Selborne* 25). He mentions elsewhere that Wolmer forest is home to many of the bird species he so loved (*Selborne* 21), and this fact may provide some context for his condemnation of those who cause such "desolation."

The impact of local agrarian and subsistence activities on animal life was perhaps even more profound and certainly more disturbing. It was apparent to White that uncontrolled fires had over time brought the decline of certain animal species in the surrounding region.[56] White recognized that the loss of local habitats could have an impact on the lifecycles of the animals they supported, as he notes in 1771 when he connects the significant reduction of beech tree cover in the parish to concurrent declines in wood-pigeon populations: "about twenty years ago ... [wood-pigeons] abounded in the district of Selborne; and strings of them were seen morning and evening that reached a mile or more: but since the beechen woods have been greatly thinned they are much decreased in number" (*Selborne* 134). Although White reports that wood-pigeons were avidly hunted, he implies that the dramatic reduction of the species is primarily associated with the loss of beech cover in the region (*Selborne* 103, 134). But he did note when other species seemed to have been hunted to extinction. White mentions that "there was a nobler species of game in this forest [i.e. Wolmer], now extinct, which I have heard old people say abounded much before shooting flying became so common, and that was the heath-cock, black-game, or grouse.... The last pack remembered was killed about thirty-five years ago" (*Selborne* 21-

22). There had also been many rabbits in Wolmer forest in times past, until the day when the royal hunt came from London: "these being inconvenient to the huntsmen, on account of their burrows, when they came to take away the deer, they permitted the country people to destroy them all" (*Selborne* 24). Unfortunately, White does not provide us with any information about the impact of local hunting practices on the rabbit population in Wolmer forest prior to this incident. We have no way of knowing if people in the parish were especially dependent on rabbits as a staple food source, or if it was a traditional practice to periodically cull large segments of the rabbit population.

Why were entire species of animals and plants disappearing from the parish at that time? At least some of the evidence indicates that increasingly heavy demands were being placed on Selborne's natural environment. But does the existence of such demands indicate that the erosion of the environment was *caused* by escalating capitalist development? Or do heavy species losses suggest, perhaps a bit paradoxically, that local people were experiencing hardship and scarcity, and so needed to supplement their sources of food? Since the population had been rising on average throughout much of the century, it may have been a problem of development coming into conflict with ecosystems that were relatively stable up to that point. It is also unclear if the observable decline of species of animals and plants was viewed as a problem by Selborne's inhabitants. White does not portray these conditions as problems of historical change, nor, beyond providing a simple explanation for a few of the cases, does

he reveal any desire to look systematically at the conditions that gave rise to them.

White's holdings would have insulated him from the pressures that these and other species losses might have exerted on the survival of his poorer neighbours. Perhaps his blunt objectivity about much of this loss was a reflection of his relatively privileged position in the parish. White, by virtue of this position and his educational background, had very different experiences of events in the parish than the majority of its inhabitants. Although White lived in the parish most of his life, it is also the case that he had been to university, had spent much of his time in London and elsewhere, and, as the preponderance of references in *Selborne* and other writings to leading intellectuals indicates, was attuned to trans-continental scientific and political debates that were occurring at the end of the eighteenth century.[57] His experiences of the parish were invariably mediated by such influences and contexts.

Knowledge claims, education, and social position

There is evidence that during his researches on conditions in Selborne, White continually struggled against the folk knowledge of his parishioners, particularly their traditional conceptions of nature. According to Hoyt Trowbridge (1979), White's methods for generating knowledge about the natural world and testing its accuracy reveal the influences of such thinkers as Francis Bacon and John Locke (86-87, 93; also Foster 65). Like these and other seventeenth-

century writers, White's attitude to the corroboration of empirical observations was exacting, and throughout *Selborne* he is unequivocal that his intention is to establish the most accurate facts possible.[58] He had a marked scepticism for any information about natural history that he received at second hand from other people, and he observes in *Selborne* that "one cannot safely relate any thing from common report, especially in print, without expressing some degree of doubt and suspicion" (*Selborne* 58). Yet much of the material that comprises *Selborne* was based on a tapestry of observations about the parish that White never witnessed personally. Trowbridge observes that White usually challenged the validity of second-hand information regardless of its source, but that he tended to trust the authority of his fellow scientists over non-scientists (87, 93). I believe that we also need to consider the evidence that class distinction was often a factor in such attributions of authority. After all, these fellow naturalists to whom White refers in *Selborne* were for the most part learned members of his class, with similar backgrounds and interests as his own. White sometimes casts doubt on the methods or results of such naturalists, but it is significant that he rarely does so by name (see *Selborne* 122, 125, 136). Lucy Maddox suggests that White was consistently sceptical of the information about Selborne that he received from members of the lower class (48-50, 53; also Wolfshol 273). It is this apparent bias against the knowledge and outlook of the folk that I want to explore.

The source of this bias is usually attributed to a section of *Selborne* in which White proposes that modern education is an effective antidote to "superstitious prejudices" (see 184-86). Several commentators have suggested that White's remarks in this section reveal a disdain on his part for the folk knowledge of his own parishioners (Maddox 48-49; 52; Wolfshol 273 and n7; Foster 79, 182n4).[59] White opens the section in question by observing that false ideas are acquired quite early in life, and then argues that a proper education provides the only means to discard such beliefs. The labouring classes, without access to modern education, are unable to rid themselves of their false conceptions and practices:

> It is the hardest thing in the world to shake off superstitious prejudices: they are sucked in as it were with our mother's milk; and growing up with us at a time when they take the fastest hold and make the most lasting impressions, become so interwoven into our very constitutions, that the strongest good sense is required to disengage ourselves from them. No wonder therefore that the lower people retain them their whole lives through, since their minds are not invigorated by a liberal education, and therefore not enabled to make any efforts adequate to the occasion. (*Selborne* 184)

White then proceeds to catalogue a number of local practices and beliefs that he would classify as superstitions. He notes, for instance, that in the recent past certain special trees in the village "were severed and held open by wedges, while ruptured children, stripped naked, were pushed through the apertures, under a persuasion that, by such a process, the poor babes would be cured of their infirmity" (*Selborne* 185). White speculates that "this superstitious ceremony, [was] derived down perhaps from our Saxon ancestors, who practiced it before

their conversion to Christianity" (*Selborne* 185). It does not need to be said that White, as a clergyman responsible for the spiritual welfare of his parishioners, would have rejected local beliefs and practices with pre-Christian associations. It should be emphasized that White's account of parish superstitions deals only with a few pre-Christian practices that were still in existence during the period. We should notice the bizarre nature of the practices described by White and the obvious relish that he takes in recounting them, for such details could suggest that White is presenting these "superstitions" largely as exceptional oddities, and not necessarily as the characteristic mode of knowledge among the local people.

Indeed, some commentators have pointed out that White liberally drew upon what Keith, citing George Sturt's remarks on *Selborne*, has called the "communal experience" of his rural neighbours: a base of folk knowledge about the land and its uses that may have profoundly influenced his physical descriptions of the parish landscape (Keith 57-58; also Mabey, *White* 201; Emden 10-11, 29-31, 46-47; Foster 79).[60] White's writings do reveal some traces of the knowledge of the "country people" among whom he lived. This does not mean that he accepted these accounts without question, for White's writings also demonstrate a consistently antagonistic attitude to many of the observations that he cites at second hand from his country neighbours. In publishing a serious study of natural history, White was obliged to establish the validity of his facts for his audience. Although White often mentions "facts" that have been established by other respected naturalists, we rarely see him explicitly admitting his debt to

his country neighbours, at least not without qualifying such admissions by stating that he remains sceptical of the information provided to him.

White's disdain for the country folk as observers of nature is present as established class prejudice in his casual remark that his own observations on a tame bat "confute the vulgar opinion, that bats when down on a flat surface cannot get on the wing again..." (*Selborne* 35). In *Wonders and the Order of Nature* (1998), Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park suggest that such concepts as "wonder" and "superstition" were increasingly stigmatized during the first half of the eighteenth century (331-43). "Out of this reaction," Daston and Park assert, "emerged a new cultural opposition between the enlightened and the vulgar..." (331). Vulgarity came to be associated with those people who lacked formal education, and so was generally, but not exclusively, attributed to the lower classes (344-50). White had a somewhat ambiguous attitude to the information that his "vulgar" neighbours provided him. He freely used what he considered to be the more valid or useful pieces of information that he received from such people; it may be presumed that much of his understanding about local agricultural practices and his basic knowledge of plants, animals, and meteorological conditions in the parish was derived in this very manner. But White invariably assessed the observations he acquired from the country folk in terms of his own standards of truth and validity, and he was quite willing to reject summarily any information that did not seem to accord well with these standards.

The issue was one of authority for White. He could confidently ascribe authority to the reports of "old people" specifically when such reports dealt with events in the past that these people, but few else now living, had personally witnessed (see *Selborne* 20-21n). As noted by Trowbridge, Locke posited several criteria for evaluating the validity of second-hand reports, and these included "the number of witnesses; their integrity; their skill ... [and] contrary testimonies" (93). There are many cases in *Selborne* in which White accepts the testimony of a member of his own class with little reservation, justifying the inclusion of such reports by frequently noting that the people from whom they come are "intelligent," a word that is often used by White to mean "observant," but that also clearly indicates that he thinks the person "well-informed" or "knowledgeable." Other similar descriptors are also used by White, and they all function to signal the intellectual fitness of the informant for observation (see *Selborne* 16, 31, 37, 42, 82, 176). But it is clear that White does not extend the same trust to his poorer neighbours. Admittedly, White does refer on certain occasions to "intelligent" country folk (see *Selborne* 44, 154), although one of these references shows him discounting the validity of the observations that he initially cites:

> Some intelligent country people have a notion that we have, in these parts, a species of the *genus mustelinum*, besides the weasel, stoat, ferret, and polecat; a little reddish beast, not much bigger than a field mouse, but much longer, which they call a *cane*. This piece of intelligence can be little depended on; but farther inquiry may be made. (44)

White believes it will take the efforts of a naturalist or some other informed person to establish the truth of this piece of information. Significantly, White is not suggesting that the "intelligent country people" who gave him the information should themselves undertake "farther inquiry" into the circumstances of the observation, for it is their ability to make observations that is implicitly being called into question.

For White, the observations of the country people seem to have little intrinsic value. He acknowledges using the information they provide him, but generally not without certain reservations, and he often stresses the need for further corroboration. It is significant that in one situation he accepts the opinion of a gentleman regarding the species of a certain bird that had been sighted in the fields, but dismisses the opinions of all country people who were also present (22). White applies this prejudice even to situations with which local country people were very familiar. The reports from country people that White mentions deal with weather, flora, and fauna, about which they might reasonably be expected to know much. What White distrusts is the validity of their knowledge. Although the country people must have possessed considerable experience of material nature in Selborne, White does not regard them as adequate observers.

There is one instance in which White casts doubt on the discernment of members of his own class. The bulk of one of the letters in *Selborne* is taken up with an account of the case of a woman who claimed to be able to cure cancers using toads. Apparently, the event had achieved notoriety, and it is clear that his

correspondent in this particular letter (i.e. Thomas Pennant) was already aware of the situation. White himself does not believe the woman's claims, and he confidently offers a rational explanation to disprove them. Nonetheless, he observes with some alarm that "intelligent persons, both gentry and clergy, do, I find, give a great deal of credit to what was asserted in the papers: and I myself dined with a clergyman who seemed to be persuaded that what is related is matter of fact" (*Selborne* 53-54). I should also point out that there are numerous ambiguous cases in *Selborne* in which White mentions receiving information from such people as "intelligent neighbours" (39), "intelligent folks" (51), or "persons worthy of credit" (89) without specifying the social background of the persons involved. White used a whole network of the country people to provide him with information about the parish's natural history (Emden 49-69). It is quite possible that some of the references noted here could be to his information gatherers among the country people. As already observed, he does describe country people as intelligent in isolated instances. But such references as those above could just as likely be to informants who possess social merit in White's eyes: gentry or clergy whom he chooses not to identify as such (perhaps because they are not personally known to his correspondent in the letter in which the reference occurs), successful farmers, and the well-to-do among the local merchants. Whatever the case may be, it certainly seems improbable that White would refer to any of the country people by such an honorific as "persons worthy of credit," no matter how knowledgeable they might be about local natural history.

We may more closely observe White's sceptical relation to folk knowledge in a letter in which he actively seeks to establish how people of differing social backgrounds interpret natural phenomena. Here White describes the following situation: apparently all sheep on the western side of the river Adur in the Sussex downs are horned and have white faces, while the sheep on the eastern side are hornless and have black faces. White finds this situation intriguing and worthy of investigation. He points out, however, that the local shepherds view the situation as entirely unremarkable, for they have come to accept it as one of the timeless circumstances of their locality:

> If you talk with the shepherds on this subject, they will tell you that the case has been so from time immemorial: and smile at your simplicity if you ask them whether the situation of these two different breeds might not be reversed? However, an intelligent friend of mine near Chichester is determined to try an experiment; and has this autumn, at the hazard of being laughed at, introduced a parcel of black-faced hornless rams among his horned western ewes. (*Selborne* 153)

It is significant that White describes his unnamed friend as an "intelligent" man. Unlike the shepherds, this man is portrayed as rejecting customary explanations for the situation. Instead, he conducts an experiment, the aim of which is to ascertain if the situation might be modified by human effort. The anecdote perfectly captures the problematic of folk knowledge for White. The real difficulty for White is not "superstition" as such, but rather the habitual acceptance of traditional practices and beliefs in the context of folk culture. These ideas are akin to superstitions, although they are more mundane. As this anecdote suggests, White regards traditional ideas as unexamined ideas. For White, the

ability to evaluate and re-evaluate one's cherished beliefs clearly derives from a liberal education that he knows is only available to the privileged classes in most circumstances. White can on this basis assume that country people, lacking exposure to the sceptical tradition of thought that figures prominently in a liberal education, are not able to adequately verify even their ordinary traditional beliefs.

White tends, then, to depict country people as gullible, unsophisticated observers who consistently demonstrate a predisposition to accept what their senses tell them without ever bothering to determine the truth of such reports. He thus situates rural folk in a traditional culture that largely supplies their interpretations of their world. Usually White reveals a bemused attitude to the views of the country folk; sometimes he seems exasperated with their obtuseness. But in one instance he lashes out angrily—in his writing at least—at a labourer whose fear of the unknown results in a missed opportunity for study:

> A gentleman in this neighbourhood had two milk-white rooks in one nest. A booby of a carter, finding them before they were able to fly, threw them down and destroyed them, to the regret of the owner, who would have been glad to have preserved such a curiosity in his rookery. I saw the birds myself nailed against the end of a barn, and was surprised to find that their bills, legs, feet, and claws were milk-white. (44)

The carter sees the birds essentially as monsters—as exceptions to the natural order that are for this reason to be regarded with alarm and suspicion. From the gentleman's perspective, an albino bird is a scientific "curiosity" that merits inclusion with his other birds (and one presumes that he nonetheless preserved

the dead rooks for display in his natural history cabinet). It is a clash of fundamentally divergent ways of interpreting the meaning of natural phenomena.

Antagonism to traditional knowledge was part of the general practice of natural history. Mary Louise Pratt (1992) has argued that the Linnaean project to classify the natural world on new scientific terms was "an urban discourse about non-urban worlds, and a lettered, bourgeois discourse about non-lettered, peasant worlds" (34-35). When used in European countries in the eighteenth century, natural history "overwrote local and peasant ways of knowing," and so was part of a modern project to put life on a rational and systematic basis (35-36). The same could be said of White's efforts to gain information about the parish, and to establish the validity of the accounts that he receives.[61] White never seems to trust the observations of the country people, nor does he typically accept their folk beliefs. He readily admits that he uses their observations, but he also seeks to transform them into facts with a properly philosophical basis of validity.

So it is interesting that there is some evidence in White's own text that the country people resist, or at least disregard, his efforts to confirm the validity of their observations and beliefs, and to make over their observations as philosophical facts. I have already noted that, in the letter in which he discusses the two different populations of sheep that are distributed on either side of a river, White notes that local shepherds greet with amusement the attempt by his friend to transplant sheep from one side of the river to the other. White narrates a

similar experience of his own when he tells of his attempts to observe the grasshopper-lark, a reclusive bird that makes a sound not unlike that of the insect for which it is named. White points out that the country people do believe the sound is made by some sort of insect, but he knows it is made by a bird, and offers some evidence from his vast store of knowledge to prove why this must be so: "Had I not been a little acquainted with insects, and known that the grasshopper kind is not yet hatched, I should have hardly believed but that it had been a *locusta* whispering in the bushes" (46). As in the other example, White here notes the amusement of the country people when they are given a philosophical explanation of the phenomenon that contradicts their traditional knowledge: "The country people will laugh when you tell them it is the note of a bird" (46-47). Perhaps White mentions the behaviour of the smiling shepherds and the laughing country people in order to provide a concrete example of the opposition encountered by improving individuals who would set out to rationalize traditional practices in the country. But in so doing, White is allowing the unheard voice of opposition to these rationalizing policies—policies he represents—to infiltrate his text.

It is this same voice, the voice of the country people for whom White usually speaks, that he here allows to "speak" almost freely. For admitting that one is being laughed at would seem to allow one's mockers to "voice" their real opinions, to articulate their disdain without fear of reprisal, even if the actual words they use are not recorded. These are moments in *Selborne* of what

Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) would likely term "heteroglossia," a situation in which dissonant forms of speech or discourse intrude upon and disrupt the unity of a dominant discourse. In Bakhtin's model of spoken and written discourses, the dissonant forms of speech that disrupt those forces working to unify a specific linguistic situation can be any form of speech at all, but they are particularly exemplified for Bakhtin by so-called non-official speech, the speech of everyday life, the speech of uneducated people, of labourers, and so forth (see 259-300). In the situation I am examining, it is the laughter of the country people that interrupts the philosophical rationality of White's narrative: his efforts to establish the validity of the account. In their laughter, the country people are voicing their demand that their own accounts of conditions in the parish should be treated with respect.

A hint of defiance on the part of the country people also emerges whenever White discusses the "illicit" activities of the country people. In his descriptions of the wood riot in Holt forest, of game poaching, and of the theft of grain during a hard spring, we literally see people acting independently, in their own interests, to secure their welfare. We even occasionally hear fragments of their speech, albeit mediated by White, as in the following remarkable instance: "Hence, towards the beginning of this century, all this country was wild about deer-stealing. Unless he was a *hunter*, as they affected to call themselves, no young person was allowed to be possessed of manhood or gallantry" (*Selborne* 23). Although this is indirect discourse, it is still, like the examples noted above,

an intrusion of heteroglossia into White's text, a bit of speech that gives more depth to the country people he describes. It is that rare moment when we hear the country folk speaking in their own voices, even if these voices are framed by the language of White's text. Although they have been ignored, like much of the evidence that I examine in this chapter, the voices of the poor do not now need to be rescued. Their traces are apparent in much of White's text, and they speak clearly.

The value of a community

Even some of the most benign scenes depicted in *Selborne* encode a set of competing interests and values that indicate a general crisis of social relations in the parish. In one such passage, White imagines a scene of communal life from the previous century that focuses on Selborne's village square, which local people call "the Plestor." Here White presents a charming portrait of the village's past in which its inhabitants enjoy themselves as they gather around the ancient oak at the site:

> In the centre of the village, and near the church, is a square piece of ground surrounded by houses, and vulgarly called the Plestor. In the midst of this spot stood, in old times, a vast oak, with a short squat body, and huge horizontal arms extending almost to the extremity of the area. This venerable tree, surrounded with stone steps, and seats above them, was the delight of old and young, and a place of much resort in summer evenings; where the former sat in grave debate, while the latter frolicked and danced before them. (10)

For those people depicted in the scene, the value of the site, of the life that is passed there, is manifested in daily use; it is the value that the Plestor provides as a common meeting place.[62] At first glance, the purpose of the depiction seems to be to showcase this particular value—to display a rooted community existing in relations of amity with itself and with a natural environment that is shown in a symbiotic relationship with the community. But it must be emphasized that the scene literally portrays a fictional community as White *imagines* it to have existed prior to the fall of the great oak during the tempest of 1703 (*Selborne* 10). The scene nostalgically recreates both the great oak that fell so long ago and what is being equated with the oak: the community that White situates beneath its branches.[63] Like the oak, the idealized social relations taking place on the Plestor are part of a lost past.[64] As Williams argues, the nostalgic look at the past as a happy time, often in direct contrast with a ruined or debased present, is prevalent in British literature (see *Country* 9-12 and passim).[65] Here there is no obvious contrast with the present, but merely the projection of community into the past. Unfortunately, there is no similar description of communal living in *Selborne*.

The scene does appear to hold some value for White, given that he recounts it rather fondly. We might speculate that he "values" the kind of communal relations depicted as taking place around the oak. As Keith Thomas notes in *Man and the Natural World* (1984), great trees were "visible symbols of continuity" (217). The oak tree itself had a number of specific associations: "The

oak had been a symbol of strength since at least the sixteenth century. Always the king of trees, it becomes, with the growth of the Navy, an emblem of the British people and as much a national symbol as roast beef. It represented masculinity, vigour, strength and reliability" (220).[66] Foster has suggested that, for White, trees represent the virtues of community, particularly the value of "stable, steady growth"; in talking about trees, White is also consciously expressing his hope for a strong community that will continue, like the trees themselves, to grow (1-2). Still, at the end of his account, White inserts a very different kind of "value" into the scene, one that also seems most important to him: monetary value. White concludes his description of the Plestor with an account of how the vicar at the time of the oak's fall attempted to have the tree put back into place. He notes that this vicar spent "several pounds" on what ultimately would be a fruitless attempt (10). There is again a suggestion of nostalgia for a lost oak and the communal setting that it had helped to sustain, but now with the added sense that such a community is *worth* saving even for a considerable sum. The community has its own value *as* a community, but White also implies that it is possible to convert this value directly into a monetary value. Community, and the pleasure offered by a tree, both have value, but they also have a valuation—a market price. What the scene recognizes is that monetary value, which can always be placed on a village site, can also, paradoxically, be placed on community itself.

There is also a set of conflicted values that impinge directly on the image of the Plestor oak. If the oak symbolizes a community with roots that extend deep into the past, it also represents a valuable commodity. As Foster points out, White was keenly aware of the value of trees in construction and shipbuilding (1). In the same letter is an account of "a small wood ... of a few acres" in the parish from which a purveyor took twenty oaks, many of which were around "sixty feet" in length; the oaks, White tells us, "sold for twenty pounds apiece" (*Selborne* 10-11). The interest White displays in these trees as commodities may help us understand the seemingly incongruous statement that immediately follows his account of the attempt to raise the fallen oak: "This oak I mention to show to what a bulk planted oaks also may arrive..." (*Selborne* 10). In suggesting that the whole point of the account was to highlight the banal fact of the oak's "bulk," White implies that the economic value of the oak supersedes its value as a symbol of community and continuity. The conflict thus revealed is between an imagined past in which the oak served as the focal point of communal life and a present in which oaks are now "planted" deliberately as a form of economic activity.

Although White does not describe communal interactions taking place on the Plestor in his own present, he does furnish a peripheral indication of how the country people in his own day may view the site. White notes that the site is "vulgarly called the Plestor." As with his depiction of a past community, contrary forms of value meet in the context of this comment, the implication of which is

that the name used by the country people for the site is a debasement of an earlier form. It is a sign of the visible social hierarchy that is overlaid onto the description of the place. The local people, who presumably use the Plestor much as did generations past, are not familiar with the history of their word for the site, but White, the distanced author, is certainly aware of it. He reveals the Saxon etymology of the word "Plestor" and the history of the site in the historical account of the parish, or *Antiquities*, that he attached to *Selborne* (384-86; 384n; *Journals* 2.29). What this suggests is that the place has a separate, intellectual value to an antiquarian of cultivated tastes like White. This is not a value in use—a value derived from the place's importance as a site of communal interaction; it is rather a value that White enjoys from the confines of his own study.

White often shows that he is intrigued by the local Saxon history of the parish, and he seems to be proud of it as well. His knowledge of the Saxon past sets him apart from his neighbours who are depicted as being largely ignorant of such matters—seemingly unaware of the relation between their debased idioms and the speech of forgotten epochs. White regards the Saxon tongue as a "pure" expression of a more authentic culture, a sentiment that arises in certain speculations on the etymological origins of local words: "Our people here, you know, call coppice-wood, or hedge-wood, *rice*, or *rise*. So brother Thomas has found that this word is pure Saxon: for *hris* signifies *fronds*; thus has he vindicated this provincial word from contempt" (qtd. in Holt-White 292). White is

not challenging the "contempt" for "provincial" speech normally held by members of his class, even though he states that the interesting etymology of this particular word elevates it above the speech in which it has been preserved. There is in this statement, then, a hint of disdain for the unlearned country folk. It is White and his brother who rescue the word from obscurity; the country people merely use the word while being unaware of its secret heritage, just as they are unaware of the secret heritage of the very word they use for their common meeting place. The secret value of the Plestor for White is a Saxon heritage that has been forgotten by its current denizens, and so by invoking this secret knowledge, White makes certain that his interest in the place comes to the forefront. Whatever value the scene on the Plestor may have as a depiction of a community (past or living) is at least partially subordinated to this ulterior value—this intellectual preference for the strands of the past over the lived relations of the present.

In the image of the Plestor oak is encapsulated the movement from traditional, community-based values to the values of the new economic order that emerges fully in the eighteenth century. White scholars tend to argue that *Selborne* projects the former set of values to the exclusion of the latter. The parish of Selborne is most often viewed as an island of peace in a gathering industrial mayhem—a special place in which the paramount virtues of compassion, neighbourliness, and reverence for nature were able to take root even as the rest of the countryside was being delivered up wholesale to agrarian

capitalist development. This representation of the parish makes numerous omissions that need to be addressed. Little attention has been devoted to exploring lives of the working poor. Thomas observes that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as the British countryside was transformed from a feudal order to a capitalist order, there were increasing depictions in art of the country as a pastoral retreat for the well-to-do (*Man* 242-54). As Thomas points out, "poets and artists who fed the new rural longings preferred to conceal such harsh realities. Most of them depicted the countryside as free from social tension; they ignored the gentry's economic reasons for being there and they manifested an extreme reluctance to mention the practical aspects of rural life" (*Man* 251). The "harsh realities" that country writers concealed included the hardships that were daily faced by the many people who actually inhabited and worked in rural places. There are always people who share less in whatever finite sources of wellbeing are to be had in a particular place. If we ignore such a fact in favour of what we may wish to see instead, do we not diminish whatever value we would like to discern in that place, or in this case, in the text that has become our primary connection to it? The virtues of *Selborne* are obvious and numerous, and it is important to acknowledge that many people over the years have been truly inspired by it. It is a book that merits close attention for its positive virtues. Yet it does not diminish the value of the book if we pay equally close attention to the evidence of hardship and crisis that is so much a part of it.

Chapter Three
Environmental Networks and Practices of Health

Eighteenth-century writers commonly advised their polite readers to get exercise outdoors, in the country or perhaps in a park or garden, as a means of restoring their bodies and minds to good health.[67] This chapter considers practices, as described in the following texts, that were designed to bring the polite reader into healthy contact with material nature: George Cheyne's *The English Malady* (1733), Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1759) and Uvedale Price's *Essay on the Picturesque* (1794), natural history treatises with emphasis on Thomas Pennant's *British Zoology* (1776), William Cowper's *The Task* (1785) and "Yardley Oak" (1791), and some scientific essays that Erasmus Darwin appended to *The Temple of Nature* (1803). Since my account is based on textual sources, its context is limited by conditions then governing textual production, dissemination, and readership; the texts I survey were published for a polite reader, and so I focus on this reader in my discussion.[68] The primary aim of this chapter is to examine how nature, understood as material system or space, could come over time to be considered a source—perhaps *the* source—of good health by many writers and their mostly educated readers.[69] If we consider that certain places, including mountains, moors, deserts, and oceans, were often viewed, particularly in the early part of the eighteenth century, as threatening and even dangerous, we may then see that this belief in the power of the country and

other putatively "natural" places to promote human health was a remarkable development.[70]

In the context of the practices of health that I survey, my specific objective is to map points of continuity between what are almost always imagined as two separate spheres: nature and culture. Of the many senses of nature that are available in the English lexicon, I use the word in this chapter primarily to signify a pre-existing material system or space that may be opposed, although not without ambiguity, to the more obviously human space of the so-called built environment. Whereas the former may take the form of a park, a garden, a green, or the country in general, the latter is primarily represented in this chapter, as we shall see, by London. The precise meaning of nature as a material space, and its opposition to a space of human activity, shifts as I move from author to author in this study. This chapter's focus on personal health practices that were intended to be carried out in natural settings would seem, then, to necessitate an approach that can analyze the contested boundary between nature and culture.

As developed in Bruno Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern*, the concept of the "network" suggests that it is not possible to view "nature," "culture," "healthcare," "the country," or even "cultivated people" determinately as either pre-existing material entities or as social constructions; they are formations produced at the cross-section of many networks with multiple elements that are all fabricated and pre-existent, ideological and material (see *Modern* 51-55, 103-6). As an organizational paradigm, the network authorizes the transgression of

normative boundaries between categories of knowledge and practice, allowing us to bring together relations normally kept separate. In this chapter, I examine practices of natural health as they are constituted at the intersection of three networks: personal healthcare, polite society, and environment. In examining the relations between health practices, theories of human health, the cultivated users of these practices, and the putatively natural places in which they were to be carried out, I am reconstructing a very specific configuration of these networks at a particular moment in time. As we shall see, this approach neatly circumscribes the subject matter of this chapter, allowing us to separately examine the networks I describe here while still providing a means of analyzing their points of convergence.

One implication of my approach is that the practices I examine must be viewed as social practices embedded in the class society that produces them. Pierre Bourdieu argues in *Distinction* (1984) that social practices involving forms of consumption—which, in the context of this chapter, would include not only the consumption of material artefacts like books, but also the consumption of medical advice and even lifestyle choices designed to make one healthy—function to manifest hierarchical social differences in modern society.[71] In a system of social stratification, particular patterns of consumption are associated with unique social groups, and so they identify members of these groups to themselves and to other groups (see 1-7, 466-84). To consider social practices in conjunction with practices of health underscores how health practices are inevitably produced in

terms of defined class positions. Too broad a definition of health practices tends to efface the very real social hierarchies that separate certain practices and their practitioners from others. The practices that I investigate in this chapter were not simply medical practices with a corresponding social element. They were social practices themselves, behaviours that could be easily be adapted to the daily life of the leisured, cultivated persons for whom they were generally intended.[72] This observation holds true even for those practices that belonged to formal "medical" traditions.

Although these health practices were indebted to medical discourses and in some cases were the work of actual doctors, they were not an appendage of institutionalized medicine understood as a specialized sphere that was separate from leisured culture. Medical knowledge and its practice was closely integrated with the networks that produced the social space of the privileged classes. Roy Porter (1985) points out that "the literate laity were not just passive uncomprehending recipients of medical treatment, for they could be expected to possess considerable medical familiarity..." ("Laymen" 313). Writers who incorporated medical paradigms into their texts could assume that readers would be conversant with them. Moreover, the theory and practice of medicine, whether official, lay, or oral, neither exhausted nor determined the significance of health, the body, and nature during the century. In a book devoted to understanding the connections between the different "cultures" of medicine and literature, Marie Mulvey Roberts and Roy Porter (1991) suggest that "throughout

the eighteenth century, much the same men ... were active in the fields of medicine, natural philosophy and general writing," and the relations produced by them resulted in "a plurality of cultures with multiple crossing-points..." (2, 6). In a similar sense, the health practices that I examine are evidence of a coherent healthcare project in the eighteenth century that, in crossing normative lines between medical and non-medical genres of writing, tended to obscure the difference between such genres.

Nonetheless, two general medical contexts help us to understand the production of these practices, and provide linkages between the often dissimilar texts I have selected. One such context was the corpus of "medical advice books" that, according to Ginnie Smith (1985), provided models of regimens for the new lay market in the eighteenth century (249-50; Thomas, "Morality" 20). Charles Rosenberg (1997) observes that regimen was based on the regulation of factors mostly external to the body: air quality, food intake, and the body's movements or exercises within its environs (35-36; Thomas, "Morality" 20-23; Smith 257-59). It is not surprising, then, that some advocates of regimens stressed the benefits of "plenty of cool fresh air, bathing, and exercise in rural surrounding[s]..." (Smith 261). The health practices that I describe were associated with the general regimen tradition, but they remained essentially independent of it. None of these practices qualified as a complete regimen in itself, although some may have been conceived as elements of certain regimens.

The other medical context important for understanding these practices is provided by theories of nervous function, which often emphasized the interactions between the human body and its environments.[73] In summarizing the basis of his own model, David Hartley (1749) states that "Vibrations ... excited in the Æther, and Particles of the sensory Nerves, will be propagated along the Course of these Nerves up to the Brain" (22). It is no coincidence that the writers I discuss in this chapter all mention the nerves in some way. The discourse of the nerves provides these writers with a means of explaining how contact with nature benefits human health. This brings me to the plan of my chapter. In my first section, I examine George Cheyne's notion that exercise taken outdoors provides the nerves with the stimulation necessary to maintain the body in good health. I then examine a model put forward by Edmund Burke and Uvedale Price in which the emphasis is on maintaining the health of the sensory organs. In my second section, I discuss health practices described in the writings of Thomas Pennant, William Cowper, and Erasmus Darwin that combine the two notions of physical and sensory health in order to encompass the health of the whole person. In the last two sections of the chapter, I investigate the class implications of health practices, and I conclude by examining how certain natural places designated as appropriate sites of these practices are being constituted.

Physical and sensory stimulation in economies of human health

In a section of *The English Malady* (1733) devoted to "Exercise proper for Nervous Distempers" (172-83), the Bath physician George Cheyne describes a practice of health that integrates conceptions of social class and privilege, leisured travel, and the natural environment as integral parts of the overall cure. Like all of the health practices selected in this chapter, Cheyne advocates a practice that upon investigation seems to ignore entirely the boundaries that traditional western metaphysics imposes between human and natural. Indeed, we may observe when examining such practices that neither these practices themselves nor their elements (networks) constitute discrete entities. Instead, they are all mutually produced by specific configurations of networks and their intersections. There is, then, no "nature" or "culture" here for us to "uncover," except insofar as we may say that these two categories are themselves networks that at times intersect in the context of the subject matter under consideration in this chapter.

Considered as a whole, the general intent of *The English Malady* is to provide a comprehensive diagnosis of "nervous diseases," an all-encompassing medical condition involving many discrete illnesses. According to Cheyne, nervous diseases occur when the normally springy or "elastick" fibres of the nerves lose their energetic "tone" and subsequently become less capable of performing their basic function: the transmission of "vibrations" and "sensation" between the parts of the human body (10-14).[74] In practice, a case of bad

nerves can result from various imbalances or deficiencies in the body, each of which results in unique symptoms and mandates a particular remedy to relieve it.[75] In his discussion of the benefits of exercise, Cheyne develops the idea that certain kinds of activities undertaken outdoors can be an effective cure for illness. Cheyne begins the section by claiming that physical exercise is the one cure, above all others, that can best remedy the condition of weak nerves directly (172). According to Cheyne, engaging in physical activity will help to increase the efficiency of the nerves as the medium that transports motions in the body:

> There is an *innate* Power of *Contraction*, a *Spring* and *Elasticity* in all Animal Solids, as being contrived and designed as Instruments of Action and Motion; by Action and Motion only, this innate Power is nourished, preserved, increased, and recovered. And on the contrary, without them, it grows languid, feeble, and weak. Not only is the Circulation promoted, the Perspiration and all the other Secretions forwarded by *Exercise*; but by the *Muscular* Actions, the Blood and Juices are kept in a due State of Fluidity, their Viscidity broken and dissolved, and all Obstructions hindered or removed. (178)

What Cheyne suggests is that physical exercise contributes new motion to the nerves, which then strengthens the nerves and the vibrations they transport. Exercise also benefits other parts of the body, since it keeps the circulation of the blood active and moving. The therapeutic goal of imparting motion to the body and especially to the nerves is a central paradigm in Cheyne's curative regime. He points out that this goal is not necessarily achieved through exercise alone, and observes that climactic conditions can also produce a similar effect: "The Warmth and Action of the *Sun*, ... [keeps] the Blood and Juices sufficiently fluid, the *Circulation* free, and all the *Secretions* in their due Degree and Plenty..."

(173). Underlying Cheyne's model of health is the notion that components of the natural environment—particularly sun, warmth, dryness, and fresh air—provide the means to support animal life.[76] Cheyne claims, for instance, that "the Nitre or Acid of fresh, new Air, is as necessary towards Life and Health as fresh balmy Food" (55-56). The essential point is that contact with nature is crucial in cures for nervous disorders.

Combining exercise and nature as components of a single curative regime, Cheyne develops a model of physical exercise that is most beneficial when it is undertaken in warm sunshine and plenty of "pure, fragrant, fresh Air" (177). Since Cheyne presents the "English malady" as an affliction of the upper classes, his advice on proper self-management is intended to help such people rid themselves of nervous disorders (Mullan 205, 211, 238-39; Porter, Introduction xi, xxx-xxxi; Porter and Rousseau 55-56; Porter, *Doctor* 92). Hence the exercises that he proposes include riding on horseback or in a carriage, hunting, lawn-bowling, and badminton, in addition to walking (180-81).[77] These pursuits were already popular with the privileged classes, although Donna Landry observes that the ability to hunt and walk in rural areas was never limited to the ranks of the privileged, as labourers also actively engaged in such activities (11, 78-91).

All of these "exercises" could be undertaken in the countryside, whether it was located in a truly rural area, on an estate, or even in a London suburb, and most of them would also have been suitable for a landscape garden, park, or

green in London or in any provincial town. As Peter Borsay (1990) points out in his discussion of the development of towns and "provincial urban culture" during the eighteenth century, "[b]owling greens were quite common in towns of any size, often one suspects attached to an inn... Several places supported town hunts in the first half of the eighteenth century" (162). In *The English Malady*, Cheyne does not finely distinguish between such places as these, but he is absolutely unequivocal that the climactic conditions in the "country" are far better for human health than those prevailing specifically in and around the city of London. For Cheyne suggests that, due to overcrowding, the great number of coal fires, and other factors, the air of London has become polluted and impure "for twenty Miles round it, and ... in Time, must alter, weaken, and destroy the healthiest Constitutions of Animals of all Kinds" (55). According to Cheyne, this impure London air directly contributes to the onset of nervous disorders, which explains why "these Distempers are to be found in their highest and most astonishing Symptoms..." in London itself (55). Given his belief about the dangers presented by London air, Cheyne asserts that "seldom any lasting or solid Cure is perform'd till the Diseased be *rusticated* and purified from the infectious Air and Damps, transubstantiated into their Habits, by a great City, and till they have suck'd in and incorporated the sweet, balmy, clear Air of the Country, and driven the other out of their Habit" (55). It would seem that *any* cure for nervous disorders, including exercising outdoors in the air and sun, will

work to best effect only when the patient has retreated from London to a more benign country.

What Cheyne means by the "country" is, as we have seen, ambiguous. London is ruled out entirely, but does this stipulation also apply to suburbs that might have every appearance of the country? For as Gerald MacLean, Donna Landry, and Joseph Ward (1999) observe, "[t]he paradox of country life as the desirable end of urban aspirations was often resolved then, as it is now, with the convenience of a suburban residence" (5). But perhaps Cheyne would not have recommended such places to ailing London residents seeking the country. As Porter points out, Cheyne left London for reasons of health in his early thirties, eventually settling in Bath where he maintained a successful medical practice and wrote several books, including *The English Malady* and an earlier text espousing the healing powers of Bath waters (Introduction xvi-xviii). So by a more rustic country, does Cheyne really mean the general region of Bath or its environs?

Cheyne's theory of nervous function develops the conception that the external world is a sensible phenomenon which, by the mediation of the senses and nerves, can provoke internal activity, including mental responses, in the patient (65, 67-72). But there is no sense here in which mental or emotional revitalization directly follows from interacting with material nature. Cheyne notes that exercise can stimulate pleasurable sensations, and that these sensations, in relaxing the mind, help to prevent it from exhausting itself and the body that it

controls (181-83; see Porter, Introduction xxxiii). Still, it is not clear if the exercising subject draws amusement from the natural environment, or simply from the pleasures of indulging in the physical activity. The lack of a conception in *The English Malady* that contact with nature exercises the mind or senses directly is significant, particularly with regard to the question of class participation in practices of health. A practice of health involving excessive physical exercise, even if put forward in the cause of better health, would have been rejected as unseemly by the leisure classes for whom this advice was intended, and so a fine balance had to be struck. John Mullan (1988) has pointed out that Cheyne "firmly disposes of the notion that those involved in such an activity as labour can aspire to the delicacy and refinement which reveal themselves in nervous disorder" (238), but he seems to thereby assume that Cheyne does not advocate exercise in any form for his leisured readers and patients (see 238-39). The evidence indicates otherwise. It is certain that Cheyne is careful to recommend only certain kinds of physical activities for the privileged reader of *The English Malady* in order not to risk affronting the main audience for his book. But he does advise such readers to engage in moderate activities as may be suited to their habits and dispositions.

It is not surprising that Cheyne promotes exercises that might already be well-known to his cultivated readers. In appropriating such activities, Cheyne links them with a whole network of health practices and with social and political considerations pertaining directly to issues of personal and public health. Landry

has argued that the countryside was increasingly imagined during the eighteenth century as the site of leisure pursuits such as touring, walking, riding, and hunting (1-25 and passim). According to Keith Thomas, "country life" meant above all a refuge from the social bustle and entrepreneurial demands of London, a retreat that might allow one to enjoy daily existence at a slower pace: "the appeal of the country was negative. It offered an escape from urban vices and affectations, a rest from the strains of business, and a refuge from the dirt, smoke and noise of the city" (*Man* 247). As William Cowper puts it in "Retirement" (1782), a quiet rural retreat provides a place in which one can abandon "constant cares," if only temporarily, for the "freedom" of the country (408-10). The creators of rural panegyrics were careful to assure their cultivated readers that a country existence would not involve strenuous exercise. In his portrayal of rural retirement in *The Seasons*, James Thomson describes a situation consisting of "Health ever-blooming; unambitious Toil; / Calm Contemplation, and poetic Ease" (3.1276-77). Thomson depicts country life as an easy and measured existence that bestows its wholesome benefits without the need for taxing activity. Cheyne's recommendations coincide with a tradition of representing the country as healthy retreat.

During the eighteenth century, nature was increasingly viewed as a material system that could exercise and invigorate the nerves of the mind and senses directly. Tom Furniss (1993) points out that in instalments of *The Spectator* (c. 1712), Joseph Addison popularized a "therapeutic model of the

benefits of imaginative activity" by arguing that watching beautiful scenes invigorates the observer (24). To occupy oneself in imaginative contemplation, according to Addison, acts as "a gentle exercise to the faculties" (qtd. in Furniss 24). An approach to personal health that distinguished the senses from the body seemed more in keeping with the practices of cultivation already in use by the privileged classes to differentiate themselves from the lower social strata. By mid-century, a pronounced concern for the health of what may be loosely termed the mind and senses was starting to become consolidated. The general emphasis of this model of health was on sensory stimulation, which the presence of nature was believed to impart. We may observe the rise of this new practice of health in the dramatic upsurge in popularity of landscape aesthetics during the second half of the eighteenth century. Writers on landscape aesthetics like Edmund Burke and Uvedale Price announced that the sensory stimuli received from observed landscapes could revitalize the mind and senses. Their innovation was in viewing the natural landscape as a constant source of sensory impressions. In the model Burke and Price proposed, natural scenery creates a stimulus that travels to a sensory organ such as the eye or ear, and then moves to the internal site of the mental faculties. The prominence of observable scenery in the model is significant. The landscape is no longer posited only as a place that one inhabits or travels through, but now becomes a detached "prospect" that one observes.[78]

In a section of *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1759) that has garnered attention from scholars ever since the book was published, Edmund Burke approaches the question of sensory health in a way quite similar to that proposed by Cheyne in *The English Malady*.[79] The basic model of health put forward by Burke is as follows: the "nerves" comprising the "delicate organs," which in turn mediate the operation of the "imagination" (and possibly, Burke speculates, "the other mental powers"), lose their "vigorous tone" over time from inactivity, and so must be strengthened by means of "exercise" (122-23). Burke suggests that "a mode of terror is the exercise of the finer parts of the system," and he recommends that the best way to achieve this feeling of terror so that it will have a beneficial effect on the nerves is to willingly experience the sublime (123). Burke frequently uses images of awe-inspiring landscapes, such as the "level plain of a vast extent on land" or the "prospect of the ocean," to demonstrate how the experience of the sublime occurs (53). Admittedly, this was not the usual way at the time of conceiving the sublime, a category of experience that was debated by many other writers. Joshua Reynolds, for instance, generally uses the word "sublime" to refer to a category of perception and its effect on the observer, and not to an identifiable object or place. Indeed, Reynolds does not typically connect the sublime with landscape at all, but rather associates it with art (see *Discourses* 65, 119). Burke makes much the same point when he observes that a passage from John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is sublime (55). Nonetheless, in light of some of the

examples that Burke provides, his notion of sensory exercise describes a practice of health that could take place outdoors while one views stunning natural scenery. These sublime scenes function for Burke as a material system that delivers stimuli to the sensory organs, which produce the experience of the sublime as a response.

Some scholars, in pointing out that physical and mental health are so tightly integrated in Burke's model, have been led to conclude that Burke presents the experience of the sublime as an extension of a physiological response. This position is perhaps best summarized by Vanessa L. Ryan's (2001) assertion that "the sublime leads not to an exaltation of our soul or our mind but to the strengthening of our body, to a strong nervous system, which ultimately compels us to action" (277; also Furniss 26-31). The physiological language that Burke uses to describe his theory of sublime experience may seem decisive, but I want to suggest that the seeming blend of physiological and mental in the sublime reveals Burke's anxiety about how to separate a mental experience from physiological theories of the nerves that were then at the forefront of medical doctrine. Despite the appearance of a link between the sublime and the body's health, Burke is not really suggesting that the practice of sensory exercise is an activity that can invigorate the body itself. Certain causes of the sublime do have the power to influence the physical structures in the body; attempting to see in absolute darkness, for instance, causes such a "contraction of the radial fibres of the iris .... as to strain the nerves that compose it beyond

their natural tone; and by this means to produce a painful sensation" that brings about the sublime (132). But it is crucial to note that there is a disjuncture between the mental experience of sensation and its immediate cause: the physical responses of the body to the material force that objects impress on the senses. The sublime was intended to be understood as a mental experience. By describing sensory exercise as "labour" (122-23), Burke asserts that such exercise is a material practice, like any other regimen that takes place in the country. I speculate that Burke's objective here is to privilege sensory experience in opposition to what must have been familiar to him: the popular traditions of physical exercise in rural environments that many writers on regimen advocated.

Uvedale Price would later comment in his *Essay on the Picturesque* (1794) on this same section of Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*, and would develop a conception of sensory health involving the observation of picturesque landscapes.[80] Price argues that viewing picturesque scenes refreshes the fibres of the nerves and promotes the health of the senses, much as the contemplation of the sublime is supposed to do. But Price also asserts that the effect of these picturesque scenes on the senses is gentler than the effects that Burke associates with sublime experience. If Price envisioned his practice of natural health differently than did Burke, it was because of differences in the way that "sublime" and "picturesque" were normally defined. The sublime, associated with such words as "power," "vastness," and "infinity," produces a sensory experience

that is extreme (Burke 53-79). Price argues that the sensory experience of the sublime "violently stretches the fibres" (86). He attempts to distinguish the picturesque from the sublime by listing "intricacy" and "variety" as attributes of the former. The picturesque would thus be exemplified by a woodland scene unevenly broken by other terrain features (see 17-19). Price suggests that this sort of scene will produce a very different sensory experience than that produced by sublime landscapes (84-86).[81] The contemplation of a picturesque scene normally results, according to Price, in a rather moderate sensory experience that "by its active agency keeps ... [the fibres] to their full tone..." (86). The experience of the picturesque is bracing but never debilitating, and Price is indeed hinting that a practice of natural health based on the observation of picturesque landscapes is more effective than alternatives such as sublime experience.

There were practical and material considerations that restricted participation in sublime and picturesque experience to the privileged and educated. The conceptions of neither sublime experience nor picturesque experience were popularly known across British society because the texts that disseminated them were generally the domain of literate society. Indeed, Price asserts that one's ability to distinguish the picturesque in nature is improved precisely by making an effort to study the artistic canon, particularly "compositions, which, like those of the great classical authors, have been consecrated by long uninterrupted admiration, and which therefore have a similar

claim to influence our judgement, and to form our taste in all that is within their province" (4). For Price, the ability to respond to picturesque scenes is, like taste, formed by education. This is not the case in Burke's theory of the sublime. As Furniss points out, Burke implies that anyone, regardless of social class, can undergo the same response to the sublime, since the power of the sublime is that it affects the human senses inexorably; one does not need to learn how to respond to it (60). But Furniss also suggests that Burke views strenuous physical labour in general as a factor that ruins one's natural ability to experience the sublime (60, 69-70, 73). There has thus been a general recognition on the part of critics that sublime experience is, as Terry Eagleton (1990) puts it, only intended by Burke for "the cultivated few" (56). Burke, according to Eagleton, assumes that the working poor have labour to keep them in good health, and to this extent he presents the contemplation of the sublime as "the rich man's labour, invigorating an otherwise dangerously complacent ruling class" (56).[82]

Nature and the health of the whole person

In certain texts from the latter part of the eighteenth century, we begin to see the integration of these physical and sensory approaches to nervous health, allowing the production of general practices that now comprehend the health of the whole person. Natural history was often linked with a general practice of health of just this kind. According to Harold J. Cook (1996), there had been numerous connections between natural history and therapeutic medicine since

the early modern period. These two disciplines "constituted ... the 'big science' of the early modern period, soaking up enormous sums of money and energy contributed by countless people" (104). Natural history was used extensively by doctors as a technique for understanding the causes of illness and for developing natural cures, a fact that explains why many medical professionals were also practicing naturalists (91).

Two brief passages from the prefaces to John Lightfoot's *Flora Scotica* (1777) and Gilbert White's *The Natural History of Selborne* (1789) contain very cursory references to practices intended to keep both the body and mind in good health. Each of these prefaces end with what, by the end of the eighteenth century, had become formulaic claims that the active pursuit of natural history in the countryside could enhance the state of one's health. Natural history could be studied either in the field or with the aid of books, but White is quick to disparage a practice of naturalism that does not emphasize going out into the surrounding country to study nature directly (109, 136). This emphasis on physically experiencing the natural environment for oneself allows these naturalists to promote their favourite pursuit as a form of bodily and sensory exercise. Lightfoot, for instance, argues that exploring the features of the natural environment are a "source of much health and pleasure, by the exercise it necessarily promotes to the body, and the complacency it always begets in the mind" (xviii). In an almost identical statement, White observes that "his pursuits, by keeping the body and mind employed, have, under Providence, contributed to

much health and cheerfulness of spirits, even to old age..." (4). Happiness was used as a solid measure of mental health in the eighteenth century because it demonstrated, to oneself and others, that one was not in the grip of debilitating emotional disorders such as the spleen (hypochondria), hysteria, and melancholy, all of which were characterized by varying degrees of sadness (see Blackmore 15-36, 102-14, 155-66). Keith Thomas (1997) reiterates this concept nicely when he notes that "[i]n the early modern period good health was conceived of less as a physical condition, narrowly defined, than as a general state of all-round felicity, of mind and soul as well as body" ("Morality" 24). Unlike Cheyne and Burke, these two naturalists do not describe the actual processes by which the natural environment produces good physical and mental health, although White does suggest that it has something to do with the exercise that one normally gets while actively studying the natural history of a particular place.

Natural history fitted neatly into networks of health practices that had already been constituted earlier in the century when medical knowledge was made more accessible to literate people. This alliance of health practices with a conception of natural history as active practice provides an indication of the wide extent of such networks in the eighteenth century. Although the health practices that I have described may appear to play a very small role in the writings of these two naturalists, such practices were crucial for helping to define these larger networks of practices of which they were a part. For instance, to induce their cultivated readers to acquire an *active* interest in natural history involving in-

depth field study of natural organisms and places, Lightfoot and White are exploiting much the same argument that Cheyne promotes in *The English Malady*: the notion that people almost immediately become healthier after they retreat from their London houses to their country residences, and there engage in various rural recreations. By aiding in the creation of a culture of investigation among literate people, the practices of health that Lightfoot and White present were closely integrated with political projects seeking to provide motivations for expanding the domain of natural knowledge. Finally, given that concerns about health had become a preoccupation of the privileged classes by the latter part of the eighteenth century, these health practices also helped to position natural history in terms of the same social networks that produced the privileged classes.

In much the same manner as Lightfoot and White, Thomas Pennant suggests in the preface to his popular *British Zoology* (1766) that the active pursuit of natural history can benefit human health, but his remarks are far from cursory. Pennant provides a very detailed account of the benefits of physical and sensory exercise. His essential treatment of this issue does not differ substantially from those provided by Lightfoot and White. Pennant suggests that the pursuit of natural history in the field can lead to better physical health and can secure emotional well-being: "health of body, and a chearful contentment of mind, are the general effects of these amusements. The latter is produced by a serious and pleasing investigation of the bounties of an all-wise and beneficent Providence; as constant and regular exercise is the best preservative of the

former" (xviii). What is significant, as we shall see, is the way in which Pennant makes these benefits dependent on active and first-hand contact with natural places.

Turning first to the question of the health of the mind and senses, Pennant suggests that one's mental state is strongly affected by impressions received from one's environment. In the passage cited above, Pennant indicates that the emotional health derived from actively studying natural history functions in terms of a larger Providential order. Good emotional health is in this sense a blessing that is bestowed on the naturalist, as if the mind were being rejuvenated by coming into contact with God. As he develops these ideas in his preface, Pennant adds the notion that studying natural history exercises and therefore rejuvenates the senses directly. At the basis of his model of sensory health is the understanding that nature and society each have a different impact on the senses. Nature is portrayed here as a panorama that delights the senses in multiple ways. Opposed to this natural space is polite society, which Pennant depicts as a pageant of sterile pastimes, none of which is capable of producing sensory impressions that differ qualitatively from any other. It seems that too much time spent in this social milieu has a debilitating effect on the mind and senses. As a cure for the monotonous spectacle of polite society, Pennant recommends taking excursions to study natural history in the country, which is an activity that can restore the hitherto anaesthetized senses: "so pleasing and useful an employment would relieve the *tædium* arising from a sameness of

diversions; every object would produce some new observation…" (xvii). Natural scenes refresh the senses because, unlike the tedious amusements of society, these scenes convey sensory impressions that vary continuously in content as each new "object" is observed. Where sterile social amusements only tire the senses, the continually varying impressions of natural scenes provoke an active response from the viewer that acts as a form of exercise for the senses.

To the extent that Pennant addresses a privileged reader as the audience of his book, and even points out that he wishes to "recommend this study most earnestly to every country gentleman…" (xvii), the ailments and cures that he describes are adapted to the concerns of this sort of person. As we have already seen, Pennant isolates the problem of illness in a privileged social milieu. Pennant continues this practice when he turns to the issue of physical health. He suggests that some members of the leisured classes, particularly people who do not regularly venture outdoors, suffer from chronically frail constitutions:

> To those of a sedentary disposition, this study would not only prove agreeable, but salutary: men of that turn of mind are with difficulty drawn from their books, to partake of the necessary enjoyments of air and exercise; and even when thus compelled, they profit less by it than men of an illiberal education. But this inconvenience would be remedied, could we induce them to observe and relish the wonders of nature; aided by philosophy, they would find in the woods and fields a series of objects, that would give to exercise charms unknown before… (xvii-xviii).

Liberal education was an experience reserved for the privileged in eighteenth-century Britain. Pennant invokes it here as a reliable marker of class—a way of setting apart the aristocracy and gentry from the labouring classes and even

some among the new middle classes. The assumption here is that the sedentary person of leisure suffers from infirmities that are not felt by those whose lower social rank obliges them to labour for a living, and so remain physically robust. After a life of "sedentary" pursuits, the inactive gentleman grows unaccustomed to labour, and becomes incapable of responding easily to vigorous exercise. But Pennant argues that traveling to the country to observe nature and gather specimens, which he has already suggested is an activity that is complementary to contemplation, can also enable even inactive people to cope with their deficiencies and gain some much needed physical stimulation. Pennant also points out that since the person "of a sedentary disposition" tends to be contemplative, taking exercise in natural surroundings, which can afford many pleasing delights for the senses, will help this sort of person *want* to exercise more frequently.

The eighteenth-century notion that a person's constitution varies by social class was central to the formulation of practices of health as classed pursuits. Pennant promotes natural history to British gentlemen as a practice addressing the health problems which were commonly believed to threaten this social group. His conception of natural history caters to elevated aesthetic preferences for activities emphasizing cultivated experience. As a recreation undertaken voluntarily, natural history was sharply differentiated from all forms of labour that were driven by pure economic necessity. Although the study of natural history would clearly involve physical exertion, Pennant presents it as a relatively

moderate activity. What he then describes is a practice of health that cultivated people can enjoy even as it rejuvenates them, and it is important that it could be performed with relatively little difficulty. For the serious pursuit of natural history generally meant protracted periods of field research. But it would seem that the gentle practice of health Pennant has in mind was best performed directly out of one's own door in the managed English countryside of fields and parks.

What do the declarations made by these naturalists about personal health and the activities that promote it mean in practice? Many natural history texts were based on the lived experiences of their writers, and so they display a kind of record of the actions taken by naturalists in the field as part of their studies. White in particular provides many accounts of his travels through the countryside around Selborne and the other places that he visited. An impression is built up of leisurely walks during which numerous opportunities are presented for observing the surrounding natural phenomena. White does not mention engaging in any activities that were particularly strenuous; he was nearing his fiftieth year when the first of the letters that comprise *Selborne* was even written, and he was almost seventy when the book was actually published. These walks seem to have taken place either close to White's home, or in rural areas that were easily accessible from the villages and country houses that he visited. It is well-known that White preferred to ride on horseback when going on extended excursions in his own parish or when traveling to other parts of England.[83] Cheyne considers riding on horseback to be the best form of exercise that a cultivated person can

undertake, arguing that it sufficiently works the body without being too taxing (180). White, then, is speaking from personal experience in suggesting that studying the natural history of particular places at first hand provides many opportunities to obtain healthy physical exercise.

The personal pursuits of Lightfoot and Pennant as naturalists were rather more robust and protracted. Like White, these two naturalists favoured travel by horseback for extended journeys (Allen, *Naturalist* 24), but they seem also to have gotten much of their daily exercise in the field on foot. Lightfoot claims that the work of compiling the information for *Flora Scotica* "took up the daily exercise of a whole summer" (xvi). He points out, almost boastfully, that he had to surmount many obstacles while travelling through parts of Scotland in order to observe its natural history, and in so doing he "embraced every opportunity of scaling the highest mountains, climbing the most rugged rocks, penetrating the thickest woods, treading the fallacious bogs, winding upon the shores of the seas and lakes, in short, of examining every variety of land or water, which promised to produce a variety of vegetables" (xvi). Pennant, despite the moderate practice of health that he offers his readers in *British Zoology*, was famous for his extended and arduous tours of remote regions in Britain. Indeed, Lightfoot notes that he undertook at least part of his travels in Scotland with Pennant as a companion (v). It was from this same trip that the latter compiled his *Tour in Scotland, and Voyage to the Hebrides* (1774). So Lightfoot and Pennant could

assert with conviction that the study of natural history in the field often involves much beneficial exercise.

This celebration of voluntary activity in the outdoors was embraced by many writers at the end of the century, and could be found in a variety of genres. It is particularly prominent in the writings of William Cowper, the most renowned poet of the period. As described by Cowper in *The Task* (1785) and "Yardley Oak" (1791), good health is almost entirely dependent on exercise, preferably when undertaken away from London in the countryside.[84] I want to suggest that a starting point for Cowper's ideas about the relations between nature and human health is a physiological model not unlike the theories of nervous function proposed by George Cheyne and Edmund Burke. In terms of this model, the nerves of the body and sensory organs become less energetic over time when not exercised, and so must be worked under appropriate conditions.[85] In *The Task*, Cowper derives support for his model from an analogy with nature as material system, which, he suggests, maintains its vigour and vitality through incessant motion:

> By ceaseless action, all that is, subsists.
> Constant rotation of th' unwearied wheel
> That nature rides upon, maintains her health,
> Her beauty, her fertility. She dreads
> An instant's pause, and lives but while she moves.
> Its own revolvency upholds the world. (1.367-72)

Nature, here depicted literally as a sort of revolving mechanism, requires the motion of its parts to maintain itself in good working order; the bane of this moving wheel of nature is inactivity. Cowper views these two states, motion and

inactivity, as the main causes of good and poor human health respectively, as will become apparent in a moment. In "Yardley Oak," Cowper presents an image of nature similar to that included in *The Task*, but he now modifies the depiction in ways that reflect directly on his model of human health:

> Skies uncertain, now the heat
> Transmitting cloudless, and the solar beam
> Now quenching in a boundless sea of clouds—
> Calm and alternate storm, moisture and drought
> Invigorate by turns the springs of life
> In all that live, plant, animal, and man,
> And in conclusion mar them. Nature's threads,
> Fine passing thought, e'en in her coarsest works,
> Delight in agitation, yet sustain
> The force that agitates not unimpair'd;
> But, worn by frequent impulse, to the cause
> Of their best tone their dissolution owe. (74-85)

Cowper now suggests that the same forces working to invigorate nature eventually cause it to wear out. Notice also that Cowper is overtly speaking of "all that live," and this includes "man," along with other organisms in nature. In this way, Cowper indicates in unambiguous terms that the principles he is discussing here apply directly to human beings and their health. The implication is that humans are inextricably connected to all other living things. Most importantly, Cowper now incorporates a notion of the nerves or "threads" as the medium by which vital motion is conveyed to and then within all living organisms.

How does Cowper apply his principle of health as motion, which is at work in both of the passages just cited, to the human economy of health? It is the cumulative effects of various motions that explain for Cowper why humans are sick or healthy, but he tries to connect the different factors involved to conditions

in one's surroundings. In particular, Cowper argues that his cultivated readers will experience ill health when they spend too much time amidst the pleasures and entertainments afforded by polite society, and provides two different reasons why this is so. First, Cowper explains that in polite society one tends to receive insufficient physical exercise, a situation that results in weakening the body:

> The sedentary stretch their lazy length
> When custom bids, but no refreshment find,
> For none they need: the languid eye, the cheek
> Deserted of its bloom, the flaccid, shrunk,
> And wither'd muscle, and the vapid soul,
> Reproach their owner with that love of rest
> To which he forfeits ev'n the rest he loves. (1.389-95)

Cowper depicts rest as the complement to exercise; rest is thus appropriate when used as a means of recovering from periods of activity. It is this cycle of exercise and rest that keeps the body itself vigorous and healthy. The cultivated person depicted here spends far too much time in "sedentary" pursuits, which afford no true rest precisely because the body was never active in the first place. Cowper also suggests that any length of time spent in fashionable society brings about the emotional distempers that he attributes to this cultivated sort of person. The monotonous sensory entertainments that make up the experience of polite society do not exercise the sensory organs sufficiently, and the outcome is emotional disturbances like spleen:

> It is the constant revolution stale
> And tasteless, of the same repeated joys,
> That palls and satiates, and makes languid life
> A pedlar's pack, that bows the bearer down.
> Health suffers, and the spirits ebb. (1.462-66)

The root cause of poor emotional health is still presented as a condition of inactivity, but unlike physical exercise, it is a passive condition. The forms of sensory stimulation afforded by polite entertainments are simply not adequate to the task of exercising the senses, which then invariably fall into a state of decay.

According to Cowper, it is in the countryside that good health awaits the cultivated person: "So manifold, all pleasing in their kind, / All healthful, are th' employs of rural life..." (3.624-25). For in the country, one receives the exercise necessary for keeping the body and emotions in good health. To be rid of the debilitating physical consequences of polite society, one need only remove to the country and take a bracing "rural walk / O'er hills, through valleys, and by rivers' brink..." (1.112-13). Time spent in the country also contributes to strengthening fatigued senses and brittle minds. "The spleen," Cowper maintains, "is seldom felt where Flora reigns" (1.455). Cowper suggests that the world of external nature was created to fulfill an innate human need to exercise the mind, an end nature accomplishes by presenting the senses with an endless display of new scenes and experiences: "The earth was made so various, that the mind / Of desultory man, studious of change, / And pleas'd with novelty, might be indulged" (1.506-8). The mind and the senses, hitherto left inactive in polite society, must now actively labour in order to absorb the diverse sensory effects that nature produces.[86]

As an example of a person with consistently good health, Cowper most often offers the image of the rural labourer, for whom vigorous exercise brings its

reward in "chearful days, and nights without a groan" (1.366). By means of such descriptions of healthy labourers, Cowper sets up a contrast with polite society, and underlines for his reader that it is the common activities and pleasures intrinsic to polite society that tend to make one unwell. Significantly, Cowper suggests that rural labourers are healthy precisely because they are *not* refined:

> Oh happy! and, in my account, denied
> That sensibility of pain with which
> Refinement is endued, thrice happy thou.
> Thy frame robust and hardy, feels indeed
> The piercing cold, but feels it unimpair'd.
> The learned finger never need explore
> Thy vig'rous pulse, and the unhealthful East,
> That breathes the spleen, and searches ev'ry bone
> Of the infirm, is wholesome air to thee. (4.357-65)

Cowper contrasts the labourer directly with the polite person, who must avoid drafts that the labourer shrugs off and, unlike the labourer, conspicuously requires the ministrations of the doctor to stave off dangerous illnesses. Richard Feingold (1978) suggests that the labourer mentioned in the passage embodies a type of person with "rugged nerves," who lacks the cultivated sensibilities of the polite classes (138-39). The labourer's good state of health is owing to this deficiency, for, as Mullan has shown, an excess of sensibility was seen by many eighteenth-century commentators as a primary cause of weak nerves and the disorders, like spleen, that were often associated with this condition (201-40). So the labourer presented here is fortunate to be "denied" the sensibility that refinement brings.

Although he idealizes the rural labourer, Cowper is not recommending arduous manual activity as a remedy for his cultivated readers. Cowper does argue that our "hours of sweetest ease" are to be obtained only through "strenuous toil" (406). But in practice he offers a hierarchy of activities, only some of which are appropriate for the privileged classes. According to Cowper, one form of exercise that is suitable for the polite is afforded by the pursuits of the amateur gardener:

> ...if the garden with its many cares,
> All well repay'd, demand him, he attends
> The welcome call, conscious how much the hand
> Of lubbard labor needs his watchful eye,
> Oft loit'ring lazily if not o'erseen,
> Or misapplying this unskilful strength.
> Nor does he govern only or direct,
> But much performs himself. No works indeed
> That ask robust tough sinews bred to toil,
> Servile employ—but such as may amuse,
> Not tire, demanding rather skill than force. (3.397-407)

As Martin Priestman (1983) observes, Cowper is making an effort in this passage to step back from the more vigorous physical activities that he had earlier celebrated in *The Task* (98-99). Here it is Cowper's hired helper who does the hard work in the garden; at such times, Cowper is employed in directing his helper's labour so that it may be put to best use. Cowper states that he also does his own work in his garden, but it is not labour of the same type as that performed by his helper; for Cowper's work is not particularly strenuous, and it requires some measure of skill. The work of the amateur gardener, then, yields physical exercise that is moderate and refreshing while simultaneously providing

much healthy stimulation for the mind. It is perfectly suited for the polite reader, as it directly compensates for the deficiencies that Cowper consistently attributes to life in polite society.

In many of the practices of health that I have examined, the natural environment is largely viewed as a benign influence on human health. The natural environment, as presented by the writers I discuss, exercises and heals by actively engaging the human subject; it requires interaction and effort on the part of those situated in it, and so counteracts illnesses that are generally depicted as the result of lethargy. What Cowper brings to this model is the notion that the same natural processes and practices that heal will eventually wear out the human body and mind. The physician Erasmus Darwin makes a similar conception the basis of his ideas about human health. Darwin sees the influence of nature in all aspects of the economy of human life: illness as well as health. Maureen McNeil (1987) has recently suggested that Darwin envisions human beings as being fundamentally a "part of nature" (*Banner* 166). This belief encapsulates his approach to the practice of health. In an essay on "Old Age and Death" appended to his long poem *The Temple of Nature* (1803), Darwin tries to account for illness and aging as a consequence of the natural deterioration over time of the fibres of "the muscles or the organs of sense" (23-26). "In early life," Darwin observes, "the repetition of animal actions occasions them to be performed with greater facility..." (30). It is this process that explains the increasing strength of young organisms as they mature. Darwin asserts that

over a period of time "many animal motions by perpetual repetition are performed with less energy.... Hence the repetition, which occasions animal actions for a time to be performed with greater energy, occasions them at length to become feeble, or to cease entirely" (31). These "animal motions" are the mental and physical activities of the body, and they originate in the stimuli that the body receives from its immediate environment (McNeil, *Banner* 152, 161-63). The effects of old age begin to manifest as the fibres respond with diminishing strength to these stimuli and to secondary stimuli that arise within the body itself.

Since illness and aging are actually changes in the way the body responds to stimuli over time, Darwin proposes that a practice of health expressly designed "to prevent the approach of old age and death, must consist in the due management of the quantity of every kind of stimulus, but particularly of that from objects external to the moving organ" (28). McNeil points out that the principle that human health is influenced by the amount and type of stimuli that the body receives from its surroundings was associated not only with Darwin's medical theories, but also with those of his predecessors William Cullen and John Brown (*Banner* 148-67).[87] This model explained illnesses as the result of situations in which stimuli acting on the body fall outside their normal or natural range (*Banner* 149-53).[88] McNeil does not explicitly consider Darwin's views on the benefits of the stimuli afforded by non-urban, natural environments, nor does she address how these environments enter Darwin's medical paradigm as sites (or networks) in which practices of health may be enacted. Yet in the essays appended to *The*

Temple of Nature, it seems clear that Darwin is primarily offering "natural" stimuli as a remedy for illness and debilitation. According to Darwin, the human body requires "heat, food, and fresh air" if it is to remain in good health, and so any significant shortage of such stimuli could be dangerous to it (28). Likewise, any long-term exposure to "unnatural" stimuli such as intoxicating substances can bring about illness or aging (28). As McNeil suggests, Darwin argues that external stimulation is most beneficial to the body when it fluctuates around a natural mean (see *Banner* 152, 155, 165-66). Indeed, Darwin asserts that the natural climatic conditions found in Britain provide just the right amount and kind of stimuli to maintain the body in good health: "the variations of the cold and heat of this climate contribute to strengthen its inhabitants, who are more active and vigorous, and live longer, than those of either much warmer or much colder latitudes" (29). These statements delineate a potential practice of health in which contact with certain kinds of environmental conditions is absolutely crucial.

Not everyone in British society had equal freedom to relocate from London to rural areas, or to move from one such area to another, in order to indulge in the reputed healing properties of such places. Commenting on the social implications of the regimen tradition, Rosenberg has suggested that it was "a doctrine best suited to the life choices of those who could exercise such choices... A laborer could not easily vary his diet or those of his wife and children; he could not improve his health through regular horseback riding or sea voyages to the Adriatic or West Indies" (37). Darwin acknowledges similar

limitations on the poor of his day when he asserts that "the children of the poor in large towns, ... become scrofulous from want of due nourishment, and from cold, damp, unairy lodgings" (28).[89] That Darwin can recommend a practice of health based on the wholesome effects of natural environments while admitting that the poor are tied by necessity to London slums provides an indication of his ambiguous relationship to the poor, their health, and the conditions in which they lived.

It has been established that Darwin did not administer care exclusively to a privileged and wealthy clientele in his vocation as a medical practitioner.[90] McNeil observes that Darwin "did try (unsuccessfully) to set up a dispensary for the poor in Derby, and Anna Seward praised Dr Darwin's 'professional generosity', crediting him with having offered free services to poor patients in both Lichfield and Derby" (140). But she also points out that Darwin largely focused on treating the privileged classes out of professional necessity, as was the case with most of his fellow physicians at the time (*Banner* 139-40, 146).[91] The implication is that Darwin dealt with separate categories of patients in entirely different ways, and that he may have recommended different curative techniques to the different groups that he encountered as a physician. The practice of health that Darwin promotes in the specific passages I examine in this chapter presupposes an educated and privileged subject with access to a country retreat.

Darwin also affirms that "voluntary effort," whether achieved by engaging in physical or mental exercise, is a practice that can help to maintain health and vigour as one ages (30). But he imposes a subtle hierarchy between these two forms of labour, arguing that intense physical exertion, when undertaken too frequently, can actually bring about the debility of old age more rapidly, "as is seen in post-horses that are cruelly treated, and in many of the poor, who with difficulty support their families by incessant labour" (30). Darwin gives precedence to mental activities, which strengthen the organs of sense without fatiguing them unduly; this bias explains his belief that intellectuals and political leaders are among those who tend to live longest (30). Still, eventually all actions that are taken by a person bring about the symptoms of aging: "Not only the muscular fibres lose their degree of excitability from age .... but the organs of sense become less excitable by the stimulus of external objects; whence the sight and hearing become defective" (24). In Darwin's view, practices of health contribute to the same conditions of illness that they are designed to forestall.

In "Analysis of Taste," another of the essays associated with *The Temple of Nature*, Darwin suggests that the sensations of "novelty" and "surprise" arise in the contemplation of landscape (81-84). These sensations are particularly useful for prolonging good health because they involve a varied stimulus that works the fibres, but also allows them to recuperate (31-32). Darwin insists, however, that unless one possesses an appropriate grounding in the principles of aesthetic

judgment and taste, one will be effectively incapable of experiencing the novelty of a scene:

> this sentiment of novelty is less perceived by those who do not readily use the faculty of volition, or who have little previous knowledge of nature, as by very ignorant or very stupid people, or by brute animals; ... therefore to be affected with this circumstance of the objects of Taste requires some previous knowledge of such kinds of objects, and some degree of mental exertion. (83)

Although the implication is that even an uncultivated person can develop a sufficient knowledge of nature for this task simply by being a competent observer, it is significant that the generic examples Darwin provides in "Analysis of Taste" of people who are "led by novelty" include the scientist and people who possess sufficient leisure and capital to be able to travel solely for pleasure (81). The exercise afforded by the observation of nature would seem to be presented by Darwin as a practice benefiting only those groups whose education enables them to experience nature in this way.

McNeil has suggested that Darwin used his poetry to sanction the political and social objectives of the influential Midlands industrialists who comprised his social and intellectual network (McNeil, "Scientific Muse" 164-83; also Jordanova 162). This political bias may be discerned in his poetry's celebration of the value of "mental" over "manual" occupations (McNeil, "Scientific Muse" 178-80). The objective of certain images in Darwin's poetry was to prove "that the ideas and knowledge of inventors and entrepreneurs, rather than the physical labour of workers, were the important factors transforming the contemporary environment" ("Scientific Muse" 179).[92] There is an obvious analogy here to Darwin's practice

of health, with its emphasis on sensory exercise over physical exercise and its warnings against the health hazards of brute labour. It was a practice uniquely designed to appeal to the desires and requirements of the wealthy industrialists with whom he regularly associated, a practice for people who directed the labour of others rather than engaging in it themselves.

Networks of practices: "health," "politeness," and "the country"

As I point out in the introduction to this chapter, one advantage of network theory is that it provides a means of making visible the interconnections between what are often viewed as detached categories. This is not to suggest that the concept of the network somehow collapses distinctions between these putatively separate categories. The main import of the theory is that such "categories" as medicine or health constitute networks in their own right, and that such networks are formed at the intersection of various other networks. In the historical context of this chapter, health and medicine are *not* isolated from a whole range of considerations that might seem, at first glance, to have little to do with them: social class and hierarchy, economic privilege, leisure and its consumption, education and readership, and rights to the use of land and particular environments. In this chapter I bring into focus sites of intersection among the networks that I list here. One representative context in terms of which we may further explore such interconnections is the issue of class participation in practices of health.

There are plenty of images in eighteenth-century literature of labourers rendered hale and hearty through work. Christopher Smart's "A Morning Piece" (1748) depicts "Strong Labour" as a rural cottager who is, not coincidentally, married to the figure of "Health" herself (6-11). Much like Cowper in *The Task*, Smart pointedly reminds the reader that the spectre of the "physician" never had to be called to this married couple's cottage, which implies that the rural working classes need no other resort than labour to keep themselves in a state of good health (11). There is a recognition here that medical practice has been largely set up to minister to the wealthy client, not the impoverished labourer. The notion that the health of the working classes derives from honest toil is, as Williams has pointed out, "a pastoral assumption" (*Country* 92). In the case of writers like George Crabbe, this assumption is eventually subjected to a vigorous critique, and is thereby exposed as a platitude that functions to hide the same disturbing truth revealed by Darwin—that excessive labour and poor working conditions can have a disastrous impact on the physical health of the labourer (*Country* 93). There was no clear consensus during the eighteenth century about the effects on the body of truly vigorous labour, but there seems to have been little ambiguity regarding the belief that the polite could benefit from a less intensive program of exercise in the country. The reason for the disparity is plain, given that the wealthy were not being encouraged to labour in the fields and parks that they owned. The health needs of the cultivated person demanded

a different solution: moderate activities uniquely suited to a delicate and sensitive frame.

The texts that I examine in this chapter were intended for an audience that was educated and leisured, an audience with access to the fashionable intellectual circles in which much of the interest for the subject matter I examine was generated. The authors of these texts are assuming readers who have some expertise in the judgments of taste, are curious about matters of philosophy and nature, and are willing to transform their bodies and minds by regulating their behaviours.[93] To the extent that the practices these texts describe are presented as recreations, they imply a practitioner coming from a privileged social milieu. It is important, moreover, that the subjects of the texts in this chapter, ranging from science to aesthetics to poetry, corresponded to a cross-section of fashionable topics that preoccupied polite society.[94] One of the questions I have deferred asking until now is how do we define the exact nature of "polite society" as it existed during the eighteenth century. In other words, how were the social networks associated with these health practices constituted? A few of the authors I discuss explicitly address the landed gentry as their audience; others leave the question of readership vague while still making certain assumptions about their implied readers. What is certain is that the British "reading public" was a broad mixture of social groups that did not identify with each other, and, indeed, partially defined themselves in opposition to one

another. As J.H. Plumb (1985) has observed in his discussion of the market for printed materials in the earlier eighteenth century, there is good evidence of a

> new and growing middle-class audience ... which longed to be modish, to be aware of the fashion yet wary of its excess, to participate in the world of the great yet be free from its anxieties, to feel smug and superior to provincial rusticity and old world manners, above all to be deeply respectful of the world of commerce: an audience in which a hunger for culture could easily be induced and one which had both the leisure and the affluence to indulge it. (269)

Ginnie Smith has made a similar claim with regard to the specialized genre of medical advice books, the audience for which was "not an elite readership only, but one which potentially stretched down to all but the very poorest, including the various 'middling ranks'" (281). There were medical advice books for the working poor; John Wesley's *Primitive Physic* (1755) is a well-known case (see Smith 257-62, 271). Given evidence that the texts I examine were not intended for labourers, the existence of specialized texts such as Wesley's indicates that poor readers and the texts to which they had access constituted a network of practice that was largely separate from that composed of privileged readers and the texts they read. These two networks could coincide, but they were essentially independent.

The point of this chapter is not to describe how networks of health and environment intersect with a network of social class broadly conceived, but rather to examine how health and environment intersect with a more restricted network constituted specifically by privileged writers, readers, and texts. Beyond this general distinction, it is difficult to determine in practice if a particular text was

produced for and consumed by the most privileged readers only, or if its author might have numbered among its intended audience urban professionals, or even the more prosperous shopkeepers. I have found that the most expedient way to move beyond this particular ambiguity is to leave the more involved and exacting questions of participation and class readership undefined for the most part. Plumb indicates that many middle-class readers had the means to take up pursuits that lacked a strict economic basis. We may therefore assume that membership in "polite" society was not restricted to aristocrats, the gentry, and *nouveau riche* industrialists, but, under specific circumstances, could include prosperous and respectable people accounted among the ranks of the middling sort.[95]

Moving past questions of readership, there is also ambiguity regarding the precise extent of active class participation in these practices. As a notable example, there has been much debate on this issue as it relates to the pursuit of natural history in the eighteenth century. Anne Secord (1994; 1996) has shown that organized groups of "artisan naturalists" used elements of the Linnaean system to classify plants in their field studies, despite being hampered by limited access to printed scientific materials ("Corresponding" 397-99; "Artisan" 380-82). Secord even suggests that "participation by working men in what was rapidly being appropriated as the cultural property of the educated and leisured classes" constituted a form of "political challenge" to the established ruling order ("Artisan" 389). Thomas has described studies of natural history firmly as "middle-class

recreations" (*Man* 281). The notion of purposeful leisure activities undertaken largely for their pleasurable associations, or perhaps for some putative value or benefit ascribed to them, gained in cultural status during the eighteenth century in Britain. According to Plumb, it was during this period that generalized leisure was "commercialized" for consumption by the newly affluent middle classes (265-85).

Stuart Peterfreund (1996) problematizes such views by asserting that economic considerations tended to restrict serious participation in natural history to the most privileged social groups during the eighteenth century. Peterfreund argues that engaging in natural history "meant being a gentleman who had been to university and who had the leisure and resources to do fieldwork, 'procure' specimens, and prepare collections of flora and fauna—with the aid of trusted servants, of course" (149). Some scholars have suggested that as natural history was "popularized" around the end of the eighteenth century, it was no longer viewed solely as a specialized activity for experts, such as members of the Royal Society, but was also promoted as a pursuit suitable for the educated classes in general (Pratt 27). Others have maintained that the outcome of this popularization process was to distance the technical practice of professional naturalists from a practice of natural history suitable for non-experts (Drouin and Bensaude-Vincent 408-19; Secord, "Artisan" 389-91). Just how far participation by various social groups in natural history indicates that such groups actively

might have engaged in the health practices described in natural history tracts is even less certain.

For there are obvious problems in suggesting that those who actually read these texts also used the practices of health promoted in them on a regular basis. How many people were inspired to take walks in the countryside specifically because the famous physician George Cheyne or the renowned poet William Cowper recommended this particular practice as healthy? It is certain that the texts I have chosen in this chapter were distributed and read widely. My own view, for which there is little direct evidence, is that these and similar texts had a profound impact on the manner in which people in Britain and elsewhere, starting from the eighteenth century, began to view their health and the influence of environment on it, and thus how they perceived themselves and their place in nature.

It can be argued that the practices of health I select do not automatically imply a "class subject" that would have viewed itself in terms of the practice and its fulfillment; nor do I mean by "the leisure classes" a historical class subject for whom practices of health constituted a reaffirming instance of its dominance in the social order. Practices of health had a functional existence that does not require a model of subjectivity for explanation. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) have suggested, it can be advantageous to refer to the practitioner as the "agent" rather than as the "subject," for the emphasis on subjectivity implies that practices are motivated primarily by "conscious intention," and so risks eliding

both the material effect of the practice itself and the social conditions that are involved in its production (121). It would be more correct to say that practices used by cultivated people to keep themselves in good health were among the total repertoire of practices available to those who occupied a specific social position, and they were, as Bourdieu might say, one means of manifesting this position.

To acknowledge this does not mean that we must forgo any discussion of subjectivity and self-fashioning in the context of practices of health. Due to the personal nature of these practices, they could have a profound impact on definitions of the "self." Michel Foucault (1997) argues that "in our tradition ... the self is not merely given but is constituted in relationship to itself as subject" (280). It is compelling to view these practices of health as procedures for creating a healthier and more vibrant self. Such practices were, after all, objective forms of self-work, and their goal was to allow people to focus on themselves for specific purposes. We might say that practices of health allowed people to constitute themselves in terms of new class-based ideals of body, mind, and behaviour that, according to Foucault (1990), were being defined in the modern period (115-31). It is possible to observe such a process at work in the texts I select. For the healthy self that emerges in these texts possesses many qualities attributed to the cultivated, the educated, and the polite. It is active without being excessively vigorous. Its body is capable of the moderate exercise that would normally be obtained during daily walks, but it notably lacks the endurance

typically attributed to the bodies of labourers. It is refined and mannerly, for it has absorbed the codes of polite society in such a fashion that decorum is now visible on the surfaces of its body and is revealed in its actions. Finally, the healthy self on display in these texts possesses a mind that is at once curious, perceptive, and fully capable of protracted mental exertions, the implication being that it is already educated.

The production of healthy places

The writers I discuss present nature as a positive influence on human health, and at times as a force that can eventually weaken the body and mind. It was, however, quite common in the eighteenth century to view nature as a great threat to the welfare of human beings (Worster 45-49). This view is exemplified by James Thomson's expression of horror at the knowledge that nature has a profoundly destructive aspect: a "sick nature" that breeds pestilence and devours life (2.1037). Cowper, although usually describing nature as benevolent in *The Task*, occasionally overturns this image, as happens when he laments the great devastation and loss of life that had been caused by famous natural disasters in recent years.[96] It would have been unthinkable to locate a personal practice of health in a nature that was considered to be a threat to humans. The fear would be that one would need to constantly contend with the negative impact of this environment, as the British labourers in Oliver Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village*

(1770) are forced to do when they are transplanted from Auburn's tamed surroundings to far harsher "distant climes" in some colonial wilderness (341-62).

Just as the practices of health that I examine describe nature as benign, there were also forms of medicine in the eighteenth century that portrayed nature as a potential danger to human health. The "medicine of the environment" that James Riley analyzes in *The Eighteenth-Century Campaign to Avoid Disease* (1987) was inspired by the Hippocratic doctrine according to which specific environmental conditions are the true causes of epidemic diseases (ix-xvi). This was a tradition of medical diagnosis that was more concerned with populations than individuals, and was essentially a "medicine of avoidance and prevention, a medicine that sought to show mankind which disease-conducive circumstances to evade, and to determine what aspects of the environment might be modified to weaken or eliminate their capacity to cause disease" (x). Through urban-health initiatives and extensive environmental engineering projects, it attempted to ameliorate disease-causing agents thought to be at work in natural environments (30).

The practices of health selected in this chapter were concerned more with individuals than populations, emphasizing personal relations with natural places. Nonetheless, expressions of optimism about a benign nature that has a positive effect on human health were also related to the same ideologies of improvement that motivated institutionalized public health movements (see Riley 30).[97] Widespread land reclamation for cultivation had begun to dramatically transform

England during the early modern period, effectively creating a new landscape in places (Thomas, *Man* 192-241, 254-69; Williams, *Country* ch. 10-13). The agricultural landscape of Britain had in this sense been produced and "improved" through generations of effort. A health practice was not located in natural surroundings that were utterly "wild" and perhaps even dangerous, a world devoid of the comforts and conveniences that humans build into their environments as they change them; it was usually assumed that procedures for improving one's health were best undertaken in a countryside that had already been thoroughly transformed. It was contact with this version of nature that the advocates of these health practices recommended to their audiences. Even if this landscape did present a semblance of wildness and diversity, its ability to do so was often an indication of just how thoroughly it had been transformed. The picturesque scene, which was intended to present an unaffectedly "natural" appearance, was the constructed landscape *par excellence* (Williams, *Country* 120-26). MacLean, Landry, and Ward point out that "eighteenth-century landscape aesthetics ... shaped and reshaped much of England's rural topography into a picturesque notion of what 'the countryside' should look like..." (6).[98] Uvedale Price's advice on picturesque aesthetics, as the sub-title of his text reveals, is actually meant to help landowners learn how to "improve" their estates.

The belief in healthy nature was not merely a reaction to ongoing environmental degradation and change, but was also a part of the drive to

recreate nature in a more benevolent image. In the process, certain aspects of supposedly wild nature came to be seen as healthy, under the right circumstances. As the environment was altered and brought under a more rigorous social and technological control, people could perhaps forget that it had ever been perceived as a dire threat to human existence. Those who used these practices imagined the country as a site of health, but if they were improving landowners, they might also have altered their estates to fit a stereotypical image of the English countryside. The idealized countryside to which these practices often referred did reflect, if not always very accurately, how rural areas were being transformed on a daily basis. In this sense at least, a large portion of the new countryside, particularly as reflected in estates and parks, *was* much as these practices depicted it: a hospitable landscape in which the privileged person could roam at leisure.

The British countryside, according to Landry, was very much an imaginary construction as well: "The long agricultural revolution ... produced the timeless countryside as its imaginary Other. Not production, but consumption and pleasure, recreation and retreat, were the good associated with the countryside" (2). As William Cronon (1996b) shows in his discussion of American attitudes towards the wilderness, the manner in which people imagine rural areas is largely determined by socio-economic background. Cronon observes that people who actually inhabit and work in such places tend to have attitudes toward their surroundings that reflect their relations of dependence with it (78-80, 85). In

contrast, "elite urban tourists" typically perceive the countryside as "a place of recreation" (78). They are able to do so precisely because their "class privileges give them the time and resources to leave their jobs behind..." (85). The countryside, then, is experienced differently as a lived phenomenon by different kinds of people. In the eighteenth century, affluent people going to rural areas in search of healthier environs were embarking on a pleasing retreat; if they happened to live in the country most of their time, they were returning to holdings that were likely comfortable. But the places that the privileged visited were often enough the same places that labouring people inhabited. To agricultural workers, from their vantage in the specific combination of networks that produced their socio-economic position, rural Britain was a place of labour. As Landry has convincingly argued, "early modern farmers and laborers seem to have shared with their landlords a less entirely functional view of the rural landscape than the modern one characterized by Howard Newby. It was their livelihood, but their source of recreation too" (11). Nonetheless, the countryside was often enough a place in which labourers were forced to work because of outright necessity, and we need to appreciate this fact if we are to fully comprehend the perspective from which the texts that I examine are written.

These texts tend to conflate labourers with the vision of the country that they produce. I have already observed that Cowper typically uses images of agricultural workers in his poetry to depict the healing powers of the country in action. The labourer is healthy, according to Cowper, because he inhabits rural

places that continually work their beneficial effects on his body and senses. These texts also ignore the contributions of labourers whose participation in support of health practices would be absolutely vital. Cheyne advises his cultivated readers to take up shooting and hunting as a means of exercise, but he does not mention the attendants that were frequently necessary on such excursions, nor does he express any concern about the impact of hunting parties on rural areas and on the people who lived and worked in such places. He is certainly not interested in how a proper exercise regimen, as opposed to simple manual labour, might improve the health of these people. Burke claims that viewing sublime scenes provides beneficial sensory stimulation, but he does not consider the local assistance that a traveller would require in order to reach those places typically considered sublime, such as remote mountain peaks or desolate moors. How many cultivated travellers *could* get to sublime locations unaided?

Along with the networks that constituted health and the polite classes as consumers of leisure, the networks that produced the countryside—both as an idealized image and as a lived reality—comprise the third part of the structure analyzed in this chapter. The practices of health that I select existed as a particular intersection of these three networks. When questions of practice are investigated in such terms, it is difficult to define a particular practice either as an artefact of human culture that provides a means of imagining nature, as an interface between culture and nature, or as a manifestation of the very nature that it seems to describe. To follow the health advice put forward in the texts I

examine might have involved walking in the fields or riding down a lane on horseback, or it might have entailed trying to achieve an active emotional state in response to picturesque scenery. In none of these cases is it possible to definitively separate out nature and culture as arbitrary and opposed components of the practice. In terms of network theory, "nature" and "culture" are networks that are themselves comprised of other networks. Certainly there is a version of the nature/culture dichotomy working in the subject matter that I have discussed in this chapter, although it tends to manifest in many of the texts as the opposition between country and town. But this opposition itself is produced as an intersection of the networks in question.

Conclusion

Politics, Method, and the Division of Nature and Culture

An underlying question of this thesis concerns the extent to which a practice of textually-based historical scholarship on nature/culture dichotomies is an explicitly political project. How can research into historical situations, for instance, bring about shifts in power in modern societies? Can we use such research to re-evaluate existing social hierarchies and categories? Kate Soper suggests that our research into the cultural implications of nature does achieve political outcomes: "My engagement here is essentially with the 'politics' of the idea of nature, with the social and cultural demarcations which have been drawn through the concept, and with the ways it is both defended and contested in the social movements of our times" (3). Soper's project involves examining the differing aims of "ecology" and "postmodernism" as they pertain to a politics of nature in contemporary society. Whereas Soper understands the former as Green activism aimed at actual political reform, she describes the latter as critiques aimed at undermining the cultural and political structures legitimated by ideas of nature (3-9). Soper is ostensibly trying to reconcile two very different approaches to understanding the political role of nature in modern societies. Yet it is significant that her emphasis is typically on critiquing "discourses" of nature that underlie ecological movements and postmodern critical thought respectively.

For Soper's approach is largely dictated by the evidence that she uses throughout her study: evidence that generally is drawn from the statements and

opinions of intellectuals as conveyed in texts. What purports to be a politics of nature, then, is really a politics of the "discourses" and "representations" of nature, and there is a distinct difference here that needs to be addressed. In defence of her approach, Soper points out that "[r]epresentations of nature, and the concepts we bring to it, can have very definite political effects, many of them having direct bearing on the cause of ecological conservation itself" (9). Still, given that nature is so very often described as a material world in western metaphysics, it is striking that Soper generally does not engage with nature as material world system. The same might be said for her handling of culture, which is generally regarded as being as much a material system as it is a discursive construct. My reason for invoking this issue is not to underscore a problem in Soper's analysis, but rather to suggest that examining nature and culture by means of evidence from discursive and textual sources entails certain theoretical difficulties, and these difficulties have some bearing on the political objectives of historical research.

Conceptual histories and the politics of effect

In this thesis, I have taken the admittedly simplified position that texts contain all manner of evidence—not only discursive evidence purely conceived, but also material evidence that is wrapped up, so to speak, in discourse—and that we can gain access to this evidence by a variety of means. The parts of this thesis are arranged as a progression to mirror this notion. In the first chapter, I

examined a set of concepts about nature and custom in the writings of Joshua Reynolds. In the second chapter, I considered a material place in the eighteenth century—the parish of Selborne—as described in Gilbert White's writings, and I also examined political and social commentaries that circulate in his text. In the final chapter, I looked at textual descriptions of health practices that are material to the extent that they are always intended to be actively carried out. The plan of this thesis has been to move (and again, this will seem a simplified way of putting the matter) from "concepts" to "material" considerations. The general point of such an exercise is to explore the limitations of and problems that arise in historical textual scholarship. An extended discussion of the nature/culture dichotomy is ideal for this purpose because, as Bruno Latour points out, it is possible to portray its two components simultaneously as conceptual and material structures (*Modern* 52-53). A more particular point is to derive coherent political objectives from this thesis and its separate chapters. How might the work of this thesis contribute to or help to articulate the goals of certain ongoing political struggles?

Perhaps this question might be best answered by considering chapters individually, since each chapter is quite different and has different aims from the other chapters. What, then, are the political implications of the first chapter of the thesis? As a practical matter, one might well question what advantage is gained by showing that Reynolds develops a theoretical distinction between concepts of nature and custom, but that he also complicates this distinction, which suggests

that the distinction itself is neither stable nor fixed in his work. An immediate answer might be that developing new interpretations of important writers like Reynolds is essential to the project of continually refining our understanding of literary and intellectual history. Understood in this sense, historical work is constructive and developmental: a project that builds on previous interpretations in order to provide an ever better picture of the past. Historical work may also be understood as a process of negating history, or at least selective parts of it. For by means of historical research we may also strive to destabilize the confident structures that have always set limitations on how we view the past and, by extension, ourselves. In either case, historical work is primarily a problem for textual scholars. The merit of trying to show that the concepts of nature and custom are not definite, but shift around and exchange their expected positions, is that in doing so we understand with greater clarity how systems of ideas have been configured in the past, and how such systems once shaped social relations.

Often enough, the project of critically examining history is made to seem as if it has well-defined and explicit political objectives. The reinterpretation of the past in this sense involves rejecting our shared history—which in this view has always been a history of repression and severity—in favour of new and hopefully more equitable ways of talking about the past and the present. Although this project may seek to evaluate the influence of the past on the present, a more defensible position is that the objective of historical research is to assess the fundamentally historical nature of all ideas, whether past or

present. From this perspective, subverting accepted categories does not merely challenge their stability, but also provides a corrective to relations of power founded on the histories of these categories, the assumption being that the "ideas" represented in texts "reflect" wider social conditions and concerns, or in a somewhat more sophisticated formulation, that texts actively "mediate" the social conditions and relations they would seem to portray (Williams, *Marxism* 95-100).

If historical texts are indeed linked to general social conditions, then by analyzing how ideas are presented in texts, we may then begin to understand how social relations themselves are structured in connection with such ideas. To describe, for instance, an aesthetic sensation as "natural" contributes to putting the question of its social role and the effects it legitimates above dispute, and so authorizes social positions based on being able to have or recognize such a sensation (see Evernden 25-31; Soper 33-34). Uncovering the history of these political effects allows us to produce better conceptual models of the ways such effects reproduce social relations. So by critiquing the aesthetic theories of a famous painter and writer like Sir Joshua Reynolds, we partially undermine the hegemony of art and its practice as normative institutions, and this undertaking can be an effective means of challenging class-based patterns of social power.

My rationale in the first chapter is, apropos of Jacques Derrida's discussion of a method for critiquing "structures" (see 278-80), that the conceptions produced by Reynolds in his writings correspond to material structures that are themselves central to the organization of modern life and

modern knowledge. Perhaps I am not really talking about "nature" and "culture" as such, for it should be clear that it is quite difficult to say what such concepts indicate—and this is assuming that particular signs have definite referents that can be identified empirically. Rather, in examining the shifting state of the ideas of nature and culture in the work of a writer like Reynolds, I am in an indirect way attempting to ascertain the structural significance of these spheres. Latour has demonstrated that the nature/culture dichotomy is directly involved as an organizational and legitimating paradigm in the production of modern social life (*Modern* 1-12; *Politics* 1-52 passim). If we overturn or reassess this dichotomy by exposing its historical production, do we then authorize alternative political and social formations? Are we then enabled to reconfigure our present, and perhaps our future?

Texts and the material evidence of history

The question then becomes whether or not the use of different kinds of textual "evidence" alters the political consequences of historical scholarship. The assumption here would be that some forms of evidence actually "mediate" social and political relations better (or worse) than other evidence. In the second and third chapters of this thesis, I no longer solely provide a history of certain concepts and their political implications, but also begin to consider descriptions of material social life and material practices as recorded directly in texts. For instance, the second chapter investigates a historical place: the parish of

Selborne during the second half of the eighteenth century as it was described by its famous inhabitant, the naturalist and curate Gilbert White, who lived in Selborne most of his life and who wrote about it in great detail in his notes on natural history. Does White's account of Selborne provide a kind of direct insight into material social life in the parish as it once existed, and does this situation have a political status that is intrinsically different from a critique of conceptual structures?

If this were the case, then the virtue of studying the past through texts might be that we contribute to furthering our collective understanding of the actual political alignments of the past, and, hopefully, their bearing on the present. One problem with this perspective is that it assumes a stable and "real" past that waits for us to uncover it. It also exploits the very distinction between conception and materiality that I attempt to undermine in the last two chapters.[99] Judith Butler has argued convincingly that materiality is always discursively produced (27-35), which is an effective way of reiterating the longstanding Marxist claim that the distinction between ideological and material relations is artificial. It follows that texts containing descriptions of "material life" and texts that contain "ideological content" do not substantially differ in their relation to the so-called "real" in which political processes may be said to take place. To the extent that we can posit such a relation at all, then all texts would seem to fulfill this relation.

Although it has been my aim in this thesis to find a way of reconciling some of the largely methodological issues that I raise here, I have also endeavoured to uncover and then explore the various complexities that often become involved in historical scholarship. For it is at least partly by noting the complexities I have encountered that I have come to mark my progress through the field that is the subject of this thesis. These complexities will never vanish. Despite the occurrence during the last fifty years of what might in hindsight be called a series of revolutions in scholarly practice, I do not necessarily believe that we are for this reason moving steadily towards a holy grail of scholarship. It seems to me, then, that the value of our scholarship can be measured by the extent to which we are aware of its complexities and can incorporate them in what we write.

Notes

Introduction

[1] The citations listed in the text correspond to the following references: Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, intro., notes, and trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978) 278-85; Neil Evernden, *The Social Creation of Nature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992) 22-31; Donna Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others," *Cultural Studies*, ed. and intro. Lawrence Grossberg et al. (New York: Routledge, 1992) 295-300, 329-30n6, 331-32n14; Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 4-5; Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (1991; Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993) 96-106; *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2004) 32-52; William Cronon, Introduction: In Search of Nature, *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (1995; New York: W.W. Norton, 1996) 23-56; Kate Soper, *What is Nature? Culture, Politics, and the non-Human* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) 1-15, 28-70; and Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) 87-111.

[2] Eagleton himself maps out a significant portion of the spectrum of meanings attached to both "nature" and "culture," and he has also examined the many points of contact between these two terms, confirming that they are indeed connected and intertwined in various ways.

[3] Williams provides a similar discussion of the meanings and history of "culture" in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. (1976; New York: Oxford UP, 1983) 87-93. To the extent that it has what seems to me a clearer and more comprehensive description of "culture," I use Williams's treatment of the term from *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977). Williams provides a slightly more schematic definition of culture, but one which essentially follows the same path as the previous two definitions, in his later *Culture*, ed. Gavin Mackenzie, Fontana New Sociology (N.p.: Fontana, 1981) 10-16.

[4] It is telling that when Kate Soper attempts to summarize a "history of the ways in which the idea or model of nature has figured in human self-conceptions" (and here Soper is speaking of modern times), she relies on a discussion of the ways in which "culture" interacts with and defines "nature" (28). Soper would seem to imply that, in the broad scope of this history, ideas about "nature" are given form and definition in an inevitable relation with formations of "culture" (see 28-29).

[5] It is sometimes difficult to precisely interpret Latour's remarks about culture and its relation to nature in *We Have Never Been Modern* because he occasionally seems to confound "culture" and "society" without giving precise definitions for either of these terms.

[6] The two positions between which Latour vacillates bear resemblance to the "realist" and "culturalist" positions that, according to Soper, form a contested dialectic in modern thought. In the context of the "...'culturalist' perspective, ... 'nature' is a kind of self-denying concept through which what is culturally ordained is presented as pre-discursive external determination upon that culture. From a 'realist' perspective, by contrast, nature refers to limits imposed by the structure of the world and by human biology upon what it is possible for human beings to be and do, at least if they are to survive and flourish" (34). The distinction between "culturalism" and "naturalism" that Eagleton uses in his work on the nature/culture dichotomy (as I discuss below) seems more directly indebted to Soper's work, to whose work he refers on several occasions.

[7] See the first chapter of this thesis for an extended discussion of "second nature" and its implications in the context of the aesthetics of Joshua Reynolds.

[8] The notion of culture as a "supplement" to nature is indebted, as Eagleton points out elsewhere in his book, to the work of Derrida (see *Culture* 4).

[9] Latour does not seem to return to the concept with any consistency in his later books such as *Politics of Nature*.

[10] For insightful discussions of certain ways in which distinctions between nature and human or nature and culture have been used to justify social and political hierarchies, see Soper ch. 2-3.

Chapter One

[11] In contrast to the common usage, I refer to the *Discourses* in the singular. Although the lectures were originally drafted as separate speeches, they are now always published together as an edition, and so it is appropriate to refer to them as a whole.

[12] I draw this particular form of the opposition from Soper 15. See my discussion of the meanings of culture and its relation to nature in the introduction to the thesis. In the *Discourses*, terms like "custom," "habit," and so forth all have

unique inflections, and are used by Reynolds at certain times as if they are interchangeable.

[13] It has been most typical of Reynolds criticism to concentrate on mapping out how he uses "nature," "custom," and other terms individually. On Reynolds's use of "nature," see Walter J. Hipple Jr., "General and Particular in the *Discourses* of Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Study in Method," *The Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism* 11.3 (Mar. 1953): 231-47; *The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1957) 133-48; Walter Jackson Bate, *From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (1946; New York: Harper, 1961) 79-92; "Sir Joshua Reynolds," *Criticism: The Major Texts*, ed. Walter Jackson Bate (New York: Harcourt, 1952) 253-54; Robert R. Wark, introduction, *Discourses on Art*, by Joshua Reynolds, ed., pref., and intro. Robert R. Wark (1797; 1959; New Haven: Yale UP, 1975) xix-xx; H[enry] A. Needham, introduction, *Taste and Criticism in the Eighteenth Century: A Selection of Texts Illustrating the Evolution of Taste and the Development of Critical Theory*, ed. H[enry] A. Needham (London: Harrap, 1952) 209-10, 225; and Hazard Adams, "Revisiting Reynold's (sic) *Discourses* and Blake's Annotations," *Blake in his Time*, eds. Robert N. Essick and Donald Pearce (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1978) 129-32. On Reynolds's use of "custom" and "prejudice," see Irène Simon, "Reynolds on Custom and Prejudice," *English Studies* 65.3 (June 1984): 226-36; Robert W. Uphaus, "The Ideology of Reynolds' *Discourses on Art*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 12 (1978-9): 59-73; and Wark xxv-xxvi.

[14] Günter Leypoldt suggests that Reynolds tries to merge the natural/empirical with the customary, but he claims that these positions are always opposed: "Reynolds's attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable must fail ... his argument oscillates between the most radical applications of each tendency..." ("A Neoclassical Dilemma in Sir Joshua Reynolds's Reflections on Art," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 39.4 (October 1999): 334). Although Leypoldt draws attention to such fluctuations throughout his discussion, he suggests that they indicate a persistent vacillation in Reynolds's aesthetics—an inability to choose one fixed position over the other.

[15] That the *Discourses* was held in high esteem during the eighteenth century and beyond has been noted by Fredrick Whiley Hilles, *The Literary Career of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (1936; [Hamden?]: Archon, 1967) xiv-xv, 145. Although many scholars view the *Discourses* as a defining text in the British aesthetic tradition, there is debate about the nature of its contribution. Scholars who have interpreted the *Discourses* as an expression of neo-classical doctrine include Needham 209, 224-5; and John L. Mahoney, "Reynolds's '*Discourses on Art*': The Delicate Balance of Neoclassical Aesthetics," *British Journal of*

Aesthetics 18 (1978): 126-36. Bate has maintained that Reynolds's ideas, although remaining neo-classical in substance, look forward to romanticism in later lectures (*Classic to Romantic* 79-92; "Reynolds" 253-56). Wark argues that so-called neo-classical and romantic ideas are present together in Reynolds's writings from his earliest published essays (xv, xxiv-xxxi). Other scholars have largely eschewed such categorizations (such as Hipple in *Aesthetic Theory* and "General and Particular"). See M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7th ed. (Forth Worth: Harcourt Brace College, 1999) 175-77 for a concise summary of neo-classicism and romanticism.

[16] For background on this debate, see Leypoldt 331-32, n5-6; John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: 'The Body of the Public'* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1986) 70; and David Mannings, "An Art-Historical Approach to Reynolds's Discourses," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 16 (1976): 355, 360-63.

[17] For a good history of *The Idler*, see the Introduction included in the edition of the *The Idler* that I cite (Bate, Bullitt, and Powell xv-xxviii). For background on friendships between Reynolds and Samuel Johnson, Edmund Burke, Oliver Goldsmith, James Boswell, Edward Gibbon, David Garrick and others, see Fredrick Hilles, *Literary Career* passim; Joshua Reynolds, *Portraits: Character sketches of Oliver Goldsmith, Samuel Johnson, and David Garrick, together with manuscripts of Reynolds recently discovered among the private papers of James Boswell and now first published*, intro., notes, and prep. Frederick W. Hilles, Yale Editions of the Private Papers of James Boswell 3 (London: William Heinemann, 1952) passim. In *Portraits*, Hilles includes several literary sketches that Reynolds wrote about many of these people.

[18] Hipple observes that scholars regularly interpret Reynolds's assertions about the superiority of the universal form as a legacy of his supposed intellectual preference for Platonic idealism over Aristotelianism ("General and Particular" 232-34; *Aesthetic Theory* 135-36).

[19] I discuss the notion of "second nature" in more detail below.

[20] Reynolds refers several times in his third *Idler* essay to the "association of ideas," and he does in a way that would appear to conflate association with customary practice, the latter concept being the primary focus of the essay (*Discourses* 89). Scholars who have considered the role of association in Reynolds's writings include Bate, *Classic to Romantic* 82, 84, 90; Simon 231-32; and Mannings 356. For a recent history of eighteenth-century aesthetics that focuses exclusively on the development of ideas about association (but neglects mention of Reynolds), see George Dickie, *The Century of Taste: The*

Philosophical Odyssey of Taste in the Eighteenth Century (New York: Oxford UP, 1996) passim.

[21] In *Idler* #79 Reynolds hints that "general nature" does not exist as such, but is rather an absent ideal. Most Reynolds scholars agree on this point to some extent, a few even suggesting that general nature is what Simon describes as "a statistical norm or average" (233). Hipple, for instance, has argued that "general nature is ... a conception in the mind of the artist; for although the conception is formed by abstraction from external reality, the ideal itself has only a potential existence prior to its comprehension" (*Aesthetic Theory* 140; see also "General and Particular" 238-39; and Barrell, *Political Theory* 93).

[22] According to Barrell, "...the division between general and local customs can take the form of a division, as it were, between the general will and the will of all: what we are all accustomed to do or to believe is opposed to what each of us in fact does and believes, and becomes a rule (as stable as that generated by an abstract, original human nature) by which we should regulate our behaviour" (*Political Theory* 147).

[23] In the third chapter of this thesis, I examine "practices of health" that, like Reynolds's "habits," were freely adopted patterns of conduct.

[24] John Barrell has discussed a slightly different distinction between two forms of custom. He claims that Reynolds divides custom into general and local forms, although he suggests that this division emerges only with the seventh discourse, when Reynolds now begins to regard custom as the only guarantor of political stability, and so feels required to derive a notion of custom consistent with his aesthetic principles: "Painting may not represent *local* customs, but it should represent general customs" ("Sir Joshua Reynolds and the Englishness of English Art," *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (1986; London: Routledge, 1990) 164). Barrell explains elsewhere that "a local custom ... varies by time and place; but the general custom ... [is] observed at all time and places, [and is that] of which all these local customs are merely instances" (*Political Theory* 143).

[25] Other commentators have had difficulty with this phrase as it is used by Reynolds. For instance, Simon refers to "habits of nature" as distinguished from "fashion," but without at all noting the ambiguity or the problematic comparison involved (233). The context of the remark would suggest that Simon simply takes "habits of nature" to mean nature as such, a conclusion that is neither certain nor warranted given the confusions in the text.

[26] Simon occasionally touches on Reynolds's distinction between nature understood as a hidden core and custom as its covering, and provides some discussion of Reynolds's thoughts on the clothing of models in portraiture (see 228, 236). Simon misses the relevance here of the meanings of "habit," which could, obviously, denote a manner of dress—a sense that was connected with the other sense of "outward appearance" (*OED* 6.993). Part of the problem is that Simon consistently takes Reynolds's statements only at face value, and so seems to be genuinely uninterested in the contradictions involved, or else is simply uninterested in examining their meaning vis-à-vis Reynolds's thought.

[27] For a discussion of "culture as surplus," see Eagleton, *Culture* 36.

[28] There is a developing body of criticism on the tradition of "second nature" as articulated in particular by eighteenth-century writers. Barrell is the only commentator I am aware of who has given more than cursory attention to second nature in the *Discourses* (see *Political Theory* 138, 141, 143, 155; "English Art" 165). He also addresses the issue of second nature in the work of Samuel Johnson ("English Art" 163). Unfortunately, Barrell does not look very deeply into the exact composition of second nature, but instead tends to conflate it with a general notion of custom that is itself never precisely defined. Barrell is thus not prepared to specify how second nature differs from either universal nature or alternate forms of custom, and how, more importantly, it also converges with the former in certain instances. Tom Furniss discusses second nature in relation to the aesthetic writings of Edmund Burke (*Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology: Language, Gender, and Political Economy in Revolution*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993) ch. 3). James K. Chandler focuses on the ways in which William Wordsworth uses second nature, but gives some attention to Burke and other writers (*Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984) see ch. 4, 6, and passim).

[29] Barrell does not, however, specifically account for Reynolds's use of "second nature" in the third discourse, the only discourse in which, to my knowledge, the term is actually used. Also, Barrell refers throughout his discussion to second nature as "custom" (rather than as local or general custom), so his use of the term can be ambiguous.

[30] Barrell claims that general nature is used by Reynolds, at least in his early discourses, to produce an awareness of the common or public features of human nature. Barrell suggests that Reynolds "make[s] public spirit a matter not of the disposition to perform acts of public virtue, but of an ability simply to overcome the tyranny of sense in any understanding of general truth. This ability results in an understanding of the grounds of social affiliation—of what is

common to the nature of us all, and of how that common nature is a social nature, for its perception is the reward of our refusal to cultivate a divisive singularity" (*Political Theory* 98). Admittedly, Barrell seems to be making a metaphorical comparison, and I assume what he means to say is that common nature is *civic* nature—that in recognizing their common natures, people then see that they are connected (see *Political Theory* 93-98). Since this principle as presented has little to do with *social* interaction, Barrell's reference to "social nature" is misleading, but he does appear to acknowledge this problem (see *Political Theory* 99).

[31] Kate Soper has pointed out that human custom is often marked by a kind of "conventionality," but that human nature is determined or conventional as well, and is hence a kind of custom. Soper suggests that there are ways "in which the 'healthy' human norm is established by reference to the custom of nature" (28; see 25-8). Furniss discusses the notion of custom as a "supplement" to nature extensively in connection with Burke's aesthetic and political writings (9-10, 70-1, 86-90). See note 8.

[32] For an enlightening discussion of Samuel Johnson's defence of custom as the only politically expedient method of ensuring social order, see Barrell, *Political Theory* 137-40; "English Art" 163-64. Barrell points out that Johnson believed "governments are established, not on regular plans, but by change or accident. It is a matter of fact that from wherever ... governments should derive their authority, they derive it in practice from the respect which, by habit or custom we pay them" (*Political Theory* 163). Barrell suggests that Reynolds's views on custom, particularly his later defence of custom as the basis of authority in judgments about art, are indebted to Johnson and also to Edmund Burke (139). Robert Uphaus has made similar claims (59-73), whereas Simon has attempted to show that Reynolds did not actually defend custom in the *Discourses*, and so was not using the work of Johnson or Burke as the basis of his ideas (226-36).

[33] David Hume's *Of the Standard of Taste* originally appeared in *Four Dissertations*. Edmund Burke's *Of Taste* was affixed as an introduction to his *Philosophical Enquiry* for its second edition. Mannings discusses some of the relations between Reynolds's ideas on aesthetics and those of other well-known writers at the time such as Hume and Burke (354-56, 354-64).

[34] By the late eighteenth century, naturalists spoke often of the inflexible nature of "instinct" as a regulatory regime in animals (see White, *Selborne* 121, 137-38, 141-43, 243-44). In describing custom as a social regime that regulates conduct, Reynolds might be forming an analogy with theories of nature as the

original regulatory regime. For custom then becomes to human beings what nature and instincts are to animals.

[35] It is not insignificant to my aims that Eagleton, immediately following the passage just cited, begins a discussion of Polixenes's ruminations on the relations between "nature" and "art" in William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (see *Culture* 3). Eagleton is applying his views on "culture" directly to notions of "art."

[36] Soper has written at length about this division "between what is naturally given and what is contrived (the artificial)..." (37-38).

Chapter Two

[37] Unless otherwise noted, all page references are to *The Natural History of Selborne*, ed. and intro. Richard Mabey (1788-89; 1977; London: Penguin, 1987). All references to the *Antiquities of Selborne* are from *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne*, ed., pref., and notes Frank Buckland, illus. P.H. Delamotte (1788-89; London: Macmillan, 1880) 351-441.

[38] Numerous claims have been made attesting to the central importance of *Selborne* in ecological thought and nature writing. Richard Mabey asserts that *Selborne* "has shaped our everyday view of the relations between man and nature," a claim that he substantiates on *Selborne*'s alleged status as "the fourth most published book in the English language" (introduction, *The Natural History of Selborne*, by Gilbert White, ed. and intro. Richard Mabey (1788-9; 1977; London: Penguin, 1987) viii). For similar claims, see Anthony Rye, *Gilbert White & his Selborne* (London: Kimber, 1970) 11; and Alan C Jenkins, *The Naturalists: Pioneers in Natural History* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978) 53. *Selborne* was certainly a popular book at one time, and W.B. Carnochan points out that by 1886 it had appeared on the first published list of "the hundred best books" ("Where Did Great Books Come From Anyway?" *The Book Collector* 48.3 (1999): 358-66).

[39] Arguments that White was benevolent and that social relations in the parish were friendly and generally equitable for its poorer inhabitants may be found in Rye 76-77; Cecil Emden, *Gilbert White in his Village*, illus. Lynton Lamb (London: Oxford UP, 1956) ch. 3-8; W.J. Keith, *The Rural Tradition: A Study of the Non-Fiction Prose Writers of the English Countryside* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1974) 56-59; Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: The Roots of Ecology* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1977) 10; Richard Mabey, *Gilbert White: A Biography of the Author of the Natural History of Selborne* (London: Century, 1986) 198-201;

introduction xx; and Edward Hoagland, "The Sage of Selborne," *The Yale Review* 85.3 (July 1997): 12. For arguments that the inhabitants of Selborne were socio-economically "independent," see Rye 74-76, 157; and Mabey, *White* 28-29, 181-82. For discussions about White's ethic of profound respect and compassion for animals, see Rye 19-20; Worster 7-11; Mabey, introduction viii-x, xv-xvi, xix-xxii; *White* 2-3, 82-86, 96, 139-40, 209; Hoagland 13-14; Jenkins 53; and Francesca Greenoak, introduction, *The Journals of Gilbert White*, by Gilbert White, ed. and intro. Francesca Greenoak. ed. and fore. Richard Mabey, illus. Clare Roberts. 3 vols. (London: Century, 1986) n. pag.

[40] Foster provides a revealing description of the socio-economic crisis of the late-eighteenth-century British countryside that emphasizes "the sheer brutality of the period" (4; see 3-7), but he does not extend this discussion to a consideration of crisis in Selborne itself.

[41] Note that considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to uncovering evidence in White's writings that he was aware of historical crisis and transformation taking place largely *outside* Selborne during his lifetime (such as the French Revolution). A sample of recent contributions includes Keith 56-57; Worster 11-12; Mabey, introduction xx; *White* 212-13; Foster 4; Lucy B. Maddox, "Gilbert White and the Politics of Natural History," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 10 (May 1986): 49-50; and Clarence Wolfshol, "Gilbert White's Natural History and History," *Clio* 20.3 (1991): 273-74. Hoagland admits that White was aware of events in the wider world, but implies that he was not inclined by temperament to take part in them, and certainly had no real interest in politics (2, 4-7).

[42] Scholars often note the heterogeneity of *Selborne*. See Keith 48; and Mabey, *White* 198.

[43] See my introduction to this thesis for more discussion of the problems of historical materialism in Marxism and how it relates to the nature/culture dichotomy. Some recent criticism has, at least in part, reduced the significance of *Selborne* to an innovation in the history of ideas about nature (see, for instance, Worster 3-31; and Mabey, introduction viii).

[44] Paul Foster's study describes *Selborne* primarily as a scientific record of natural phenomena. Foster suggests that we can draw objective "contextual data" from *Selborne* and White's other writings, and can make conclusions on this basis (96-98). It should be noted, however, that he does give some attention to *Selborne* as a form of social commentary. Taking what amounts to the opposite approach, Lucy Maddox has alleged that a large cross-section of White scholars emphasize the "objectivity" of White's text, and thus fail to account for the ways in which his observations are historically and ideologically constituted

(45-46). A comprehensive study that attempts to use all available archival resources in order to reconstruct the best possible picture of eighteenth-century Selborne and its famous curate is Richard Mabey's biography of White.

[45] On the social implications of land tenure in open-field villages, see G[ordon] E[dmund] Mingay, *A Social History of the English Countryside* (London: Routledge, 1990) ch. 1-2; J[ohn] L[awrence] Hammond and Barbara Hammond, *The Village Labourer 1760-1832: A Study of the Government of England Before the Reform Bill*, new ed., Reprints of Economic Classics (1911; New York: Kelly, 1967) 26-42; and W. Hasbach, *A History of the English Agricultural Labourer*, trans. Ruth Kenyon, pref. Sidney Webb, Reprints of Economic Classics (1894; 1908; New York: Kelley, 1966) 1-103. On agricultural practices and land use in Selborne itself, see Walter Samuel Scott, *White of Selborne* (1950; Liss, England: Nimrod, 1985) 229-35; and W[alter] Sidney Scott, "An Historical and Topographical Account of Selborne," *The Antiquities of Selborne in the County of Southampton*, by Gilbert White, ed., notes, and append. W[alter] Sidney Scott, illus. Samuel Hieronymous Grimm (London: Falcon, 1950) 199-202.

[46] For an enlightening discussion of Sir Simeon Stuart's landholding activities in the parish, see Mabey, *White* 181-82.

[47] For the standard explanations of the different forms of land tenure that are mentioned by White, see the *OED* definitions of "Copyhold" (3.917), "Freehold" (6.165-66), and "Leasehold" (8.770).

[48] For a comprehensive discussion of White's farming activities, see Emden 38-48. According to Emden, White's tenants included Thomas Benham and a man named Parsons (20, 39). These tenancies are confirmed by the summary of White's farm holdings and their rents in Holt-White 2.45. White also refers to "Berriman's field" in his journals in a way which suggests that he may have owned the property himself (3.37, 3.406). Walter Johnson speculates that Berriman was another tenant of White's (Walter Johnson, ed., *Journals of Gilbert White*, by Gilbert White (London: Routledge, 1931) 451n2 for 1792). It should be noted that this field does not appear in the list of White's properties that is included in Holt-White. In addition, White had farms that were located in other parishes (Holt-White 2.45; Emden 39). To derive a complete list of White's tenants may not be possible. White did not keep thorough records of his income (Holt-White 2.45), which means he may have had tenants who remain unknown.

[49] A discussion of the popularity of this sort of arrangement in eighteenth-century agricultural practice can be found in Mingay 51-52. Significantly, Mingay points out that landlords often felt obligated to support tenants in financial difficulty if only so as to avoid having to farm the lands themselves.

[50] Although White's personal attitudes to hunting do not concern me here, it should be noted that there has been widespread debate on this issue. For some scholars, the issue is how to reconcile White's often utilitarian approach to the procurement of animal specimens for study with the sensibilities and regard for all living things that they see in his book and project back onto him. White's shooting activities potentially destabilize the confident image built up of him as an almost naively unqualified lover of all nature. For discussions of White's hunting activities, see Rye 16, 79; Mabey, introduction xx-xxii; *White* 83-87; Foster 12-13; and Donna Landry, *The Invention of the Countryside: Hunting, Walking and Ecology in English Literature, 1671-1831* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) 33-34.

[51] In his commentary on White's anecdote about the situation in Holt forest and the theft of wood by the poor, Rye takes a similar view of the value of marginal economic activities as an institution "designed to help the poor and assist them to a sturdy independence" (157), but without, it needs to be said, ever allowing them the means to break free of their situations.

[52] Descriptions of the extent of the common rights available to people in the parish can be found in Scott, *White of Selborne* 233-34; Mabey, *White* 29-30.

[53] I do not have access to all of White's account books, but only to a portion from the 1750s that was excerpted by Thomas Bell in his definitive 1877 edition (see "Gilbert White's Account-Book," *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne, in the County of Southampton*, ed. Thomas Bell, vol. 2 (1788-9; London, 1877) 316-46.

[54] For an interesting discussion of the effects of bad harvests on agricultural production in Britain in the late-eighteenth century, see Chambers and Mingay 112-15.

[55] This is only an estimate. White found that the population of the parish in 1783 was 676. But he does not provide firm data for the earlier part of the century, saying only that the population of the parish was "about 500" at some point during the tenure of the vicar "who died in 1727-8" (*Selborne* 17).

[56] Worster points out that White actively endorsed collective efforts in the parish to systematically wipe out certain creatures that were commonly perceived as vermin, particularly insects (8, 11).

[57] White's relation to the intellectual context of the time has been another concern for many scholars, given their focus on White himself and the problem of

his achievement in having written such a popular book (see Keith 41; Foster 15-16; Mabey, *White* 10-11; and Wolfshol 276).

[58] An indication of White's meticulousness is provided by Foster's reconstruction of his method for ensuring the accuracy of his observations (112).

[59] Hoagland bestows the same sensibility on White by implying that his reasonable practice of natural history epitomizes an era that had freed itself of "ecclesiastical domination and medieval superstition," in which there was a new recognition that "the proper study of mankind need not be limited to man" (1). Hoagland thus suggests, as do many White commentators, that no single naturalist paid any real attention to animals before White.

[60] Both Keith and Mabey are citing comments about *Selborne* that were originally made by George Sturt in *Lucy Bettesworth* (1913). The general motivation here is to demonstrate that White was a good, rural-minded sort of fellow who respected the ideas of his neighbours in the parish.

[61] For discussions of White's intellectual relation to Linnaeus, see Maddox 48, 51; Foster 118-20; Keith 44-45; and Jenkins 61.

[62] For a discussion with similar implications, see Robert Markley's "'Gulfes, Deserts, Precipices, Stone': Marvell's 'Upon Appleton House' and the contradictions of 'nature,'" *The Country and the City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550-1850*, eds. Gerald MacLean, Donna Landry, and Joseph P. Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 89-105. Markley describes the cultural associations and economic importance of trees in seventeenth-century England (90-94, 97-98). In the context of Andrew Marvell's "Upon Appleton House" and Brian Fairfax's "The Vocal Oak," Markley analyzes the anxieties resulting from the conflict between "use-value" and "exchange-value" as attributed to oaks. If the former is projected as a purer of the two values in these poems, the latter signifies the true end of oaks destined to be cut down to build fortunes and supply the Navy (94-102). Interestingly, Markley's account is intended in part as a comment on "the separation of 'nature' from 'culture'" (89).

[63] That the portrait is highly idealized has been noticed by scholars before (see, for instance, Keith 41).

[64] Indeed, when White describes the Plestor as it exists in his approximate present, he never invokes the same idealized vision of social life (see *Antiquities* 385; *Journals* 2.29).

[65] The literary structure that Williams describes was very prevalent, and, for that reason, quite general and conventionalized. Nonetheless, I am not suggesting that White's account in this letter is directly influenced by this literary structure.

[66] See Markley's discussion of the representation of oaks in British political rhetoric following the Restoration (93, 98).

Chapter Three

[67] At the root of such advice was a belief that contact with material nature can prove beneficial to human health. For discussions of this belief, see G[eorge] S[ebastian] Rousseau, "Medicine and the Muses: An Approach to Literature and Medicine," eds. Marie Mulvey Roberts and Roy Porter, *Literature and Medicine During the Eighteenth Century*, Wellcome Institute Ser. in the History of Medicine, eds. W.F. Bynum and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993) 40-43; and Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (1983; London: Penguin, 1984) 245-48.

[68] There is much good research on the conceptualization and treatment of diseases of the wealthy in the eighteenth century. For a fine analysis of gout as a disease of the wealthy, see Roy Porter and G[eorge] S[ebastian] Rousseau, *Gout: The Patrician Malady* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998) 48-124 passim. For more information about such diseases of the wealthy such as nervous disorders and consumptions, see Roy Porter, "Consumption: Disease of the Consumer Society?" *Consumption and the World of Goods*, eds. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993) 58-81; *Doctor of Society: Thomas Beddoes and the Sick Trade in Late-Enlightenment England*, Wellcome Institute Ser. in the History of Medicine, eds. W.F. Bynum and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1992) 58-118. For a good discussion of the belief that climate influences human health, the role of such notions in spurring the growth of a culture of spas and resorts for the wealthy (a topic I do not address in this chapter), and reflections on Thomas Beddoes's critique of the spa culture, see Porter, *Doctor* 119-53.

[69] Another eighteenth-century medical discourse that made reference to nature was the "healing power of nature" tradition, which was based on the conviction that medical practice should attempt to understand and mimic natural processes. See Maureen McNeil, *Under the Banner of Science: Erasmus Darwin and His Age* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1987) 164-6; Ginnie Smith, "Prescribing the Rules of Health: Self-Help and Advice in the Late Eighteenth Century," *Patients and Practitioners: Lay Perceptions of Medicine in Pre-Industrial Society*, ed. Roy Porter, Cambridge History of Medicine (Cambridge:

Cambridge UP, 1985) 259; Charles Rosenberg, "Banishing Risk: Continuity and Change in the Moral Management of Disease," *Morality and Health*, eds. Allan M. Brandt and Paul Rozin (New York: Routledge, 1997) 38; and Porter and Rousseau 42, 67, 74.

[70] On the cultural history of that specific early-modern representation of nature as a frightening and barren waste, see William Cronon, "The Trouble With Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (1995; New York: W.W. Norton, 1996) 70-73; Thomas, *Man* 17-18, 254-69; and Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford UP, 1973) 128.

[71] Smith has stressed the importance of taking into account the "social practices associated with the regimen tradition" (253), but does not recognize the practical nature of social differentiation itself.

[72] See below for a discussion of the difficulty of determining exactly who it was that would have used these specific practices.

[73] For more on the discourse of the nerves, which was a popular theme among medical writers in the eighteenth century, see John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988) 231-32.

[74] I am indebted to Roy Porter's insightful commentaries on George Cheyne's life and his theories of nervous diseases, their causes, and their treatments. See Roy Porter, introduction, *The English Malady*, by George Cheyne, ed. Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1991) xix-xxxviii; "Consumption" 64-65; and *Doctor* 90-94.

[75] Cheyne, for instance, recommends a long list of drugs to relieve specific symptoms, and also discusses the benefits of specialized diets that emphasize milk and vegetables; he often suggests combining remedies as stages in a complete cure. See George Cheyne, *The English Malady*, ed. and intro. Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1991) 130-31.

[76] The incidence of nervous diseases is thus, according to Cheyne, more prevalent in the colder climates of northern Europe, for in such regions local climactic and environmental conditions are less conducive to good health (171, 173-4).

[77] Horseback was the mode of travel that tended to set apart the privileged classes from those who could not afford a horse. See David Elliston Allen, *The Naturalist in Britain: A Social History* (London: Lane, 1976) 23.

[78] On the history of the detached "prospect" in landscape aesthetics and its relation to the aspirations and activities of the landowning class, see Williams, *Country* 120-29; Landry 4-5, 15-21; Thomas, *Man* 257-69; and Allen, *Naturalist* 52-54.

[79] Among those scholars to examine the implications of Burke's notion of sensory health as presented specifically in this passage are Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) 56-57; Tom Furniss, *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology: Language, Gender, and Political Economy in Revolution*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993) 24-34; Vanessa L. Ryan, "The Physiological Sublime: Burke's Critique of Reason," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62.2 (Apr. 2001): 276-77; and Walter J. Hipple, *The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1957) 91-92.

[80] For another discussion of this passage in Price by one of the foremost modern scholars on aesthetics, see Hipple, *Aesthetic Theory* 204-5. Hipple does not neglect to mention Price's relation to Burke. Hipple's emphasis is mostly on the physiological basis of the ideas presented in the passage.

[81] Price also claims that the picturesque produces a different sensation than that which, according to Burke, attends the contemplation of beauty, but this issue is beyond my current objectives (see Price 84-86).

[82] Along similar lines, Furniss argues that the sublime creates a space in which a new middle-class politics can take shape, and that it was, in fact, "constituted as a mode of distinction" to allow the middle classes to show their true character (24, 28, 30-2, 34, 41-60, 69-70, 73).

[83] White's strong preference for horseback over the coach has become an integral part of the White legend. See Allen, *Naturalist* 24; Keith 46; and Mabey, *White* 67, 111.

[84] Many scholars have mentioned Cowper's claim that getting exercise in the country promotes good health, but its treatment remains incidental and cursory. To my knowledge, there are no comprehensive studies on this topic in the Cowper scholarship. For discussions of Cowper's ideas about the relations between nature and human health, see Richard Feingold, *Nature and Society: Later Eighteenth-Century Uses of the Pastoral and Georgic* (New Brunswick:

Rutgers UP, 1978) 137-39, 187; George M. Ella, *William Cowper: The Man of God's Stamp: A Bicentenary Evaluation, Vindication and Appreciation* (Dundas, Ont.: Joshua, 2000) 105; William Norris Free, *William Cowper* (New York: Twayne, 1970) 67-70; Morris Golden, *In Search of Stability: The Poetry of William Cowper* (New York: Bookman, 1960) 122-24; and Martin Priestman, *Cowper's Task: Structure and Influence* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983) 62-63.

[85] The paradigm of nervous function is largely implicit, but it does emerge explicitly in some passages, such as when Cowper, using medical terminology, argues that sensory experiences in the country "restore the tone of languid Nature" (*Cowper: Verse and Letters*, sel., intro., and notes Brian Spiller (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1968) 398), or when he observes that rural walks leave the "nerves new-braced" (405). It is notable that Cowper suffered from depressive episodes throughout his life, had much contact with doctors, and was on one occasion placed in a mental institution for a period of time (see James King, *William Cowper: A Biography* (Durham: Duke UP, 1986) 26-27, 50-58, 86-89, 177-78).

[86] To those who believe that works of art exceed the perfection of natural scenes, and so have the capacity to replace nature entirely, Cowper furnishes this warning: "imitative strokes can do no more / than please the eye, sweet Nature ev'ry sense" (407).

[87] See Porter's discussion of the "model of the healthy body as a vital economy, demanding energetic stimulus, [a model that] was widely accepted ... by the medical profession itself" during the eighteenth century ("Consumption" 60, 59-61; also *Doctor* 100-1).

[88] Maureen McNeil states that the emphasis of this tradition was on regulating bodily stimulation by such means as drugs, a technique encouraged by Erasmus Darwin (see *Under the Banner of Science: Erasmus Darwin and His Age* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1987) 163-65). The ideas of this group of physicians found application in efforts to promote the health of populations through the large-scale management of living and working conditions in cities (*Banner* 162-64). There are definite connections between the population-based health initiatives inspired by the theories of Cullen, Brown, and Darwin and the public health projects that came under the "medicine of the environment" as described by James Riley, *The Eighteenth-Century Campaign to Avoid Disease* (London: MacMillan, 1987) (see below).

[89] Porter notes that "scrofula" and similar ailments were "widely associated with poverty and the riff-raff, with dirt, bad air, and with wretched standards of life" (introduction xxxii).

[90] McNeil observes that the second half of the eighteenth century coincided with an increasing interest among medical professionals in the health of the working classes (*Banner* 140-42). According to McNeil, Darwin believed "that the provision of health-care for the lower social orders was no longer a matter of benevolence, but positively essential for the economical function of factories and, indeed, the whole nation" (*Banner* 142).

[91] For speculation that eighteenth-century medical practice was forced to serve the needs of its privileged clientele above other considerations, see Porter, "Laymen, Doctors and Medical Knowledge in the Eighteenth Century: The Evidence of the *Gentlemen's Magazine*," *Patients and Practitioners: Lay Perceptions of Medicine in Pre-Industrial Society*, ed. Roy Porter, Cambridge History of Medicine (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985) 286-88; Mullan 204; and McNeil, *Banner* 128-29.

[92] It should be noted that in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), Adam Smith tends to celebrate all kinds and levels of labour, including that of "common" workers and tradespeople: "A great part of the machines made use of in those manufactures in which labour is most subdivided, were originally the inventions of common workmen, who, being each of them employed in some very simple operation, naturally turned their thoughts towards finding out easier and readier methods of performing it" (*The Wealth of Nations*, intro. Robert Reich, ed., notes, marg. summ., and enlarg. index Edwin Cannan (1776; 1994; New York: Modern Library, 2000) 10). Smith goes on to describe a boy whose innovation not only resulted in the improved performance of the machine he operated, but also saved him considerable labour (10).

[93] On the history of "curiosity" and its class basis, particularly as it relates to developing interests in science and nature in early-modern culture, see Barbara M. Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2001) passim; Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature: 1150-1750* (New York: Zone, 1998) ch. 3, 6, 8-9; and Katie Whitaker, "The Culture of Curiosity," *Cultures of Natural History*, eds. Jardine, N[ick], J[im] A. Secord, and E[mma] C. Spary (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 75-90.

[94] On natural history as a fashionable pursuit among the polite, see David Elliston Allen, "Tastes and Crazes," *Cultures of Natural History*, eds. Jardine, N[ick], J[im] A. Secord, and E[mma] C. Spary (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996)

394-407; *Naturalist* 26-51; Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (Boston: Beacon, 1993) 3; Thomas, *Man* 281-84; and Whitaker 75-90. On the fashionable interest in natural philosophy during the early-modern period, see Daston and Park 354; and Steven Shapin, "'A Scholar and a Gentleman': The Problematic Identity of the Scientific Practitioner in Early Modern England," *History of Science* 29 (1991): 282, 297-300, 313-14. On the fashionable status of medicine, particularly in the case of medical textbooks or advice books intended to allow educated readers to coordinate and manage their own care, see Smith 265-66; Mullan 204-5; and Porter, "Laymen" 291-92; "Consumption" 65-71. Both of the medical writers whose work I examine at length, George Cheyne and Erasmus Darwin, were popular with the educated reading public of the eighteenth century. On the popularity of Cheyne's work, see Porter, introduction ix; and Mullan 238. On Darwin's renown and popularity, see Desmond King-Hele, introductory note, *The Temple of Nature*, by Erasmus Darwin (London: Scolar, 1973) n. pag; and McNeil, *Banner* 139-40.

[95] Tom Furniss has pointed out that the "the relationship between the new commercial class and the existing ruling class has been the subject of much historical debate. Historians have begun to suggest that this relation was neither entirely conflictual nor perfectly harmonious" (42). Recently, there has been some tendency to replace the older term "ruling classes" with "elites" when referring generically to those groups holding economic and political power in eighteenth-century Britain. Terry Eagleton argues that the "ruling bloc" which exercised hegemony over British society consisted of the bourgeoisie and traditional elites (*Aesthetic* 32). See also Landry 2.

[96] These disasters included the hurricanes in Jamaica of 1780-86 and the earthquake in Sicily of 1783. See Brian Spiller, sel., intro., and notes, *Cowper: Verse and Letters* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1968) 419n1, 420n1; Ella 112; Priestman 72.

[97] A common theme in environmental history is "improvement," a process that is often blamed for the huge transformations of the natural world over the past three centuries. Raymond Williams provides perhaps the most insightful analysis of improvement and its ideology available. See Williams, *Country* 60-67, 113-17, 120-26. For other discussions of this topic, see Thomas, *Man* 254-69; Carolyn Merchant, "Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative," *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (1995; New York: W.W. Norton, 1996) 132-59; and Markley 91-94, 96. Also informative regarding the general theme of the human "domination of nature" is Donald Worster 26-55.

[98] On the relations and often profound differences between ideal representations of rural Britain and the realities that were actually found there, see Williams, *Country* 13-141; and Thomas, *Man* 243-54.

Conclusion

[99] Indeed, it is my intention in the second chapter to try to bring various kinds of evidence to bear on the issues I survey without necessarily drawing distinctions between kinds of evidence, and in this way to provide as complete an examination as is possible. Perhaps we should say that we can draw no real conclusions from such evidence as that provided by White, for, whatever its value as documentary evidence of a place as it existed in the past, it is still the case that it is conveyed in language. I think this point simply underscores the problematic status of any distinction between ideal and material.

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