

Thomas Thistlewood's Libidinal Linnaean Project: Slavery, Ecology, and Knowledge Production

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When twenty-nine-year-old white Englishman Thomas Thistlewood arrived in British colonial Jamaica in 1750, he worked briefly as a surveyor's assistant. Subsequently, he assumed his first position overseeing enslaved persons as keeper of Vineyard Pen in St. Elizabeth parish. Thistlewood continued to engage in various surveying projects during his time in Jamaica (he lived there until his death in 1786), but, as I will argue here, his chief mode of surveying—and surveilling—the landscapes under his control was through serial rapes of enslaved women, which he documented in his diaries. This practice constituted what I term a “libidinal Linnaean project,” in which rape, slavery, natural history, and surveillance coalesced.¹

In eighteenth-century Jamaica, Thistlewood gained recognition among colonists for his botanical and vegetable gardens as well as his extensive library.² He was a lay Enlightenment intellectual eager to engage in scientific pursuits, such as monitoring the weather and preserving animal “specimens.” He read a wide array of literature, including satirical and classical texts, philosophical treatises, natural histories, technical manuals, novels, and poetry. He left

1 With “libidinal Linnaean project” and “libidinal ecology of slavery” (discussed later) I am building from Saidiya Hartman's notion of the “libidinal economy of slavery.” See Saidiya V. Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe*, no. 26 (June 2008): 1.

2 See Trevor G. Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 106–12, 124; and James Walvin, *The Trader, the Owner, the Slave: Parallel Lives in the Age of Slavery* (2007; repr., London: Vintage, 2008), 155–59.

behind thirty-seven diaries and multiple volumes of reading notes, among other documents. Owing to the daily and detailed nature of his recordkeeping over the thirty-six years that he lived on the island, Thistlewood's papers constitute the largest extant archive for studying slavery in eighteenth-century Jamaica.

Thistlewood seems to have kept the diaries for his own purposes, as opposed to writing with an audience in mind, let alone with a view toward their publication. Interpreting the diaries is difficult. His acquaintances in Jamaica were not avid diarists, if they kept such records at all; this limits researchers' ability to interrogate more fully Thistlewood's person and perspective.³ Each dated entry consists of individual notes separated by hand-drawn lines, often more zigzag than straight, which cut across the page. One understanding of the diaries' structure would suggest that Thistlewood compartmentalized his daily doings, that he did not see a relationship among subentries, and, therefore, we should not read across the lines. Trevor Burnard remarks on the diaries' "extreme lack of self-consciousness," which renders them "diffuse, shapeless, and unremittingly concrete."⁴ They show Thistlewood's "compulsive urge to find, generate, sift, handle, collect, and record factual impressions and were one way in which his passion for collecting facts and desire for routine and regularity could be advanced." As such, Burnard proposes, Thistlewood's diaries resist even psychoanalytical interpretations.⁵

By contrast, I will argue that, at times, the diaries imply a stream of consciousness; indeed, as explored here, even the same line within a day's entry might record two seemingly unrelated events or observations that nonetheless suggest an associative logic, whether conscious or subconscious. Entries often skip around temporally instead of providing a chronological account of his day, lending further support for exploring the insights that might be gained from a more exegetical reading. It is the diaries' potentially tacit coherence that I aim to investigate, through a joint analysis of Thistlewood's diaries and reading notes, with a focus on natural history, surveillance, and sexual violence.⁶

Today, Thistlewood is notorious for his serial rapes of enslaved women, which he recorded using a Latin formula. Yet *rape* is not the term used in much of the scholarship on Thistlewood. Instead, one encounters references to his "sexual athleticism," "spur-of-the-moment lust," "voracious libido," "couplings," and "sexual conquests" recorded in "schoolboy Latin."⁷ Michael Craton proposes that Thistlewood's "attentions" seem not to have been "imposed by force," adding that he "wisely concentrated on the 'new African' females rather than on

3 See Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*, 25–27.

4 *Ibid.*, 26.

5 *Ibid.*, 27.

6 My analysis stands in contradiction to that of Burnard, who proposes that Thistlewood's "absence of self-scrutiny is most evident in his accounts of his many sexual encounters" (*ibid.*, 28).

7 "Sexual athleticism": *ibid.*; "spur-of-the-moment lust": Walvin, *Trader, the Owner, the Slave*, 150; "voracious libido": Brian L. Moore, foreword to Douglas Hall, *In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica, 1750–86* (1989; repr., Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 1999), vi; "couplings": Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 39; "sexual conquests": Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*, 28; Walvin, *Trader, the Owner, the Slave*, 118; "schoolboy Latin": Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*, 5, 156; Walvin, *Trader, the Owner, the Slave*, 117.

those who had already formed a permanent bond with male slaves.”⁸ The rapes themselves have been characterized by James Walvin as providing Thistlewood with “instant sexual gratification” and his records of them as “tell[ing] an amazing story.” Additionally, historians have been intrigued by Thistlewood’s undoubtedly complex relationship of thirty-three years with an enslaved woman named Phibbah, and Walvin writes that Thistlewood documented “the mundane details of his own domestic life with Phibbah, the pleasure they found in each other’s company, though often spiced with domestic discord.”⁹ Burnard imagines Thistlewood and Phibbah as having “a warm and loving relationship, if such a thing was possible between a slave and her master.” He cites as evidence their “vigorous sex life,” which he reads as “an obvious manifestation of the bond between them,” and opines further that “their active sex life appears to have been consensual”: “Alone of female slaves under Thistlewood’s control, Phibbah could refuse to have sex with him, as she did ten times between 1754 and 1759.”¹⁰ Burnard calculates the number of occasions on which Thistlewood “coupled” with enslaved women—and with how many “different partners”—dutifully identifying “peak[s]” and nadirs in his “sex life.” Burnard even compares Thistlewood’s rate of “sexual activity” with that of “the average Briton” today.¹¹

Saidiya Hartman, by contrast, translates the “*Cum sup terr*” of Thistlewood’s recorded “sexual exploits” as “I fucked her on the ground.” However, Hartman places this citation and translation of a typical entry from the diaries (the enslaved woman’s name would follow the word *cum*, Latin for “with”) in a footnote rather than in the body of her text.¹² Perhaps this is because the translation “fucked her” commits another, discursive, violence. Hartman’s dual aim is, in part, to interrogate and resist the spectacularization and fetishization of sexual violence in slavery’s archives—and in interpretations of these acts. “The libidinal investment in violence is everywhere apparent in the documents, statements and institutions that decide our knowledge of the past,” she writes. “What has been said and what can be said about Venus *take for granted* the traffic between fact, fantasy, desire, and violence.”¹³ Subsequently, Hartman refers to Thistlewood’s “serial rapes” and insists further: “It is too easy to hate a man like Thistlewood; what is more difficult is to acknowledge as our inheritance the brutal Latin phrases spilling onto the pages of his journals.”¹⁴

That a historian might *object* to the use of the term *rape* to describe Thistlewood’s actions and substitute (prefer) terms such as *sex*—even *sexual conquest*—seems, to me, one such

8 Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 39.

9 Walvin, *The Trader, the Owner, the Slave*, 118, 151, 137.

10 Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*, 238. Contrast this with Hartman’s identification of “the impossibility of consent and the struggle to mitigate the brutal constraints of captivity through an entitlement denied the captive—‘no,’ the prerogative of refusal.” Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 86.

11 Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*, 156.

12 Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” 1n1 (italics in original). Thistlewood’s Latin formula—specifically, *cum*—hardly constitutes that which Burnard characterizes as “an easily translated code” (*Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*, 28).

13 Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” 5 (italics in original).

14 *Ibid.*, 6.

brutal inheritance. As Hartman writes of slavery and sexual violence in nineteenth-century America, “The rape of black women existed as an unspoken but normative condition fully within the purview of everyday sexual practices, whether within the implied arrangements of the slave enclave or within the plantation household.”¹⁵ Thus, to use the term *rape* in our analyses is, according to Hartman, “to issue a provocation”: “It is a declaration intended to shift our attention to another locus of crime. It is to envision the unimaginable, excavate the repressed, and discern the illegible.”¹⁶ What Sharon Block proposes with respect to the archives of sexual violence in colonial America, that “the very absence of recorded categorization of such acts as rape was crucial to early American systems of sexual and social power,” might be true of not only eighteenth-century Jamaican archives but of the historiography of slavery as well. “The exclusion of women of color from the status of rape victim,” Block writes, “was a crucial feature of American racialization of rape through not only legal prosecution, but also the privileges afforded to whiteness.”¹⁷ Marisa Fuentes, in her study of enslaved women’s experiences of violence in British colonial Barbados, likewise argues, “The discursive power of racial ideology worked to subjugate, mark as deviant, and make sexually accessible black women’s bodies for public consumption at the same time and in relation to the ways white women were protected via law, gender, race, and sexual norms.”¹⁸

The language that historians use when archival records are one-sided is ultimately their or our choice. In this instance, we must decide how to “classify” (note the natural-historical echo) intimate acts in which we know that enslaved women ultimately did *not* have a choice to participate; their enslaved status plainly contrasts with Thistlewood’s empowered one. (As Burnard remarks, Thistlewood “*paid a rental fee for [Phibbah’s] services*” when he moved to his own property and desired her presence there).¹⁹ Moreover, feminists have long fought for the legal recognition of the reality that while two people can be in a (seemingly) “willing,” even “contractual,” relationship (e.g., marriage), either person is nonetheless capable of raping the other.²⁰ How one views Thistlewood’s interactions with enslaved women is a feminist, antiracist issue. The fact that the law in both the United States and the Caribbean remains ambivalent about the possibility and consequences of (even) *marital* rape is all the more reason to resist romanticizations of Thistlewood’s relationships with enslaved women, Phibbah included.²¹ The

15 Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 85.

16 *Ibid.*, 83.

17 Sharon Block, *Rape and Sexual Power in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 3, 4. Block’s response to the difficulty of writing about rape resonates with my own approach: “I am not opposed to readers’ seeing various parts of this book as transhistorical,” she explains, “but I also hope that they will see how sexual coercion was intricately tied to early America’s specific social and cultural realities. . . . Rape’s imbrication in multiple strands of history, discourse, and popular culture makes rape both transhistoric and culturally specific” (7).

18 Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 84–85.

19 Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*, 239 (emphasis mine).

20 Jill Elaine Hasday has demonstrated that since the mid-nineteenth century feminist movements in the United States vocally protested laws that denied spousal rape or assigned more lenient punishments to men convicted of marital rape. See Jill Elaine Hasday, “Contest and Consent: A Legal History of Marital Rape,” *California Law Review* 88, no. 5 (2000): 1373–505.

21 Hasday shows that in the United States “[a] majority of states still retain some form of the common law regime,” under which “husbands were exempt from prosecution for raping their wives.” For example: “They criminalize a narrower range of

attacked person's ability to "choose" to extricate themselves from such a relationship is not guaranteed, and is certainly not uncomplicated. The threat of retribution or public shaming, the possibility of a not-guilty verdict, and the socioeconomic situations that might lead someone to remain in an abusive relationship must always be accounted for. Viewed in light of the legal and ethical stakes of responses to sexual violence (both now and in the past), it is startling that any historian would *choose* to champion the use of *sex* over *rape* to describe Thistlewood's actions, given that enslaved women had no legally recognized "choice" to refuse him, just as they had every likelihood of facing brutal retaliation for their opposition.²² Thistlewood's diary notation "Phibbah keep away" is hardly evidence of an enslaved woman's empowered "refusal" of him, as though she were simply not "in the mood." Indeed, one such entry comes immediately after Thistlewood records sending an enslaved person to a neighboring estate "with the grindstone handle to get [it] mended." Thistlewood notes that he "recd. [received] it back mended," followed by "Phibbah keep away," suggesting that he views Phibbah, too, as an implement out of order, requiring repair.²³ *Rape* is therefore the term that I will use here.

Scholars engaging Thistlewood's archive have tended to take his rapes of enslaved women at "face value," imagining him as some sort of hyper-"heterosexual" person. Relatedly, they often quarantine Thistlewood's violent practices from his more traditionally enlightened pursuits, citing their apparent contradiction.²⁴ My approach, by contrast, demonstrates how Thistlewood's intellectual interests dovetailed with his plantation practices and vice versa.

offenses if committed within marriage, subject the marital rape they do recognize to less serious sanctions, and/or create special procedural hurdles for marital rape prosecutions" ("Contest and Consent," 1375). See also Stacy-Ann Elvy, "A Postcolonial Theory of Spousal Rape: The Caribbean and Beyond," *Michigan Journal of Gender and Law* 22, no. 1 (2015): 89–168. Elvy argues that the continued use of common law conceptions of marital rape in Caribbean nations, including Jamaica, is part of the legacy of colonization.

- 22 See also Dorothy Roberts's searing critique of "pro-choice" (white) feminist movements in the United States that fail to account for "a long experience of dehumanizing attempts to control Black women's reproductive lives," from slavery to forced sterilization and selective (racist) deployment of birth control. Dorothy E. Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Pantheon, 1997), 4. "The feminist focus on gender and identification of male domination as the source of reproductive repression," Roberts argues, "often overlooks the importance of racism in shaping our understanding of reproductive liberty and the degree of 'choice' that women really have" (5).
- 23 All diary entries referenced are found in Thomas Thistlewood Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. For this particular record, see Thistlewood, diary entry, 26 February 1754, box 1, folder 5. For other references to Phibbah "keep[ing] away" from Thistlewood and sleeping elsewhere, see diary entries, 17 April 1754, box 1, folder 5; and 6–7 and 9 July 1755, box 2, folder 6. On 3 October 1754, Thistlewood writes, "About 4 P.M. Cum Violet by the River Side Congo ground" and, on the next line, "At Night, had great Words Cum Phibbah in Bed, about her behavior & c Since Mr. Cope [his employer] Came" — as though contrasting Violet's "proper" conduct with Phibbah's poor "behavior" (diary entry, 3 and 4 October 1754, box 1, folder 5). The following day, Thistlewood writes, "At Night Cum Phibbah. Was forced to goe 2ce. [twice] to her dom. [house] (She in Bed already) before She would Come—Enough to do to get her" (diary entry, 4 October 1754, box 1, folder 5). This record is among those Burnard cites as an example of Phibbah's ability to "refuse" Thistlewood. Another example Burnard cites does *not* include a "cum" record and reads instead, "At Night Phibbah & I quarrell'd, She left me & I fetch'd her back" (diary entry, 19 November 1754, box 1, folder 5). Thistlewood's remark the following year that "Phib. denyed [him]" — another refusal reference for Burnard — implies that Thistlewood did not view their relationship as consensual but, rather, understood himself as being sexually entitled to Phibbah's body (diary entry, 7 February 1755, box 2, folder 6).
- 24 Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*, 31, 243, 258; Walvin, *Trader, the Owner, the Slave*, 137, 159–60. In a subsequent review of Michael Chenoweth's *The Eighteenth-Century Climate of Jamaica Derived from the Journals of Thomas Thistlewood* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2003), Burnard does describe Thistlewood's language for documenting what he terms "sexual encounters" as "scientifically dispassionate." Trevor Burnard, "Tropical Storms," *H-Net Reviews*, August 2005, www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=10808, para. 1; cited in Alison Donnell, "Contesting Thistlewood: Slavery, Agency, and the Limits of Representation," in Joscelyn Gardner, ed., *Bleeding and Breeding*, exhibition catalogue (Whitby, ON: Station Gallery, 2012), 33.

As such, this essay is admittedly akin to a prosecution, the charge being (in addition to rape) that Thistlewood's sexual assaults of enslaved women were part and parcel of—rather than in contradiction to—his self-fashioning as an avid reader, capable surveyor, and producer of natural-historical and botanical knowledge. Analyses of the imbrications of natural history, colonization, and slavery have at times operated at the level of discourse—focusing their attention, for example, on how descriptions of plant reproduction served as metaphors for human sexuality.²⁵ A central text in such studies is Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus's widely influential *Systema Naturae*. First published in 1735, Linnaeus's work promoted a classification system for plants based on their sexual parts, leading to all manner of erotic—and racialized—anthropomorphisms.²⁶ My interpretation of Thistlewood's diaries grounds such discourse in physical acts and daily life. It shows that “knowledge” and “practice” developed through reciprocal, intimately experienced circuits. I will argue that Thistlewood engaged in a “libidinal Linnaean project” wherein his violence against enslaved women was central to his working-out of Enlightenment thought and plantation management. “T. T.”—Thistlewood's initials—will come to emblazon the “silver mark” with which he brands his “New Negroes” as well as the “Bundle of Trees” that he imports by boat and the chest (“T. T. No. 2. Books & Wearing Apparel”) upon which he rapes “Mountain Susanah.”²⁷

If enslaved women's appearance in Thistlewood's archive reflects their “mutilated historicity,” to borrow Marisa Fuentes's formulation, then a turn to cultural production that has interrogated this archive might point to an alternative language with which to approach Thistlewood's brutal discourse and that of eighteenth-century overseers and slaveowners in general.²⁸ Thus I will conclude this essay with an analysis of a lithograph from contemporary artist Joscelyn Gardner's series *Creole Portraits III: “bringing down the flowers . . .”* (2009–11), which directly engages Thistlewood's archive.

Thistlewood's *Silva*

On 5 December 1750, about five months after he assumed the position of penkeeper at Vineyard (a property producing crops and livestock), Thistlewood recorded the following in his diary: “Cum Silvia (an Ebo Negroe) in Silv[a] [forest/wood], Sup. Terram [upon the

25 For works that focus on more metaphoric implications, see Londa L. Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (1993; repr., New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), esp. chap. 1, “The Private Lives of Plants,” 11–39; and Jill H. Casid, *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005). Casid makes reference to Thistlewood's archive but only to highlight an enslaved woman named Dido's contribution of several herbs to Thistlewood's garden (*Sowing Empire*, 209).

26 Casid, *Sowing Empire*, xiv.

27 For his purchase of the “silver mark,” see Thistlewood, diary entry, 3 January 1758, box 2, folder 9; for an example of Thistlewood branding enslaved persons he purchases, see diary entry, 8 December 1761, box 2, folder 12; for the bundle of trees, see diary entry, 6 April 1761, box 2, folder 12; and for the rape record, see diary entry, 10 September 1761, box 2, folder 12. It is possible that the upside-down triangle comprised of three X's that he uses to set off rape records and the upside-down triangle of the brand-mark that he chooses exist in deliberate conversation.

28 Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*, 16.

ground]—between Corn grounds by the Morass Side, abt. [about] Eleven A.M.”²⁹ The entry documents his first rape of an enslaved woman “Sup. Terram,” out-of-doors, on the land itself. It is as though he relishes the wordplay—“Cum Silvia . . . in Silv[a]”—seeking to survey the grounds and mark the “wood” as his: Thistle-wood’s. In so doing he also enacts a taxonomic classification that transforms the rape record and act into a quasi-scientific or libidinal Linnaean project: the entry includes the information that Silvia is “an Ebo Negroe,” at least according to Thistlewood.³⁰ Here, classification is inseparable from sexual violence; indeed, the latter provides the occasion for the former.

If the “wit” of Thistlewood’s Silvia/silva conjuncture is deliberate, one is prompted to ask: What (other) governing logics or aesthetics might underlie his sexually violent acts? Quantitative analyses of Thistlewood’s rapes (whether one calls them rapes or not) have depersonalized the attacks, threatening to numb responses to them as individual encounters melt into statistics.³¹ Attention to the rapes’ specificity resists this common historiographic move, indicting Thistlewood further for the self-consciously enlightened nature of his brutal interactions with enslaved women.

In fact, Thistlewood may have intended more than a play on words with his description of the rape of “Silvia” in the “Silv[a].” His choice to attack this woman in particular may have carried symbolic weight. As Robert Pogue Harrison writes, “The traditional legends of Rome’s foundation tell us . . . that the city was born of the forests, but they also suggest that Rome had to turn against its matrix in order to fulfill its destiny.” According to Livy, Harrison explains, Romulus (“founder” of Rome) belonged to the Sylvian family line.³² As is the case in many foundation myths (the Rape of the Sabines, the Rape of Lucretia) it is sexual violence that sets the story in motion: Romulus and his twin brother Remus were born when Mars, the Roman god of war, raped the virgin Vestal Rhea Silvia.³³ “The god of sacred boundaries in Roman religion was *Silvanus*, deity of the outlying wilderness,” Harrison adds. “The natural boundaries of the Roman *res publica* were drawn by the margins of the undomesticated forests, which in ancient Roman law had the status of *res nullius* (belonging to no one).”³⁴ The Romans, therefore, “were not merely invaders who sacked and plundered and then moved on”; they were “builders of roads, imperial highways, institutions, a broad integrated network of ‘telecommunications.’”³⁵

29 Thistlewood, diary entry, 5 December 1750, box 1, folder 1. Silvia worked mostly in Thistlewood’s house, with several other enslaved women.

30 While Thistlewood also deployed Latin formulas in his sex records back in England, the classificatory and cartographic language that he uses in Jamaica relate these rape acts to imperial natural history and surveying projects, differentiating them from his prior records involving white female romantic interests and sex workers.

31 For a critique of quantitative approaches to the transatlantic slave trade, see Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

32 Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 47.

33 Or, as Livy puts it, Rhea Silvia “named Mars as the father of her dubious progeny, either because she thought he really was the father or because naming a god as the one responsible for her transgression made a more respectable story.” Livy, *The Rise of Rome: Books 1–5*, trans. T. J. Luce (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1:8.

34 Harrison, *Forests*, 49 (italics in original).

35 *Ibid.*, 51.

Viewed in this light, Thistlewood perpetrated his initial act of terrestrial rape against an enslaved woman whose name evokes a “spirit” or “goddess” of the wood, targeted for Roman “conquest”—as well as Rhea Silvia, targeted for divine rape. His act also conjures the very manner in which Romulus populated Rome, by capturing women from nearby cities and forcing them into relation with Rome’s founding men.³⁶ Thistlewood’s rape of Silvia may well participate in this classical genealogy of (mystified) sexualized violence, ambiguous parentage, colonization and captivity, and the imperial “domesticating” of unruly forested land as a sign of “progress”—a fitting lens through which to view eighteenth-century Jamaica.³⁷ Bracketing the rape record in the diary entry, after all, are Thistlewood’s notations that “an Ewe Lamb’d a She Lamb” and that he had “Kill’d a Black Snake.”³⁸ In other words, this particular rape record is enclosed within two signifiers of his “progress”—an “increase” in livestock and a “decrease” in the threatening, “undomesticated” creaturely population.

A subsequent rape record that took place at Vineyard Pen one and a half years later similarly configures the forest as a site of transition: “Gave Dinah, a Congo Negroe 1 Bitt [currency]. Cum Illa [her], Sup Thatch Leaves upon ground, in Silva between Negroe ground and Morass, abt. 4 P.M.”³⁹ That the rape occurs in the woods between the enslaved persons’ provision grounds and the morass—the latter being land unsuitable for planting—suggests that the “Silva” is also a liminal space. If left “uncultivated,” it goes the way of the morass (is “wasted” space, agriculturally speaking), or, if “cultivated,” it might help to sustain the plantation, as did the provision grounds that planters assigned to enslaved persons so that they might generate some of their own food.⁴⁰ Inseparable from this suggestion that Thistlewood might “cultivate” the silva is the plantation ecology’s desired *human* “increase.”⁴¹

Another potential valence of the Silvia/silva entry is that of the *silva* as literary-scientific genre, popularized by Francis Bacon’s posthumously published *Sylva Sylvarum* (1627).⁴²

36 Livy, *The Rise of Rome*, 1:13–16.

37 For *res nullius* in relation to the establishment of plantations in British colonial Jamaica, see Casid, *Sowing Empire*, 7. Margaret Williamson has noted Thistlewood’s familiarity with classical mythology, singling out the enslaved persons named “Charon, Minos and Rhadamanthus,” figures “associated with the Underworld.” Williamson argues that such names, which extended to geographies, as in the case of Jamaica’s “River Styx,” functioned “as a kind of in-group joke.” Margaret Williamson, “Africa or Old Rome? Jamaican Slave Naming Revisited,” *Slavery and Abolition* 38, no. 1 (2017): 121.

38 Thistlewood, diary entry, 5 December 1750, box 1, folder 1.

39 Thistlewood, diary entry, 4 May 1751, box 1, folder 2. “1 Bitt” indicates the money that Thistlewood gave Dinah, not an uncommon practice according to his diaries, though hardly a “gift” or even exchange.

40 Jennifer Reed observes that a morass also could be a site to which enslaved persons escaped. See Jennifer Reed, “‘Sites of Terror’ and Affective Geographies on Thomas Thistlewood’s Breadnut Island Pen,” *Caribbeana* 1, no. 1 (2016): 54–56, openjournals.neu.edu/caribbean/cbn/article/view/11.

41 As Jennifer Morgan notes, “increase” was used for the reproduction of crops, livestock, and enslaved persons. See Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 82. This essay explores plantation ecology in a more material sense than that proposed by Britt Rusert. See Britt Rusert, “Plantation Ecologies: The Experimental Plantation in and against James Grainger’s *The Sugar-Cane*,” *Early American Studies* 13, no. 2 (2015): 341–73. See also Heather V. Vermeulen and Hazel V. Carby, *Prospects of Empire: Slavery and Ecology in Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Britain*, exhibition catalogue (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014). Toward the end of Thistlewood’s subsequent overseership at Egypt sugar plantation in Westmoreland parish, he will force another enslaved woman named Silvia to labor in his renowned garden and rape her there: “Silvia Weeding in the Garden,” he writes, immediately followed by, “A.M. Cum Silvia in the Garden, Stans! Backwd. [standing backward]” (Thistlewood, diary entry, 29 January 1766, box 3, folder 17).

42 For Bacon’s use of the *silva* genre, see Frans De Bruyn, “The Classical Silva and the Generic Development of Scientific Writing in Seventeenth-Century England,” *New Literary History* 32, no. 2 (2001): 347–73.

(Thistlewood lent a copy of this text to a fellow colonist four and a half years after his sylvan rape.)⁴³ Bacon's redeployment of a classical literary genre in the service of ordering scientific knowledge even influenced the editorial decisions behind such publications as the Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions*.⁴⁴ "Early modern writers," Frans De Bruyn explains, "viewed the *silva* much as they regarded other genres—not as a rigid prescription of structure and content but as an invitation to explore new modalities of literary representation within a preexisting practice or tradition."⁴⁵ Peter Shaw, in his 1733 edition of Bacon's works, defines "Silva Sylvarum" as "a *Wood* of Experiments and Observations; or a Collection of Materials, ready procured, and laid up for forming particular Histories of Nature and Art, in the Author's inductive manner."⁴⁶ Inspired by the *silva*, scientists endeavored "to conceive of collection forms that could encompass provisionally a variety of parts without the whole as yet being known or fixed, but in the belief that the whole is ultimately knowable and determinate."⁴⁷ In other words, by way of the *silva* one might achieve "order" through a hegemonic admission of (certain forms of) "disorder."

If the grotesque Silvia/*silva* "wordplay" invites literary analysis, one also might discern in this record a protean effort on Thistlewood's part to reach for a genre through which to understand and order his "new" world. We also might detect in the record a libidinal exegesis of *silva* that not only held in tandem its multiple meanings but also apprehended its flexibility and agricultural resonances as particularly or potentially suited to the environment in which Thistlewood had situated himself. The penkeeper whose education included classics would have been no stranger to the *silva*'s literary history.⁴⁸ A surveyor turned penkeeper, Thistlewood may have recalled the myth of the boundary-marking Silvanus and sought to "sow empire," quite literally, imagining the future increase that a cleared and cultivated forest and an enslaved woman's body might "yield."⁴⁹ Perhaps he envisioned his recordkeeping in relation to Bacon's legacy.⁵⁰

43 Thistlewood, diary entry, 4 August 1755, box 2, folder 6. That evening, Phibbah told Thistlewood she "found herself Nigh her Time," and, the next morning, Phibbah gave birth to her stillborn son (Thistlewood, diary entry, 5 August 1755, box 2, folder 6).

44 De Bruyn, "Classical Silva," 355–70.

45 Ibid., 363. See also Claudio Guillén on the *silva* as "an invitation to form." Claudio Guillén, *Literature as System: Essays Toward the Theory of Literary History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 109; cited in De Bruyn, "The Classical Silva," 349.

46 Peter Shaw, ed., *The Philosophical Works of Francis Bacon . . . Methodized, and Made English, from the Originals*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (London, 1737), lxii (italics in original); cited in De Bruyn, "The Classical Silva," 354.

47 De Bruyn, "The Classical Silva," 363.

48 For Thistlewood's reading habits, see Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*, esp. 106–15. Williamson proposes that the names Thistlewood uses "seem to carry no particular weight for him despite his classical education," cautioning further that "because the whole pool of names was already creolized and constantly evolving, the specific weight of a name's origin in any particular usage is difficult to determine" ("Africa or Old Rome?," 120). While I agree that any precise determination is impossible, I nevertheless argue that Thistlewood's rape records in particular seem to suggest a perverse "logic" and even a literary-historiographic and scientific project undergirding his acts.

49 Here I again reference Casid's *Sowing Empire* and Morgan's *Laboring Women*. "As they surveyed the survivors of the Middle Passage on American shores," Morgan writes, "European men could hardly help but see in the bodies of African women and girls the physical manifestation of their own dreams for the future" (*Laboring Women*, 56).

50 Burnard has suggested that Thistlewood "attempted to achieve renown in two areas in which professional skill was not required and empirical observation and the application of extensive industry were most important" (*Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*, 120).

As Édouard Glissant has observed, “Thought . . . spaces itself out into the world. It informs the imaginary of peoples, their varied poetics, which it then transforms, meaning, in them its risk becomes realized.”⁵¹ Or in the words of Katherine McKittrick, “Blackness is integral to the production of space”; geography constitutes a “racial-sexual terrain.”⁵²

A Libidinal Linnaean Project

Thistlewood’s reading practices also *reflect* rather than prescribe his interest in blurring the lines between the scientific and the libidinal. This can be seen through an analysis of excerpts copied into one of his commonplace books from Dennis de Coetlogon’s two-volume opus *An Universal History of Arts and Sciences* (1745) and the satirical work *The Man-plant; or, Scheme for Increasing and Improving the British Breed* (1752), written by the pseudonymous “Vincent Miller, M.E. and Professor of Philosophy.” Thistlewood transcribes these passages *after* he has begun his classification of enslaved women in rape records, which suggests that his practices “Sup. Terram” preceded or at least existed in reciprocal relationship to his engagement of (pseudo)scientific theory. My analysis of these texts is deployed retroactively as a preface to further interpretation of the acts in which Thistlewood had been engaged in Jamaica since his arrival.

As summarized by Jeff Loveland, Dennis de Coetlogon’s *Universal History* “emphasized pedagogy, claiming it could lead readers to ‘perfect’ knowledge of the arts and sciences, . . . ‘without the assistance of a master.’”⁵³ Doubtless this appealed to Thistlewood, far from the metropole but desirous of continuing his education. Of interest here is that, in the passages copied from Coetlogon’s text, Thistlewood deliberately conjoins terminology for plants with terminology for human sexual organs. His first transcription is of the encyclopedia’s entry for “transplant” under Coetlogon’s subject header “Agriculture.” The entry provides tips for the successful transplantation of trees—a key component of (and metaphor for) colonization and plantation projects.⁵⁴ Thistlewood next skips three subjects to arrive at “Anatomy,” from which he copies the agriculturally resonant yet sexually inflected definitions of “yard” and “seed.” In the book that is his source these terms refer *not* to the measuring of ground and the seeds of plants but to the human penis and *its* “seed.”

Equally demonstrative of his investment in a libidinal Linnaean vocabulary is Thistlewood’s attraction to *The Man-plant*, the contents of which reflect a fearful fascination with wombs

51 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (1997; repr., Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 1 (italics removed).

52 Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xiv.

53 Jeff Loveland, “Unifying Knowledge and Dividing Disciplines: The Development of Treatises in the Encyclopaedia Britannica,” *Book History* 9, no. 1 (2006): 70; Loveland quotes from Dennis de Coetlogon’s prospectus to *An Universal History of Arts and Sciences*, 2 vols. (London: John Hart, 1745), 1:5.

54 Thistlewood, reading notes, commonplace entries, and memoranda (n.d.), 96–97, box 10, folder 73. See Dennis de Coetlogon, “Agriculture,” in *An Universal History of Arts and Sciences*, 1:5–23, and “Anatomy,” 1:43–105. See also Casid, “The Hybrid Production of Empire,” chap. 1 in *Sowing Empire*, 1–44.

and a desire to control them, staged against the backdrop of empire and its produce. *The Man-plant*'s author includes a chart "in which the Female of the human Species is described, as a Flower Plant, in the Method of *Linnaeus [sic]*."⁵⁵ Miller refers to Linnaeus's classification system based on plant reproduction. Written in Latin, like Linnaeus's study, Miller's chart likens a woman's body parts to the components of a flower. He describes a woman's breasts—which may be soft, snow-white globes, or dark, rough, and horridly flaccid (racist mammary classifications typical of the period's natural-historical and travel literature)—as well as her uterus, vagina, vulva, and eggs (10–11).⁵⁶ Under the heading "Calix," one learns that Miller's female specimen "Dediduum omni Nocte" or "surrenders" her various garments and ornaments "every evening" (10). He concludes the entry with "Not. Variant Species, prout differ locus natalis" ("Note. Species vary with respect to place of birth"). In the footnote to this qualification Miller directs the reader to "Venus Physique. Dissertation sur les Noirs" (11), referring to French natural historian Pierre-Louis Moreau de Maupertuis's *Vénus Physique (The Earthly Venus)*, first published in 1745. The French text consists of two parts, one containing "Une Dissertation sur L'origine des Hommes, et des Animaux" ("A Dissertation on the Origin of Men, and of Animals") and a second containing "Une Dissertation sur L'origine des Noirs" ("A Dissertation on the Origin of Blacks"). Thus, it is not only—perhaps not at all—the (white) "British breed" that Miller has in mind but enslaved persons from the African continent and their descendants, conscripted to support the British Empire.

Following his Linnaean configuration of a woman's body, Miller describes his success in cultivating humans like "exotic Plants" in a greenhouse, which first required that the egg "be brought away . . . from its Inhesion within the dark-Holds and Fastness of the Womb" (19). He accomplishes this feat via the discovery of a "potion," a "Mistura Mirabilis" ("Wonderful Mixture"), that induces such separation. The ingredients are strikingly colonial-tropic: "Sacchar. alb. depurate" (purified white sugar), "Succ. Limon." (lemon juice), "Succ. Aurant." (orange juice), and "Limat. Nuc. Maciss." (ground nutmeg). In other words, these are products of the British Empire's West Indian colonies, refined for national consumption (and reproduction).⁵⁷ Miller posits that by means of this human cultivation the Empire "may also then more reasonably grasp the Conquest of both the *Indies*" (36; italics in original). "Plantations of Men are susceptible of Improvement as well as those of Trees," he insists (39); "Is not the fine chop-

55 Vincent Miller (pseud.), *The Man-plant; or, Scheme for Increasing and Improving the British Breed* (London: Printed for M. Cooper, at the Globe in Pater-noster-Row, 1752), 9 (italics in original); hereafter cited in the text. Such comparisons were not uncommon in erotic texts; see Karen Harvey's discussion of Philogynes Clitorides's *The Natural History of the Frutex Vulvaria* (1737) and Miller's *The Man-plant* in "The Substance of Sexual Difference: Change and Persistence in Representations of the Body in Eighteenth-Century England," *Gender and History* 14, no. 2 (2002): 205–8.

56 See Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, 64–65 and 161–63, for natural historians' arguments regarding breast shapes in relation to race; and Morgan, "'Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder': Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology," chap.1 in *Laboring Women*, 12–49.

57 For the importance of distancing colonial products from their means of production, attended by efforts to make the British West Indies seem less threatening to white Europeans, see Kay Dian Kriz, *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); and Simon Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

ping Boy, the *Terræ-filius* I have to show as the Fruit of my Process of Plantation, and Culture, worth all other facts I could accumulate in Favour of my Experiments?" (49; italics in original).⁵⁸ Again, Miller's professed aim may be the growing of *British* subjects but his language evokes plantation slavery.

From *The Man-plant* Thistlewood transcribes two passages: Miller's Linnaean description of a woman—the cited "Venus Physique. Dissertation sur les Noirs," included—and the recipe for Miller's "Mistura Mirabilis."⁵⁹ It is not insignificant that a "scientist's" configuration of a woman's body according to the Linnaean sexual classification system for plants, within a satire devoted to making visible and externally controllable "the dark-Holds and Fastness of the Womb," caught Thistlewood's attention. Moreover, whereas Miller does not italicize or underline the title of Maupertuis's text, Thistlewood (who seldom underlines titles) literally underscores blackness when he transcribes the footnote: "Vide Venus Physique. Dissertation Sur les Noirs."⁶⁰

Thistlewood's diary entries both before and after he copies such passages display a similar elision of terminology for measuring land and terminology for male sexual organs attended by a sexualized classificatory impulse. While at Vineyard Pen, Thistlewood uses "yard" to indicate *penis* when he writes of "Negroe youths in this Country" who "Take unclarify'd hoggs lard, and Chafe into their *yard* by a fire Side, to make that Member large."⁶¹ He also frequently uses "yard" to refer to his diseased penis, and "seed" to refer to his ejaculated semen.⁶²

It is my contention that Thistlewood's rapes of enslaved women should be viewed as both acts of sexual terror and ways of marking the grounds—and people—under his surveillance.⁶³ For example, three weeks after his sylvan rape of Dinah, Thistlewood's rape of another enslaved woman engenders a map of Vineyard Pen and traces his control of it: "abt. Sunset, Cum Mary, alias Adamah, a Coromante [*sic*] Negroe, Sup. Terram, by the Side of the fence, running from the Corner of the New Clear'd groun'd, thro' the burnt ground, to fullerswood Canes Side, within about 2 hund. [hundred] *yards* of the latter."⁶⁴ Here, like a self-ordained

58 Empire's "founding paternal gesture of possession," Casid writes, hinged on "the materializing metaphor of planting scattered seed, that is, the practices of agriculture and landscaping as (hetero)sexual reproduction." As a result, "to plant was both to produce colonies and to generate imperial subjects to sustain them" (*Sowing Empire*, xiv).

59 Thistlewood, reading notes, commonplace entries, and memoranda (n.d.), 141–42, box 10, folder 73. Thistlewood's transcription of the potion omits the nutmeg.

60 Thistlewood, reading notes, commonplace entries, and memoranda (n.d.), 142, box 10, folder 73 (underline in original).

61 Thistlewood, diary entry, 10 May 1751, box 1, folder 2 (emphasis mine).

62 For a use of "yard" in reference to his genital ailments, see Thistlewood, diary entry, 25 August 1752, box 1, folder 3. For references to his ejaculated semen as "seed," see Thistlewood, diary entries, 16 December 1752, box 1, folder 3; and 23 March 1755, box 2, folder 6. I find Edward Baptist's decision to name his book chapters according to different "parts" of enslaved persons deeply disturbing. See Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic, 2014). Chapter 7, "Seed: 1829–1837" (215–59), (re)enacts and spectacularizes—even renders cinematographic—the agro-sexual violence it seeks to describe, in a more graphic manner than the scholarship on Thistlewood discussed above.

63 Reed is producing digital maps of Thistlewood's Breadnut Island Pen that will show the locations of his rapes of enslaved women and provide information about them culled from Thistlewood's diaries. Reed writes of her project: "Thistlewood's consistent reporting of the locations of each rape on the Pen makes these acts peculiarly mappable" ("Sites of Terror," 37). My approach is the reverse: rather than propose that the acts are mappable, I argue that Thistlewood used rape to map the grounds that he sought to control.

64 Thistlewood, diary entry, 23 May 1751, box 1, folder 2 (emphasis mine).

Sylvanus turned sexual predator, Thistlewood marks a boundary with the neighboring estate through rape: the attack takes place “by the Side of the fence” about two hundred yards from a section of Fullerswood Pen. He even uses this record to measure the work that he has overseen—his, or, rather, the enslaved persons’ productivity—through references to “the New Clear’d groun’d” and “the burnt ground.” Finally, like a natural historian documenting a new species Thistlewood provides two names: “Mary, alias Adamah.” The former denotes the woman’s insertion into the plantation’s anglophone nomenclature; the latter suggests her “foreign” appellation.⁶⁵ Then he classifies her: “a Coromante Negroe.”

Thistlewood’s cartographic practice materializes that which David Scott has referred to as the “paths” of African diasporic persons’ “conscripted encounter with European modernity.”⁶⁶ For example, the following rape record forges a connection between imperial road-making and the formation of “local” subjects: “about 7 A.M. Cum Clarinda, a Creolian, belonging to the Salt-Spring Estate, Sup. Terram. on the North Side of the Road, or rather foot-path leading there, abt. half way.”⁶⁷ Clarinda’s classification as a “Creolian” designates her as an enslaved person born in Jamaica; it is a signifier of colonial presence and re/production.⁶⁸ Similarly, a “foot-path” is (mistaken for, or projected as) a “Road.”

It is also telling that the first enslaved woman whom Thistlewood rapes after leaving Vineyard for Egypt, the sugar plantation soon to be his new place of employment, is Flora. In addition to mapping a portion of Egypt, this rape record echoes the “wordplay” of *Silvia/silva*. It features “Flora” the person, while also mentioning an example of the estate’s “flora”: “About ½ past 10 A.M., Cum *Flora*, a Congo, Super Terram, among the Canes, above the wall head, right hand of the River, toward the Negroe ground. She [had] been for *water Cresses*. gave [her] 4 Bitts.” Six days later Thistlewood notes that the planter William Dorrill officially offers him the position of Egypt’s overseer for sixty pounds per year, which Thistlewood accepts.⁶⁹

It is on 15 March 1766—when Thistlewood is in his final year as overseer of Egypt—that he receives a copy of Vincent Miller’s *The Man-plant* from his friend Samuel Say, another white male colonist. Thistlewood reads *The Man-plant* and copies the passages discussed above sometime during the week that passes before he returns it on 22 March.⁷⁰ He is in the midst of sugarcane harvesting, having noted the previous day that “about 17 [cane] Cutters [were] in the Field.” They had “Beg[u]n to Cut the old Negroe house [cane] Piece”—each section of the planted grounds having its own appellation. The next day, on the line immediately follow-

65 It is difficult at times to distinguish vowels in Thistlewood’s writing. It is possible that the enslaved woman’s alias is “Adomah.” Interestingly, in Hebrew *adamah* is feminine and means “earth.”

66 David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 208.

67 Thistlewood, diary entry, 9 June 1751, box 1, folder 2.

68 Hilary Beckles has noted the common, if erroneous, belief among Barbados’s white population, especially in the early 1800s, that creole enslaved persons were less likely to rebel than their counterparts born on the African continent. This notion led planters to propose that creole enslaved women’s reproduction alone would prove sufficient to sustain the plantation economy in the event that the transatlantic slave trade was abolished. Hilary Beckles, *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 110–11.

69 Thistlewood, diary entries, 10 (emphases mine) and 16 September 1751, box 1, folder 2.

70 Thistlewood, diary entries, 15 and 22 March 1766, box 3, folder 17.

ing an entry in which he notes that he has returned *The Man-plant* to his friend, Thistlewood writes, “A.M. Cum Eve, Sup. Terr. in the old Negroe house [cane] Piece x(gave do. [ditto] a Bitt.”⁷¹ In other words, after noting that he returned a text that imagined “Plantations of Men,” Thistlewood records that he raped an enslaved woman named Eve and that he did so at the estate’s current harvest site, “the old Negroe house Piece.” Put differently, in an engineered Eden the pseudoscientist Vincent Miller grew his “*Terræ-filius*” from an egg extracted from the womb of his gardener’s daughter.⁷² In a cane piece, Thistlewood marked the time of harvest by raping an enslaved woman named Eve.

According to Thistlewood’s accounting, Eve was assigned to the Copes’ house (John Cope, Dorrill’s son-in-law, had taken over Egypt Estate after Dorrill’s death), under the surveillance of Mrs. Cope in particular. Eve ran away frequently. For example, on 3 March 1755, Thistlewood notes that Eve is one of four enslaved persons “wanting.” The following day he records that “William Crookshanks [Thistlewood’s subordinate] brought Eve into the Savanna to her Mistress [Mrs. Cope], but She Soon made her Escape again,” adding in small print, “He Slept with her under the Logwood.”⁷³ Two days later Crookshanks finds Eve and returns her to Egypt; the following week, after dinner four “heartily drunk” white male colonists, all Thistlewood’s acquaintances, “haw!’d Eve Separately into the Water Room and Were Concern’d with [raped] her,” one of them, his good friend Harry Weech, “2ce. [twice] first & last.”⁷⁴ The following month Eve runs away two more times.⁷⁵ One morning in August Thistlewood rapes her in the curing house (the building in which sugar is dried). The next night, Thistlewood records that he “went to See Phibbah,” who “is much out of humour about Eve yesterday Mornng. [Morning] don’t know who Can have told her.”⁷⁶ Perhaps Phibbah felt some sympathy for Eve and anger at Thistlewood. After being absent for most of October Eve is “brought home from the Creek, whipp’d and Chain’d.”⁷⁷ On 23 December she is “brought home & Chain’d again, for running away,” then “ma[kes] her Escape” the next day. On 25 December, however, “Paradise Dover br[ings] home Eve” and Thistlewood “Chain[s] her in the Cookroom.”⁷⁸ She runs away again in 1756.⁷⁹ When she runs in early April 1757 Thistlewood reports that he “tyed her to the Oven Post and gave her a little Correction”—a harrowingly opaque phrase—and the following month he writes that she is “brought home,

71 Thistlewood, diary entries, 21 and 22 March 1766, box 3, folder 17.

72 See Peter Wagner, “The Discourse on Sex—or Sex as Discourse: Eighteenth-century Medical and Paramedical Erotica,” in G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter, eds., *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987). In his discussion of *The Man-plant*, Wagner suggests that “the eighteenth-century household offered servants for this kind of situation” (61). However, the eighteenth-century plantation seems to be the site that undergirds Miller’s metropolitan innuendo.

73 Thistlewood, diary entries, 3 and 4 March 1755, box 2, Folder 6.

74 Thistlewood, diary entry, 12 March 1755, box 2, Folder 6. Burnard does acknowledge that this is a gang rape (*Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*, 82).

75 Thistlewood, diary entries, 4 and 20 April 1755, box 2, folder 6.

76 Thistlewood, diary entries, 21 and 22 August 1755, box 2, folder 6.

77 Thistlewood, diary entry, 31 October 1755, box 2, folder 6.

78 Thistlewood, diary entries, 23, 24, and 25 December 1755, box 2, folder 6.

79 Thistlewood, diary entry, 16 June 1756, box 2, folder 7.

Whipp'd, Chain'd, &c.”⁸⁰ In March 1757 Thistlewood reports that Eve had “Miscarried.” Eve miscarries again on 9 January 1758.⁸¹ Unimaginably, she survives numerous subsequent rapes by both Thistlewood and his friends.

The details of Eve's existence as conveyed through Thistlewood's diaries should give any researcher pause before interpreting Thistlewood's interactions with other enslaved women, including Phibbah. She knew full well the brutality of which he was capable. Indeed, when Thistlewood documents raping an enslaved woman named Mimbah “in the Curing house,” he adds, suggestively, “Phibbah Search'd her, Coming out, and made a Sad Noise.”⁸² Moreover, Thistlewood's diaries imply that his interactions with Phibbah were not independent of his agricultural and scientific inclinations. For example, his entries manifest an evocative proximity of planting and land measurement, on the one hand, and rapes “at Night Cum Phibbah,” on the other. On 11 July 1754, Thistlewood records that he received “Near an hundred young Cofee Trees, planted Some in the garden, and the rest in the old garden beyond the Cook room.” Following this is the notation “at Night Cum Phibbah —(habet Mensem[])” (he documents that Phibbah was menstruating at the time). One week later, the same line in his diary contains both “Employ'd holing as before: Mr. Blithe running” —measuring out— “the Cane Pieces Pasture, &c” and again, “at Night Cum Phibbah.”⁸³ Perhaps Thistlewood made a connection between “holing” to plant cane in the fields or planting myriad seeds and trees in his garden and the future human re/production that he might have hoped to achieve—and eventually would— “Cum Phibbah.” An entry from the following month reads, “Planted Several Seeds, &c. in the garden, Viz. Sun Flowers, dates, Ronceval Peas, Black Eyes, &c. long Oakrae &c” and “at Night Cum Ph. [Phibbah].” Six days later, he strikingly sandwiches another “Cum Phibbah” record between remarks that he killed a black snake and a centipede and that a white man named Mr. Gordon visited Egypt and “Shew'd [Thistlewood] his method of planting, which Seems to be very good.”⁸⁴

The following year, Thistlewood writes that Phibbah “about Shell Blow this morning was (by Old Phibbah, belonging to Mr. Mould) deliver'd of a Child, dead, a fine Boy (a mulatto) In the Forenoon had him buried.” Here, “Shell Blow”—the time at which enslaved persons were awakened and forced into the fields—marks the child's birth, and death. After noting that he suspects that the child is not *his*, but, rather, his employer's, Thistlewood writes on the very next line that the enslaved persons were “leading out *dung* in the Forenoon.”⁸⁵ The stillborn child's unceremonious burial, Phibbah's possible “infidelity,” and the spreading of animal feces to encourage future growth (in contrast to the dead child's “decrease”) come morbidly

80 Thistlewood, diary entries, 2 and 4 April 1757, box 2, folder 8; see also 14 May 1757, box 2, folder 8.

81 Thistlewood, diary entries, 1 March 1757, box 2, folder 8; and 9 January 1758, box 2, folder 9.

82 Thistlewood, diary entry, 29 July 1755, box 2, folder 6.

83 Thistlewood, diary entries, 11 and 18 July 1754, box 2, folder 5.

84 Thistlewood, diary entries, 13 and 19 August 1754, box 2, folder 5.

85 Thistlewood, diary entry, 5 August 1755, box 2, folder 6 (emphasis mine).

together. When Phibbah is pregnant with their son John four years later, Thistlewood's report emphasizes his agricultural outlook: "Phibbah Says, She Suspects She is *breeding*."⁸⁶

Mapping Breadnut Island

Thistlewood's ritualistic deployment of rape as an instrument of mapmaking continues as he prepares his portion of "Paradise Pen," the property he purchased with Samuel Say in 1765.⁸⁷ For example, nine months before he relocates to his half of the property (subsequently renamed "Breadnut Island"), Thistlewood writes, "A.M. Mr. Hartnole & me rode to the Penn, Where [we] met Mr. Say, and we looked about us with my Telescope &c." The following day, Thistlewood rapes an enslaved woman there: "A.M. Cum Franke, Sup. Terr. in Mr. Say's part of Paradise Penn, near the Trench head. x(gave do. a bitt[.])."⁸⁸ In other words, surveying and surveilling by means of a prized (penile) scopic instrument blurs with surveying and surveilling by means of sexual violence. Two months later Thistlewood charts the contours of "his" new land through the rape of one of "his" enslaved persons: "A.M. Cum Coobah (*Mea*) in Paradise Penn, *my* Part, Stans! Backwd [standing backward]."⁸⁹ The following year Thistlewood goes so far as to perpetrate and situate a rape in relation to his new house: "P.M. Cum Sally (*mea*) Sup. Terr. at foot of Cotton Tree by New ground Side West northerly from my house, Sed non béne."⁹⁰ The concluding evaluation, literally translated, "but not well" or "but not good," is ambiguous but suggests that Sally (by Thistlewood's account) endeavored to thwart him in some manner, however temporarily and partially.⁹¹

Thistlewood's brutal map-making landscaped the spaces through which enslaved women and men moved each day. As McKittrick argues, "Racism and sexism produce attendant geographies that are bound up in human disempowerment and dispossession." The body, through acts of rape and other forms of violence, "is not only marked as different, but this difference, precisely because it is entwined with domination, inscribes the multiple scales outside of the punished body itself."⁹² The enslaved women who appear in Thistlewood's rape records might have been able to see the site of his attack as they worked his and "their" grounds. Or it might have been impossible to shake the place from their minds even when it lay beyond their field of vision. His rapes were intended to terrorize not only the women he physically targeted but also those who might witness the attack: "A.M. Cum Louisa, (belong-

86 Thistlewood, diary entry, 22 October 1759, box 2, folder 10 (emphasis mine). Here, enslaved women's "proximity to . . . breeding livestock" that Morgan identifies in planters' wills is not metaphorical but is mapped directly onto Phibbah's body—and Thistlewood presents the dehumanizing language as Phibbah's own (*Laboring Women*, 80).

87 Thistlewood purchased his portion of Paradise Pen on 3 July 1765 but did not relocate there from Egypt Estate until 3 September 1767.

88 Thistlewood, diary entries, 11 and 12 January 1767, box 4, folder 18.

89 Thistlewood, diary entry, 2 March 1767, box 4, folder 18 (emphases mine).

90 Thistlewood, diary entry, 20 October 1768, box 4, folder 19. Williamson notes that owners might name enslaved persons themselves for cardinal directions ("Africa or Old Rome?," 120).

91 "Sed non bene" appears often in Thistlewood's records of raping Sally.

92 McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, 3.

ing to Mr. Cathbert) Sup. Lect. [on the bed] in Watchman Harry's hut, in the Negroe ground, Hynes's Land—Rose was in her ground, just by.”⁹³ While the enslaved woman Rose tended “her” garden (in the provision or “Negroe” ground), she may also have heard and perhaps seen Thistlewood rape another enslaved woman, Louisa, on the bed in a hut assigned to an enslaved man named Harry. Perhaps the notation that Harry was a “Watchman” functions ironically, as, through rape, Thistlewood positions himself as the ultimate overseer, “even” of the grounds assigned to enslaved persons.⁹⁴

Contested Ecologies and Unstable Enclosures

In an effort to reiterate what is at stake in how researchers delineate the boundaries of their archives and, thus, circumscribe their “objects” of inquiry, the remainder of this essay turns to *Bromeliad penguin* (*Abba*) (see fig. 1), a hand-colored lithograph by white Barbadian-born artist Joscelyn Gardner, currently based in London, Ontario. The image appears in Gardner's *Creole Portraits III: “bringing down the flowers . . .”* (2009–11), a series that directly engages Thistlewood's archive. Drawing on early modern pictorial conventions and scientific and taxonomical formulas, Gardner's work also points to the inseparability of Enlightenment natural history projects and the libidinal ecology of slavery. Each lithograph in the series presents a “portrait” of the head of an enslaved woman seen from behind. The thirteen images combine (thwarted) views of their subjects with detailed yet stylized natural history–inspired depictions of plants used by enslaved women in the Caribbean as abortifacients.⁹⁵ Hovering between head and plant in each lithograph is a stylized collar, evoking the restraints that planters and overseers might have employed to torture those who attempted to induce abortion as a means of disrupting the plantation ecology.⁹⁶

Gardner's lithographs mobilize the science of botany as both a contested site of knowledge production and a gendered, sexualized, and racialized project bound up in systems of power.⁹⁷ The title for each lithograph comprising *Creole Portraits III* stresses the coconstitutive nature of scientific and racist vocabularies. The first half is the binomial Latin name for the plant depicted—for example, *Bromeliad penguin*—reflecting the colonialist project undergirding and proliferated by the Linnaean classification system.⁹⁸ The second half, placed in

93 Thistlewood, diary entry, 13 June 1767, box 4, folder 18.

94 While compelling, I find arguments that celebrate enslaved persons' provision grounds as sites of self-fashioning and relative autonomy at odds with these spaces as they appear in Thistlewood's diaries. For such arguments, see Kamau Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (Mona: Savacou, 1985), 62; Mimi Sheller, *Democracy after Slavery: Black Publics and Peasant Radicalism in Haiti and Jamaica* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 44; and Casid, “Countercolonial Landscapes,” chap. 5 in *Sowing Empire*, 191–236.

95 For enslaved and indigenous women's herbal abortifacient use, see Londa L. Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

96 See Joscelyn Gardner, “A Collection of Creole Portrait Heads of the Female Sex,” *Small Axe*, no. 37 (March 2012): 71–118.

97 See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992); Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Picturing Imperial Power: Colonial Subjects in Eighteenth-Century British Painting* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 185; and Susan Scott Parrish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

98 See Jennifer Law, “Knowledge Is Made for Printing: Joscelyn Gardner's Creole Portrait Series,” in Gardner, *Bleeding and Breeding*, 13–14.

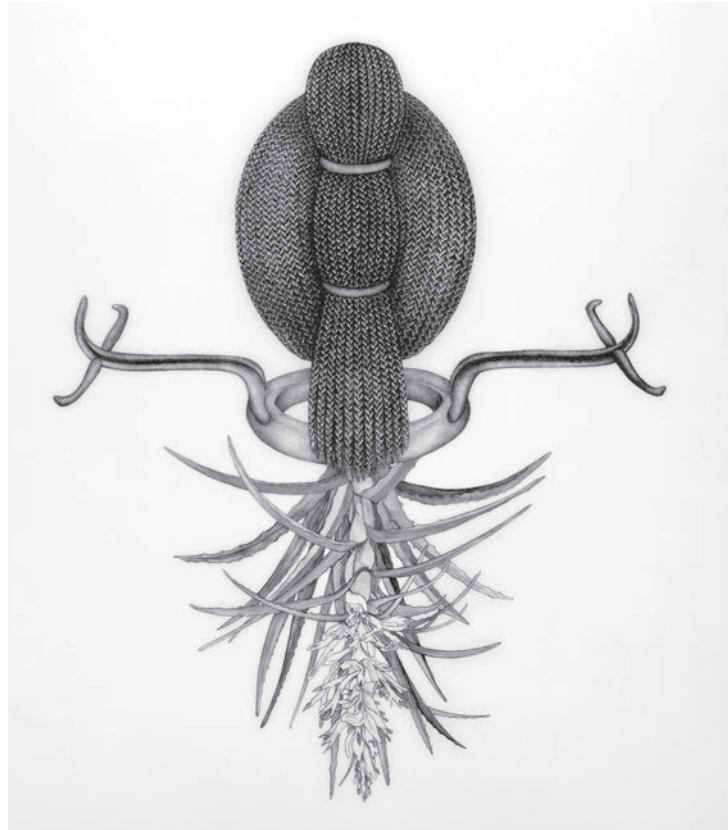


Figure 1. Joscelyn Gardner, *Bromeliad penguin (Abba)*, 2011, from the *Creole Portraits III: "bringing down the flowers . . ."* series, 2009–11. Hand-colored stone lithograph on frosted mylar, 24 in. × 36 in. Used by permission of the artist. Photograph by John Tamblyn

parentheses like the “common” name of a plant, is instead the name of an enslaved woman who appears in Thistlewood’s dairies—for example, (*Abba*). *Creole Portraits III* gestures toward intimate, and brutal, relationships between the human and the nonhuman, the animate and the inanimate. Gardner’s series vividly conveys the insufficiency of endeavors to describe slavery that focus solely on social (human) death without considering the ecological imbrications of the human in addition to the role of gender and sexuality in structuring these relations.⁹⁹ In

99 For slavery as “social death,” see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982). Following Sylvia Wynter, I am interested in revising the “genre” of the human, but my approach is not that of Monique Allewaert, who proposes “parahumanity” as an alternative. See Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *CR* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337; Monique Allewaert, *Ariel’s Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013). For recent ecological approaches to the study of slavery’s literature, see Ian Frederick Finseth, *Shades of Green: Visions of Nature in the Literature of American Slavery, 1770–1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009); Kimberly N. Ruffin, *Black on Earth: African American Ecoliterary Traditions* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010); Jennifer James, “Ecomelancholia: Slavery, War, and Black Ecological Imaginings,” in Stephanie LeMenager, Teresa Shewry, and Ken Hiltner, eds., *Environmental Criticism for the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2011); and Christopher P. Iannini, *Fatal Revolutions: Natural History, West Indian Slavery, and the Routes of American Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

a very clear sense, enslaved women's use of abortifacients was an effort to cultivate death through miscarriage.¹⁰⁰

Yet as Thistlewood's archive attests, the word *miscarriage* had multiple uses in British colonial Jamaica. On 25 January 1753, while overseer of Egypt sugar plantation, Thistlewood reports of an enslaved woman, "Basheba Miscarry to day."¹⁰¹ On 17 June 1767, he mentions an enslaved woman's use of an herbal abortifacient: "P.M. Mountain Lucy Miscarried, having, I am told, drank Contrayerva lately, every day, on purpose."¹⁰² (Nine days before Lucy's miscarriage Thistlewood had raped her).¹⁰³ An excerpt from Barbados planter William Belgrove's *A Treatise upon Husbandry or Planting* (1755), copied by Thistlewood into his diary in 1759, uses the word *miscarriage* to describe a failed attempt to produce *sugar*.¹⁰⁴

Thistlewood seems to have been ignorant of the fact that the *Bromeliad penguin*, which he, like other colonists, often planted to fence in sections of the various estates under his control, was also an herbal abortifacient. Thistlewood used the "prickly penguins" to protect his renowned botanical and vegetable gardens. He even had enslaved persons transplant them from Egypt to Breadnut Island when he moved there in 1767.¹⁰⁵ A plat delineating the boundary between Breadnut Island and the property owned by James Robertson to the east reveals that Thistlewood's domicile lay about six chains, or about 132 yards, north of "A Stone Wall and Penguin Fence" that served as the pen's southernmost border.¹⁰⁶ Thus, even as Thistlewood sought to protect his property and its *agricultural* production—and to ingratiate himself with the elite through his botanical pursuits—he may have unwittingly fostered enslaved women's opposition to slavery's libidinal ecology.

In *Bromeliad penguin (Abba)*, Gardner depicts the penguin plant conjoined with "Abba," who was the first female enslaved person (a "New Negroe girl") whom Thistlewood purchased, together with two "New Negroe Men" on 21 February 1758, while overseer of Egypt. Abba's designation as a "girl" indicated that she was quite young, and "new" meant that she had survived forced transport from the African continent. Thistlewood raped her two months after her purchase: "about 2 P.M. Cum Mea Abb[a] Sup. Lect. (Sed non bene)."¹⁰⁷ Here Thistlewood notes that Abba is "his" and that the rape took place "upon a bed (but did not go well)"; he all but admits rape, though he may not have acknowledged it as such.

100 For the ways death cultivated life in eighteenth-century Jamaica, see Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

101 Thistlewood, diary entry, 25 January 1753, box 1, folder 4.

102 Thistlewood, diary entry, 17 July 1767, box 4, folder 18. Douglas Hall points to the *Dictionary of Jamaican English*, to define Contrayerva as an "herbal drink used as an antidote and remedy for stomach ailments" (*In Miserable Slavery*, 147n11). F. G. Cassidy and R. B. Le Page, eds., *Dictionary of Jamaican English*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), s.v. "contrayerva."

103 Thistlewood, diary entry, 8 July 1767, box 4, folder 18.

104 Thistlewood's copying of the excerpts appears after his diary entry for 26 July 1759 (box 2, folder 10), so presumably he copied them around that date. For the text in question, see William Belgrove and Henry Drax, *A Treatise upon Husbandry or Planting* (Boston: D. Fowle, 1755).

105 Thistlewood, diary entries, 2 March 1767 and 29 September 1767, box 4, folder 18.

106 Plat delineating the boundary between properties owned by Thomas Thistlewood and James Robertson, 19 August 1789, Deeds, vol. 374, f. 75, Island Record Office, Spanish Town, Jamaica.

107 Thistlewood, diary entries, 21 February and 19 April 1758, box 2, folder 8.

In Gardner's lithograph, Abba is not the woman herself but a gesture toward her or even an inscription of her refusal to be summoned, given Abba's turn from the viewer.¹⁰⁸ Her "portrait" is combined with a plant that she might have used—perhaps with little to no "success"—in an effort *not* to become "The Slave Mother," to quote one historian's recent classification of her.¹⁰⁹ Here the leaves of the *Bromeliad penguin* mimic the slave collar's prongs, which would have served to make escape through fields and forests—plantation ecologies and territories policed by Maroons, enslaved persons, and colonists alike—difficult if not impossible.¹¹⁰ However, the braided patterns of Abba's hair also suggest another kind of touch and gaze taking root in "the crevices of power."¹¹¹ That the "prickly penguin's" spiny leaves additionally evoke those of the aloe, a plant used to heal, raises questions about the undocumented kinds of healing or survival that might take place on a plantation. Care in this regard could be one woman harvesting and preparing the *Bromeliad penguin* for another; or it could be covering her newborn's nose and mouth.

Through her "portraits" Gardner stresses the instability of any knowledge of women such as Abba that one might glean from Thistlewood's archive. She confronts viewers with the archive's and artwork's silences and refusals, visually bringing to the surface questions about whether attempts should be made to narrate (survey, map, classify, illuminate) these women's lives, and how, and to what end.¹¹² The delicacy of the frosted mylar on which Gardner prints the lithographs—a surface notoriously difficult for such work because it resists taking on ink—adds to their spectral nature, evoking a mode of fugitivity that repels descriptive enclosure.¹¹³

Simultaneously, however, such "portraits" risk reinscribing the violences they embody and materialize. Inevitably, this is the historian's risk as well. Each person who engages historical documents unavoidably brings their own intertextual archive with them to the reading room—not only their study of eighteenth-century texts and historiography but also (like Thistlewood) their encounters with literature, art, and theory, across time periods and geographies. If one is interested in disrupting and attempting not to reinscribe or even exacerbate Thistlewood's

108 On the turn away and its resonance with the work of artists like Lorna Simpson, see Law, "Knowledge Is Made for Printing," 12–13.

109 Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*, 221–27. Indeed, when Gardner created her own mock-natural-historical volume from the Creole Portraits lithographs for *Small Axe*, titled "A Collection of Creole Portrait Heads of the Female Sex," she lists opposite the reproduction of *Bromeliad penguin* (Abba) instances in which Thistlewood recorded Abba giving birth as well as instances in which Abba miscarried or her children died. In an annotation, Gardner, too, makes the connection with Thistlewood's use of *Bromeliad penguin* to fence in his gardens. In the margin she adds the cryptic inscription, "Our bodies are still trembling . . .," perhaps a reference to the ways women like Abba appear in scholarly literature on Thistlewood's archive ("Collection," 88).

110 See also Walter Johnson's notion of the "carceral landscape" in *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2013), 209–43.

111 "Crevices of power" is cited in McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xvii, 44, 84; she takes this phrase from Jenny Sharpe, *Ghosts of Slavery: A Literary Archaeology of Black Women's Lives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xxi. Gardner relates her lithographic practice to "the careful, laborious, and sisterly act of braiding hair." Joscelyn Gardner, "Subverting Colonial Portraiture: A Contemporary Memorial to the Women of Egypt Estate," *Small Axe*, no. 26 (June 2008): 118. Law also suggests a connection to the role of hair in nineteenth-century mourning rituals ("Knowledge Is Made for Printing," 12).

112 Donnell similarly remarks that "these portraits force us to question what stakes are involved in bringing the lives of the enslaved and violated back into regimes of representation" ("Contesting Thistlewood," 34).

113 For the difficulty of printing on mylar, see Law, "Knowledge Is Made for Printing," 15–16.

brutal discourse, then it is essential to take seriously antiracist feminist theory and creative work that offers alternative vocabularies and perspectives to those of Thistlewood and his contemporaries. Perhaps the visual arts, which place the onus on the beholder to generate words for images rather than providing quotable (and deceptively translatable) text, open up a space for critical reflection on how historians engage archival documents, both their haunting omissions and their horrific articulations.

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