

Articles

“And all the crops of Asia flourish here”: *Unsettled Boundaries between East and West, Landscape and Text in Eliza Lucas Pinckney and André Michaux* (Article)

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The stories European writers tell about “the East” leave a physical mark on the landscapes we inhabit. Literature and landscape are linked both in the physical forms of gardens and plants and in the consumeristic, imperialistic narratives that surround these organisms. However, the disciplinary boundaries that twenty-first-century scholars draw between garden history and literature obscure these linkages. Tom Williamson’s pivotal study *Polite Landscapes* articulates this border best. Williamson delineates between the idealized landscapes of eighteenth-century’s British landed elite—such as the undulating parks of Capability Brown—and the actual landscapes designed by the landed gentry. Williamson frames this distinction as a critique of Ann Bermingham’s *Landscape and Ideology*: “Individual landowners were . . . much more concerned about the impression their gardens made on neighbours of similar rank than with the impact they had on the local poor. . . . Gardens, like houses, were certainly expressions of wealth and status. . . . But the social realities they expressed, or concealed, were highly complex.”¹ From this critique, Williamson’s argument branches out, revealing the methodological constraints of garden historians: an overemphasis on what literature has to say about gardens and not enough emphasis on what gardens actually looked like for most eighteenth-century British landowners. Most cleaved to the older geometric tradition that various landscape writers (Addison, Pope, Walpole, etc.) railed against. Such writers heralded not an aesthetic that typified the eighteenth-century English garden but rather something of an avant-garde. While the cultural work of literary and artistic forms helps twenty-first-century scholars uncover fantasies of what people wanted landscapes to look like, Williamson urges us to heed the boundaries between artistic representation and the one-upmanship of people who designed these landscapes.

I intend not to overturn Williamson’s distinction between literary and actual but to qualify it. Garden historians have often taken Williamson’s warning to mean that these two conceptions of landscape had little to do with one another. As Stephen Bending notes, Williamson critiques “a stress on the literary [that] has misled us in the past into a false account of eighteenth-century garden design by emphasising what was written over what actually happened on the ground.”² Thus, in turning to “letters, journals, and diaries” as archives of British women’s gardening experiences in the eighteenth century, Bending proposes that “the world of letters and of cultural imagination was not just some literary exercise for women who gardened; rather it was a crucial part of the way in which they engaged with a world beyond their apparent rural seclusion.”³ Thus, this essay extends

1. Tom Williamson, *Polite Landscapes: Gardens and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 8.

2. Stephen Bending, *Green Retreats: Women, Gardens and Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 4.

3. Bending, *Green Retreats*, 4–5.

Bending's work of bringing literature and landscape in closer conversation. While these two do not reflect one another, they do influence one another through a consumerism that assumes the form of a narrative of "the East."

To illustrate this orientalized consumerism, I rely on two case studies: Eliza Lucas Pinckney (1722–93) and André Michaux (1746–1802). Both writers lived in South Carolina, yet they see this landscape from different perspectives. Pinckney works this landscape in the middle of the eighteenth century, whereas Michaux traverses it after American independence. As the daughter of a planter, Pinckney managed her father's estates near Charleston, where she introduced indigo. As the royal gardener of Louis XVI, Michaux made expeditions to the Allegheny and Appalachian Mountains, where he found plant species unknown to Europeans and prepared them for shipment back to France in his experimental garden near Charleston. Despite their differences of time, gender, and purpose, both writers imagine these landscapes through the consumerist narrative of "China." The southern British colonies to each of them become a miniature Orient capable of producing the crops and botanical riches of "the East." Garden historians influenced by Williamson would treat Michaux and Pinckney as strictly historical figures. However, I propose attending to the literary elements of their writing, not only because of my own background as a literary scholar but also because their writings bring to light the orientalized, consumerist boundary between physical landscapes and the landscapes imagined in literary texts.

To discuss both Pinckney and Michaux as literature might seem odd since their literary merits are not held in equal esteem. Pinckney has struck scholars as the more elegant of the two. Pinckney's letters come to us in the form of a bound volume that survived a fire during the American Revolution. Ever the woman of business, Pinckney copied or summarized each piece of correspondence. This rare letter-book provides an intimate glimpse into her world. In an 1896 edition of this letter-book, Harriet Horry Ravenel (a descendant of the Pinckneys) praises her epistles as "careful compositions" replete with classical allusions, worthy of a lady of polite education.⁴ Michaux's journals, on the other hand, strike later readers as "crudely laconic,"⁵ far less accomplished than the sublime *Travels* (1791) of his contemporary William Bartram (1729–1823). However, Michaux's journals are not the only account of his life. Shortly after Michaux's death from a fever contracted in Madagascar in 1802, J. P. F. Deleuze (1753–1835), a colleague of Michaux in Paris, published a biographical sketch of the botanist, which was translated into English and circulated widely. Despite their differing levels of literary accomplishment, both Pinckney's letters and the Deleuze biography of Michaux bring consumerist narratives of China in contact with physical landscapes. For Pinckney, the Chinese tale hums as a baseline, whereas for Michaux the tale rings as the dominant melody.

I. "All the crops of *Asia* flourish here": A Tale of Chinese Abundance

In Pinckney's and Michaux's texts, "China" (or Asia, Japan, India, Persia, etc.) is not a place. It is a free-floating Orient that supplies all crops that Europeans could desire. Before examining the function of this narrative in the writings of Pinckney and Michaux, it is worth looking at what this orientalized narrative looks like in a literary context. George Ogilvie, a contemporary of both botanists, articulates this tale of Chinese abundance in the literary setting of imperial georgic. Ogilvie oversaw Myrtle Grove Plantation near Charleston, where

4. Harriott Horry Ravenel, "First Years in Carolina," in *Eliza Pinckney, by Harriott Horry Ravenel, with Facsimile Reproduction. Women of Colonial and Revolutionary Times* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), 4.

5. Rudy Mancke and David Taylor, eds., *South Carolina Naturalists: An Anthology, 1799–1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 46.

he composed *Carolina, or the Planter* (1776). Like other eighteenth-century plantocratic commodity poems (e.g., James Grainger’s *The Sugar Cane* [1764]), *Carolina* characterizes the tropical landscape as spontaneously abundant, oriental, and exotic; it also serves British imperialist ideology by figuring Britain as an empire of agrarian virtue. As Jennifer Rae Greeson has observed, plantocratic commodity literature figures British empire “in opposition to forms of Spanish New World colonization, which were anathematized as extracting wealth from American soil via gold mining rather than improving it through cultivation.”⁶ These poems tell a georgic tale through a rhetoric of agriculture: unlike other European empires that decimate and plunder, Britain fashions itself as an agrarian empire that improves and cultivates. This fiction displaces the exploitation of land, indigenous peoples, and African peoples onto other empires, painting Britain as an empire of liberty. Unlike servile colonies prostrating themselves before the absolutist monarchs of continental Europe, the North American British colonies could style themselves autonomous fiefdoms: industrious planters taming a rugged landscape, furnishing the Crown with both quality goods and exotic dainties. By longing for an agriculture of what David Shields terms “yeomanry rather than slavery,”⁷ these plantation poets could use what Beth Fowkes Tobin calls “imperial georgic”⁸ to position themselves not only as participants in a global imperial commerce but also as innovative producers of its commodities. Each crop—or the landscape itself—appears to bring forth its wealth free of slaughter of indigenous peoples, free of enslaved human labor.

Spontaneous production or white human ingenuity: these, in Ogilvie’s telling, bring the South Carolina landscape to perfection. Ogilvie sees this landscape as a tangled wilderness that must be wrested from the tyranny of nature and brought to heel through the planter’s will. The planter can produce an ideal garden “in which the ‘wildings’ of Carolina and the exotic flora of the globe mixed in an artful, cultivated beauty.”⁹ So, serving the ideological functions of imperial georgic, the tale of Chinese abundance employs two tropes: slave-free production and inexhaustible variety. All appear at the coda of Ogilvie’s *The Planter*:

[The Muse] sees ev’ry winding Valley wave with corn,
 Sees purple Vineyards ev’ry hill adorn;
 Sees yonder Marsh, with useless reeds o’erspread,
 Give to a thousand looms the flaxen thread;
 And Hemp, from many a now neglected field,
 Its sinewy bark to future Navies yield.
 Nor shall Tobacco balk the Planter’s hope,
 Who seeks its fragrance on th’irriguous slope.
 Around each field [the Muse] sees the Mulb’y grow,
 Or unctuous Olive from the frugal row;
 Behold our hills the precious *Thea* bear,
 And all the crops of *Asia* flourish here.”¹⁰

6. Jennifer Rae Greeson, *Our South: Geographic Fantasy and the Rise of National Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 22.

7. David S. Shields, *Oracles of Empire: Poetry, Politics, and Commerce in British America, 1690–1750* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 92.

8. Beth Fowkes Tobin, “Introduction: Troping the Tropics and Aestheticizing Labor,” in *Colonizing Nature: The Tropics in British Arts and Letters, 1760–1820* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

9. David S. Shields, “George Ogilvie’s ‘Carolina; Or, the Planter’ (1776),” *The Southern Literary Journal* 18 (1986): 5–20, 13.

10. Shields, *Oracles of Empire*, 92.

Ogilvie's georgic muse envisions the Carolina low country as a geography of Mediterranean crops (grapes, olives), embellished with commodities native to the New World (tobacco), and an Orient: mulberry for silkworms ("Mulb'y"), tea ("*Thea*"), and the shorthand of "all the crops of *Asia*." The commodity catalog culminates in an imaginary China. Likewise, Ogilvie's oriental abundance gestures toward a range of commodities that other South Carolina planters attempted: namely, silk and tea.

This is not to say that every product produced in the South Carolina colony came from China. Pinckney, who supervised productions of Chinese silkworms, Caribbean indigo, and African rice, is a complicated exception to this notion. The Caribbean legume indigo (*Inidigofera tinctoria*) is most well-known for Pinckney's fame, but her experiments with silk and rice merit some discussion in light of this plantocratic myth of Chinese abundance. In silk production, Pinckney was not alone in her efforts. As Shields points out, James Oglethorpe (1696–1785) attempted to cultivate silk in Georgia. Ben Marsh surmises that Pinckney might have gotten the idea of sericulture from her husband Charles, who published essays speculating about cultivating silkworms prior to Pinckney's attempts.¹¹ Pinckney would have relied on the expertise of several of her enslaved Africans to harvest the eggs, spin the fibers, and weave the fabric, whose knowledge would have made possible her rice production as well. Walter Muir Whitehill suggests that rice proved the more profitable commodity for Pinckney's plantations until the War of Jenkins' Ear (1739–48) disrupted markets, prompting Pinckney's father to send her seeds of several crops to try.¹² Regardless of the origins of each crop, writers in Pinckney's world (such as Ogilvie) imagined them as part of an orientalized bevy of colonial goods.

Of these, indigo would turn out to be Pinckney's most successful. In July 1740, Pinckney summarizes a letter she sent to her father detailing "the pains [she] had taken to bring the Indigo, Ginger, Cotton and Lucerne [alfalfa] and Casada [cassava] to perfection, and had greater hopes from the Indigo (if [she] could have the seed earlier next year from the West India's) than any of the rest of the things [she] had tryd."¹³ While her immediate goal was to ensure the success of her father's plantation, she used her position as manager of his estates to speculate on riskier schemes. She imported white mulberry trees (*Morus alba*) and silk worm eggs, harvesting enough raw silk to have three dresses made for her trip to England,¹⁴ one of which Pinckney had dyed with indigo from her plantation and presented to Augusta, Princess Dowager of Wales, during a visit to Kew Botanical Gardens in 1753 (Marsh 847). Thus, Pinckney attempted to cultivate indigo as one of many strategies for innovating her father's plantation, most of which centered on exotic commodities. Although the dye was Caribbean, the fabric's sinophilic allure helped motivate Pinckney's experiment.

To be clear, I am not arguing that a narrative of Chinese abundance presupposed the consumerist desire for these goods but rather that this tale, articulated by Pinckney's contemporary Ogilvie, is symbiotic with it. Pinckney's letters show that her chief goal was to please her father instead of fulfilling overwrought fantasies of China. So the appetite for exotic crops speaks to a broader sinophilic fascination in British culture. Chinese abundance

11. Ben Marsh, "Silk Hopes in Colonial South Carolina," *The Journal of Southern History* 78, no. 4 (November 2012): 807–54, 844.

12. Walter Muir Whitehill, Introduction to *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney: 1739–1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney and Marvin R. Zanhiser (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina and South Carolina Historical Society, 1972), xvii.

13. Pinckney, *Letterbook*, 8.

14. Harrott Pinckney Horry, Introduction to *The Papers of Eliza Lucas Pinckney and Harriott Pinckney Horry: Digital Edition* (ed. Constance Shulz, Robin Copp, and Mary Sherrer et al., Charlottesville, VA: Rotunda, 2012), no printed editions of Pinckney's letters anthologize all of them. Since I am interested in posthumous presentations of Pinckney's character, I have consulted three different editions, each of which anthologizes different samples of her letters. In-text citations indicate which editions each quotation came from.

was the tale in the air, and consumerist desires inspired by it informed the way Pinckney conceived her plantations. Thus, Pinckney characterizes South Carolina as a place ripe with Chinese abundance. Writing to her brother Thomas Lucas in May 1742, Pinckney describes the countryside around Charleston as having “soil in general . . . very fertile, and there is very few European or American fruits or grain but what grow here. The Country abounds with wild fowl, Venison, and fish . . . and peaches, Nectrons, and mellons of all sorts extremely fine and in profusion, and their Oranges exceed any I ever tasted in the West Indies from Spain or Portugal.”¹⁵ As Eugenia Zuroski Jenkins points out, “Chineseness” operates in the British imaginary as a capacious category, one that both defies any geographic moorings and describes a mode of English consumerism. “The ‘Chineseness’ of ‘things Chinese,’” Jenkins specifies, “is something that English literature ascribes to them, not something the things themselves introduce into the culture.”¹⁶ Surveying objects as disparate as silk, porcelain, and tea, Jenkins demonstrates the ways in which English culture maps itself onto commodities designated as “Chinese,” commodities whose appeal is rooted in their supposed exoticism, regardless of where they are produced. Thus, Pinckney’s experiments with indigo, ginger, and silk all operate through the same tropical, sinophilic narrative that we have seen in Ogilvie.

This orientalist mode of consumerism shaped South Carolina as a colony, which was then the frontier of British imperialism. However, after the revolution, the new empire of the United States extended the boundary westward. A botanist after Pinckney’s era, Michaux imposed that tale of exotic abundance onto the frontier he traversed. As with the consumerist Orient of Pinckney and Ogilvie, Michaux’s orient floats free of geography and overflows with botanical goods that entice European appetites. Deleuze’s posthumous biography casts the French botanist’s early interest in the East as the impetus for Michaux’s imperialist project of transplanting botanical riches across the Atlantic. Deleuze opens his biography with a catalog of agricultural commodities reminiscent of Ogilvie:

The walnut-tree comes from Pontus; the cherry from Cerasonte; the olive from Athens; the almond-tree from the East; the peach from Persia; the mulberry from China; the fig from Syria; the apricot from Armenia; the pomegranate from Carthage; and the orange from India. It is unknown from what country corn was originally derived; but many of our best culinary and agricultural vegetables are natives of Asia.¹⁷

Deleuze’s survey looks eastward, locating in a vague Orient all plants capable of bearing useful fruits. The almond tree simply comes “from the East,” occupying a location both geographically imprecise yet somehow at home with the Persian peach or Chinese mulberry. And, as with Ogilvie, the shorthand of Asia as the origin of all the “best culinary and agricultural vegetables” establishes the character of the orient as a space ripe for the projection of European desires. In this fantasy setting, a young Michaux, in Deleuze’s portrayal, first finds his desire to search out exotic plants.

So Michaux sets his sights on Persia as his first frontier. Deleuze recalls that Michaux read the Roman historian “Quintos [*sic*] Curtius when he was fourteen, [and] that author’s descriptions of the countries conquered by Alexander so inflamed his imagination, that from

15. Pinckney, *Letterbook*, 39.

16. Eugenia Zuroski Jenkins, *A Taste for China: English Subjectivity and the Prehistory of Orientalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7.

17. J. P. F. Deleuze, *The Annotated Memoirs of the Life and Botanical Travels of André Michaux*, trans. Carl D. E. Köenig and John Sims, ed. Charlie Williams (Athens, GA: Fevertree Press Editions in Botanical History, 2011), 1.

that period he had almost constantly sighed for the happiness of traveling over the eastern world.”¹⁸ Fittingly, the Roman historian’s narrative of Alexander the Great tempts Michaux farther and farther east. After completing the early years of his botanical training at the *Jardin du Roi*, Michaux requests to be sent to “travel into countries where he might find new objects for his science.”¹⁹ This request would lead Michaux to Persia, where Michaux would convey his excitement to his mentor André Thouin in a letter in 1782. Deleuze includes Michaux’s letter in the 1802 biography. Michaux exclaims, “I was often transported beyond myself. . . . What happiness! To find myself in Asia, and at my pleasure to traverse the mountains and valleys covered with lilaceous plants, orchidere, daphnes, laurus, vitex, myrtles, andrachnes, styrax, palms and other vegetable productions different from those of Europe.”²⁰

The strangeness of the flora in Michaux’s list underscores the oriental abundance trope. Persia abounds in objects of interest to the French botanist, overwhelming him with sheer wonder. Yearning to explore the botanical riches of the East, Michaux requests to be sent to Tibet and Kashmir, only to be sent to Charleston instead to research North American trees that could be used to replenish France’s forests.²¹ The change in assignment would prove beneficial to the botanist: as he would find, the physical and literary climate of South Carolina resembled the Orient of his fantasies.

To Deleuze, the East hovers over the horizon not only as Michaux’s symbolic destination but also as the very commodity he circulates. Deleuze declares that Michaux set out from a young age “to travel into countries little known . . . to collect their productions, and naturalize them in his native soil.”²² After establishing his experimental gardens on the lands of Henry Middleton in 1786, Michaux sent for a variety of Chinese, Japanese, and Indian trees and shrubs. As with Pinckney’s indigo and silk, Michaux’s claim to fame lies in his introduction of the plant species—Asiatic ones, notably. These include the gingko (native to China), the flowering camellia (*Camellia japonica*, native to Japan), and the *Camellia sinensis*, or the tea tree (China).²³ Michaux sent for tea-tree cuttings in 1799, only to have to abandon his project after being recalled to France for further dispatch on another expedition.²⁴ Deleuze praises “his plantations [as] extremely grand and showy, being composed not only of the finest trees in the country, but of a beautiful collection of European and Asiatic trees, which he had undertaken to naturalize in America, in many of which his success was complete.”²⁵ The progression of the Chinese narrative in Deleuze’s biography is worth noting here: first the young botanist’s curiosity draws him eastward; then Michaux achieves success as a horticulturalist with a knack for transplanting Chinese and Japanese plants. Even if Michaux never reaches China, he can make the South Carolina landscape conform to cultural fantasies of it. For Pinckney, the British desire for all things Chinese governs products of the colony, whereas for Michaux that desire has now extended beyond such commodities as tea and silk right to the very flowers and trees that adorn this fanciful Chinese setting—as well as the landscape of the southeastern United States. Colony has become metropole.

Michaux’s oriental narrative works in multiple directions, too: both in transplanting an Orient and in orientalizing the frontier, transposing the lens of sinophilic desire onto North

18. Deleuze, *Annotated Memoirs*, 2–3.

19. Deleuze, *Annotated Memoirs*, 4.

20. Deleuze, *Annotated Memoirs*, 5.

21. Deleuze, *Annotated Memoirs*, 7.

22. Deleuze, *Annotated Memoirs*, 2.

23. Charlie Williams, “Basic Biographical Facts,” accessed June 27, 2018, <http://www.michaux.org/michaux.htm>.

24. Susan M. Walcott, “Brewing a New American Tea Industry,” *Geographical Review* 102, no. 3 (July 2012): 350–63, 351.

25. Deleuze, *Annotated Memoirs*, 18.

American plants that he describes in his travels. From his base in Charleston, Michaux made multiple expeditions across the Appalachians and Alleghenies, as well as the territories of Kentucky, Georgia, and Florida. On the banks of the St. John River in Florida, Michaux finds an “*illicium* with a yellow flower, the perfume of which was equal to that of the Chinese one, and which may be put to the same uses,”²⁶ which he would later attempt to cultivate “on a large scale in South Carolina” (12). Michaux named this shrub *Illicium parviflorum*, commonly called the Florida anise tree. Engaging in what Londa Schiebinger has called “bioprospecting,”²⁷ Michaux noticed the shrub thanks to its resemblance to star anise (*Illicium verum*), known for its use in medicine and cooking for centuries. In addition to American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*), which Michaux also found on his travels due to its resemblance to Korean ginseng (*Panax ginseng*), Michaux attempted to grow both plants in his Charleston garden to sell as alternatives to their Asiatic counterparts. As with Pinckney’s silk experiment, the motivation persists of reproducing crops of Chinese origin—or, in this case, native North American plants that happen to resemble Chinese ones. When Deleuze describes Michaux searching out the “vegetable productions” of the wild, the example of the *Illicium parviflorum* suggests that the value of these potential crops lay in their resemblance to all things “Eastern.”

The tale of Chinese abundance shapes the desire to turn the South Carolina landscape into a place where Chinese goods can be grown. This desire serves the sinophilic appetites of Britain and Europe, reinforces the narrative of China as a space ripe for the projection of European desires, and transcribes that narrative onto the southern colonies of British North America. Through this link between consumerism, sinophilia, and the botanical abundance of the North American landscape, Pinckney and Michaux demonstrate an influence of literary, georgic, orientalized landscapes on the physical landscapes they inhabited. Thus, they become protagonists of a new imperial story: that of the botanical hero, serving empire by circulating plants. Presented as a noble servant of humanity worthy of memorializing, the botanical hero enacts a tale of botanical exchange, one in which the work of empire becomes as much about the transplantation of plants as the valorization of the people who transplant them.

II. *Non sine magna labore; non sine vitæ periculo*: To “bring to perfection the plants of other Countries”

A cult of botanical hero worship surrounds Pinckney and Michaux. Whereas previously the narrative of Chinese abundance reaches fruition in the way Pinckney and Michaux thought about landscape, the botanical hero narrative germinates through successive generations of those who write about them. While posthumous, one common root still traces through: both figures served their countries through the circulation of plants. In each version, the plants acclimate to new soil, acting as a living memorial onto which successive generations of writers can inscribe their own agendas.

Indigo provided Pinckney both the ink with which she writes her legacy and the ink with which her legacy is written. A common theme of Pinckney’s story centers on her role as a mother of the American Revolution, a “southern Abigail Adams”²⁸ whose work has been unfairly ignored. Prompted by Pinckney’s obscurity, Natasha Boyd fictionalizes Pinckney in

26. Deleuze, *Annotated Memoirs*, 11.

27. Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

28. Cynthia A. Kierner, review of *The Papers of Eliza Lucas Pinckney and Harriott Pinckney Horry: Digital Edition* (2014), ed. Constance Schulz et al., <http://scholarlyediting.org/2014/reviews/review.pinckney.html>.

her novel *The Indigo Girl* (2017).²⁹ Boyd depicts her as a subversive woman of business trying to make her way in a world not made for her. Reading into the gaps between Pinckney's letters, Boyd imagines that Pinckney (Eliza Lucas, since the novel takes place before her marriage to Charles Pinckney in 1744) strikes a deal with the enslaved Ben. He will teach her the secrets of processing the dye while she teaches him to read. However, intent on preserving France's indigo monopoly, Ben's owner Cromwell sabotages the experiment, framing Ben. Fearing retribution, Ben flees and drowns, leaving Eliza to complete the project by memory. Nor does Boyd's novelistic license end there. Boyd's version of Eliza sympathizes with the people her family has enslaved: this sympathy blossoms into a borderline romance with Ben, who catches Eliza by the waist before she topples into a pool of dye water. Through such flourishes Boyd seeks to assuage the white guilt of her reader: Eliza isn't one of the "bad" slaveowners. Boyd's Eliza aches at witnessing "this awful practice of selling humans and wrenching them away from their families."³⁰ Dissatisfied with her lot as a woman, she complains, "It seemed a ridiculously careless accident that made me female rather than male. The rest of the time I wondered why it should make a difference at all."³¹ While such narrative gestures could help a twenty-first-century reader sympathize with a plantocrat's daughter, Boyd risks corseting a twenty-first-century woman into an eighteenth-century bodice. Boyd's historical note clarifies that she took liberties: "Forgive me, dear reader," Boyd declaims, "for any anachronistic mistakes, either accidental or wilfull [*sic*]."³² Becoming a vessel for twenty-first-century desires, the figure of Eliza Lucas is always bound to the indigo she cultivates. Boyd's novel opens with Eliza dreaming of drowning in an "opaque blue abyss"³³ and concludes with her finally producing the dye, praised by her enslaved people as "the indigo lady" and astonished "that this lustrous stuff could be hidden in so unhandsome a plant."³⁴ Unlocking—or exploiting—the dye-making secrets of African peoples, the botanical hero serves empire even in this latter-day retelling.

Boyd's fiction is not the first attempt to adapt Pinckney's persona to anachronistic themes. Whereas Boyd seeks to reimagine Pinckney as a twenty-first-century woman, Harriet Horry Ravenel's 1896 edition of Pinckney's letters turns Pinckney into a Confederate monument. Ravenel's editorial apparatus paints a picture of Pinckney as a "southern matron of the old time" who "exemplif[ies]" "the bygone civilization" of the antebellum South.³⁵ To Ravenel, Pinckney is a far cry from the "indolent, ignorant, self-indulgent, cruel, [and] overbearing" plantocrat relying on slave labor but is instead "rather, active, useful, merciful, accepting without hesitation the conditions [she] found, and doing [her] utmost to make those conditions good."³⁶ Waxing patriotic at Pinckney's introduction of indigo, Ravenel asks, "When will any 'New Woman' do more for her country?,"³⁷ implying that the "new women" who sought a purchase in public, literate life in the 1890s had fallen from the ideals of their kindly antebellum ancestors. While it would be tempting to relegate this "southern Abigail Adams" to the late nineteenth century, Boyd unfortunately perpetuates the Confederate nostalgia. In her afterword to *The Indigo Girl*, Boyd quotes Ravenel's same rhetorical question: "As so eloquently put by her descendant . . . in 1896, 'When will any New Woman

29. Natasha Boyd, *The Indigo Girl* (Ashland, OR: Blackstone, 2017).

30. Boyd, *Indigo Girl*, 216.

31. Boyd, *Indigo Girl*, 212.

32. Boyd, *Indigo Girl*, 353.

33. Boyd, *Indigo Girl*, 1.

34. Boyd, *Indigo Girl*, 337.

35. Harriott Horry Ravenel, *Eliza Pinckney, by Harriott Horry Ravenel, with Facsimile Reproduction. Women of Colonial and Revolutionary Times* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), 322.

36. Ravenel, *Eliza Pinckney*, 322.

37. Ravenel, *Eliza Pinckney*, 106–07.

do more for her country?”³⁸ In both contexts, introducing a Caribbean legume becomes a patriotic act, uncritically mooring Pinckney to the imperialist project. While Ravenel turns Pinckney into a Confederate monument, Boyd turns her into a pseudofeminist anachronism. But for both writers, Pinckney is very much the botanical hero.

Despite all this misappropriation, such admiration is not without merit. Glimmers of Pinckney’s sense of accomplishment peek through her veil of modesty. She laces her letters with subtle boasts, balancing her persona as a lady of business with a persona as a lady of leisure. When Pinckney records the state of the estate, she keeps her writing brief, as we have seen, in the previous paragraphs, with her letter to her father reporting her attempts at cultivating indigo and ginger. When addressing her friends, though, Pinckney is more effusive. Pinckney presents Mrs. Boddicott a picture of her town-and-country life in 1740: “I have the business of 3 plantations to transact, which requires much writing and more business and fatigue of other sorts than you can imagine. . . . But I some times . . . enjoy all the pleasures Charles Town affords.”³⁹ While Pinckney frames her business as a matter of filial duty, she undercuts her industry with the remark about her downtown entertainments. Pinckney does this repeatedly: sometimes the more masculine lady of business, sometimes the more feminine lady of leisure. Both personae serve Pinckney’s purpose. Her language bespeaks a need to prove that she is equal to the task of managing her father’s properties and of struggling with a finicky plant to produce the dye. Toward the end of her life, Pinckney would recount her quest to perfect indigo to her daughter Harriet Horry in September, 1785:

You have heard me say I was very early fond of the vegetable world, my father was pleased with it and encouraged it, he told me the turn I had for those amusements might produce something of real and public utility, If I could bring to perfection the plants of other Countries: accordingly when he went to the West Indies he sent me a variety of seeds, among them the Indigo, I was ignorant both of the proper season for sowing it, and the soil best adapted to it. To the best of my recollection I first try’d it in March 1741 or 1742. It was destroyed (I think by a frost). The next time in April, and it was cut down by a worm; I persevered to a third planting and succeeded.⁴⁰

Centering her indigo tale on the plant itself, Pinckney styles herself an intrepid explorer attempting to solve a riddle. Her emphasis on her failed first two attempts, and success with the third, follows a predictable storytelling rhythm: third time’s the charm. Thus, she imbues her lady-of-business persona with a gumption that allows her to take credit for her success, even while framing it as a duty to father and country (“public utility”). The lady-of-business persona equips her with masculine savvy, and the lady-of-leisure persona preserves her feminine delicacy. In this balance successive writers have found Pinckney’s appeal: her iridescence of tone allows Ravenel and Boyd to read into her character contrasting agendas. Pinckney’s deployment of roles always centers on planting for both family and country.

Two decades after Pinckney, André Michaux too would be memorialized as a botanical hero in service of empire. Michaux’s hero narrative renders him more like an American frontiersman with a unique talent for finding new plant species and shipping these species across the globe. As with Pinckney, some of this hero worship stems from Michaux’s own self-fashioning, though his corpus of writing offers much fewer clues than Pinckney’s.

38. Boyd, *Indigo Girl*, 349.

39. Pinckney, *Letterbook*, 7.

40. Eliza Lucas Pinckney, “Letter from Mrs. Charles Pinckney to Harriott Horry,” *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*. Published quarterly by the South Carolina Historical Society 17 (1916): 101–2.

Michaux's introduction to his *Flora Boreali-Americana* (1803)⁴¹ indicates that he collected specimens for his herbarium "not without great danger to his life" (*non sine vitæ periculo*) and that many of the most useful plants to agriculture need to be transplanted from Europe to North America through human labor (*Plures quidem plantarum species ex Europa in American septentrionalem humana industria demigrarunt*). Paraphrasing Michaux's Latin in his biography, Deleuze establishes the worth of the botanical hero: "We are indebted . . . to the efforts of industry" (*humana industria demigrarunt*) for much of what the well-appointed garden produces.⁴² Deleuze showcases the importance of the hero-botanist, framed as the imperialistic project of transplanting exotic flora from their places of origin to the domesticated space of the kitchen garden.

Significant, too, is Michaux's concise phrase *non sine vitæ periculo*, whose litotic expression recalls the Virgilian formula *non sine magna labore*. It is not without great work and great danger that the botanist performs the imperial task, so Deleuze makes out Michaux as one who risked life and limb in his search for North American specimens. After describing Michaux's early life and careful study of botany, Deleuze sets the stage for Michaux's first major expedition: sent by Louis XVI in September 1787 to research North American trees to replenish France's forests, Michaux establishes experimental gardens in New Jersey and Charleston, from which he would depart on his expeditions, with the aid of Native American guides. Michaux's contemporary William Bartram not only relied on the expertise of Native American guides to conduct his expeditions but also held a more charitable view of indigenous peoples than his contemporaries.⁴³ The French botanist, however, did not share Bartram's sympathies. Although Deleuze claims that Michaux formed "connections of friendship with the Indians" during his 1787 Allegheny expedition,⁴⁴ Michaux's journals complain in one instance that French fur trappers near the Kaskaskia River (in modern-day Illinois) "have become the laziest and most ignorant of all men" and "are clothed in the manner of the Savages."⁴⁵ This detail suggests that Michaux regarded his guides as quite beneath him, despite his reliance on their expertise. Despite this downplaying, "the Savages" lead Michaux through the treacherous mountains: a terrain that in Deleuze's telling becomes its own character. Deleuze paints a picture of the American wilds as

uninhabited countries [in which] the forests [are] almost impenetrable, there being no other tracks than those formed by the bears. The bed of the torrents is the only route that can be followed: these must often be forded or traversed on the trunk of a tree thrown across. On the banks the traveller meets in some places with marshes in which he may sink, in others with thorny spreading plants: for sustenance there is nothing but the uncertain produce of the chase, or some harsh fruit accidentally met with. . . . I will not here describe the dangers which our traveller incurred in these solitudes . . . where a frightful darkness rests over the wilds, produced by the thickness of the

41. André Michaux, *Flora Boreali-Americana* (Charleston: South Carolina Historical Society, 1803). For access to the original Latin edition of Michaux's *Flora Boreali-Americana*, I thank the Bartram Trail Conference, which funded a trip to the South Carolina Historical Society's special collections through the Fothergill Research Award in 2014. Translations and paraphrases of Michaux's Latin are my own.

42. Deleuze, *Annotated Memoirs*, 1.

43. Matthew Jennings, *The Flower Hunter and the People: William Bartram's Writings on the Native American Southeast* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2014), 20.

44. Deleuze, *Annotated Memoirs*, 9.

45. André Michaux, *Travels West of the Alleghanies Made in 1793–96 by André Michaux; in 1802 by F. A. Michaux; and in 1803 by Thaddeus Mason Harris, M. A. Translated by the American Philosophical Society's Proceedings in 1889. Edited by Reuben Gold Thwaites* (Cleveland, OH: A. H. Clark, 1904), <https://archive.org/details/jou00rnalofandrmichrich>.

branches interwoven with climbing plants, and set upon by almost continual fogs; which cover these rugged mountains.⁴⁶

Deleuze's portrayal of the frontier amasses sublime tropes: jagged mountains, treacherous streams, fallen logs, mists, untrustworthy guides. These rugged motifs underscore Michaux's *periculum vitæ*. So, despite Michaux's indebtedness to indigenous guides, Deleuze makes Michaux out to be the solitary wanderer over a sea of forests. The dangers of the American frontier parallel the odds that Pinckney faced: the tale of man versus nature, like the tale of woman versus society, furnishes ample material for the botanical hero.

Both botanical heroes risk it all in service of country. Charlie Williams's notes to the Deleuze biography indicate that Michaux ascended Grandfather Mountain in North Carolina on August 30, 1794. "Mistakenly believing that he had climbed the highest mountain in North America," Williams remarks, "the usually reserved botanist sang the new French national anthem and shouted 'Long live America and the Republic of France, long live liberty' into the wind."⁴⁷ Deleuze, too, closes his biography by emphasizing both Michaux's stoic and patriotic character: "Though of silent turn, [he] was of a frank temperament. . . . In his excursions to America having met with several Frenchmen in distress, he opened his purse to them, and procured them other assistance."⁴⁸ The botanical hero helps fellow citizens, serving humanity (European empire) through botanizing, to which mission the plants themselves stand as the lasting monuments. As Deleuze puts it: "In all the countries from Florida to Canada, he had introduced new vegetables, plants, and trees; and the traveller cannot penetrate into Persia, Africa, or the vast continent of North America, without finding some family that will say 'These are the trees that we owe to André Michaux'"⁴⁹

Quoting Charles Kuralt's speech given on the bicentennial of Michaux's ascent of Grandfather Mountain, Charlie Williams adorns the Michaux.org website with a eulogy that encapsulates the botanical hero narrative surrounding the French botanist: "His name was André Michaux and we should all remember his name, for he was one of the most remarkable human beings of the 18th century, or of any century."⁵⁰ Bearing witness to the breadth of Michaux's travels from Hudson Bay to Madagascar, trees, flowers, and shrubs all mark the botanist's heroic trek across the globe, acting as organic reminders of a tale that successive writers continue to reiterate.

III. "I love a garden and a book, and they are all my amusement": Landscape as Text

As Rebecca Bushnell reminds us, literature and horticulture share a common root in the early modern era: "Buying books, reading books, and practicing the garden arts became inextricably intertwined."⁵¹ With Pinckney and Michaux, landscape is text. For Pinckney, the garden is a site for plant circulation and literacy. For Michaux, plants themselves are texts to be pasted into his herbarium, described in his *Flora*, cultivated in his experimental garden, and shipped with instructions to his correspondents. Binding both material and textual, the garden and the American landscape for these botanical heroes is itself a story constantly being retold and remade.

46. Deleuze, *Annotated Memoirs*, 9–10.

47. Charlie Williams, "Basic Biographical Facts."

48. Deleuze, *Annotated Memoirs*, 24.

49. Deleuze, *Annotated Memoirs*, 23.

50. Williams, "Basic Biographical Facts."

51. Rebecca Bushnell, *Green Desire: Imagining Early Modern Gardens* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 42.

As Pinckney would muse to one of her correspondents, “I love a garden and a book, and they are all my amusement”⁵²(Ravenel edition). While Pickney’s fame stems from her agricultural ambitions, her letters show a deep interest in ornamental gardening that speaks to her desires to transform her parcel of land into an Arcadian paradise. She spends several of her letters both describing the gardens of others and plotting gardens of her own. In April of 1742, Pinckney describes to Miss Bartlett a cedar grove she plans for her estate:

You may wonder how I could in this gay season think of planting a Cedar grove, which rather reflects an Autumnal gloom and solemnity than the freshness and gayty of spring. But so it is. I have begun it last week and intend to make it an Emblem not of a lady, but of a compliment which your good Aunt was pleased to make to the person her partiality has made happy by giving her a place in her esteem and friendship. I intend then to connect in my grove the solemnity (not the solidity) of summer or autumn with the cheerfulness and pleasures of spring, for it shall be filled with all kind of flowers, as well as Garden flowers, with seats of Camomoil and here and there a fruit tree—oranges, nectrons, Plumbs, &c., &c.⁵³

In her planning, Pinckney reveals a multifaceted motive for planting her shady grove. More than a visual ornament, Pinckney proposes that she will “connect” in her grove the qualities of summer, autumn, and spring, using the grove to bridge several seasons through the sensual pleasures afforded by flower, foliage, and fruit. As Williamson rightly observes, the British style of garden design in the 1740s allowed landowners “to vent all sorts of highly personalized views of the world, political or otherwise.”⁵⁴ Thus this wilderness walk will serve Pinckney as “an Emblem not of a lady, but of a compliment which your good Aunt was pleased to make.” She intends the grove as a reflection upon the graces of her character. The cedar grove acts as a text—a compliment—both to Miss Bartlett’s aunt and to Pinckney herself.

Like Ogilvie, Pinckney imagines landscapes through georgic tropes, a genre explicitly linking landscape and text and through which she expresses her identity. Whitehill notes that Pinckney read her father’s edition of Virgil,⁵⁵ so it is not surprising that she channels georgic language. When she describes the Oaks Plantation in Goose Creek to Miss Bartlett in May of 1743, Pinckney intends the description to illustrate her keen eye for landscape, as well as her mastery of the classics. She paints the following picture:

The house stands a mile from, but in sight of the road, and makes a very handsome appearance; as you draw nearer new beauties discover themselves, first the fruitful Vine mantling up the wall loading with delicious Clusters; next a spacious bason in the midst of a large green presents itself as you enter the gate that leads to the house. . . . From the back door is a spacious walk a thousand foot long; each side of which nearest the house is a grass plat enameled in a Serpentine manner with flowers. Next to that on the right hand is what immediately struck my rural taste, a thicket of young tall live oaks where a variety of Airry Chorristers pour forth their melody; and my darling, the mocking bird, joined in the artless Concert and enchanted me with his harmony. . . . [Beyond the grove spread] smiling fields dressed in Vivid green. Here

52. Ravenel, *Eliza Pinckney*, 223–24.

53. Pinckney, *Letterbook*, 36.

54. Pinckney, *Letterbook*, 65.

55. Pinckney, *Letterbook*, xi.

Ceres and Pomona join hand in hand to crown the hospitable board . . . a delightful place . . . the silvan scenes or even Arcadia it self [*sic*].⁵⁶

Pinckney walks her correspondent through the garden from the entry avenue to the green in front of the house, then out back to the serpentine walks. During her garden tour, she observes both the overall pleasing effects of the landscape design and individual specimens that strike her eye, such as the “flowering laurel” and catalpa trees (likely *Catalpa bignonioides*). Ever the botanist, Pinckney selects her details carefully, crafting the description to show that this New World plantation emulates the charms of a British country estate. Likewise, references to customary agricultural deities (Ceres and Pomona) ornament the scene with neoclassical flourishes. Pinckney transposes the georgic form onto a landscape of South Carolinian plants. When Pinckney styles herself “a sort of enthusiast in [her] Veneration for fine trees” who looks upon “an old oak with the reverencial Esteem of a Druid”⁵⁷ (Ravenel edition), she is engaging in more than a mere literary flight of fancy. She views her plantings as integral to her identity. As Stephen Bending has observed of other British women’s personal writings, “Literary texts . . . invite us to explore how individuals might use literary traditions and cultural constructions in the organization and understanding of their own lives.”⁵⁸ Virgil’s *Georgics* supply Pinckney with a vocabulary with which to describe landscapes and with which to fashion gardens as representations of herself.

Likewise, Deleuze’s biography characterizes Michaux’s botanizing as a rendering of plant in textual form. This motif occurs as Michaux nurses ambitions of recording the place of origin for each tree he encounters. Deleuze describes this lifelong quest as “giving a complete Flora of North America, from the tropic to Hudson’s Bay.”⁵⁹ Humboldtian in scope, Michaux’s grand scheme to botanize the whole world—to render a mind-boggling array of plants as text—ended before it came to fruition. Thus, Michaux’s biographer seems intent on disclosing Michaux’s methods for others to follow. Deleuze reports that when Michaux attempts to locate the place of origin of plants, Michaux would observe

in what latitude they thrive the most; where they begin to languish, till at length they disappear entirely; and also, at what altitude on the mountains they will grow, and in what soil they flourish most. He considered the native country of a tree to be that where it multiplies most and grows to the greatest size. Thus he concluded that the tulip-tree [*Liriodendron tulipifera*] is a native of Kentucky, since there it forms vast forests, grows 7 or 8 feet in diameter, and to 120 feet in height, in a rich clayey soil that is never inundated. Both in more elevated and lower situations, where the soil is of course of a different nature, these trees become more rare and of smaller dimensions.⁶⁰

Sublimating the tulip tree as a set of numbers, soil specifications, and measurements, Deleuze dramatizes the completion of Michaux’s scientific project: the tree is now preserved like an herbarium specimen, its growth requirements ready for an arborist to replicate. Michaux’s project mimics on a smaller scale what Michel Foucault sees in Linnaeus: “The botanical calligrams dreamed of by Linnaeus . . . reproduce the form of the plant itself” as text, such

56. Pinckney, *Letterbook*, 61–62.

57. Ravenel, *Eliza Pinckney*, 221–22.

58. Bending, *Green Retreat*, 44.

59. Deleuze, *Annotated Memoirs*, 12.

60. Deleuze, *Annotate Memoirs*, 14.

that the book of natural history would become “the herbarium of living structures.”⁶¹ As with Humboldt and Linnaeus, Michaux’s mission is to render entire biota as paragraphs of botanical Latin. It bears repeating that this project is imperialistic in nature. As Londa Schiebinger and Claudia Swan remind us, European botanists routinely acculturated plant specimens, “wip[ing them] clean of [indigenous] cultural complexities in order to be pasted neatly into folios of European herbaria, shipped effortlessly to European botanical gardens, and included efficiently in European classificatory systems.”⁶² Each plant Michaux found thus became a palimpsest, a text of Native American meanings erased and replaced with meanings germane to European empire. Michaux’s reliance on his Native American guides proved instrumental in his work to search out strange new plants, press them in his herbarium, describe them in his *Flora Boreali-Americana* (1803), and ship them back to France with instructions for their propagation. Michaux’s *Flora* and his *Histoire des chênes l’Amérique* (1801) stand as his monumental attempts to account for the origins of North American plants, a quest that occupied his life’s work. For Michaux, finding and describing plants was just as important as circulating them from the North American British colonies to France, or from China and Japan to his garden in Charleston. By chronicling fantastical trees and where to find them, Michaux aided in the networks of botanical exchange that, as Richard Grove argues, both fostered European empire and sowed the seeds for environmental consciousness.⁶³

I have dealt with the ways that the lives and writings of Pinckney and Michaux have engaged with structures of consumeristic fantasy, self-fashioning, and empire. In parting, I will gesture toward the ecocritical implications of their work. The endeavors of Pinckney and Michaux—both horticultural and literary—have left a mark on environments of the southeastern United States. Williams reminds us that several of the Asiatic trees introduced by Michaux are now considered invasive species by the USDA Forest Service, most notably the mimosa (*Albizia julibrissin*) and Chinese parasol tree (*Firmiana simplex*).⁶⁴ Indeed, the sinophilic consumerism that Pinckney responds to in her own era reaches its fruition in Michaux’s later efforts. Ecologists’ designation of such plants as “invasive” bears an imprint of the imperial project that circulated these plants worldwide, a project that Pinckney and Michaux each furthered in his or her own ways. Thus, when Cheryll Glotfelty asks us in the environmental humanities to consider how science “is . . . itself open to literary analysis,”⁶⁵ her question does more than merely lay the groundwork for ecocritical thought. These questions of the boundaries between academic disciplines are much like the questions Williamson asks of the boundaries between literature and landscape: far from settled. However, just as the untamed frontier witnessed Michaux’s greatest works, and just as Pinckney too could see her plantations perfected as “an old woman in the Wilds of America”⁶⁶ (Ravenel edition), it is in these frontiers that we can explore our most fruitful questions. The landscapes of the southeastern United States are now a hybrid place, a place

61. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. A translation of *Les Mots et les choses* (1970) (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 135.

62. Londa Schiebinger and Claudia Swan, introduction to *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce, and Politics in the Early Modern World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 7.

63. Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens, and the Origins of Environmentalism 1600–1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

64. James H. Miller, Erwin B. Chambliss, and Nancy J. Lowenstein, *A Field Guide for the Identification of Invasive Plants in Southern Forests* (Asheville, NC: USDA Forest Service, Southern Research Station, Insect, Disease, and Invasive Plants Research Work Unit, 2015), 19n.

65. Cheryll Glotfelty, “Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis,” in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens: University of Georgia University Press, 1996), xviii–ix.

66. Ravenel, *Eliza Pinckney*, 223.

where natives of Asia and natives of North America tangle together, where texts of east and west remain unsettled.