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Recreating Place: Charles Fothergill and the Limits of Travel Writing

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Abstract: In 1806, Charles Fothergill, a young man with a strong interest in natural history, set out on a seven-month tour of Orkney and Shetland. His goal was to write a book about the islands that would emulate the work produced by the earlier traveller Thomas Pennant on Wales and mainland Scotland. Despite his ambition, Fothergill never succeeded in completing his book. His surviving manuscripts, which range from a rough working journal covering one part of his journey to some comments on botany that seem ready to go to press, suggest some of the difficulties that he might have found both in constructing a coherent narrative of his travels and in recreating a version of Pennant's antiquarian and scientific travels at a time when tastes in travel writing were shifting to focus more on the pleasures of landscape and aesthetics.

Keywords: travel writing; Charles Fothergill; Orkney; Shetland; manuscripts

1. Introduction

This paper is a discussion of a travelogue that was never written. In the summer and autumn of 1806, Charles Fothergill, a twenty-four-year-old Yorkshireman, toured Orkney and Shetland, planning to gather information for what he intended to be a definitive account of the culture and natural history of the northern islands. Traces of the journey and the intended book survive: the Shetland Museum and Archives hold a water-damaged working journal that Fothergill kept in Shetland during that summer and autumn, and the Thomas Fisher Library in Toronto has notes and drafts for what were to be published accounts of Orkney and Foula, as well as various draft introductions attempting to set out the parameters of the book (Fothergill 1795–c.1875a, 1795–c.1875b, 1806). In those drafts, Fothergill presents himself as both following the path laid out by Thomas Pennant and other travellers of the previous generation and filling the gaps left in those accounts. As he boasted in a puff for the book, his travels had enabled him to clear "up some doubtful points in the Zoology of Great Britain", and his "investigation" of subjects ranging from the natural history and antiquities of the islands to "the state of their agriculture and fisheries" could not "fail to excite very general interest" (Anon 1807b, p. 265). The changes that Fothergill made at various stages of composition, as well as the differences between the main text and what was promised in the promotional material and in the introduction, suggest not only the challenges of trying to turn the disorienting and unsettling experience of being an outsider in a new culture and environment into a confidently authoritative literary recreation of place. In addition, they highlight the difficulties involved in trying to recreate Pennant's methods without Pennant's resources and at a point in literary history when tastes in travel writing were undergoing significant changes.

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2. Travel and the Production of "Knowledge" in the Home Tour

Part of Fothergill's difficulty in finding a satisfactory way to reproduce his experiences in print might have arisen from contemporaneous uncertainties about the most effective method to do so. As many critics (including Batten, Kinsley, Leask, Thompson, and Youngs) have pointed out, while travel writing was one of the most popular literary genres in later eighteenth-century Britain, that popularity did not translate into any consensus about what that "stubbornly indefinable" (Youngs 2013, p. 2) genre should look like or what might make it valuable. In his groundbreaking 1978 study of the genre, Charles Batten argued that throughout most of the eighteenth century, what most readers sought when they picked up a volume of non-fictional travels was an "admirable [. . .] blending of factual information and literary art", in which they were able to find reliably and pleasurably informative pictures of unfamiliar places (Batten 1978, pp. 3, 5–6). However, he suggests that by the last decades of the century, this understanding of the genre was breaking down, as "pleasure becomes divorced from instruction" (Batten 1978, p. 30). Batten's chronology might be a little too neat, even though, as Zoë Kinsley and others have established, the opening years of the nineteenth century unquestionably saw an increasing interest in travel that offered "an articulation of an 'inner world of thought and feeling'" (Kinsley 2019, p. 418; the quoted phrase is from (Thompson 2011, pp. 110–11)). This interest went hand in hand with a rising "scepticism" about the idea that travellers could, in any case, produce "purely objective description[s]" (Leask 2002, p. 6) of what they were seeing. Mary Wollstonecraft went a step further, arguing in 1790 that "diffusing a taste for picturesque beauty" was, in fact, one of the more important functions of a book of travels (Wollstonecraft 1790, p. 161). At the same time, however, the assumption remained that instruction was at least part of the purpose of "this most important and most interesting department of general knowledge" (Anon 1803, p. 1). John Stanley, who travelled to Iceland in 1789, seemed to take for granted that he needed to supplement his direct experience of the country with a rather random assemblage of factual detail. In 1791, as he was trying (unsuccessfully) to draft his book, he sent four closely written pages of follow-up questions to an Icelandic acquaintance, ranging from requests for information about the landing site of the first settlers to the citizenship status of servants and belief in ghosts and spirits (Stanley 1791, ff. 1466–1467v). At least some readers seemed to share Stanley's assumptions about the importance of presenting as many "facts" as possible, even while making space for the "inner world" and the aesthetic perceptions of the traveller. Henry Brougham, for one, argued in the inaugural number of *The Edinburgh Review* that the best travel writing combined a presentation of "facts" with "the delineation" of the traveller's feelings and impressions (Brougham 1803, p. 163), while an 1807 observer praised travel writing for its ability to provide "rational instruction" in an entertaining and accessible form (Anon 1807a, p. 28). Even more influentially, Sir Walter Scott, whom Nigel Leask credits with transforming travel writing "by romancing the Pennantian travel account" (Leask 2020, p. 220), was notoriously dismissive of what he saw as the more or less completely uninformative *Caledonian Sketches* by Sir John Carr (Scott 1809).

This continuing expectation on the part of Scott, Brougham and other reviewers that travel writing should be instructive as well as entertaining is important when considering the home tour—a strand of travel writing to which Fothergill hoped to contribute and one that was becoming increasingly prominent towards the end of the eighteenth century.[1] The problem confronting writers of home tours is obvious. In an era when travellers ranging from Samuel Hearne to James Cook were providing exciting new information about far-flung lands that were entirely unknown to their British readers, visitors to less exotic places might find themselves struggling to establish the pleasurable novelty and, by extension, the value of their work. One response to this problem was to stretch the boundaries of what counted as useful knowledge to a degree that made it possible to find something

new even in relatively accessible territory. A 1789 handbook for travellers by the German travel writer Leopold von Berchtold provides a staggeringly long list of questions that he insists intellectually serious travellers need to investigate if they hope to inform themselves properly about the places they are visiting (von Berchtold 1789). Yet he clearly directs this advice to Europeans travelling within Europe rather than to explorers. His inspiration was the English agriculturist Arthur Young, whose writing about France he holds up as a model of enlightened travel. He also implies the European focus of his ideal travellers in his advice to them to gather information on the overseas "possessions" of the countries they are visiting, implicitly bringing the colonising Western European powers under the same sort of scientific, systematising gaze that was then supposedly being applied to more distant lands (see (Robinson 2019) for a discussion of the ambitions and limitations of European "scientific" travel).

The idea that the responsibilities of a traveller, even when that traveller remained fairly close to home, involved gathering an encyclopedic range of social, political, scientific, and cultural facts introduced a "new professional rigour into the practice and representation of domestic travel" (Constantine and Leask 2017, p. 5). Notably, as Constantine and Leask make clear in their introduction to a collection of essays on the Welsh traveller Thomas Pennant, this was the approach taken by Pennant, whom Fothergill saw as both a model and a rival. (See the next section for a discussion of Fothergill's views on Pennant.) Especially through his later tours, Pennant established himself as "an influential intellectual authority" on Scotland and Wales, "a source of historical and cultural as well as scientific information" (Constantine and Leask 2017, p. 7). Pennant's approach to travel was influential; as Elizabeth Edwards has noted, he almost immediately became a (perhaps the) major figure in the canon of British travel writing and "a reference point for all the major travel writers that follow him" (Edwards 2017, p. 143). What Pennant offered was a version of the British peripheries that effectively exoticised them, suggesting that while British explorers were bringing back information from the farthest reaches of the globe, places that were, comparatively speaking, on the armchair traveller's doorstep remained almost unknown and equally worthy of being the subject of the traveller's knowledgeable and systematising gaze. Indeed, Pennant made this point explicitly, claiming "that prior to his tour, 'Scotland had been almost as little known to its southern brethren as *Kamtschatka*'" (Constantine and Leask 2017, p. 5).

Yet somewhat paradoxically, this accumulation of detail could obscure, rather than create, a sense of place. For one thing, the traveller's gaze is limited by his own expectations and values; for example, as Zoë Kinsley has noted in reference to Berchtold, a traveller guided by his questions would be unable to see women as anything more than "signifiers of the state of progress" in a society (Kinsley 2008, p. 173). More generally, readers at the time and since have noted that Pennant's books can seem "weighed down with information" (Edwards 2017, p. 144). The risk here, as Paul Smethurst has observed, is that any sense of "*being there*" might be lost among the "encyclopedic detail" provided about the places that Pennant was visiting (Smethurst 2012, p. 18). By the time that Fothergill was writing, this risk was arguably even greater, as a generation of readers sought pictures not just of the places being visited but also "of the traveller's mind" (Brougham 1803, p. 163). Consequently, the correct balance between objective facts and subjective impressions of a place became even harder to measure.

3. Charles Fothergill and His Manuscripts

Born into a prominent Quaker family, Charles Fothergill (1782–1840) was the son of a well-to-do comb and brush manufacturer, but he had no interest in taking up his father's business. He appears rather to have been inspired by his great uncle John Fothergill (1712–1780), a prominent mid-century physician and botanist. Although the elder Fothergill

provided a model of learned expertise, the younger Fothergill was, by his own account, almost entirely self-educated. He claimed that he developed his interest "in Zoology, before I was much acquainted with books: the little knowledge that I possessed was, therefore, founded in facts, and derived from practical observations made in the haunts of the animals themselves" (Fothergill 1795–c.1875a, p. 7). He made his first attempt to launch himself as a writer at the age of seventeen, printing a pamphlet titled *Ornithologica Britannica; or, a List of all the British Birds in Latin and English* (Fothergill 1799) at his own expense in York. Four years later, in 1803, while living in London and unsuccessfully pursuing new career options ranging from the theatre to the Royal Navy, he published a two-volume collection of moral poetry and tales (Fothergill 1803), which turned out to be his last foray into print until his 1813 *Essay on the Philosophy, Study, and Use of Natural History*. What had occupied him for most of the preceding decade was an ambitious attempt to write a detailed zoology of the British Isles; however, the closest he came to a finished, publishable version of the material that he had assembled during his research travels in northern Britain was a draft of a more general interest travelogue about the seven months that he spent in Orkney and Shetland in 1806.[2]

Yet even as Fothergill apparently narrowed his focus from the British Isles as a whole to the northern islands of Scotland, the ambition of his plans remains striking, to say the least. Without any resources behind him other than what he could scrape from his (presumably disapproving) father after abandoning the family business to drift around in London, Fothergill made clear in his draft introduction that he planned to outdo Pennant and any other travellers who had written about the northern Scottish islands. He coolly asserts the complete uselessness of all previous studies, dismissing Martin Martin's "Brief Description" of Orkney and Shetland as "a curious morsel of British Topography" and criticising the "crude and utterly uninteresting" style and "numerous and intolerable errors" of Thomas Gifford's *Historical Description of the Zetland Islands* (Fothergill 1795–c.1875a, p. 26). Pennant himself receives a more extensive and more damning dismissal, as follows:

> The next work of any name or character treating of these islands was the production of the celebrated Mr Pennant than whom no man ever enjoyed so extensive a fame at less [inserted: cost] to himself but he wrote in an agreable manner & treated of a vast variety of subjects without being profound in any. He devoted a considerable portion of [inserted: the introduction to] his Arctic Zoology to the description, the antiquities, & natural productions of Orkney & Shetland though he was never in any of the islands & is a striking example of the dangers that to which authors are liable who write of what they have not seen. (Fothergill 1795–c.1875a, p. 27)

In effectFothergill is making a virtue of his limitations. He implies that, unlike Pennant, he cannot rely on a network of correspondents to fill in any gaps in his work; thus, anything that he has to say about the northern islands will necessarily be based on personal experience. This air of confidence is amplified in Fothergill's attempts to promote his unfinished book. An advertisement he inserted in *The Monthly Magazine* (which also appeared in a wide array of other British magazines, as well as in French, German, and American periodicals) boasts that he is offering an "investigation" of the northern islands' "natural history, antiquities, state of their agriculture and fisheries, political importance, manners, customs, condition, past and present state, &c &c." (Anon 1807b, 265). For good measure, he also describes himself, without any academic basis, as "Dr. Charles Fothergill".

This smooth assertion of encyclopedic expertise is belied by the chaotic state of Fothergill's manuscripts, which suggest not only the range of interests asserted in the advertisement but also, more clearly, his uncertainty about how to bring these interests together into a single, coherent publication. Much of the volume now in Shetland is part of

a working journal that Fothergill kept during his travels; it records daily events, including regular notations of the temperature and reports of the weather, and it appears to have suffered water damage at some point, unfortunately effacing large sections of the account of Foula. It is also closely written on both sides of the page, with very little room for additions or corrections; what additions there are tend to be written across the main text. In contrast, throughout much of the account of Orkney, which appears in the two volumes in Toronto, Fothergill uses only the right-hand page for his narrative, leaving the left side for additions, notes, or corrections, suggesting a later stage of composition.

All three volumes contain a variety of other materials, as well. Along with the fragmentary drafts of introductions, there are rewritten versions of some daily journal entries about Shetland; a detailed account of Orkney and Shetland flora and fauna, complete with a hand-drawn title page; a draft of a rather idiosyncratic index; notes on the Icelandic language and northern "provincialisms"; and an unflattering draft essay on the Orcadian character. Taken together, the volumes make it clear that Fothergill continued to work on the project for years after his travels as he tried to organise his notes and drafts into a coherent, authoritative book. The left-hand pages alongside his account of Orkney include notes about the publication of Jean André de Luc's *Geological Travels* and the death of one of his Orkney hosts, John Traill of Westove, both of which took place in 1810. He might well have worked on it much later than that. The second of the two volumes in Toronto includes notes he made on Canadian wildlife and customs, which obviously postdate his 1817 emigration to Canada. Granted, this might indicate nothing more than a frugal recycling of blank pages left among records of a then thoroughly moribund project, but there is no question that he was revisiting the content of his Shetland journal at some point more than half a decade after his emigration, when he scrawled a note on Scott's *Pirate* (1822) across a reference to Shetlandic folklore (Fothergill 1806, p. 99).

Given this evidence of continuing interest in the project for years after the initial burst of enthusiasm and ambition, the question arises as to why Fothergill was never able to complete his work. This is not a question that can ever be answered with certainty. In the preface of his *Essay on . . . Natural History*, he hints that the variety and "magnitude" of his literary projects slowed his progress on any individual book (Fothergill 1813, p. xvi). His bankruptcy later that year, after which he fled to the Isle of Man to escape his creditors, and his subsequent emigration undoubtedly also interfered with his literary composition. Yet the manuscripts themselves hint at other, more complicated literary problems. Fothergill might have wanted to emulate and even surpass Pennant, but he struggled to do so for several reasons. First, despite his claims to novelty, the northern islands, and Shetland in particular, were already contested spaces at the time he was writing, raising questions about what a travel writer could or ought to say about them. He also struggled to construct an imagined audience and an appropriate mode in which to address them. Like many other travel writers of the time, he was explicit about wanting to present instruction in an amusing manner, yet unlike at least some of his contemporaries, he struggled to balance these two elements of his work.[3] This difficulty might have been intensified by what the manuscripts suggest was a dramatic gap between Fothergill's embodied experience of the discomforts and disorientating effects of travel (most fully recorded in the Shetland journal) and the calmly authoritative voice of the "scientific" traveller.

4. Travellers in Orkney and Shetland: Debating Place

As Fothergill knew very well, being on the spot might be a necessary condition for producing an "accurate" account of an unfamiliar place, but it was by no means a sufficient one. A reviewer for the *Monthly Magazine*, writing in 1818, summarised what was by then a familiar litany of complaints about travel writing. "No traveller, in these

days", the reviewer notes crossly, "makes any scruple to note down all that he sees, and to print all that he writes", leaving "the public" neither amused nor informed but merely "stunned and stupefied" by superfluous detail (Anon 1818, pp. 311–12). According to this reviewer, "modern" travellers attempting to follow in the tradition of Pennant simply lack the judgement to assess the value or interest of the facts they are so assiduously attempting to gather, slipping instead into a sort of impressionistic randomness.

Yet assessing the value of the raw information being gathered was not the only problem Fothergill faced when trying to bring his work into publishable form; his destination and timing also complicated his task. In his 1807 advertisements for the book, he claims that he is providing "the fullest and completest description" to date "of those remote and hitherto neglected regions" (Anon 1807b, p. 265)—rhetoric echoing Pennant's argument that Scotland was as unfamiliar as Kamchatka and therefore as much worth exploring. This might not have been quite as empty a claim as the self-bestowed doctorate he uses to bolster his scientific authority, but while it is true that accounts of the northern islands were minimal in comparison with the numerous Highland tours pouring off the presses by the first decades of the nineteenth century, Fothergill would have been competing for attention with a number of other books and pamphlets on the subject that came out during the first decade of the century and which, at least according to some readers, quickly glutted the market. When the mineralogist James Headrick wrote about George Barry's *History of Orkney* (1805) for *The Edinburgh Review*, he felt that the subject still had "all the recommendations of novelty", as he (again echoing Pennant) suggested that most British readers would know less about Orkney than about "the Sandwich or Philippine islands" (Headrick 1806, p. 87). Just four years later, however, Patrick Neill, a botanist who had spent eleven days travelling in Shetland in 1804 and who was also writing for *The Edinburgh Review*, was much less warm in his response to an account of Shetland by the Lerwick-born physician Arthur Edmonston. Given the number of recent "tours and travels" published or forthcoming on the subject (including his own), Neill scoffs at Edmonston's claims about the unfamiliarity of the islands to most Britons (Neill 1810, p. 135). Fothergill clearly still had hopes of publishing his own book when Neill's review came out (he even added a footnote to the draft introduction criticising the inadequacies of Edmonston's book), but this very public mockery of the sort of rhetoric that he was using in his advertisements and some versions of his introduction might have undermined his claims to be offering new and valuable knowledge about an unfamiliar place.

Yet there was a far more serious problem with this rhetoric of discovery and with the claim by an English writer to be introducing a region of Scotland to an English-language readership. Shetlanders and Orcadians were, after all, not only quite able to write about their own territory (Edmonston was a Shetlander, and Barry had lived in Orkney over a decade before publishing his account of the islands) but were also among the potential audience for such books. As the notoriously angry reception of Samuel Johnson's 1773 tour demonstrated, Scots could be sceptical, to say the least, about outsiders' views of them. This was no less true of the northern islanders in the early nineteenth century than it had been for their mainland compatriots a generation earlier. Patrick Neill's deeply critical account of Shetland in articles and in his 1806 book (Neill 1806) sparked something of a pamphlet war in 1805–1806. The Shetland landowner Robert Hunter of Lunna (writing under the pseudonym "Thule") claimed that Neill was unable to observe accurately or understand what he saw, much less translate those "facts" into a picture of the islands. As Hunter angrily argues, Shetland's remoteness means that visitors such as Neill come there "with all the prejudices of foreigners" ("Thule" 1805, p. 914), expecting exotic novelty and then seeking out and exaggerating differences. Their supposedly industrious pursuit of knowledge thus becomes, in Hunter's view, merely an attempt to justify and reinforce the

cultural biases that they bring with them from the metropolitan centre. In effect, as Hunter accuses Neill of imposing his own "facts" on Shetland, he both aligns Neill with the sort of imperialist travel that (in the influential phrasing of Mary Louise Pratt) was attempting to "produce[ ] 'the rest of the world'" in its own image for a domestic readership and implicitly undercuts the value of such travel (Pratt 1992, pp. 3–4).

Whatever the merits or weaknesses of the arguments made by Hunter and Neill, this very public dispute over the "facts" about Shetland and who had the right to determine those facts provides important context for Fothergill's work, taking place as it did while he was preparing for his journey and during its early stages. Fothergill does not mention Neill, but it was impossible for him to be unaware of the debate. The notes and additions that he made to his journal after his return show that he was anxiously following any relevant publications; furthermore, while he was on his travels, he met and formed sociable connections with some of the angry Shetland landlords who were still fulminating about Neill's work and hoping that Fothergill would join forces with them against Neill. In July 1807, eight months after Fothergill's return, Hunter's uncle, Thomas Mouat of Garth, was already awaiting Fothergill's book with "some anxiety" (Mouat 1807). By the following February, he was "wearying to see" it, at least in part because he hoped that Fothergill would offer a corrective to Neill by treating Shetland and the Shetlanders in "a Gentleman like manner" (Mouat 1808). Clearly enough, these debates raised the stakes for Fothergill in terms of determining the significance of what he had seen and what deductions to draw from those observations. The point here is not, of course, that Fothergill was writing to please his Shetland hosts or to dispute Neill; on the contrary, his working Shetland notebook indicates that he would have agreed with many of Neill's points about the economies of the islands. Rather, as Fothergill's draft introductions and the revisions that he made to his journal demonstrate, he was acutely aware of writing at a time and about a place in which the very nature of what constituted "factual" detail or "objective" description was being hotly contested. Significantly, by far, the most finished part of the book is a stand-alone section on botanical information; aside from a very few minor corrections or pencilled notations, it appears ready to go to press, complete with an attractively drawn title page. The only material that he gathered that appeared to give Fothergill minimal trouble, in other words, were details about natural history that could be reported in the sort of scientific language that both the Shetland landowners and metropolitan readers could agree was an acceptably neutral and objective tool for representing the world.

One of Fothergill's difficulties, as he wrote and rewrote his introduction, seems to have been finding a way to move beyond such relatively uncontested information into a more wide-ranging argument about economic and cultural history so that he could reach beyond a relatively specialised audience and justify the claims that he was making about the general interest of his book. His attempts to do so might have been stimulated by Headrick's review of Barry; whatever the virtues of the book, Headrick writes, it had "too much science and sobriety" to attract the typical reader of travels (Headrick 1806, p. 87). After writing and crossing out several passages highlighting his zoological interests, Fothergill ultimately retains a long paragraph in which he argues that his observations will allow him not only to offer insights into natural history but also to provide information on a subject of "the greatest national importance" (Fothergill 1795–c.1875a, p. 11)—that is, what he claims is the scandalously neglected economic potential of northern agriculture and fisheries. These subjects were controversial—they were at the heart of the debate between Neill and Hunter—but in the revisions that Fothergill made to his main text to foreground economic matters, he seems careful to focus on what he admires, perhaps in an attempt to sidestep some of the controversy associated with Neill.

Much of the account of Orkney survives only in what is at least a partially revised form; nonetheless, we can see Fothergill using later revisions to widen the focus of his draft

manuscript. For example, in the account of John Traill of Westove, which Fothergill revisited at some point after 1810, the original narrative is mainly concerned with ornithology, as Fothergill notes that Traill's "warm enthusiasm" for the subject helps with his investigation of the local bird populations. However, in a note on the left-hand page, added at some point after Traill's death, Fothergill shifts from the ornithological to the economic, praising Traill's estate management. "If all the Lairds of the Orcades were like him resembled what he was, those remote islands would be trebled in value & political importance", he concludes (Fothergill 1795–c.1875a, p. 107). Fothergill chose a particularly unfortunate example to illustrate his point about what estate management should look like in Orkney; Westove was already in an economically precarious state, and when Traill's great-nephew came into the inheritance some years later, he was forced to abandon it and emigrate to Canada. One could read that historical detail simply as a bit of literary bad luck on Fothergill's part, but it might also suggest that Fothergill was not merely being modest when, in his introduction, he wrote about the "peculiar anxiety" he felt about the usefulness of his "hints" on agriculture (Fothergill 1795–c.1875a, pp. 10–11). Given what he saw as the importance of the subject, as well as what he must have known would be the challenges of presenting "facts" about it that could be agreed upon, it might not be surprising that he found himself at an impasse in his revisions.

5. Constructing a Narrative: Audiences and Literary Pleasure

Deciding what sort of information to include and how to present it was not the only problem Fothergill faced in preparing his material for publication. Even as he insisted on the value of the information that he was collecting, he was clear that he did not want his book to be a mere assemblage of facts, and the various stages of his manuscript indicate some of the ways he experimented with making it as engaging as possible for a public readership. Notably, he attempted to retain the impression of immediacy even (or perhaps especially) as the composition dragged on. Again, one can turn to the account of John Traill for evidence. Fothergill's tribute to the memory of his then-deceased host was written long after his journey, but, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, he uses the note to create an illusion of unrevised immediacy in his main text. As he explains at some point after 1810, Traill had, in 1806, casually picked up Fothergill's working notebook while waiting for Fothergill to get dressed and had been both amused by the account of his own character and pleased by the comments about his interest in natural history. Whether or not this is an invention, it is a clever literary move; it allows Fothergill to underscore both his own authority (his Orcadian host had seen and approved his text) and his impartiality as an observer (Traill had picked up the book by chance, and Fothergill had not been writing for his host's entertainment or approval). Even more importantly, he is not only giving readers basic information about birds and estate management but also offering them a glimpse of his own social life on Orkney, returning them, in imagination, to the scene of composition.

That glimpse is illusory, of course. The notebook that Traill (supposedly) read does not survive, and while it is possible that the narrative on the right-hand page of the manuscript is an exact transcription of the lost original, that seems unlikely, given the extent to which Fothergill revised the parts of the Shetland working journal that survive in other manuscript form (a point discussed further below). Fothergill's creation of this illusion demonstrates his interest in presenting information in a manner that would not only be informative but also pleasurable for the increasingly varied readership attracted to travel writing. Zoë Kinsley has discussed the challenges of form in eighteenth-century travel writing, noting that "travel writers' formal choices" can be affected not just by "the experience of place" but also by the expectations of the readership that the writer hopes to attract (Kinsley 2019, p. 408). Her focus is on the varied effects that can be achieved through journals and letters,

both forms that Fothergill attempted to use at points during his own revisions. His first thought, according to one discarded section of his introduction, was to claim that the book was the print version of a travel journal that had been "originally written, and intended for, the private amusement of a dear friend". He then explains that although the friend, a Mr. Brunton, had died before his return, he had, as a form of tribute, "preserved" his work's "original simple form as a journal", even while attempting to ensure greater interest "by collating my manuscripts" with published accounts of the islands (Fothergill 1795–c.1875a, p. 6). Second thoughts, however, led him to remove that reference to his editorial work, so that the book becomes simply "letters [. . .] addressed to a friend" and all references to the additions made to its "original simple form" are crossed out (Fothergill 1795–c.1875a, p. 6).

At a later stage in composition, Fothergill expanded this fiction of epistolarity to include another friend, a military man, and his siblings, John and Marianne, and in doing so, began to experiment with tailoring the information that he had been gathering during his travels to align with the presumably gendered and professional interests of these very different inscribed readers. He frames his account of the Stone of Scar, located on the Orkney island of Sanday, as a letter to Brunton, explaining that this "natural curiosit[y]"—a huge glacial erratic—would "to any other than a Naturalist or one interested in the geological history of our globe [. . .] appear an uninteresting object. To you however", he adds, "I know it will be far otherwise" (Fothergill 1795–c.1875a, p. 109). John, who has "a turn for the study of antiquities" (Fothergill 1795–c.1875a, p. 40), receives a description of the Stone of Setter in Eday. In contrast, when Fothergill turns to aesthetic matters, for example, in what is, in effect, an essay on Orkney music, he addresses his sister. "To whom, with more propriety, can I write of the music of poetry", he begins rhetorically in a "letter" addressed to Marianne; then, with even more of a flourish, he revises his opening to increase the illusion of intimacy so that it reads "To whom can I address a letter on a poetical subject with greater propriety than to one who is herself so sweet, so charming a poet" (Fothergill 1795–c.1875a, p. 69).

6. Constructions of Place: Foula, Emotions, and Economics

Yet by adding Marianne as a correspondent, Fothergill was not merely trying to highlight the more conventionally "feminine" and aesthetically pleasing elements of his tour. He was also changing the nature of the work that he was writing, moving away from facts and descriptions to create a more emotionally engaged, introspective voice for himself, a point that is best illustrated by the revisions he made as he reworked his journal entries on Foula into a letter to Marianne. His decision to use Marianne as the recipient of the information on Foula is striking and even suggests a departure from his original attempts to emulate Pennant and other informational travellers. The advertisements and the title page of his draft volume indicate that Fothergill saw his ability to provide information about Foula as one of the major selling points of his work. Neill had not visited the island, and if Shetland in general was underrepresented in the travel literature of the day, Foula was almost completely unknown, making the section on it central to any continuing claims of novelty as a travel writer that Fothergill might wish to make. The problem is that Fothergill seemed incapable of containing Foula within the sort of coolly informational framework that he used for Traill and Westove. While there, he was overwhelmed by the sublime aesthetic spectacle of the island, shocked by the deprivation and suffering of its inhabitants and thrown somewhat off-balance by melancholia and the physical discomforts of cold and hunger.

As the visit to Foula is one of the few parts of Fothergill's journey that survive (more or less) in both the working journal and a revised copy, we can see some of the issues that he struggled with as he tried to translate what was evidently a disorienting, even overwhelming, personal experience into a smoothly controlled public narrative. The entries

in the working journal are partly effaced by what appears to be water damage; however, enough remains legible to demonstrate that Fothergill's initial impressions of Foula are recorded in a style that is unusually detailed and self-consciously literary, not only in comparison to much of the rest of the working journal but also to some of the accounts of Orkney that he had drafted for publication. Indeed, Fothergill spent some time honing his prose even before revising it in the form of a letter to Marianne. In interlinear corrections in the original journal, for example, precipices that originally merely "defend[ed] the island" become more impressively active, "check[ing] the dreadful assaults of the furious Atlantic" (Fothergill 1806, p. 4). At some point in his revisions, he also scrawled a note across the section of his journal describing his first sight of what he calls "this Thule—this abode of the daemon of storms—this island of sublimity", reminding himself to "Give all the particulars on my approach to Foula" in his revisions (Fothergill 1806, pp. 3–4). Yet, despite being overwhelmed by the spectacular landscapes of the island, he cannot sustain this pose of detached aestheticism in the immediately following account of a place so desperately poor that nobody can offer him tea or even sheets for the bed that, as he notes, he was able to obtain only by the fortunate chance of the landlord of the island having left it there after a recent visit. Sublimity dissolves into misery in the journal entry describing his first day there. As he is too overcome by exhaustion and depression to venture out, he sits "in a dirty apartment nearly suffocated by peat smoak" and finds that the only relief from his "melancholy fits" are the "little courtesies" of a hen that happens to wander into his room (Fothergill 1806, p. 5).

In brief, the working journal entries about Foula present a tumultuous mixture of aesthetic exhilaration and physical and mental discomfort, exacerbated by what was clearly Fothergill's deep shock at the abject condition of the locals. All of this is juxtaposed with his usual matter-of-fact notations on natural history and economics, including observations on bird life, geology, typical fishing catches, and so forth. Even as he turns his attention to his own state of mind and emotional reactions, he continues to gather information for his planned supplement to (or correction of) Pennant. The revised letter to Marianne attempts to construct a more coherent narrative from this jumble of impressions and information, in part by smoothing over some of the more unsettling aspects of his experiences on the island by bringing an aesthetic gaze to squalor and misery. For example, two meetings with an impoverished widow, her insane son, and her dying daughter are condensed in the "letter" into a single, almost Wordsworthian encounter with virtuous poverty. The story, as told in the original journal, is anything but picturesque; Fothergill is first badly unnerved by a rain-soaked encounter with an emotionally disturbed, half-naked man and his mother, who runs out of her cottage in distress to reassure him that her son is harmless. Then, two days later, when he returns to sketch the interior of the hut, he meets the terminally ill daughter. Significantly, in the revised version, Fothergill presents himself as entering the hut as an invited guest rather than as a curious tourist; even if he is unable to help, he emphasises his benevolent willingness to do so—although in the original, he noted that even to try to "advise" the girl would be "to insult her condition" (Fothergill 1806, p. 17). This presentation of himself in the revised letter as a man of feeling, moved to moral reflection by the spectacle of "exceedingly interesting" sufferers rather than as a mere helpless onlooker, is reinforced by more general comments in the revised version on the inhabitants of Foula and their value as an object of "contemplation" (Fothergill 1795–c.1875b, p. 17). It is true that in both versions, Fothergill praises the islanders' virtuous "simplicity", but that conventional sentimentality is decidedly fainter in the original, especially given that it follows an earlier entry in which he vehemently denounces the degrading conditions in which they are forced to live because of the rapaciousness of their landlords. Conversely, in the account written for Marianne, he acknowledges that poverty is not always picturesque, describing

huts that are "receptacles of the most nauseous filth & vermin" (Fothergill 1795–c.1875b, p. 18). Yet, even if Fothergill refuses to downplay the horrors of poverty entirely in the "letter" that he was preparing for publication, he still appears to have been unwilling or unable to incorporate his original passionate denunciation of economic exploitation into the public version of his work and to have decided instead to substitute aestheticised sentimental pieties.

It seems clear that Fothergill was not content with this revised "letter", however. Most obviously, there are indications that he was trying to find a way to incorporate economic matters more fully into the account of Foula that he was preparing for publication. On the left-hand page facing the second page of the "letter", he transcribed a quotation from Daines Barrington's 1775 speculations *On the Probability of Reaching the North Pole*, in which Barrington comments on the value of the northern islanders, inured as they are to hardship and cold, in advancing Britain's economic interests in the Arctic. This quotation echoes the increased interest in economic issues indicated in the revisions to the account of Traill, but it clashes sharply not only with the sentimental pleasure expressed in the letter regarding the spectacle of isolated and insulated virtue but also with his furious denunciation in the journal of the way that the Foula islanders are *already* being economically exploited. In effect, through his various drafts and revisions, Fothergill offers at least three ways of reading the "facts" that he has observed on Foula, all of which seem directed toward different potential readerships and none of which are easily reconcilable with the others.

7. The Discomforts of Travel

The disparate representations of Foula thus highlight some of the challenges that Fothergill faced in trying to present a coherent picture of the northern islands for a wide public readership. These sections of the manuscript also emphasise the strains imposed by travel on Fothergill's physical and mental health, which in turn interfere with his attempt to create a dispassionately observational voice. It is clear, even in the more polished versions of his time in Orkney, that Fothergill was struggling with loneliness and melancholy. Yet in those earlier revised passages, he tends to present these problems as reminders of the necessity of mental resilience or as inspiration for social enquiries that he might otherwise not have considered. In a letter addressed to Brunton from Eday, for example, he admits that he was "oppressed with disease & anxiety", heightened by "the solitude of my situation", but then reflects on the aid he believes ought to be provided by "philosophy & religion" (Fothergill 1795–c.1875a, p. 28). On a somewhat more comic note, in his next letter, he describes hearing footsteps while being kept awake by a toothache in a supposedly haunted house. Undaunted by either superstition or the pain of the toothache, he heads out to investigate and discovers a calf that has somehow strayed into the house. "I mention this trifling incident", he concludes, "merely to shew that here [. . .] superstitious notions are maintained respecting spectres & goblins walking the night & how fanciful & ridiculous such notions generally are" (Fothergill 1795–c.1875a, p. 30). Even as his health continued to deteriorate, he insisted that his only reason for mentioning his ailments was that his experience of ill health on a remote island gave him even more insight into that society. After learning that no medical advice was available anywhere nearer than Kirkwall, on the main island, he made the following comments:

> I should not have occupied your attention for a moment with such a subject were it not to give you some notion of the miserable state in which the diseas'd poor must of necessity linger out their existence in the more remote corners of these isles at a distance from medical aid—They, indeed, may look around for relief and find no one to comfort them. (Fothergill 1795–c.1875a, p. 33)

His own state of body and mind, he implies, is of interest only insofar as it enables him to add to the picture he is building of Orcadian isolation—and this denial of the significance of the merely personal is all the more striking because it appears in a letter addressed to his brother.

In contrast, the "melancholy fit[ ]" that Fothergill experiences on Foula does not seem to produce any comforting moral reflections; indeed, the working journal implies that his state of mind impedes rather than aids his ability to gather information. For example, while staying on the island of Yell with the eccentric landowner Robert Niven of Windhouse, who regaled him with accounts of "his personal conflicts with the prince of darkness & evil spirits", Fothergill noted that while in other circumstances, he "might have been well amused" by his host's behaviour, the "extreme gloom" of the house and surroundings produced such a "fit[ ] of melancholy" that he spent his evening at Windhouse in a state of "ennui not to say disgust" (Fothergill 1806, pp. 72–73). He was similarly depressed while at Westshore House on the island of Burray. "Can the heart leap in joy when the eye every where encounters scenes of desolation?" he asks rhetorically (Fothergill 1806, p. 120). Of course, it is hardly surprising that melancholia and illness (Fothergill also suffered from a bad cold during his time in Shetland) would shade his response to the places and people around him. The key point here is that the contrast with the Orkney journal, in which he implicitly asserts the opposite, indicates Fothergill's deliberate attempts to downplay the embodied experience of travel in his revisions for print.

It might be tempting to interpret this retreat from the experiential simply as an indication of a slightly old-fashioned approach to travel, one that assumes the traveller should "manag[e] the experience of the foreign" (Chard 1999, p. 28) rather than dramatising his engagement—or struggles—with it. The trouble with such an interpretation is that it conflicts with Fothergill's simultaneous attempts to create both a sense of immediacy, even as his experiences in the northern islands receded into the past, and a sense of intimate engagement with the reader through his emotive "letters" to Marianne. In doing so, he implicitly aligns himself with the emergent interest in the inner world of the traveller. Merging imaginative and informational approaches to travel was, of course, entirely possible; as Tom Furniss has shown, James Hutton structured the journals that he kept of his geological tours—journals that Hutton never intended to publish—according to the conventions of "imaginative" travel (Furniss 2014). The problem for Fothergill seemed to be that he was struggling to separate, rather than merge, these two strands of travel writing. Yet, even as he was convinced, as indicated by the advertisements and parts of his introductions, that the value of his travels lay in the information that he had gathered, he seems most strongly compelled by experiences, such as his days on Foula, that resisted any sort of easy classification into categories of useful knowledge. The clash between the kind of book that he wanted to publish and the actual experiences he had in Shetland left him with no clear direction forward as he sought to bring his travels into print.

To be fair to Fothergill, he was not the only traveller of his generation who had trouble finding a satisfactory way to represent the northern islands. The two books that would have been his most obvious competitors displeased their reviewers for more or less opposite reasons; if Headrick thought Barry's book too dryly scientific, Neill complained that Edmonston had skimped on matters of "importance" and had instead "unprofitably occupied" himself with non-scientific matters (Neill 1810, pp. 135–36). Even the Shetlanders themselves appeared not to be entirely sure of the best way to represent their islands. Robert Hunter of Lunna once planned to write his own rebuttal to Neill and got as far as approaching Thomas Mouat for information on matters such as the number of slated roofs and chimneys in Unst. Mouat obliged but seemed rather dubious about the direction his nephew was taking, commenting dryly that no doubt Hunter's "fertile genius" would

enable him to use those observations on chimneys to show Shetland in "the fairest light" (Mouat 1807). Indeed, there was only one writer of Fothergill's generation whose treatment of the northern islands, and Shetland in particular, managed to capture the public's fancy: Sir Walter Scott, whose *Pirate* (1822) depicted a sublime landscape and inhabitants whose ancient Scandinavian roots were still traceable in their culture and folklore. It might be significant that the latest datable intervention that Fothergill made in his manuscripts was a note on *The Pirate*, which he scrawled over his account of a legend about a Shetland stone circle (Fothergill 1806, p. 99).

Fothergill seems to have found in Scott an evocation of place compelling enough to lead him to revisit, in its light, his own records of his time in the islands more than a decade and a half earlier. This apparent rekindling of interest in what was, by then, a long-ago journey might also suggest his fundamental sympathy with Scott's romantically exoticising approach to unfamiliar lands and cultures. This was, of course, a taste that he shared with many of his contemporaries. As Nigel Leask (2020) has established, Scott helped to transform what travellers and their audiences looked for in tours of the Scottish Highlands, and it is tempting to read Fothergill's rather belated return to his Shetland travels as a hint that he saw in Scott's work an example of how to escape "the exhaustion of the Pennantian prose travelogue" (Leask 2020, p. 275). Granted, that might be a lot to derive from a single phrase, but it is worth noting that the informational writers on Shetland and Orkney that Fothergill cites in his draft introduction are introduced mainly to establish the inadequacy of their work (see the section above on Fothergill and his manuscripts). Scott is the only writer who appears to have inspired him to reconnect with or amplify his own work rather than to argue with theirs. Fothergill himself might have never found a satisfactory balance between pleasure and instruction in his own attempts at travel writing, but by giving what might, in effect, be the last word on his travels to Scott, he is perhaps signalling a belated awareness that attempting to outdo Pennant was not a productive way forward as a travel writer. Rather, his failed travelogue can be read as yet another testament (in addition to all those compiled by Leask) to the impact of Scott's aesthetically pleasurable versions of landscape and culture and to the establishment of new directions in travel writing in the opening decades of the nineteenth century.

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Notes

1 The idea the a traveller should provide information in a pleasurable manner is almost ubiqutous in early ninteenth-century reviews. In addition to the articles by Brougham and the anonymous reviewer cited in the previous paragraph one can see, for example, Anon (1803, 1807b), and Headrick (1806). In addition to Brougham and Headrick, other identiable (and influential) reviewers proclaiming the importance of pleasure in travel writing include Mary Wollstonecraft, who quotes approvingly the observation that travel writing should "open a new source of pleasure" to the reader (Wollstonecraft 1790, p. 161); and Francis Jeffrey, who argued, in the first number of *The Edinburgh Review* that even a book of travels containing little "important" information could be valuable if it "gives an agreeable expansion to our conceptions [. . .] and the imagination" (Jeffrey 1803, p. 141). For the growing popularity of the home tour, and particularly the Scottish tour, around the end of the eighteenth century, see (Glendening 1997; Hagglund 2010; Kinsley 2008; Leask 2020; Williams 2010).

2 All surviving information on Fothergill's time in Orkney and Shctland comes from the manuscript journal of his tour and of the drafts of his book now held in Lerwick and Toronto: (Fothergill 1795–c.1875a, 1795–c.1875b, 1806).

3 See Brougham's 1803 review of Joseph Acerbi—who ended up dividing his travels into two books, one for information and one for aesthetic pleasure—for one example of a traveller struggling with this balance. Jeffrey (1803) was also dubious about Alexander

Mackenzie's ability to merge the useful with the pleasurable, and as Edwards (2017) shows, some of Pennant's contemporaries had their doubts about the ability of Pennant himself to get this balance right.

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