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In: New West Indian Guide/ Nieuwe West-Indische Gids 61 (1987), no: 1/2, Leiden, 39-53

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THE SUGARED MUSE: OR THE CASE OF JAMES GRAINGER,
MD (1721-66)

When James Grainger conceived the literary project that was later published as *The sugar cane: a poem in four books* (1764),¹ he must have had problems not dissimilar to those the early English planters faced as they attempted to cultivate sugar cane on the New World plantations of the West Indies. To the European planter, both the plant and the soil that was to give it nurture were alien: much experiment and innovation were going on in eighteenth-century Continental agriculture, but could the methods that worked in Europe be adapted to the West Indies? Could the new knowledge and technologies be transferred and utilized to make sugar-producing a profitable enterprise? And then, there were the deep philosophical issues of migrating large human masses from distant continents – African slaves to provide the labour, English masters (owners, overseers, managers and the like) to administer and control. What new relationships, compromises, appeasements would have to be forged between master class and slaves? How would these two groups in turn define themselves with respect to the unfamiliar space of New World cosmology? How, too, would both define themselves with respect to the commodity they were to produce, and what exactions would that commodity make on their identities?

The nature of these questions suggests why the idea and the existence of slave economies in the eighteenth-century colonial West Indies engaged the discourse of minds across the spectrum of literature, politics, economics, agriculture, and sociology. Analogically, the adaptation of an ancient form like the georgic to a new subject like the sugar cane (with both poem and plant taking shape outside traditional georgic country) required the fluid historical sense of a robust poetic imagination to interpret and translate into coherent vision the discrete insights and speculations such a project

could yield. Remarkable as an example of the profits and perils of imitation, *The sugar cane*, described by its author as a 'West India Georgic', raises a set of parallel, if not always identical, questions that hold the key to understanding the deeper epistemological and hermeneutic resources of Grainger's project.

What happens when an author adapts an old form to a new subject? What transformations operate to assist or impede the creative process so engaged? Could the commonplace agricultural procedures of transplanting seedlings provide semiological references which might help Grainger to resolve the logistical dilemmas of migrating the Muse to foreign parts, and to acculturate his own poetic sentiments to a New World landscape? Could that landscape be faithfully rendered in a foreign idiom? In short, would the old rules be applicable to this new 'husbandry'? Just as the sugar-cane-as-crop was new to West Indian soil, so was the sugar-cane-as-subject new to English poetry. Could this plant and its chief by-products, sugar and rum, be made palatable to the tastes of a serious English audience of fellow writers, readers and critics (so devoted to the values of tradition and decorum), all constituting a literary establishment led by Samuel Johnson, who found the West Indian plantocracy contemptible and the institution of slavery which supported it abominable?²

As a Doctor of Medicine and man of letters living and practicing in the West Indian island of St. Christopher, Grainger would appear theoretically well placed to elaborate from his study of these questions a systematized critique of the West Indian locus, its contents and discontents. He displays extensive knowledge in his description of cane culture and sugar manufacture. His catalogues of the medicinal uses of WI flora and fauna do justice to his scientific training; his word-pictures of the St. Christopher landscape recommend his relative literary endowments. However, he misses the potentials, innate in his own chosen form, the georgic, for clarifying the peculiar definitions that relate him to his poem and the poem's subject to its historical time and place. He fails to extract the deeper historicist and hermeneutic essence implanted in his own 'Sugar Cane', a historicism and hermeneutics that are demonstrably feasible, given the work of more successful georgic poets in particular and didactic poets in general.

In the strictest utilitarian terms, he proposed *The sugar cane* as a georgic describing – for the primary benefit of sugar planters – the topographical and economic conditions specific to St. Christopher and broadly common in other West Indian islands. But choosing poetry as his medium and georgic as his genre, he was forced to address technical complications that he clearly did not anticipate.

For Grainger, the problem of finding a voice to sing the sugar cane and a Muse to inspire that voice was a fundamental and pervasive one. The distinguished precedence of Virgil had authorized poetic compositions on agricultural themes as far back as 37 BC. A number of Grainger's own contemporaries had likewise written georgics on subjects such as 'The Hop Garden' (Smart, 1752), 'Agriculture' (Dodsley, 1754) and 'The Fleece' (Dyer, 1757). These and other subjects were altogether familiar to English experience, if not always harmonious with their assumptions about the fitness of untried or commonplace subjects for classic forms of discourse. In the matter of the sugar cane, however, Grainger had no precedence. Classical authors like Pliny (the Elder, A.D. 23-70) and Galen had barely heard about cane sugar; the Greeks and Romans appeared not to have used it before the seventh century A.D. (Deerr, 1949 I: 66). Grainger himself betrays a personal sense of unease about sugar as a subject for a polite author by adverting to the progressive pejoration of the term and its derivatives since the mid-seventeenth century. In some of the earliest lines of Book I, he extols the sugar cane in high panegyric strains as 'supreme of plants', but within another 150 lines he apologizes for the use of the term 'saccharize'. Although the use of sugar as a sweetener increased with the popularization of tea and coffee in the seventeenth century,³ ironically, towards the end of that same century, authors were becoming increasingly squeamish about the use of the word 'sugar' in polite discourse; the verbs 'to sugar', and 'to sugar over', as well as the derivatives 'sugared' and 'sugary' came to be used with pejorative connotations.⁴

Time and use would eventually nullify these specific objections, but Grainger had to resolve an even more central rhetorical dilemma: the problem of inventing a persona that could at once satisfy the diverse needs of a heterogeneous audience of actual or prospective sugar planters, gentleman farmers with poetic tastes, and purely literary types interested in the broader philosophical issues of farming.⁵ The experience of Virgil was not entirely helpful here. Although the political structure of Virgil's Rome, like West Indian plantation society, was rigidly stratified between masters and slaves, in his *Georgics* Virgil does not write primarily as a member of the master class, nor, like Grainger, as an expatriate: in his relationship to the land, he (Virgil) could invoke and identify with a clearly defined past, he could appropriate myths and traditions that were indigenous to his particular time and place; the land and its gods he could truly claim for his own. The case of James Grainger was altogether different. His relationship to the island of St. Christopher was that of an immigrant (an 'arrivant' in Edward Kamau Brathwaite's elastic phrase), a physician who had had greater success in England living off literature than medicine,

and now an estate doctor who would have preferred to be a planter if he had had the financial means.

The sugar cane, then, conceived and composed during his search for better economic circumstances in the New World, seemed at least partly intended to establish for James Grainger the public distinction that had eluded him both in medicine and letters. He therefore makes his georgic a speculative venture, an excursion into mercantilist poetics. Just as agriculture (the culture of the earth) is perhaps the purest (because the earliest) form of speculative activity, embodying, as it characteristically does, all the features of risk, investment, challenge, industry and diligence, so husbandry in Grainger's georgic becomes an allegory for enterprise in poetic composition that borrows all the above signs not primarily to extend the domain of poetry, but to increase the poet's stock in his own eyes as well as in those of his audience who might be disposed to assess his personal moral value on the criterion of this work. In the poem's preface, Grainger writes (emphasis mine): *'Though I cannot indeed say I have satisfied my own ideas in this particular [i.e. 'enriching poetry with many new and picturesque images']:* Yet I must be permitted to recommend the precepts contained in this poem. They are the children of truth, not of genius; the result of experience, not the productions of fancy. Thus, *though I may not be able to please*, I shall stand some chance of instructing the reader, which, as it is the nobler end of all poetry, so *it should be the principal aim of every writer who wishes to be thought a good man.*' The declarations emphasized are only secondarily expressions of rhetorical modesty. They suggest primarily that if generalized aesthetics or abstract morality were his principal aim, he might not have chosen georgic after all. Alternatively, he could have restricted himself to the practical aspects of sugar cane cultivation and the pictorial features of the landscape. The statements also reflect Grainger's sense of inadequacy about the finished work's capability to deliver the best that georgic had yielded at the hands of more able practitioners. That sense forces him to adopt a compensating strategy, a double-edge praxis, one edge to serve his own egoism, the other to serve the conventional moral ends of poetry.

Grainger's chief challenge, then, was to search for the proper form — a version of georgic capable of comprehending and revealing his own moral value as author of that form, and of winning acceptance for his proposal of a sugar cane plantation economy as the root of a new civilization, a mirror through which could be reflected prophetic images of England's future. In another sense, the issues which confronted him were analogous to those that entered into the debate about the proper method of translating the classics in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁶ Writing on this

subject, James Kinsley observes that both Dryden and Pope aimed to make Virgil and Homer speak good English, as though they were good Englishmen living in Restoration and Augustan London. From the outset, Grainger behaves like a poet who, preparing for a voyage to an exotic destination, places a classified ad for a Muse to serve as travelling companion and inspiration. His ad, as it may be reconstructed from his poem, might read like this: 'Required: one Muse to assist a physician-poet in composing a West Indian georgic; experience in foreign travel (especially to tropical loci) is essential; knowledge of plantation societies, especially those worked by black slaves is required; applicant must be congenial to Africa as well as to her sons enslaved in the West Indies.' The success of our fanciful ad is tellingly reflected throughout the text of *The sugar cane*. The hired muse proves curiously reluctant, if not downright sullen and uncooperative. The tropical heat of the West Indian climate seems to throw her into sustained bouts of somnolence, necessitating Grainger's frequent invocations. And no wonder: she is called upon variously to sing mosquitoes, sandflies and cockroaches (I, 334); to celebrate the native soils of 'deep dark mould with clay or gravel mix'd' (I, 217), to inveigh against monkeys and rats that devastate ripened crops; and to celebrate tropical storms during the hurricane season. As the poem proceeds and its scope enlarges, Grainger's enthusiasm and ambitions for his project grow also, but his Muse becomes overwrought by the ever-widening demands of the job description: some scenes of plantation slavery (the crack of the whip and the bite of the lash [III, 140ff]) become too grisly for her. In a fit of frustration, Grainger accuses the muse of perversity. He must increase his workforce. By Book IV, he is back in the Want Ads calling for another Muse, this time one well-disposed to Africans and knowledgeable enough about the terrain of the African continent to guide his footsteps on a whimsical journey there, and to support his own ambivalent sympathies for enslaved African humanity:

O attend my song (Genius of Africa)
 A Muse that pities thy distressful state;
 Who sees with grief, thy sons in fetters bound;
 Who wishes freedom to the race of man;
 Thy nod assenting craves: dread Genius, come!
 (IV, 13-17)

But within the small space of one stanza, we find Grainger uneasy again. Diffident about the qualifications of a native African Muse, he invokes a back-up European Muse, apparently to assuage his deepening anxieties over the problematics of a georgic on the sugar cane.

Elsewhere in the poem, the roles of Muse and poet become reversed. The subject matter is so novel and the poet's resolution so distracted, that Grainger's Muse proves either incompetent or unwilling to inspire his ambitions. Grainger takes to instructing the Muse (as a master tradesman might instruct an apprentice), in matters like tropical climate and tropical husbandry, matters decidedly beyond the Muse's ken.

Grainger is largely exact in his depictions of West Indian natural scenery and vegetation, particularly in his copious footnotes on the use of indigenous plants as food, and as herbs in the practice of tropical medicine. At his hands, the sugarcane (and tropical vegetation in general) gains the most extensive legitimacy ever conferred on them by any of his contemporaries in English letters. Sugar itself is elevated beyond its common household uses to the level of an elixir that 'dilates the soul with genuine joy', rum is described as 'heart-recruiting', and rum punch outstrips the best burgundies and champagnes of France:

For not Marne's flowery banks, nor Tille's green bounds
Where Ceres with the God of vintage reigns
In happiest union; not Vigornian hills,
Pomona's loved abode, afford to man
Goblets more priz'd or laudable of taste,
To slake parch'd thirst, and mitigate the clime.
(III, 501-506)

Adding together his own private gustatory delights, the planters' and traders' commercial profit and the sugar cane's aesthetic effects on the eye and on the landscape, Grainger transforms the sugar cane into a plant of total and ultimate utility. He finds much in the landscape to delight the eye, like this hillside prospect of huts built of reeds and covered with lush vegetation:

With plantanes, with banana's bosom'd-deep
That flutter in the wind: where frolic goats
Butt the young Negroes, while their swarthy sires,
With ardent gladness wield the bill; . . .
(III, 532-35)

Other objects and sensations enlarge the soul:

Yet musical those little insects' hum,
That hover round us and to Reason's ear
Deep, moral truths convey; while every beam
Flings on them transient tints, which vary when
They wave their purple plumes; . . .
(III, 568-72)

Up until now, Grainger has endeavored to transform St. Christopher into a *locus amoenus* (it is salubrious, fertile, prosperous) wherein could be realized a quasi-paradise providing leisure and recreation (the ideal of the retired life) and the material benefits of careful husbandry and ordered economy (the ideal of the active life in New World terms). By the last third of Book III, however, the tensions between these two ideals erupt into an open lament over the insufficiencies of the island. Grainger admits that St. Christopher's insularity effectively exiles him from his central cultural references, from those, like Samuel Johnson, William Shenstone and Thomas Percy, who could provide the intellectual stimulation he needed to harmonize the two ideals and make the paradise complete:

O, were ye all here,
 O, were ye here; with him my Paeon's son!
 Long-known, of worth approv'd, thrice candid soul!
 How would your converse, where mild wisdom tempers mirth;
 And charity, the petulance of wit;
 How would your converse polish my rude lays,
 With what new noble images adorn?
 Thence should I scarce regret the banks of Thames,
 All as we sat beneath that sand-box shade; . . .

(III, 513-22)

In addition, this lament registers his sense of discontinuity from his native tradition of letters; it resonates with the metropolitan's dread of being cut off from growth and change.

The verse itself appears sometimes to be straining to deny the landscape and its contents their indigenous character and shape, constraining West Indian nature to behave like English nature. The previously quoted passage (III, 501-506) extols the sugar-cane-derived beverages of rum and rum punch above the best traditional wines of Old World, but these drinks enjoy that distinction only in reference against others more familiar to the European palate. Such tensions pervade Book III; they serve as objective emblems of those conflicting impulses at work in the poem and in Grainger's consciousness, impulses which Grainger calls his 'thwarting sentiments'. Further inspection of the verse reveals the recurrence of certain grammatical and rhetorical patterns that seem to result directly from Grainger's divided consciousness. In a major passage following those elegiac lines to absent friends, we find five examples of litotes concentrated in thirty-seven lines. Ironically, this passage contains some of *The sugar cane's* best prospect poetry, but Grainger undercuts his considerable representation of St. Christopher's panoramic beauty by a compulsive resort to understatement. The plantation great-houses are described as 'neat though not lofty';

humbler slave dwellings, though fleetingly ennobled with an echo from Milton's *Comus* (they 'front the rising Sun'), are rated as 'not delightful'.⁷ Remarking the absence of classic birds (nightingales and larks) whose song conventionally charms the sense of poets, he seeks compensations in the sound of a cool, silvery stream and of the waves crashing on the seashore, only to find these 'not unmusical' (III: 561, 566). The choice of such rhetoric bespeaks less than complete satisfaction with the natural and social order he so much wants to legitimize.

By this point in the work, those initial intentions that were signalled in the preface are being transformed. It becomes clear that the poet-Muse dissonance evidenced repeatedly in the first three books springs from Grainger's frustrated attempts to manipulate the Muse into complicity in a dialectical strategy of vision and revision. The eye must record what it sees in deference to objective reality, but the mind, torn between the familiarity and persistence of Old World images and the inventive potentiality of the New World milieu, compulsively revises the scenery by such devices as arranged marriages (between the myrtle, the love plant of Italy, and the citron, the Grainger-appointed loveplant of St. Christopher [I, 550]), or the intermittent obtrusions of his own 'spots of time' where, in the midst of extolling the white purity of a flowering privet fence, he must compare it to snowdrifts on the Grampian mountains and thereby awaken an immediate nostalgia for past times and distant places: 'O might the Muse tread, flush'd with health, the Grampian hills again!' (515-519). This process of comparison and/or marriage of New World nature with Old World nature may be taken to represent a first-phase revision of Grainger's original systemic principle of cultural hierarchies. By that principle, the definition of colonial value, even in the undisputable domain of indigenous nature, must remain the prerogative of the metropole.

But historical truth opposes itself to the principle's momentum. In a sudden concessionary turn of the text's rhetoric, Grainger acknowledges the flawed logic of a cultural superiority based on the presumption of older historical consciousness. He begins to revise (indeed to reverse) his original basis for value to give priority to West Indian nature. By Book III he allows that that very European presumption would place European nature rather near the point of exhaustion, as, from his viewpoint at mid-century, he perceived it to stand thoroughly 'methodiz'd', 'pursued' 'through all her coyest ways and 'secret mazes' (III, 625-6). By contrast, West Indian nature, because still a novel idea to the European mind, stands fresh and abundant ('with savage loneliness, she reigns'). To give further emphasis to his discovery, he counterpoints some of the highest artistic achievements of Jones, Wren and Palladio. Against the natural beauty and elegance

of St. Christopher, these artists' works appear as mere artifice. The visual excellence of the royal palm, combined with the particular sensory pleasure afforded by the taste and smell of pineapples, mammey apples and tamarinds (IV, 496-533), proposes a West Indian aesthetic which supplants the European aesthetic in the new order of Grainger's vision.

Even though the text seems to theorize the sufficiency of the natural environment to support civilization, Grainger rationalizes the visionary order by imposing on it a built environment and a human social and political economy where power devolves from the metropolitan center to a benevolent Creole elite, and the sinews are supplied by contented African slaves. What he proposes is a comprehensive physical and cultural development plan. Slave huts were to be built nearest to the coastline surrounded by coconut trees or bay grape, or on landscaped upland slopes. For the recreation and enjoyment of the slaves, he recommends the staging of song and dance festivals on holidays, but with an unambiguous interdiction against the use of African drums, fearing no doubt their subversive communicative power.

His program goes further to include elements of social engineering. Slaves were to be dissuaded either by 'threats' or 'soothing arts' from extra-plantation romance; intra-plantation courtship and marriage would, he thought, conserve for economically profitable work the energies slaves would otherwise expend in walking long distances to tryst with mates. However compelling might be the vision of the West Indies providing the paradigm for a new order of civilization, it is evident that Grainger cannot accept the apocalyptic image of Europe in the throes of cultural decline; Grainger's next act appears to extend the pattern of revision but the revision is not as radical as he would wish his several audiences and himself to believe. The act recalls to the West Indies those absentee plantation owners and their wayward sons still beckoned by the myth of the Grand Tour and other rituals promising status and personal fulfilment. It promises that their creative energies could be more constructively employed as legislators, civil servants, soldiers, aesthetes – and even gourmets – in the pioneering work of evolving a new civilization, rather than frustrated in the pursuit of moribund dreams:

Say, is pre-eminence your partial aim?—
 Distinction courts you here; the senate calls.
 Here crouching slaves, attendant wait your nod:
 While there, unnoted, but for folly's garb,
 For Folly's jargon; your dull hours ye pass,
 Eclips'd by titles, and superior wealth.

(III, 580-85)

On the conscious level, Grainger purports to revise the existing metro-centric political arrangements by empowering a new Creole elite. What he achieves in fact is the displacement of the authentic resident Creole caretakers by a new class of Creole-born but European-acculturated men. The conflict illustrated in that process reflects a luminous irony: Grainger's divided consciousness provides the generative facility that allows the very Europe he wants the Creoles to reject to propel its presence into the new order.

The paradigm for the perfect example of Europeanized-Creole manhood was prefigured in Book II, in the mythicized romantic vignette of the two star-crossed lovers Junio and Theana. Grainger depicts Junio as a paragon of Creole gentility, proof positive that a slavocracy was capable of fostering virtue and steadfastness. Though he spent his young manhood studying and travelling in England and Europe, no beauty from those lands could supplant Theana in Junio's affections ('Nor long had absence yet effac'd her form; Her charms still triumph'd o'er Britannia's fair' [II, 443-44]). His childhood had been shaped by the tropical ethos of St. Christopher. His boyish rituals of courting Theana with gifts of coconuts and sapodillas show that his ideas of romantic duty were formed by local idioms and objects. Through them Grainger invents quite early in his poem a kind of tropical romance iconography that foreshadows the full cultural program of the later books.

If Junio exemplifies Creole virtue complemented by the intellectual experiences of Europe, Montano (Book I) represents English gentlemanhood tested and tried by adversity. He embodies and achieves everything Grainger wished he could be himself. Driven to exile in St. Christopher, Montano brings diligence and determined industry to exploiting and managing the resources of his New World estate; his munificence with his worldly goods wins him the respect of his neighbors; his paternal compassion earns him the love and obedience of his slaves (they are 'sturdy', 'Well-fed, well-cloth'd, all emulous to gain/Their master's smile, who treated them like men' [I, 609-611]). For the care he exercised in ordering the physical landscape around his property, Grainger adjudged him a 'friend to the woodland reign' (he planted tamarind groves, hedgerow-trees and cool cedars to shade the public way and provide protection from the sun's burning rays for slave and stranger alike). The presence of such an exemplar of liberal social ideals and thoroughgoing public-spiritedness provided Grainger with the paradigm of Creole yeomanry. In the microcosm of Montano and his estate we see the vindication of the West Indian slavocracy, the revisioning of St. Christopher into Grainger's ideal of a New World paradise: Montano is the perfect exemplification of the eighteenth-century

ideal of the active and the retired life; St. Christopher the perfect harmony of the busy plantation (prosperous and profitable) and the sylvan retreat (leisure-promoting and recreative).

Junio and Theana die heroically in each other's arms, the victims of family discord: 'One grave contains this hapless, faithful pair;/And still the cane-isles tell their matchless love' (II, 552-53). Montano dies peacefully from natural causes, delivering a charge to his son to carry on his liberal, philanthropy: 'His knell was rung. . . /And all the cane-lands wept their father lost' (I, 645-46).

Revision, then, functions in two major ways: First, it allows the audience whose absence Grainger regrets to see in verbal images what they cannot see in physical actuality. And secondly, it paints those images as he wishes they would want to see them, which is, as he wishes the images could exist. Yet, for all the idealism the Junio-Theana-Montano mythos suggests, Grainger's personal material aspirations and cultural impedimenta shackle his vision and so dilute the full potential of the poem.

A passage near the end of Book III illustrates this endemic divided purpose that consistently undermines the poem's moral vigor and betrays the poet's materialist proclivities as corrosive forces that impoverish the yield of an investment as bold as a West Indian georgic. In this direct address Grainger holds out the sulphur-laden, ore-rich caves of the St. Christopher mountainsides as inducements for absentee Creoles to exercise their minds in the pursuit of philosophy:

Leave Europe; there through all her coyest ways,
Her secret mazes, Nature is pursued:
But here with savage loneliness, she reigns. . .
Heavens! what stupendous, what unnumber'd trees,
Stage above stage, in various number drest, . . .
Heavens! What new shrubs, what herbs with useless bloom
Adorn its channel'd sides; and, in its caves
What sulphurs, ores, what earths and stones abound!
There let Philosophy conduct thy steps,
For nought is useless made: 'with candid search
Examine all the properties of things;
Immense discoveries soon shall crown your toil,
Your time will soon repay. . .'

(III, 625 passim)

But the idea of offering such lucrative economic resources to a class of economic men in a mercantilist age as objects for philosophic reflection further aggravates Grainger's already fractured resolution, demystifying the announced high-seriousness of his project to a series of comic am-

biguities. This passage barely intimates some of the poem's deeper hermeneutic possibilities, but Grainger glimpses them only imperfectly. His vision is ephemeral, evanescent, flawed by the poet's perverse disposition to dissociate himself from the inherent logic of his work. In the succeeding lines of that passage, Grainger undermines his own moral authority by pleading that he cannot himself participate in that quest or intuit further its potential discoveries because of 'the cares of fortune'. This utterance signals a decisive shift in the direction of the poem that redefines its overall relationship to traditional georgic. The original terms of discourse are so altered that the cleavage between Grainger and his Muse and Grainger and his primary intentions is widened even further. The whole poem now becomes an object lesson in the uses of adversity.

At this juncture, another inversion of roles occurs. This time, poem displaces poet, as poem writes itself, directing Grainger to transmute the perils of imitation and the dilemmas of migrating the Muse into a whole new treatise on the interpretation of signs. Situated in a region where the succession of the seasons is not as clearly demarcated as in Northern latitudes, St. Christopher challenged Grainger's *a priori* assumptions with new signs for rain, new signs for planting (the moon here is no guide for planting the sugar-cane [I, 416, 475], new prophetic signs for Britain to revise its colonial philosophy and practice. This inchoate semiology prefigures new roles for both poet and Muse.

By Book IV, the idea of the possibility of a West Indian georgic about the sugar cane has fully set in train a process that subverts certain key eighteenth-century criteria for poetic methodology and widely accepted assumptions about the value of the received past in understanding unfamiliar phenomena. In a statement describing this methodology and these assumptions, Geoffrey Tillotson writes that the classical poetic mind invests the widest possible range of external phenomena with 'the tincture of [its] past experiences'; because that mind, unlike the nineteenth-century romantic's is not interested in the freshness of original response but in response at a much later stage: 'when the new has been welcomed by the old, when it has been accommodated to existing harmony' (Tillotson, 1959: 218).

The subliminal content of this georgic on sugar itself and the emergent idea of a sugar colony civilization upsets that whole classical scheme, effectively supplanting the textual and political regime Grainger was designing for this work. It provides instead a basis for hypothesizing far more creative engagements between empowered master class and powerless slaves. Grainger responds by theorizing about a system of order in which the metropole would surrender to the colonies its prerogatives of wielding power and dictating formal order. But, as he discovers, the New World

was only a construct of the European imagination; the essence or interiority of the place so designated resisted any harmonic integration with the designs of Old World hegemony.

The project ensures from the metropolitan audience respectability for the West Indian landscape and Creole civilization. But in abandoning the vision of revolutionary history forged by the poem's autonomic energy, Grainger fails to extract the deepest hermeneutic essence implanted in his own *The sugar cane*. This retreat from the poem's emergent power dilutes the author's achievement; the net result is a repudiation of georgic itself, a misappropriation of the form that finally asks of the work only that it serve the conventional moral ends of poetry, and of the reader only that he think the author a good man.

NOTES

1. All textual references to *The sugar cane* (including quotations) are to the first edition (1764). Although writers on eighteenth-century didactic poetry in general and English georgic in particular typically recognize Grainger and his poem, the two are still not very widely known and still less extensively critiqued. The most recent (and, thus far, considerable) discussion may be found in John Chalker 1969: (55- 64). After medical training and military service, Grainger set up an unsuccessful physician's practice in London where, in course of time, he made the acquaintance of such leading literary figures as Johnson, Goldsmith, Dodsley, Smollett and Percy. His other major works include verse translations of latin authors (Ovid's *Hero and Leander* [1758] and the poems of Tibullus and Sulpicia [1759] and *Bryan and Pareene* (1764), a ballad about West Indian life. Between May 1756 and May 1758, he made regular contributions to the *Monthly Review* on drama, poetry and medicine. Some further poems of his appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1758). In the Spring of 1759 he accompanied John Borryau, a young plantation heir, to St. Christopher where he met his wife-to-be and spent the next seven years living on the combined income from his practice as a doctor to estate families and slaves and from his own interests in slave-trading.

2. Johnson held Grainger in high personal esteem and greatly admired his latin verse translations. He had strong reservations, however, about *The sugar cane*. As a subject for serious discourse he thought the plant 'unpoetical', and reportedly derided Grainger's introduction of rats into the poem. Still, in an apparent attempt to win favorable reception for the work and to forestall hostile attacks from critics like Smollett (who had splenetically censured Grainger's translations of Tibullus and Sulpicia in the *Critical Review* of December 1758), Johnson co-authored with Thomas Percy a largely affirmative review of *The sugar cane* in *The London Chronicle* (July 1764). Motives of sympathy and personal affection aside, Johnson could not excuse Grainger for failing to repudiate the West Indian slavocracy in his poem. And so, consonant with Johnson's principled stand against slavery, he denounced that part of *The sugar cane* which revealed Grainger's complicity in a system that made a commerce of 'fellow-creatures'. For Grainger's relations with Johnson and Percy, see respectively James Boswell (1934) and Nichols (1848).

3. In early modern Europe sugar was used chiefly among the privileged classes as a sweetener in medicines and confectionery, as a preservative for fruits and as a flavoring for meats. Growing consumption of tea and coffee in the eighteenth century increased the demand for sugar. As the price fell, sugar consumption in this latter form spread rapidly among the lower classes. Valuable socio-historical information on this phenomenon may be found in Drummond, J-C, A. Wilbraham & D. Hollingsworth (1957), and in a more specialized anthropological article by Sidney Mintz (1978).
4. The following 17th and 18th century usages, documented in OED, illustrate the problem: 'sugared': 'having an attractive outward appearance' (closely synonymous with current usage of 'sugar-coated') and 'sugary': 'deliciously or alluringly sweet, honeyed, deceitfully or flatteringly pleasant, excessively or offensively sweet'.
5. This difficulty of narrowly specializing the audience for an eighteenth-century georgic was not peculiar to Grainger. For a discussion of the diversity, the mind and interests of the period's georgic audience, see Geoffrey Tillotson (1959).
6. Kinsley 1961: viii.
7. This is an enigmatic phrase which I can only construe, in harmony with the dominant contextual tone of the passage, to mean 'not giving *full* delight or *great* pleasure, but not entirely lacking in those essential qualities' (quotes and emphasis mine). OED documents an obsolescent usage of 'delightful' which yields the opposite positive meaning from which I extrapolate here.

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