5 The culture of curiosity

The study and collection of natural objects in the seventeenth century was undertaken as part of a broad interest in rarities and wonders of all sorts, natural and artificial. Natural histories such as Robert Plot's *Natural History of Oxfordshire* (London, 1677) included treatments of many not strictly natural phenomena such as the houses of the local gentry and the antiquarian remains of the area. Similarly, antiquarian histories such as Thomas Fuller's *History of the Worthies of England* (London, 1662) included such natural subjects as natural wonders and medicinal herbs. Both natural and artificial rarities, or 'curiosities' as they were called, filled the collections that were eagerly formed by gentlemen and scholars who described themselves as 'curiosi' or 'virtuosi'. My discussion of these curiosi will concentrate on England where the culture of curiosity was particularly pronounced.

Curiosi were aristocrats, gentlemen and aspiring gentlemen, dispersed through the counties of England in their homes in the summer, but converging on London in the winter where they attended meetings of the Royal Society. Predominantly landowners, they also included clergymen, lawyers, university men, physicians, wealthy merchants, and apothecaries. Curiosity was considered an important attribute for an accomplished gentleman to possess. It was an attitude of mind involving a fascination and admiration for the rare, novel, surprising, and outstanding in all spheres of life. Young gentlemen were trained in curiosity by making the grand tour on the Continent. Often accompanied by a tutor, they followed standard routes to view the many curiosities described in their guidebooks. They returned to England as fully-fledged curiosi, bringing back rarities of nature and art which formed the basis of their collections of curiosities. They settled into the life-style characteristic of curiosi, travelling to seek out and view rarities, displaying rarities in their houses, gardens, and estates, and visiting each other to view and discuss these rarities.[1] These curiosi formed an educated culture whose outlook on the world must be understood if we are to appreciate how natural objects were studied in the period.

Curiosity and wonder

Curiosity in the seventeenth century played the same role as would the sublime in the eighteenth century: it was the standard of appreciation of nature and art.[2] Appreciation of the sublime was to involve astonishment, awe, and terror, felt in the face of vastness, power, and grandeur. Curiosity, on the other hand, involved wonder and admiration at whatever was rare or outstanding, whether in size, shape, skill of workmanship, or in any other respect. Such rarities formed the curiosities whose unusual and outstanding qualities curiosi admired and wondered at.

Thus rare exotic animals and birds were curiosities which produced wonder: the first rhinoceros to be brought to England was regarded as 'a very wonderfull creature' for its unusual appearance, size, and strength. A curious waterfowl produced wonder by its remarkable eating habits: 'It would eat as much fish as its whole body weighed, I never saw so unsatiable a devourer, I admir'd how it could swallo[w] so much & swell no bigger: I believe it to be the most voracious creature in nature, it was not biger [*sic*] than a More hen'.[3]

Natural curiosities also produced wonder by their beauty and the apparent art of their contrivance. Butterflies in particular were wonderful for their 'curiously variegated Wings, admirably beautiful for their Colours or Texture' and shells were admired as 'engraved and painted with various Colours and Figures', 'curiously striated, with transverse Lines', or 'very curiously variegated, with triangular Figures white upon black'. The similarity of nature to art could become so wonderful as to produce incredulity, as happened in the case of the Chinese chair, one of the greatest curiosities of the Royal Society's museum. Supposedly made from the natural growth of a root, it led one viewer to conclude that 'I cannot possibly believe that art did not come to assist, so elegantly is it carved'.[4]

Natural features of the countryside were also curiosities to be appreciated with wonder. The hills of Derbyshire were appreciated as the 'most prodigious high mountains as ever my eye beheld', and one of the caves there was 'esteemed one of the wonders of England' because of 'the vast largeness of it' which made it a true rarity. At Knaresborough in Yorkshire, a petrifying spring, another rare natural feature, was a curiosity considered 'admirable'.[5]

Experiments and mechanical inventions were also seen as wonderful curiosities. Thus the virtuoso Robert Boyle (1627–91) reported experiments which inspired wonder in his 'Tracts of A Discovery of the Admirable Rarefaction of the Air' and 'The

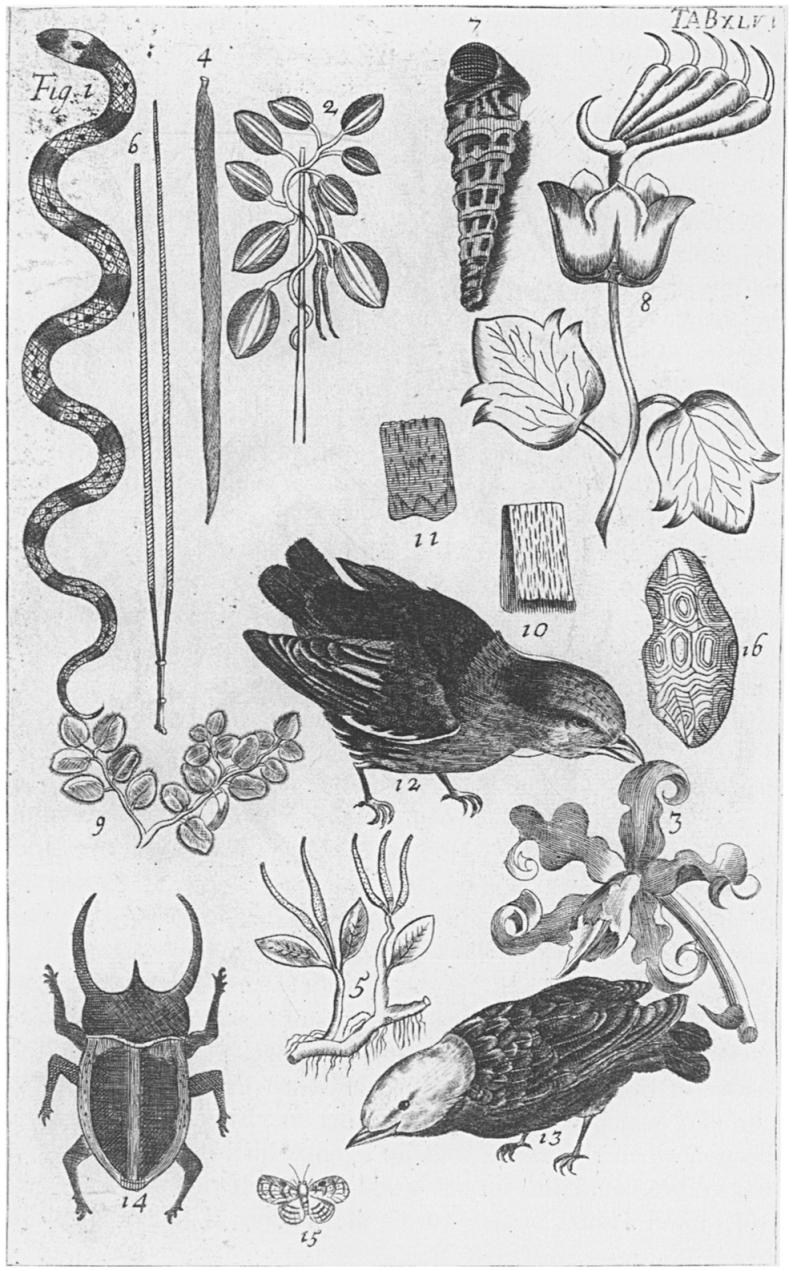

Figure 5.1 A selection of natural curiosities. From James Petiver, *Gazophylacium naturae et artis* (London, 1702–6).

admirably Differing Extension of the same Quantity of Air rarified and compressed'. Visitors to the Royal Society wondered at the experiments which they saw there: the Duchess of Newcastle (1624?–74), writer of poems, plays, and works on natural philosophy, was 'full of admiration' when she visited the Society and was shown some 'fine experiments . . . of Colours, Loadstones,

Microscope, and of liquors: among others, of one that did while she was there turn a piece of roast mutton into pure blood – which was very rare'.[6]

Unusual human beings were also appreciated as wonderful curiosities. A 'native Irishman, Edmund Mallory . . . two yards and a half tall' was considered 'a wonderful sight', and the Cumbrian clergyman, botanist, and antiquarian William Nicolson (1655–1727) admired the 'wondrous feats performed by one John Valerius, a German, born without Arms' whose curious drawings were displayed at the Blue Boar in London.[7]

Houses and their gardens could be rare curiosities and so inspire wonder. The virtuoso John Evelyn (1620–1706), visiting the house of Lord Sunderland, found that 'above all are admirable & magnificent the severall ample Gardens furnish'd with the Choicest fruite in England, & exquisitely kept: Great plenty of Oranges, and other Curiosities: The Parke full of Fowle & especialy Hernes [herons]'. Similarly, the Yorkshire antiquarian and collector Ralph Thoresby (1658–1725) admired 'the greatest house in England, viz. Audley-end, a vast building, or rather town walled in; it is adorned with so many cupolas and turrets above, walks and trees below, as render it a most admirably pleasant seat'.[8]

Even ordinary objects could become noteworthy curiosities if they were associated with strange and wonderful stories. An apparently unremarkable fly in Ralph Thoresby's collection was in fact a rare curiosity because of its wonderful history: it was 'sent me by the Reverend Mr. Hall of Fishlake, An. 1699 with this remarkable Account, That in May the same Year, at Kerton in Lincolnshire, the Sky seem'd to darken North-Westward . . . as though it had been with a Shower of Hailstones or Snow; but when it came near the Town it appeared to be a prodigious Swarm of these Flies, which went with such a Force towards the South-East, that Persons were forced to turn their Backs of them, to the Wonder of those that were abroad and saw them'.[9] The fly was a curiosity which would inspire wonder in visitors to Thoresby's collection when they were told its strange history.

Curiosities could also inspire wonder by their richness and cost. In the Jewel House of the Tower of London, William Nicolson

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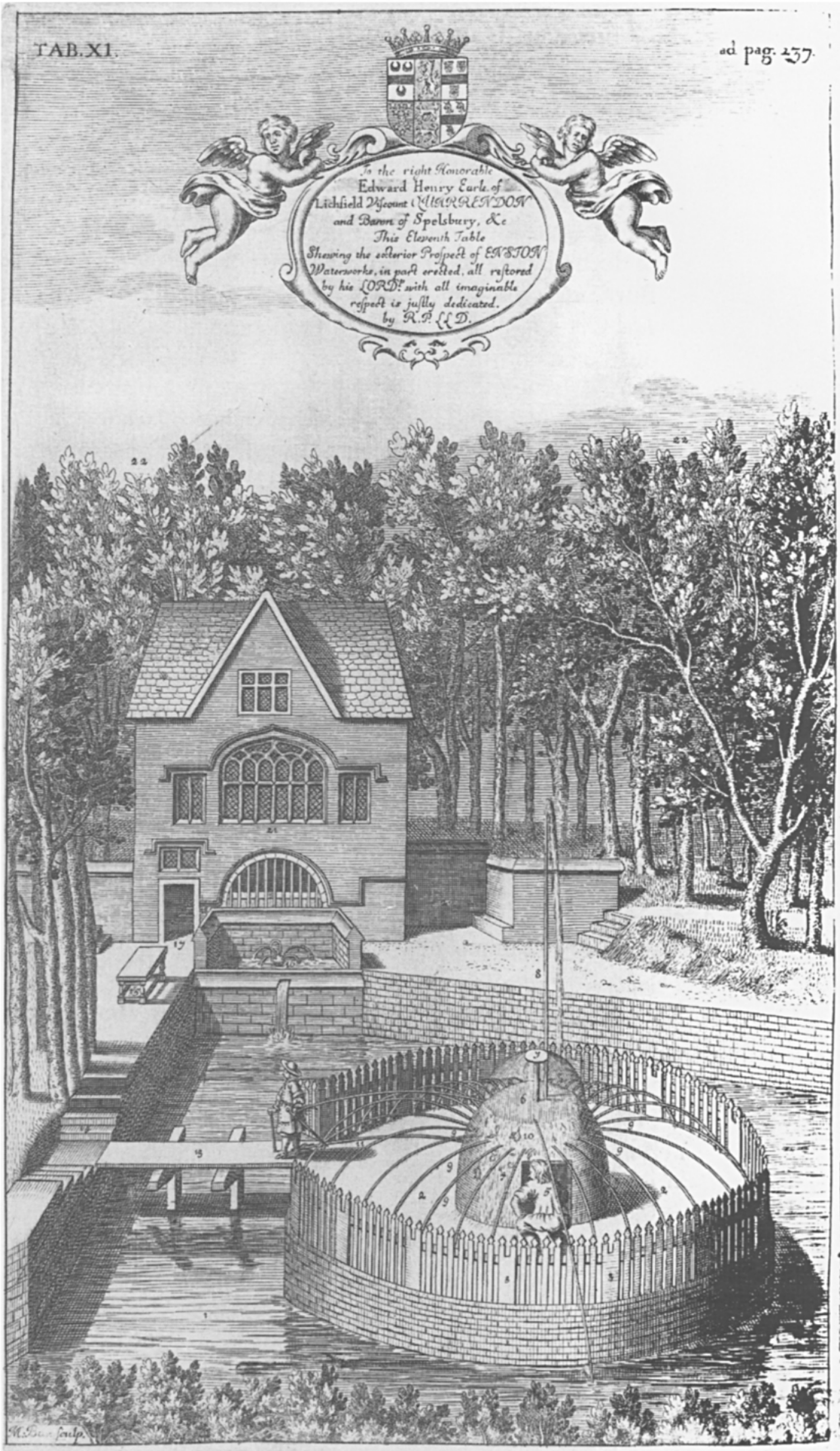
Figure 5.2 An admirable artificial curiosity: Enston Waterworks formed by Thomas Bushell Esq. from 'a Rock so wonderfully contrived by *Nature* her self, that he thought it worthy of all imaginable advancement by *Art*'. A house with a banqueting room looks out over the 'Ingenious Contrivances' of the waterworks, including a vertical 'Column of water rising about 14 foot, designed to toss a Ball', streams of water which 'sportively wet' any person on the island, and two spouts designed to wet the back and legs of the curioso as he retreated over the bridge. From Robert Plot, *Natural History of Oxfordshire* (Oxford, 1677).


TAB. XI.
ad pag. 237.
To the right Honorable
Edward Henry Earle of
Lichfield Viscount QUARRENDON
and Baron of Spelsbury, &c
This Eleventh Table
Shewing the exterior Prospect of ENSTON
Waterworks, in part erected, all restored
by his LORDP. with all imaginable
respect is justly dedicated.
by R.P. LLD.

admired 'The Rich Crown of State . . . in which there's a large Emerald (green) of 7 Inches round; the finest Pearl in the world, pawned by King Charles II to the Dutch for 40000£ and a Rubie (given by the Jewes of London to the late King James, when he was Duke of York) of an inestimable value'.[10]

The wonder felt by curiosi was quite unlike the awe and amazement with which the sublime was later to be appreciated. The sublime inspired the strongest emotions which the mind was capable of feeling. In this delightful state of astonishment, as Edmund Burke described in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London, 1757), the mind is overcome and made incapable of reasoning.[11] The state of wonder caused by curiosities in the seventeenth century was completely different from this: curious wonder was reasoned and articulate. Curiosi understood what they found wonderful and expressed this in their writing and conversation. Exact descriptions of curiosities were recorded which stated precisely what about them was considered wonderful. Thus when John Evelyn viewed a rhinoceros he noted in detail all its outstanding and wonderful features, forming a reasoned and articulate expression of wonder:

> It more ressembled [*sic*] a huge enormous Swine, than any other Beast amongst us; That which was most particular and extraordinary, was the placing of her small Eyes in the very center of her cheekes and head, her Eares in her neck . . . her Leggs neere as big about as an ordinarie mans wa[i]st . . . but what was most wonderfull, was the extraordinary bulke and Circumference of her body, which though very Young . . . could not be lesse than 20 foote in compasse: she had a set of most dreadfull teath, which were extraordinarily broad, and deepe in her Throate . . . but in my opinion nothing was so extravagant as the Skin of the beast, which hung downe on her ha[u]nches . . . loose like so much Coach leather . . . and these lappets of stiff skin, began to be studdied with impenetrable Scales, like a Target of coate of maile, loricated like Armor . . . T'was certainly a very wonderfull creature, of immense strength in the neck, and nose especially.[12]

As part of this articulate expression of wonder, curiosities were compared so as to reveal what was really outstanding and rare. The German traveller Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach, who visited England in 1710, described Hans Sloane's collection of corals as 'especially charming' since the corals 'were not only of unusual size but also quality', but he criticized the 'great cornua Hammonis' in John Woodward's collection since 'their size did not equal those we saw in Limburg at Herr Reimer's'. The clergyman John Covel (1638–1722), in his northern travels, was 'particularly pleased with Gingling-Cove and Reeking-Cove, near Ingleton, which (he saies) outdoe Oakey-Hole in Somersetshire and all the wonders of the Peak'. At Kensington Palace William Nicolson 'spent two

Hours in walking about the fine Garden, Wilderness and Green-House' and viewed the 'Queen's Dressing-Room hung with Neddle-work, in Satin . . . And the great Gallery stored with excellent Pictures' concluding with a comparison, that the 'whole [was] much Superiour to the Palace at St. James's'.[13]

In addition to detailed description and comparison, curious wonder also essentially involved the attempt to understand its object. Wonder occurred in the face of a phenomenon which was not understood and led the curioso to speculate and philosophize on the causes of curiosities. Thus when Ralph Thoresby went to see some wonderful corn which had been 'rained down the chimney upon the Lord's-day seven-night', he was led to consider 'What it may signify, and whether it doth proceed from natural causes . . . or preternatural'. Similarly, when the antiquary and collector Lord Coleraine (1636–1708) described the remarkable burning of a haystack at Bath to the curious collector William Courten (1642–1702), his admiration at the monstrous occurrence led him to philosophize on its cause:

> a Great Hay stack att the Bath . . . takeing fire of ittself about August last indangerd the whole Towne, allarmd the inhabitants, occasiond much discourse & admiration att the flying out of itt in great peices [*sic*] of this (then inflamed matter) with a Crackling Noyse, & desperat[e]ly scalding while itt burnt. Noe doubt butt y^{e} Tendrest herbs & y^{e} dews w^{ch} fall upon y^{m} too are much impregnated with the sulphureous Attomes ariseing from y^{e} Springs Thereabouts, so y^{t} 'tis no wonder y^{t} ys Grass at y^{e} Bath being layd up not th[o]roughly dry should from the abundance of those minerall exhalations (both in & about itt) take a more y^{n} ordinary heate w^{ch} did att once bake itt hard & light itt, as a Cake of Seacole is accended & concocted.[14]

This reasoned articulate wonder which sought understanding was contrasted by curiosi with speechless astonishment in which the mind was baffled and brought to a stand, unable to exercise its judgement. True wonder was felt by the Christian curioso who observed 'the true Works and wonderful Contrivances of the Supreme Author'. Unreasoning astonishment in which causes were not understood was seen as the fate of the non-Christian whose superstition led him 'to think all strange things Supernaturall' and not to distinguish the wonders of nature from genuine miracles: 'To behold a Rainbow at night' was a curiosity to be wondered at, but was 'no prodigie unto a Philosopher'. Wonder was a religious activity: whereas vain amazement led to superstition, just admiration of God's works was a religious duty, and the viewing of natural curiosities led to admiration of the wisdom and power of God. Thus Ralph Thoresby, wondering at the sights which he saw in the Peak District, was led to admire God's power: 'God, who is truly Θαυματουργος, the only worker

of wonders, has more manifested his might in this than in any other county in England, such the heaps of wonders therein'. Curious natural philosophy dealt with the true wonders of God's works and was 'Next to Gods Word . . . the most Soveraign Antidote to expell the poison of Superstition; and . . . the most approved food to nourish faith'.[14]

The need to experience Christian wonder and avoid vain superstition led curiosi to have a serious concern with the accuracy of reports of curiosities: only reports which were ascertained to be true could produce Christian wonder at the real works of the Creator. Accounts of curiosities thus had to conform to stringent standards of accuracy. They had to be 'particular', describing all the details of the phenomenon minutely and circumstantially. They had to show care and diligence which ensured their reliability.[16] This accurate reporting of wonders formed a new style of natural history, characteristic of the period.

Curious natural histories

Natural histories were written within this culture of wondering curiosity. They described curiosities, treating novelties, rarities, and wonders, and ignoring the common and ordinary. This bias can be clearly seen in the *Natural History of Oxfordshire* written by Robert Plot (1640–96), a commoner of University College, Oxford, who was to become the first custodian of the Ashmolean Museum and professor of chemistry at Oxford in 1683. Plot's treatment of plants and animals was not a complete catalogue including the common, but described only 'such, as either have not been noted before, are very unusual, or have somthing [*sic*] extraordinary attending them' (p. 175). The other chapters of his natural history similarly concentrated on rare and wonderful phenomena.

Natural histories of a particular geographical region were a popular genre in the period, and many curiosi wrote local natural histories modelled on Robert Plot's *Natural History of Oxfordshire*. Plot himself wrote *The Natural History of Stafford-shire* (Oxford, 1686). The Wiltshire gentleman and antiquarian John Aubrey (1626–97) wrote *The Natural History of Wiltshire* (written between 1656 and 1691; published London, 1847, ed. J. Britton) and, having been empowered to survey Surrey by a licence from the royal cosmographer John Ogilby, performed a perambulation of that county in 1673 which resulted in *The Natural History and Antiquities of the County of Surrey* (published posthumously in London, 1718–19). The Lancastrian physician Charles Leigh (1662–1701?) wrote *The Natural History of Lancashire, Cheshire, and the Peak, in Derbyshire* (Oxford, 1700), and *The Natural*

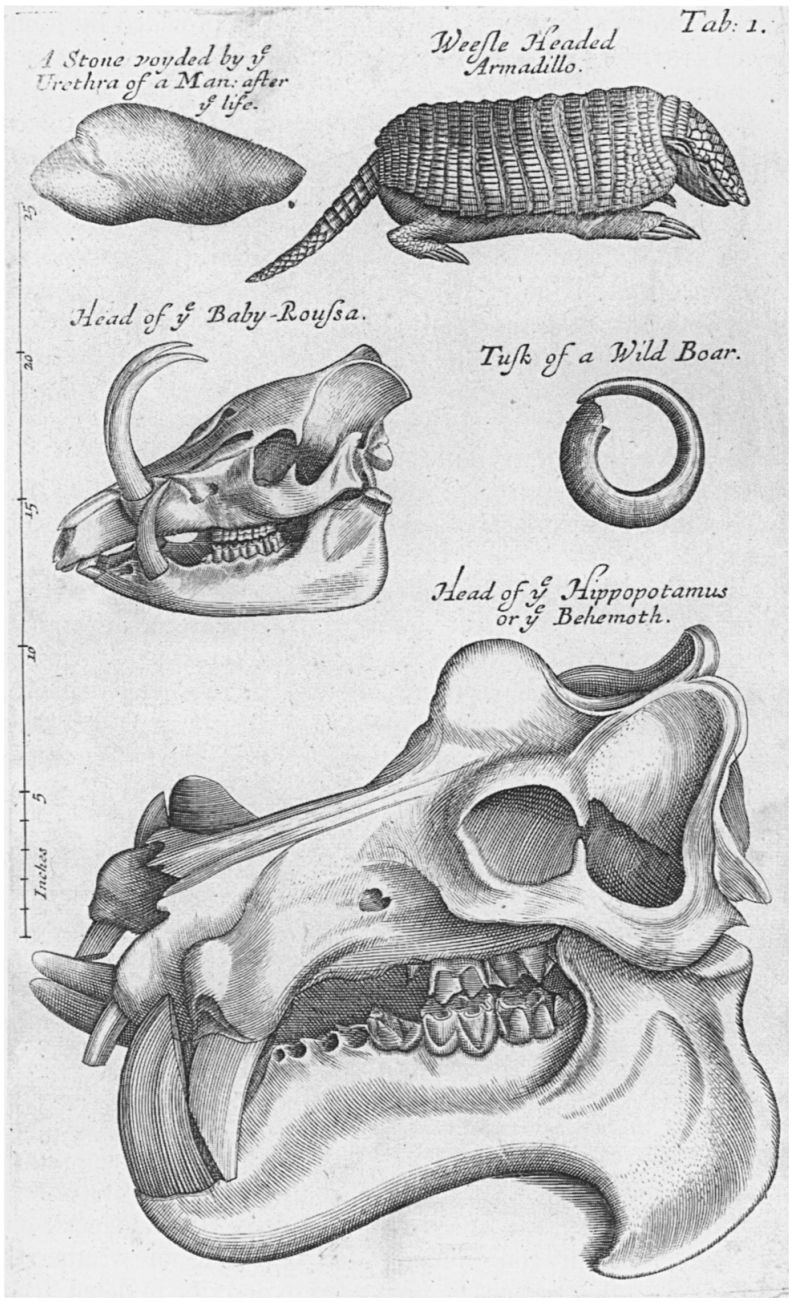


Figure 5.3 An illustration in the curious accurate style showing specimens in great detail. The provision of a scale increases the impression of accuracy and also enables the viewer to wonder at the contrast in size between the hippopotamus and the armadillo. From Nehemiah Grew, *Musæum Regalis Societatis* (London, 1681).

History of Northamptonshire (London, 1712) was provided by John Morton (1671?–1726), a Northamptonshire clergyman, naturalist, and antiquarian.

All of these local natural histories concentrated, in true curious style, on rarities and wonders, taking curiosities of all sorts as their subject matter without strict specialization in natural phenomena. They treated all the topics of interest to curiosi: mineral waters; formed stones; plants; animals; notable experiments; mechanical inventions; unusual methods used in agriculture, mining, and manufacture; the houses, gardens, and estates of the gentry and nobility; and antiquities. The rare and fine of all of these subjects formed the interest of curiosi and the subject matter of natural histories.

In describing wonderful curiosities, natural histories adopted the new style of accurate reporting which demonstrated the truth of the wonders which they described and thus fitted them to be objects of the true Christian wonder of the curioso. The natural histories of Plot and others were full of matter-of-fact reports of detailed observations which involved great circumstantial detail demonstrating their accuracy. Measurements were frequently reported, providing further proof of accurate reporting, and illustrations were made as realistic as possible. This concern for detailed accurate description distinguished curious natural historians from their sixteenth-century predecessors whose works had not conformed to these standards of description and who were now criticized as insufficiently careful, or 'curious', in their observation.[17]

Natural histories were written in the 'miscellaneous' or 'essay' style as a further device to cause wonder in the reader. This style avoided pedantry and was seen as particularly suitable for the expression of the wit of a gentleman.[18] It was characterized by variety and contrast: very varied topics were treated without any systematic organization and these different discussions were closely juxtaposed so as to produce striking contrasts. Thus, for instance, Robert Plot in his *Natural History of Oxfordshire* turned from the dramatic death of a scholar of Wadham College struck by lightning to support John Beale's suggestion that the weather be recorded every day so as to learn 'how far the positions of the Planets, or other symptoms or concomitants, are indicative of weathers'. Changing the subject again, he proceeded to describe in detail 'tryals' made on echoes to see whether they differed by night and day, or with a pistol or the human voice. He emphasized the contrast between these different subjects by introducing this last discussion with 'Next the Tragedies . . . it will not be amiss to present the Reader with some of the sports of Nature, and entertain him awhile with the Nymph Echo' (pp. 5–7). All these different

discussions were contained in just two pages which served to emphasize the contrast between them.

In adopting the miscellaneous style of writing, involving variety and contrast, writers of natural histories encouraged wonder in their readers. Variety and contrast were the principal techniques used by poets and painters in the period to cause delight and wonder, which were seen as the aim of poetry and art.[19] Thus natural histories were written in a style designed to cause wonder in the reader. They provided rare and surprising material for the wondering speculation and conversation of their curious readers. The accurate style of their descriptions ensured that their reports were true and thus that the wonder was genuine.

Curious collections

Curiosi collected rarities and curiosities avidly, filling their houses and gardens with them. From the hot house in the garden, full of rare exotic plants, to the gallery of paintings in the house, via the curious echo on the stairs, the whole house and garden of a curioso was, like that of the Norwich physician Sir Thomas Browne, 'a Paradise and Cabinet of rarities'.[20]

In addition to the curiosities spread through the house and garden, curiosi generally had a room or sequence of rooms in which their curiosities were concentrated. Here curiosities could be viewed by visitors and form the subject of their curious conversations. These collections or museums had great variety of content: rarities of all sorts, natural and artificial, were included without great specialization. The collection of Ralph Thoresby, described in his *Musæum Thoresbyanum* (London, 1713), is typical in its broad range of curious contents. There were more than two thousand coins and medals, Hebrew, Greek, Roman, British of all ages, and European. The human rarities included a fragment of an Egyptian mummy and the hand and arm of the Marquis of Montrose which 'seems really to have been the very Hand that wrote the famous Epitaph . . . for K. Charles 1st'. The collection contained wonderful monsters such as a 'young Cat (littered at Leedes) with Six Feet and Two Tails having two distinct Bodies from the mid Back'. There were specimens from exotic animals, such as the 'Foot of a great White Bear, eight Inches broad' and the 'Pizle [penis] of a Whale, in Length a Yard and a Quarter', as well as a crocodile almost six feet long. There were shells and butterflies remarkable for their beauty, 'very rare exotic Plants', 'Manna gathered in the Wilderness, where the Children of Israel travelled' and a 'Fragment of the Royal-Oak at Boscobell, where King Charles II was miraculously

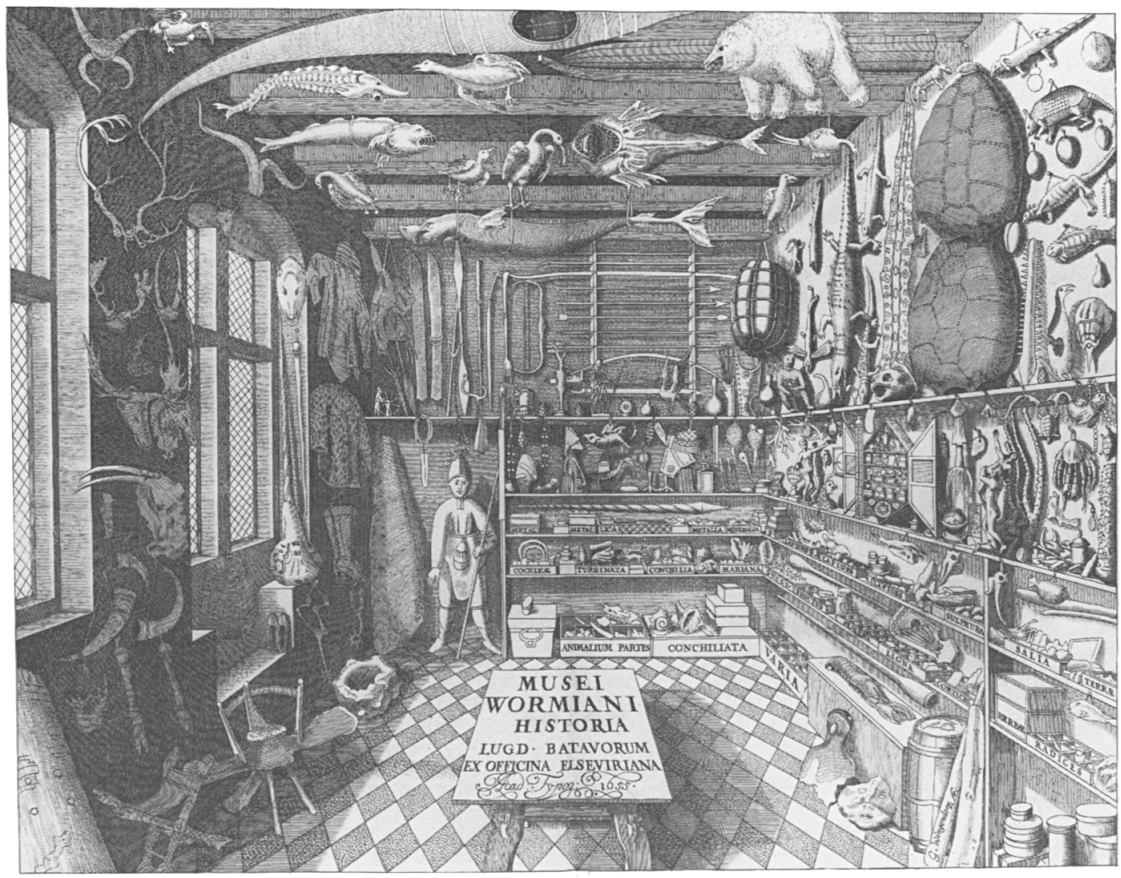


Figure 5.4 The collection of Olaus Worm is typical in displaying variety and contrast in the arrangement of the specimens. From the ceiling hang a canoe, a bear, and various fishes and birds. The contents of the shelves on the right include a globe, statues, fish, antlers, birds, corals, stones, fruits, and a zither. From Olaus Worm, *Museum Wormianum seu Historia Rerum Rariorum* (Leyden, 1655).

preserved'. The collection contained fossil shells, beautiful agates, and mathematical instruments which included a telescope, two globes, and an ivory multiplication table. There was an Indian tomahawk and a Turkish scimitar, a 'Tooth-brush from Mecca' and a pair of gloves which had belonged to King James I. There were statues, seals, 'Heathen Deities, Amulets, Charms', and 'Matters relating to the Romish Superstition', including a 'Surprizing Representation of the Trinity'. There were paintings, prints and maps, ancient manuscripts, early printed books and rare editions of the Bible. The collection also contained many Roman antiquities including altars, bracelets, mosaic pavements, urns, lamps, and bricks.

Although catalogues of collections presented their curiosities arranged into kinds, the collection itself was governed by no such systematic classification. Natural and artificial objects were displayed together. Shells, formed stones, medals, and corals might all be contained in the drawers of the same cabinet and animals from all over the world were hung together on the ceiling. The curiosities were crammed into a small space where they filled the walls and ceiling, as well as the drawers and shelves of cabinets.[21]

This close juxtaposition of very different things crammed together in a confined space was the desired effect sought by curious collectors. Widely diverse objects were brought into close proximity in collections so that their variety was emphasized and the contrast between them could be better appreciated. This contrast and variety produced wonder in the viewer. Thus William Nicolson felt wonder at the famous collection of the London physician Hans Sloane (1660–1753) in 'four large Rooms crammed with so much variety': 'The collection indeed, since the Accession of the whole Stores of the late Mr. Charlton's Rarities of all kinds and Mr. Dendridge's Insects, Dr. Plukenet's dryed Plants, &c. is wonderful'.[22]

Collections were designed to provoke wonder in the viewer. They contained the rarities which curiosi found wonderful and were arranged in such a way that the variety and contrast of the rarities were displayed and so inspired wonder. The systematic arrangement of objects into kinds according to some method of classification, which was adopted in eighteenth-century natural history collections, would have been inappropriate in a seventeenth-century curious collection, since an object surrounded by similar but slightly different species would have seemed unsurprising and ordinary. Instead, specimens were arranged to display their variety and contrast, and thus cause wonder. Collections were sites for admiration at the rarities of the world and wondering conversation between curiosi, and their arrangement and contents were designed for this purpose. A curious collection was 'a repository of rare and select objects of natural history and art so curiously and elegantly arranged' that wonder and admiration were provoked.[23]

This artful arrangement of curiosities in the collection or museum made it the best place for viewing curiosities. Here the strangeness of curiosities was displayed by the close juxtaposition of contrasting specimens, whereas in nature no such contrast could be readily made. The rarity and variety of curiosities could thus be better appreciated in a collection than in nature, and curiosi thought that curiosities were improved by being placed in a well arranged collection: Lord Coleraine admired William Courten's ability to 'bring home whatsoever you found good, & make itt better by yo^{r} ranging itt so judiciously in your Apartements'.[24]

In a collection objects were brought together from all over the world and displayed in a single place where the whole of Creation could be seen in a single glance. In thus bringing the curiosities from the whole world into one place, the collector recreated Paradise before the animals were dispersed at the Fall, and he and his visitors could view the whole world just as Adam had done after the Creation. This idea of the collection as a recreation of Paradise can be clearly seen in the anonymous 'poem occasion'd by the viewing Dr. Sloans musæum London Dec: 1712'.[25] The poem begins with a description of Adam viewing Creation in Paradise:

> When the fi[r]st man in Paradise had place
> He lookd around and viewd all natures face
> The world had gather'd to its ma[s]ters view
> Its severall kind each wondrous creature knew.
> Here Quadrupeds in all their shap[e]s surround
> Their knowing Lord and Reptiles there abound
> Obsequious fishes press to touch the Shoar
> And all its birds the Airy Region bore
> Its vegetable world the Earth sustain'd
> and various mineralls its womb containd.

The poet recounted how Adam had named the creatures in Paradise and proceeded to compare his own experience in Sloane's collection to Adam's:

> The admiring Lord y^{e} wide Creation knew
> and gave to ev'ry part its name anew.
> Thy crowded world thus do I now survay
> wishing with wondring Eyes for longer day
> Thus while I hear thee name each beauteous part
> Admire the maker's and the owners Art.

The poet viewed the collection, Sloane's world, and wondered at it in the same way as Adam had admired Creation. Sloane himself was likened to Adam naming the creatures.

Sloane's collection was the world collected in one place, hidden indoors unseen by the sun, but seen by the poet with such enjoyment and wonder that he wished that time would stand still. God had spent six days creating the world which was collected here, and the poet proposed that six days could well be enjoyed in viewing it. This wondering viewing of the world was to continue on the seventh day of the week: the first six days were 'enjoy'd' in wondering at God's work, but the Sabbath by contrast was to be 'spent' in this way as a religious duty:

> Phoebus the world to which so fast you fly
> Collected here you pass regardless by
> Time has forgot for scenes of blood to go[26]
> And sure it might for scenes of knowledge too

If six whole days y^e^ new born world employ'd
Six might in viewing thine be well enjoy'd
Spent as seventh too by heavens Command
In wondring at y^e^ great Creators hand
Here all his works in beauty rang'd appear
If theres a paradise on Earth tis here.

Sloane's collection was further likened to Paradise in its preservation of plants by drying. The world after the Fall had seasons in which plants withered, but Sloane's art preserved the colours of plants throughout the year:

In Nature plants decay'd and with[e]red seen
here kinder art makes each an Ever green.

Collections of dried plants provided a 'Hortus Hyemalis' where the plants kept their colour regardless of the season. This meant that they could be viewed in flower even in the winter, just as in the Garden of Eden where it was believed that there had been no seasons, and the plants and trees had borne fruit and flowers continuously.[27]

The collection was presented as a terrestrial paradise where the collector's industry had brought together curiosities from all over the world and his art had arranged them beautifully. All of Creation could be seen in a glance, as Adam had done before the creatures were dispersed at the Fall. The visitor felt wonder at the works of God, just as Adam had done, and admired the collector's art in collecting and preserving the objects, as well as the art of God who had originally made them.

This recreation of Paradise in the collection made hazardous and difficult travel no longer necessary. Products from all over the world were brought together so that the curioso could visit nature by visiting the collection:

No more the Traveller from pole to pole
Shall search the seas or round the globe shall rowll
Safe from the dangers of the deep may be
and visit nature while he visits thee
Here Lappland Bears with Borneos Quantury[28] meet
Those guests of Ice These once dissolv'd in heat
Whales from the north come down to visit day
and flying fishes meet them in their way.

Since collections were the ideal place for viewing curiosities there was no incentive to study objects in their natural environments which only tended to diminish their curiosity. The activities of the curious centred on the collection where the rarities of the world were brought together and could best be viewed and discussed with wonder. Thus when Ralph Thoresby visited William Nicolson in 1694, the two men 'presently retired from the company

to his museum, where he showed me his delicate collection of natural curiosities . . . [and] some coins and medals'. When they later went out to visit the local sights, they soon cut short their walk, 'longing to be again in that little paradise, his study'.[29]

The curious way of life centred on the study or library. Here the gentleman curioso collected together the rarities and wonders of the world. Here he and his friends met to admire the works of nature and art and to examine his many books and manuscripts describing natural and artificial curiosities. Here they conversed in curious style, expressing their wonder and admiration, philosophizing on causes and telling the stories which made objects curious.

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