



The word *breeding* sets a place for nature at culture's table.

Eighteenth-century British writers often use *breeding* as a synonym for *education*, as in Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755), but the word's connotations include blood as well as upbringing. Breeding folds nature into culture in a way that might save one from having to choose between two competing and (it is possible) largely incompatible accounts of human nature: the first, a hereditarian model in which birth determines one's character and one's place in the world; the second, a model that emphasizes the power of education and other environmental influences to shape essentially malleable human beings into whatever form is deemed best.<sup>1</sup>

Nurture's power to counter or overcome nature became an article of faith in eighteenth-century Britain, and throughout the century, philosophers promoted the uses of education to cultivate the self, novelists experimented with plots of improvement, and writers across a host of technical disciplines explored the hows and whys of nature's betterment. Some authorities even went so far as to argue that culture could change one species of grain into another, or to account for the resemblance between a child and its father by invoking a maternal imagination so powerful "that though a Woman be in unlawful Copulation, yet if fear or any thing else causes her to fix her mind upon her Husband, the Child will resemble him, tho' he never got it."<sup>2</sup> Yet even the most extreme eighteenth-century advocates for culture are aware of nature tugging against nurture, and the word *breeding* itself remains charged with the tension between these two complementary terms.

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Writing this book has meant digging up and sorting through a huge mass of what British writers thought about breeding—an umbrella term that can refer to nature or nurture, generation, pregnancy, hereditary resemblance, manners, moral character, social identity, or all of the above—in the several hundred years that preceded the coinage of the modern nouns *biology* (ca. 1802), *heredity* (ca. 1830), and *genetics* (ca. 1906).<sup>3</sup> I have chosen from that mass what seemed to me the most intriguing and suggestive elements and have laid them out in a sort of mosaic that shows unexpected and revealing facets, not just of eighteenth-century discussions but also of the ways in which we continue to explore and explain human nature. Needless to say, human nature represents an unusually challenging subject, given the volume and variety of the source material. Roger Smith puts it well when he observes that “[q]uoting references to human nature in the eighteenth century is a bit like quoting references to God in the Bible.”<sup>4</sup> Even the terminology is slippery, impossible. “Nature and the natural are the most porous words in the language; they soak up ideology like a sponge,” writes Gillian Beer, and Raymond Williams (after deeming *culture* “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language”) calls *nature* “perhaps the most complex word in the language.”<sup>5</sup>

Two historians of science, summing up the results of a recent major conference on the cultural history of heredity, conclude that “no general concept of heredity was underlying the discourse on life (including medicine, anthropology and the moral sciences) in the eighteenth century and that such a concept was only slowly emerging in the first half of the nineteenth century.”<sup>6</sup> Given that over the first half of the nineteenth century, British writing about everything from anthropology to horticulture and animal breeding would increasingly come to emphasize hereditary rather than environmental factors, how might this shift be understood? The rise of hereditary explanations can certainly be seen as a rejection of the previous century’s cherished environmentalism, a reaction strengthened after the violence that accompanied revolution in France revealed some of the costs associated with the attempt to transcend nature by cultural means. Given that so much eighteenth-century writing about people, plants, and animals already represents nature as a stubborn stowaway on board the vessel of nurture, though, the early nineteenth-century turn to heredity might also be construed not so much as a reversal of earlier arguments about people and their properties but rather as consequent upon them.

In a moment when the cultural and intellectual prestige of genetics has never been greater, this book will bring to bear traditional strengths of scholarship in the humanities (including history and close reading) on breeding’s story in the

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few hundred years before Mendel, before Darwin, and before Galton: a series of impassioned debates about nature and culture, the possibility of improvement, and the price of human perfectibility that clarify and call into question many of our current beliefs about what these things mean and why they matter. Eighteenth-century Britain's growing interest in what we would call selective breeding, the complex and conflicting explanatory schemes people used to account for familial resemblance, the passionate emphasis on the transformative effects of education: *Breeding* will sound the most striking and important conversations around these and related preoccupations in the hope that filling in historical gaps may help us become better prepared for the next stages of decision-making about breeding in all of its manifestations.

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What does it mean to say that eighteenth-century writers gave environmental causes—everything from nutrition to weather, as in the climate theory associated with Montesquieu—the lion's share of the credit when it came to explaining human nature? Climate theory's origins could be traced back to the Hippocratic "Airs, Waters, Places" (ca. 400 BCE), a medical treatise with a strongly anthropological flavor that enjoyed a great resurgence of popularity in the eighteenth century. Characteristically Hippocratic thinking can be seen in a great deal of eighteenth-century writing, as for instance when the physician John Arbuthnot argues, in his *Essay Concerning the Effects of Air on Human Bodies* (1733), that the "Diversity of National Features and Shapes" cannot be "altogether the Effect of Propagation from the same original Stock; for it is known by Experience, that Transplantation changeth the Stature and outward Shape, both of Plants and Animals."<sup>7</sup> It wasn't that early eighteenth-century British observers couldn't conceive of plants, animals, and people being subject to manipulation of a kind that we would now call genetic. But the language available to them blurred the distinction between environmental and genetic management, as a passage from Addison and Steele's *Tatler* will attest.

The *Tatler* paper for 1 October 1709 opens with Isaac Bickerstaff's declaration that he has been "call'd off from publick Dissertations by a Domestick Affair of great Importance," namely the disposal in marriage of his sister Jenny ("as unspotted a Spinster," he says, "as any in *Great Britain*").<sup>8</sup> Bickerstaff elaborates on this project in a distinctly agricultural vein, invoking an ancestor in the days of King Arthur who "was low of Stature, and of a very swarthy Complexion, not unlike a *Portuguese Jew*" who had the "Design of Lengthening and Whitening his Posterity." After chronicling the vicissitudes of the family's genetic fortunes in sub-

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sequent generations, a history of “Defects . . . mended by succeeding Matches,” Bickerstaff reflects on the appeal of a set of tactics borrowed from husbandry:

One might wear any Passion out of a Family by Culture, as skilful Gardiners blot a Colour out of a Tulip that hurts its Beauty. One might produce an affable Temper out of a Shrew, by grafting the Mild upon the Choleric; or raise a Jackpudding from a Prude, by inoculating Mirth and Melancholy. It is for Want of Care in the disposing of our Children, with Regard to our Bodies and Minds, that we go into an House and see such different Complexions and Humours in the same Race and Family.

Rather than matching his sister with “a Fine Gentleman, who extremely admir’d her Wit, and would have given her a Coach and Six,” Bickerstaff finally decides to “cross the Strain” by choosing a businessman who will put his witty sister in her place and ensure that she produces “an Offspring fit for the Habitation of City, Town, or Country; Creatures that are docile and tractable in whatever we put ’em to.” All these techniques are strikingly put under the rubric of “Culture”: grafting and the related technique of inoculation do not describe coupling so much as manipulation or manuring, and pretty much *all* the words in the constellation around breeding have this property.<sup>9</sup>

Despite Bickerstaff’s playful analogy, it was very much up for debate whether the same rules really applied to people and to plants and animals. Shouldn’t answers to the question of whether culture or the mysterious quality often just called “blood” contributed more to form the organism be affected by whether that organism had a rational mind—or a soul? How likely was it, as Condorcet speculated in his *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795), that not just physical but “intellectual and moral faculties” might be transmitted from parents to children, and that “education, in perfecting these qualities, [might] at the same time influence, modify and perfect the organization itself”?<sup>10</sup> Questions like these—which also touch upon the mechanisms of generation and inheritance, the relative contributions of male and female parents, and the possibility that “acquired” characters might be passed on to offspring—were pursued in many different modes of writing, from novels to popular manuals of practical husbandry to abstruse scientific treatises read by only a tiny subset of the population. Increasingly a consensus developed, though, that the controversial elements of such debates could not easily be confined to animals and vegetables; arguments about husbandry led inevitably to heated speculation about man’s origins, the literal truth or otherwise of the account of the creation in Genesis, and indeed the

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notion of a possible multiplicity of human species, an idea whose consequences were particularly devastating for Europeans and Americans of African descent.

Assuming that properties descended from parents to children—the germ of the idea of heredity, before there was a proper word for it—should the new breeding techniques associated with animal husbandry be extended to people? And if so, how? It made sense, once one thought of man as an animal, to concentrate on bringing the most up-to-date breeding methods to bear on the problem of human sinfulness. Did this, though, commit one to the steady erosion of others' humanity, or even perhaps to programs of eradication? The great question about the eighteenth century's proto-eugenic arguments, if I may call them that, is whether the fact that it is impossible *now* to talk of eugenics without its twentieth-century history coming to mind—everything from the forced sterilization of the mentally retarded in the United States to the Nazis' yoking-together of medicine, racial prejudice, and mass murder—means that violence is intrinsic to the entire family of arguments about breeding and human perfectibility, or whether it's a more contingent and accidental linkage. My anachronistic use of the term "eugenics" (the *OED*'s earliest example is drawn from Francis Galton's 1883 *Inquiries Into the Human Faculty and Its Development*) may seem to predetermine the outcome of this inquiry, but the languages of eugenics and sinfulness are intimately historically intertwined, as Daniel Kevles shows when he cleverly names "the elimination of original sin by getting rid biologically of the original sinner" as eugenics' "chiliastic goal."<sup>11</sup>

Our orientation toward such questions depends in part on our position with regard to a momentous question about Enlightenment thought, one that crops up whether we are talking about empire or literature or science and that was given early and influential articulation by Adorno and Horkheimer. Dorinda Outram's essay "The Enlightenment Our Contemporary" offers a perceptive summary of their iconic work, with its impassioned indictment of the twinned catastrophes of man's sovereignty over nature and rationalism's disenchantment of the world and its deep-seated commitment to a vision of Enlightenment thought, especially scientific thought, as "the precondition for twentieth-century modernity, defined as the domination of technology and science, the restriction of the value sphere, and the consequent facilitation of technological mass murder."<sup>12</sup> What claims do we assent to, Outram asks, when we portray the Enlightenment "as in some sense the origin of modern science"? If we cling to a possessive notion of Enlightenment, she suggests, an Enlightenment that is in important respects one with our own time, "we run the risk of approaching it simply as a mirror to ourselves," a function of "the need to find projections of ourselves in the past"; these

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“assertions of contemporaneity” ironically limit the possibility of writing a genuinely critical cultural history of the period, because they make it impossible to assemble “external points of reference to validate that critical viewpoint.” While I share many of Outram’s concerns, including her wariness about quests for origins and her attentiveness to the restrictions of presentism, I confess that I hope to achieve some of the same critical ends by altogether different means: namely, by plunging into a vast sea of eighteenth-century materials and welcoming the sheer disorientation that accompanies such an act of self-immersion. I have especially tried throughout the book to listen closely to the voices of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers without letting subsequent developments in the history of the state’s interventions in the health of citizens determine the outcome of the investigation. What were the rhetorical and ethical consequences of arguing for the control of human as well as animal propagation? Were doubts about perfectibility mere quibbles or technical caveats, or did the notion of perfectibility itself encompass fundamental ethical dangers?

Perhaps the single most striking fact about the eighteenth-century conversations treated here is that whereas, in our own time, the threat of determinism is perceived to come almost entirely by way of genetics, eighteenth-century writers saw free will seriously eroded by forces like custom and climate and habit—a through-the-looking-glass reversal of our own expectations.<sup>13</sup> Evelyn Fox Keller observes of American science in the years after World War II that “[b]ecause nurture (or culture) had always been seen as a more commodious force than nature, . . . it was nurture, not nature, that was seen as conducive to the kind of unfettered development imagined possible by a victorious and ‘free’ republic,” but her “always” certainly doesn’t extend as far back as the eighteenth century, and a longer view shows that the alignment of nurture with freedom and nature with necessity is quite culturally specific.<sup>14</sup> The dimensions of that longer view may be spatial as well as temporal: in the Soviet Union, the influential agronomist Lysenko’s ruthless commitment to increasing crop yields by environmental means—in his mechanistic view of plant propagation, a wheat plant might actually be induced to produce rye—contributed to later generations of Soviet progressives holding a degree of admiration for genetic accounts of human nature that would have been altogether antipathetical to (let’s say) their liberal American counterparts in the 1970s.<sup>15</sup>

One of the axioms laid out by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in the introduction to *Epistemologies of the Closet* (1990) speaks directly to the difficulties inhering in these topics. “The immemorial, seemingly ritualized debates on nature versus nurture take place against a very unstable background of tacit assumptions and

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fantasies about both nurture and nature,” she writes, pointing out that though we may be drawn to meditate upon and attempt to adjudicate between mutually exclusive constructivist and essentialist definitions of homosexuality, “any such adjudication is impossible to the degree that a conceptual deadlock between the two opposing views has by now been built into the very structure of every theoretical tool we have for undertaking it.”<sup>16</sup> There is no doubt that feelings run high around questions about nature and nurture precisely because of how quickly they carry us into arguments about free will and determinism, but it’s worth resisting any easy equation of nurture with liberty in the philosophical sense. “The notion that we ‘have a nature,’” Mary Midgley writes in her 1978 book *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature*, “far from threatening the concept of freedom, is absolutely essential to it. If we were genuinely plastic and indeterminate at birth, there could be no reason why society should not stamp us into any shape that might suit it.”<sup>17</sup> Many eighteenth-century writers saw custom working so strongly it could actually be written into bodies, an idea often expressed in shorthand by allusion to the Hippocratic discussion of the Macrocephali, or long-headed, tribe:

The chief cause of the length of their heads was at first found to be in their customs, but nowadays nature collaborates with tradition and they consider those with the longest heads the most nobly born. The custom was to mould the head of the newly-born children with their hands and to force it to increase in length by the application of bandages and other devices which destroy the spherical shape of the head and produce elongation instead. The characteristic was thus acquired at first by artificial means, but, as time passed, it became an inherited characteristic and the practice was no longer necessary.<sup>18</sup>

The notion that acquired characteristics could be inherited was persistent enough that when the biologist August Weismann came to refute it, in a powerful and highly original series of essays on heredity published in the 1880s, he rather belabors the point: “We cannot by excessive feeding make a giant out of the germ destined to form a dwarf,” Weismann writes, with an audibly irritable and polemical edge; “we cannot, by means of exercise, transform the muscles of an individual destined to be feeble into those of a Hercules, or the brain of a predestined fool into that of a Leibnitz or a Kant, by means of much thinking.”<sup>19</sup>

My goal has been neither to compose a literary-critical account nor to write a history (whether intellectual or cultural or scientific) of the period’s changing orientation to the idea of heredity.<sup>20</sup> Instead, I wanted, medium-like, to make these pages a sort of parliament, an auditorium in which the voices of actors in and

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commentators on the story of heredity in the eighteenth century can be heard, although always with the intention of allowing these long-gone conversations to illuminate aspects of our own thought on heredity and human nature. To separate out the literary from the scientific from the medical from the philosophical, I have come to feel, does a violence to the matters with which all of these disciplines are concerned—disciplines which, by the way, we perceive as being distinct only as a consequence of developments newly underway during exactly this period. In the original preface to his 1963 history of the eighteenth-century life sciences, Jacques Roger called for more studies “to explain what constitutes the unity of an age across the diversity of its forms of art and thought and to justify the interconnections that draw our attention to areas apparently foreign to one another,” and went on to suggest that “[l]iterary history is better able than any other discipline to involve itself in an undertaking of this sort.”<sup>21</sup>

By virtue of a professional training oriented especially toward language and rhetoric, the literary scholar brings a somewhat different skill set to this sort of investigation than the cultural historian or historian of science. Growing up in Philadelphia, I loved visiting the underground museum below the Ghost Structure, a steel skeleton designed by Robert Venturi to mark the dimensions of Benjamin Franklin’s house, razed in 1812. The museum had a sort of phone bank that allowed one to telephone a huge number of different eighteenth-century figures whose names and numbers were posted across a banner like the menu at a fast-food restaurant. Once the call was put through, I would listen to the recording of what Washington or Mozart or whoever I had chosen to dial up that day had to say about Franklin: history as spiritualism-inflected gossip! The metaphor of hearing the dead speak is of course built into our relationship with writing, especially with writing from the deeper past.<sup>22</sup>

The great value of this kind of swerve away from the straight-and-narrow of the historical method—what makes it worth the risk—seems to me to lie in the counterfactual or *path-not-taken* traction it offers on ideas. In “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” an essay whose influence has been even more pronounced in literary studies than in anthropology departments, Clifford Geertz—writing of a passage taken from his own field journal—offers a sardonic and somewhat disingenuous conclusion concerning the interpretive enterprise:

I do not know how long it would be profitable to meditate on the encounter of Cohen, the sheikh, and “Dumari” (the period has perhaps already been exceeded); but I do know that however long I did so I would not get anywhere

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near to the bottom of it. Nor have I ever gotten anywhere near to the bottom of anything I have ever written about, either in the essays below or elsewhere. Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is.<sup>23</sup>

The fact that it may be impossible to “get to the bottom” of breeding seems to me more enabling than inhibiting. (Leave nature some mystery!) And the reporting techniques of cultural anthropologists undoubtedly provide an important precedent for my accumulation of particularities, as do a number of other inquiries whose results have been organized by their authors in a somewhat unorthodox fashion.

Especially attractive to me are rule-based schemes of a fairly stringent nature, which seem to me uniquely capable of expressing what might be called (to coin an oxymoron) irrational arguments, accumulations of words that fulfill a number of evidentiary and persuasive criteria and establish a position or make a case—all within the constraints of formal structures that would seem to be thoroughly at odds with reason. How is it that Georges Perec’s “Attempt at an Inventory of the Liquid and the Solid Foodstuffs Ingested by Me in the Course of the Year Nineteen Hundred and Seventy-Four,” which is quite literally what the title says—a year’s worth of transcribed menu items, sorted out and organized by category (“One milk-fed lamb, three lamb cutlets, two curried lambs, twelve *gigots*, one saddle of lamb”)—should be so redolent of meaning?<sup>24</sup> Not simply of an emotional meaning—pathos, poignancy, a certain demented precision—but of a quite clear set of arguments about the history of the Jews in twentieth-century Europe, the burdens of memory, and the nature of humanity? As tempting as I found the prospect of haring off after something of this sort, it seemed to me impossible—or at least highly inappropriate—to contrive a strictly rule-based approach for organizing and presenting my material. Yet other (and less extreme) works than Perec’s similarly show how richly a story may emerge from unconventional patterning; I am thinking here especially of Primo Levi’s *The Periodic Table* (1975), a remarkable series of autobiographical musings (Levi was a professional chemist) cast into the structure of Mendeleev’s table of the elements.<sup>25</sup> At any rate, the story as it has emerged does follow a roughly chronological sweep whose juxtapositions and necessary shifts of gear allow for the drawing-out of what seemed to me most interesting and valuable about the material.

I gravitated especially, in the end, toward the work of two writers whose imaginative formal and stylistic choices are uniquely well-suited to their intellectual projects. One of these is W.G. Sebald, with his sinuous twentieth-century archeologies of ashes. Though increasingly he abandoned the form of the novel for

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a kind of documentary prose, Sebald's extended prose pieces are also fictions of a sort, experiments in voice and pastiche (in the literal sense) that touch on very deep questions about memory and the natural history of destruction. Sebald's life work was to chronicle a haunting and highly heterogenous mix of wanderings, literal and literary, and *The Rings of Saturn* (which begins with meditations on Thomas Browne's skull and Rembrandt's painting *The Anatomy Lesson*) offers this description of a meal at the seaside hotel Sebald reaches early in that book's pages:

That evening I was the sole guest in the huge dining room, and it was the same startled person who took my order and shortly afterwards brought me a fish that had doubtless lain entombed in the deep-freeze for years. The breadcrumb armour-plating of the fish had been partly singed by the grill, and the prongs of my fork bent on it. Indeed it was so difficult to penetrate what eventually proved to be nothing but an empty shell that my plate was a hideous mess once the operation was over. The tartare sauce that I had had to squeeze out of a plastic sachet was turned grey by the sooty breadcrumbs, and the fish itself, or what feigned to be fish, lay a sorry wreck among the grass-green peas and the remains of soggy chips that gleamed with fat.<sup>26</sup>

This gruesome scene of eating—of trying to dig out an almost historical artifact that's simply *not there* (“nothing but an empty shell”) or exists only in a sinister ersatz (“what feigned to be fish”)—will be echoed later on in a tragic account of the transportation of over ten thousand refugee children, during the Second World War, from Bosnia to Croatia in cattle wagons. At the end of the journey, Sebald—or his narrator—recounts, “Many of those who were still alive were so hungry that they had eaten the cardboard identity tags they wore about their necks and thus in their extreme desperation had eradicated their own names.”<sup>27</sup>

My second model is Roland Barthes. At almost every point in his career, Barthes approached the task of criticism in a deeply writerly mode—consider the whimsical alphabetical ordering of the sections of *Le plaisir du texte* (1973), or the literary richness of the work on photography or Michelet or any number of other topics.<sup>28</sup> Like Sebald, Barthes is at once enraptured and troubled by his fleeting encounters with the ever-elusive past; one immediate inspiration has come from a collection of lectures delivered in the late 1970s and published in English as *The Neutral* (2005). Barthes' description of his approach there especially resonates with me: he describes taking “the word ‘Neutral’ . . . for a series of walks along a certain number of readings,” identifying his practice with “the procedure of the

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topic: a grid over the surface of which one moves a ‘subject.’”<sup>29</sup> In an elliptical series of phrases, he goes on to perform arabesques on the metaphor:

. . . I took the Neutral for a walk not along the grid of words but along a network of readings, which is to say, of a library. This library, neither analytical (I didn’t follow a bibliographic program: cf. the intertext that is handed to you) nor exhaustive: infinite library: even now, I can read a new book in which certain passages will crystallize around the notion of Neutral as a whimsical *sourcery*: I read, the water-divining rod rises: there is Neutral underneath, and, for this very reason, the notion of the Neutral expands, inflects itself, modifies itself: I persist, and I transform myself at the same time.

My own library in this case has been both analytical and as exhaustive as I could make it, and my own grid includes a chronological axis, but the book will indeed take breeding for a walk through the stacks—a walk on a long leash.

Elsewhere in the lectures, Barthes invokes the notion (it exists in the same conceptual universe as Raymond Williams’ keyword approach) of a “[n]etwork of closely related words” which one confronts in order to refine “meanings, differences, nuances,” the last term spurring a string of phrases in which Barthes reflects on his

wish for a great “pedagogy” of nuance in the classroom: nuance is one of the linguistic tools of nonarrogance, of nonintolerance: civic imperative to teach nuances (but I suppose great resistance from kids), to make up nuance exercises; one of these exercises: inventory of micronetworks of words that are very similar but a tiny bit different: → “discourse on the bit of difference”: wouldn’t deny difference but would recognize the price of the “bit.” Justness: just between being and “bit.”<sup>30</sup>

The work I’ve done here can also be thought of as a “nuance exercise” in this sense, a close consideration of a micronetwork that starts with breeding and fans out very quickly into impossibly huge terms like *nature* and *culture*. Keeping my attention on nuance—on the particularity of each use of each word—is another way of resisting the strong pull of grand narratives of Enlightenment, and of the complementary orbits of self-recognition and self-castigation into which the period always threatens to draw us.

Working on this book has confirmed for me the importance of what might be called the writerly approach, an essayistic or discursive mode that prefers not to

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participate in all of the disciplinary practices of history or criticism proper. A great part of its value, it seems to me, lies precisely in this sensitivity to the nuance and the particularity of the material. The writers I consider deploy a shared but often contested vocabulary to make their cases, in language frequently studded with metaphors, solecisms, self-contradictions, and a number of other equally suggestive and highly personal rhetorical features. I came to suspect that subordinating individual writers' voices to loosely historicist arguments about dominant tropes and broad sweeps of cultural and linguistic change would in this case be at best ineffectual, at worst actively misleading—certainly far less *interesting* than patterning the material not so much like a monograph as like an oratorio or a grand country dance, so that echoes and responses and recapitulations would emerge from a congeries of voices.

The major social, economic, and political transitions concerning inheritance in eighteenth-century Britain have been amply chronicled elsewhere; the history of science and medicine for this period is equally rich, and many of the literary works I treat have over the years received untold amounts of attention. The principles of selection governing my choice of material differ somewhat from those of a scholar working more straightforwardly in a single established discipline or methodology, and my account is necessarily partial: partial in the sense of selective, of course, as all books must be, but also “partial” in a sense not altogether remote from the practice of the self-described “*partial, prejudiced, and ignorant Historian*” who narrates Jane Austen’s “History of England.”<sup>31</sup> There’s something to be said for the worm’s-eye view, and I have more or less deliberately adopted the trope of synecdoche—taking the part for the whole, operating by means of contiguity and association—over the more accepted modes of analogy and argument, though I will pay my courtesies (to borrow an eighteenth-century image) to those interpretive modes.

I have grouped the episodes of my story under six headings, proceeding in roughly chronological order. Though I am most centrally concerned with Britain in the eighteenth century, I visit French discussions when they illuminate aspects of my main story (especially in the case of Rousseau), and I also begin with a number of seventeenth-century discussions that cast light on topics that cannot always be neatly demarcated by a round number like 1700. Because of their interest in generation and their playful experimentation with the notion that “blood will out” (in a familial rather than a homicidal sense), *The Winter’s Tale* and its eighteenth-century descendants provide one through-line for my investigation into breeding in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England.<sup>32</sup> The play, having been almost entirely neglected from 1650 to 1750, was adapted for the stage in

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the mid-eighteenth century by David Garrick and several others, and it turned out to be a powerful vehicle for later eighteenth-century storytellers trying to work out the nature of the relationship between parents and children—and more especially between fathers and daughters—in an era of immense social transformations. Shakespeare’s play thus provides at the outset both a rich language and a stimulating conceptual structure for thinking about generation, inheritance, and the interplay between nature and culture, and I have allowed it to shape the first part of my story about what happened to the concept of “breeding” during this period.