CHAPTER 13

‘Eloquence and Oracle’: Tobacco in Eighteenth-Century Life and Literature

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Human beings need breath to function, to speak, and to do many things that are essential to life. They also use breath to inhale products that are variously pleasurable or efficacious. One such product is tobacco. From its origins in the Americas, tobacco arrived on European shores in substantial quantities from the early seventeenth century onwards. While some was imbibed as snuff or chewing tobacco, the bulk was added, as smoke, to breath. What were the consequences of the high and intense levels of tobacco consumption, particularly among the male literati of the time, on human life and thought? Can we draw parallels between the influence of tobacco in the eighteenth century and its place in indigenous societies in lowland South America where its evolutionary and human histories are longest? To answer such questions I bring anthropology, science, and technology studies into communication with literature and the other creative arts, based on the assumption that the latter can reveal ‘those dimensions of personal and social life we may have little access to when using other research strategies’.[1] Using an interdisciplinary approach I

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argue through comparative analysis for the significance of tobacco as a hitherto unacknowledged agent in the development of the epoch we now call 'the Enlightenment'.

Tobacco is an example of things which, for ethnographers, 'may appear as material objects; as practices or concepts; as events, institutions or beliefs; as gifts, mana, traps, actants, spirits or dividuals; or as structures, perspectives, networks, systems or scales'.[2] Tobacco has multiple dimensions of 'thingness', through the multiple hybrid relationships it establishes with people. Lupton et al. use the example of 'the swimmer, who while wearing the goggles, embodies the ability to swim differently, and the goggles, who when wearing the swimmer, acquire the ability to move'.[3] We can think similarly about, and reflect on, the relationship between people and tobacco. For example, the person who inhales tobacco smoke embodies an altered state of consciousness, while tobacco, incinerated and penetrating the lungs on the breath of the smoker, acquires the ability to increase the spread and reach of its species.[4] Geismar distinguishes between objects with impact (like falling meteorites) and objects with agency (which, to be effective, must be 'entangled within social relations and indeed within our own humanity').[5] Tobacco, I argue, is both—the agency it garners through hybrid relationships with people is matched by the impact/agency it develops in its own right. My essay is thus part of a broader framework, traversing both anthropology and literary studies, associated with notions such as actor-networks, 'material agency', and 'thing power'. It invites us to think differently about tobacco, both temporally and spatially—to consider its arrival on European shores as a mere blip in time, and its transmogrification into cigarettes as an unseemly aberration of twentieth- (and now twenty-first-) century capitalism.

In what follows, I first consider some significant features of the 'deep history' of tobacco in lowland South America—its role in constituting persons, changing perspectives, and generating dualisms. I then explore the possibility that the impact of tobacco in eighteenth-century European life was associated with similar manifestations of material agency, and how its entanglements with people can be discerned through the art and literature of the period. Finally I identify two eighteenth-century literary genres where tobacco's influence may particularly reverberate, namely the popular object- or 'it'-narratives of the time, and the less commonly recognized or celebrated 'poetry of attention'.[6]

A Deep History of Tobacco in Lowland South America

Tobacco Constituting Persons, Shifting Shapes, and Changing Perspectives

Tobacco has a 10,000-year history of engagement with humanity in lowland South America. For the Muinane, Witoto, and Andoke, the self-styled 'People of the Centre' living along the Brazilian/Colombian border, tobacco actively constitutes persons, exemplified in an elder's remark that 'we all have the same hearts, made from the same tobacco'.[7] Among the Xié of Amazonia the newborn is a 'little fish': a creature fluid and vulnerable, in need of forming into a fully-fledged human being.[8] Tobacco smoke serves to cool, dry out, and firm up—to humanize the less than human. So great is this sense of tobacco constituting persons that among the People of the Centre differences that westerners might consider cultural are attributed to differences between their tobaccos.[9]

In contrast to western notions of the 'natural body', regarded as a generally stable substrate for the range and diversity of multiple human cultures, for Amazonian peoples culture is the stable constant, a 'soul essence' that underpins and is shared with a multiplicity of natural forms of which humans are only one. The 'chronically unstable'[10] boundaries within and between the variety of human and non-human animals, plants, and objects require careful nurturing, and tobacco is a key component in this process. Another manifestation of Amazonian body instabilities is belief in the propensity of bodies to alter and transform, a property known as shape-shifting.[11] This shape-shifting may also occur when, through ingestion of prodigious quantities of tobacco, shamans become were-animals (particularly jaguars), combative heroes against opposing 'spirits, sorcerers, sickness, and death'.[12] Tobacco, a mainstay of shamanic practice, is strongly implicated in this shape-shifting agenda.[13]

Shape-shifting is not always an easy matter for Amerindians to deal with. 'Metamorphosis is something that haunts the native imagination', writes Vilaça about the Wari' in the Rodonia region of Brazil.[14] A Wari' story relates the luring of a child into the forest by her mother to pick fruit. One day the child realizes they have spent an inordinate amount of time away from home and notices a tail discreetly hidden between her mother's legs. She cries out in alarm and the jaguar flees, leaving a trail of paw-prints. The anthropologist who recorded this story relates that

one woman, telling her about this event, said that the girl's true mother hereafter warned the girl always to distrust other people: 'Whenever she went far from home, either with her mother or father, she should take along a brother or sister as company (in order, I assume, to secure her point of view)'.[15]

This extends into what the anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro describes as 'the conception, common to many peoples of the continent, according to which the world is inhabited by different sorts of subjects or persons, human and non-human, which apprehend reality from different points of view'.[16] So marked is this recognition of perspectives other than one's own, and so profound its consequences, that Viveiros de Castro has coined the term 'cosmological perspectivism' to encompass it. Perspectivism leaves 'indelible, though elusive, marks'.[17] A compelling example is a pattern of speech common to many lowland South American groups, reflected in phrases such as '*this is beautiful to me*', '*for him, the animal turned into a jaguar*', and '*to us, there appeared prey while we were making the canoe*', as Stolz-Lima records in the Portuguese spoken by the Juruna of Brazil.[18]

This grammatical relativization of 'self' and 'non-self' offers a constant perspectival reminder that, while this is how it was for me (or us), others might see things differently. The ability to shift perspective in this way is a recurrent trope in lowland South American folklore. I suggest there are discernible parallels in eighteenth-century Enlightenment life, literature, and the creative arts.

Tobacco Generates Dualisms

Tobacco's ability to generate dualisms is exemplified by the structuralist paradigm of Claude Lévi-Strauss, which in turn derives from his claims about deep, fundamentally binary structures of the human mind. The myths analyzed by Lévi-Strauss in his four-volume *Mythologiques* come from across the Americas, and correspond with 'the limits of tobacco distribution in the New World'.[19] Lévi-Strauss's fundamental categorical premise, indeed what has been described as a core Amerindian cosmological concern,[20] is the opposition of nature and culture, whatever these two poles might contain in specific circumstances. Volume Two of *Mythologiques* (*From Honey to Ashes*) presents one such mythic system, one which, significantly enough, 'revolves round the central theme of tobacco'.[21]

Where they are acknowledged, the binaries inherent in much structural theory seem to fit the ethnographic data in North and South America surprisingly well. This is precisely the same hemisphere marked by what Wilbert calls an ubiquitous 'tobacco ideology' which, he suggests, indicates 'the extraordinary power of this agent of diffusion'.[22] Could it be that tobacco constituting persons, bending perspectives, and possibly even generating the binary oppositions on which Lévi-Strauss was able to build his theories may have had something to do with the long-term relationship between plant and people in the region? I argue for its influence on the life and thought of the people living there over the millennia. Can similar influences be discerned in some of the intellectual changes that helped precipitate what we now call the 'Enlightenment'?

Tobacco in Enlightenment Life and Thought

Various reasons have been posited to explain the emergence of the philosophical and cultural epoch known as the 'Enlightenment' in Europe. One element that I feel has been ignored or overlooked in such analyses is the arrival of tobacco on European shores. It is suggestive that the word Enlightenment is first recorded in the English language in 1621, at around the same time as tobacco was starting to make substantial inroads into European life. Given the impact and agency of tobacco, a case can be made for including this powerful substance as a significant but hitherto neglected component in the history of the period.

The Stupefying Pleasures and Material Sociality of Tobacco

At the turn of the seventeenth century, the average price of Spanish American tobacco in London was about £1.10s. per pound; labourers' wages were about 8d. per day. However, consumption increased as the supply of tobacco from the nascent Virginian colonies started to grow from 1640 onwards. By the start of the eighteenth century, Davies estimates that tobacco imports into England totalled around 26 million pounds annually. Sixty per cent of this was re-exported to other parts of Europe, but the remaining 10.4 million pounds still permitted a generous one and a half pounds of tobacco per inhabitant per year—enough for twenty-five per cent of the adult population to enjoy a pipe and a half every day.[23] The Dutch were consuming tobacco in similar proportions.[24]

Social spaces such as coffee houses constituted a growing 'public sphere' offering opportunities for people across classes to meet (and smoke) together. Tobacco in eighteenth-century Britain was deeply imbricated in whatever conversations took place in these settings. For Porter, 'to be enlightened, a gentleman had to be sociable'.[25] This was also, he argued, an era marked by 'a *philosophy* of expediency, a dedication to the art, science and duty of living well in the here and now'.[26] Such 'materialistic worldliness' was fostered in and by the 'bubbling commercial atmosphere' of eighteenth-century England. In such a world, people's concerns were with 'the here-and-now, in matters tangible, buyable, disposable'. Tobacco, sugar, and tea were 'the first objects within capitalism that conveyed with their use the complex idea that one could become different by consuming differently…closely connected to England's fundamental transformation from a hierarchical, status-based medieval society to a social-democratic, capitalist, and industrial society'.[27] The melding of human and non-human through consumption, the 'constituting of persons', was a prominent trope in the life and literature of eighteenth-century England. In the process, tobacco was recognized, as the character Tobacco itself states in the seventeenth-century play *Wine, Beere, Ale and Tobacco: Contending for Superiority*, as a substance whose 'divine breath…doth distill eloquence and oracle upon the tongue'.[28] The capacity for eloquence and oracle was a significant contribution to the development of the 'Enlightenment'.

Sahlins sees the pleasure principle as a fundamental part of the Enlightenment, when 'self-pleasing came out of the shadow of its sinful ancestry to assume a moral position nearly 180 degrees removed. The individual's singular attention to his own good turned out to be the basis of society rather than its nemesis—as well as the necessary condition of the greatest wealth of nations'.[29] Tobacco played an important role in helping 'to frame a distinctively early modern culture in which the pursuit of pleasure was thereafter more public, routine, and unfettered'.[30]

Israel is critical of those who would make too much of 'new eighteenth-century social spaces and practices…in generating Enlightenment ideas'.[31] Yet if anything was uniting people from across the social classes, it was tobacco, 'the Old Man's Solace, and the Student's Aid', as a poem published in *The London Medley* in 1731 put it.[32] The 'Convert to Tobacco', in *A Collection of Merry Poems* published in 1736, describes tobacco offering contentment to the Welsh farmer trudging barefoot through the snow ('With thee he warms his dripping Nose, / And scrubs,

and puffs, and on he goes'), as well as to the 'Justice grave', who partners tobacco with ale to hold court at his table after dinner 'Whilst sober whiff fills each Hiatus'.[33] 'The Triumph of Tobacco over Sack and Ale' similarly emphasizes the social communion tobacco engendered:

> Tobacco engages
> Both Sexes, all Ages,
> The Poor as well as the Wealthy,
> From the Court to the Cottage,
> From Childhood to Dotage,
> Both those that are sick and the healthy.[34]

Snuff, later to become the *sine qua non* of distinction and refinement, was performing a similarly unifying role in Parisian society at this time. One commentator wrote:

> at court as well as in the city: princes, lofty lords, and the people all take snuff. It ranks among the favourite occupations of the noblest ladies, and the middle-class women who imitate them in everything follow them in this activity as well. It is the passion of prelates, abbés, and even monks. Despite the papal prohibition, priests in Spain take snuff during the Mass. The snuffbox lies open before them on the altar.[35]

Yet smoking remained the primary means of tobacco consumption. As Brook argues, 'whenever tobacco showed up, a culture that did not smoke became a culture that did…Not all the original meanings of Native smoking made the jump to other cultures…but many did, including the notion that tobacco opened a door to the spiritual realm'.[36] The ways in which tobacco was consumed in eighteenth-century Europe, however, were very different from those of the twenty-first century. An amusing and somewhat moralistic account of 'Sam Scot's Smoaking Club' in mid-eighteenth-century London describes its gentlemen members—a linen draper turned dancing-master, a city musician, an engraver, and a Scottish writer—as a group that 'had acquired such an expeditious Way of consuming a Pipe of Tobacco, that when they were met together, they would make no more of smoaking a Pound in an hour'.[37] This is tobacco consumption of potentially shamanic proportions. Simon Schama describes the Dutch artist Adriaen Brouwer who, in the 1620s and 1630s, 'took great care to record the expressions of deep inhalation or drowsy puffing peculiar to the serious pipe smoker. Some of their figures appear

so stunned and insensate with smoke that it has been argued—speculatively—that their tobacco might have been spiked with some sort of opiate or narcotic'.[38] Such exotic speculations are unnecessary, however. The amount of tobacco being consumed was enough to generate the same kind of narcotic intoxication experienced by shamanic practitioners in lowland South America through the heavy ingestion of *N. tabacum* to this day. The stupefied silence frequently engendered was captured by a Russian historian who visited England in 1790:

> I have dropped into a number of coffeehouses only to find twenty of thirty men sitting around in deep silence, reading newspapers, and drinking port. You are lucky if, in the course of ten minutes, you hear three words…'Your health, gentlemen!'[39]

Tobacco and Embodied Cognition

Nowhere was tobacco use more prominent than among the literati, as is brilliantly evoked in Isaac Hawkins Browne's six satirical poems in praise of tobacco. Every one of them is written in the style of a different contemporary poet. For Browne, the 'light from smoke' upon which they all rely is tobacco. He sees tobacco as either a disreputable cousin to the classical Muses or the divine inspiration of the Christian tradition. 'While offering a sublime heightening of perception and thoughts, the inspiration she [tobacco] offers is debased by fleshly cravings, foul-smelling fumes, and addiction'.[40] Oxfordshire poet John Philips, while revelling in the ability of inhaled tobacco to 'suck new Life into my Soul', likewise noted the inferiority of a 'Muse from smoke' to a classical Muse, since even as it elevates the mind, tobacco weakens the body.[41] Tobacco could also, though, be described as 'Assistant Chief' to 'Country vicar': 'If text obscure perplex his Brain, / He scratches, thinks, but all in vain; / Till lighted Pipe's prevailing Ray, / Like *Phoebus*, drives the Fog away'.[42] In some cases 'to think and smoke tobacco'[43] became a profoundly spiritual experience, described by one Scottish Secessionist minister as bringing the mind closer to God, with tobacco's effects on the body likened to the Holy Spirit's even more powerful action on the soul. Inspiration was also attributed to snuff, which was becoming recognized for its stimulant properties: when pulverized into 'smart Rappee' (a coarse snuff) it was said to invigorate 'Sir Fopling's Brain, if Brain there be', giving him the ability to shine 'in Dedications, Poems, Plays'.[44]

Heretofore there has been little recognition or acknowledgement of the breadth and profundity of tobacco's influence on the 'embodied cognition' of individuals who regularly subjected themselves to such high levels of nicotian stupefaction. One fundamental effect, I surmise, was the development of binary notions of 'self' and 'non-self' or 'other', a prerequisite, if one were needed, for the generation of individuality. The narcotic effect of tobacco can only encourage the formation of such relationships. Some scholars see these changes in terms of the Renaissance humanist idea of Man boldly stepping out from behind God's shadow and becoming a unique, all-powerful entity.[45] For Riesman and co-authors, though, there are two distinct periods in the development of modern individualism: its fifteenth- and sixteenth-century emergence from older 'tradition-directed' social forms, and what they call an 'inner-directed' stage of intense individualism which they see as developing between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. This of course was precisely the period when tobacco was making such great inroads into Europe.[46] Martin points out significant regional variations between and within countries in the increasing production of 'ego documents' in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—variations he describes as 'baffling'.[47] Although pre-tobacco late Medieval Italy was similarly full of people writing letters, diaries, memoirs, journals, and such like,[48] the eighteenth-century effulgence of ego documents took place predominantly in England and the maritime provinces of the Dutch Republic (Friesland, Zeeland, Holland), the two areas of Europe where tobacco use was particularly heavy at that time.

Both the 'individual as expressive, self-reflective subject' in Martin's formulation of the performative type of selfhood, and the shades of cosmological perspectivism inherent in a self 'increasingly conscious about the need to assume different roles in different contexts', would have been encouraged by nicotian influences (see Table 13.1). However, as well as 'self' and 'non-self', other dualisms appear to have become prominent in European thought at a time corresponding with the arrival of tobacco.

Tobacco and the Scientific Separation of 'Facts' and 'Values'

Francis Bacon, for example, was one of the new breed of seventeenth-century philosopher-scientists whose arguments exemplified the trend towards the bifurcation of 'facts' and 'values', 'reality' and 'fantasy'. According to Bacon, 'traditional' modes of knowledge continually mixed

Table 13.1 Martin's three basic types of selfhood in Renaissance Europe (from Martin, 'The Myth of Renaissance Individualism', 210–11)

Type	*When?*	*Characteristics*	*Comments*
Communal or civic	Throughout period	Group or collective identity	Often based on family or lineage
Performative or prudential	Appeared quite suddenly in early sixteenth century	Individual as expressive, self-reflective subject	Increasingly conscious of need to assume different roles based on context
Porous or open	Late medieval and early modern	Body as porous, open to strong 'spiritual' forces from outside	Often through witchcraft or possession

up 'the reality of the world with its configurations in the minds of men'.[49] The 'cracks and deformities' of the mind, he argued, prevented it reflecting 'the genuine ray of things'. The only option, in Bacon's view, was to 'dissect the nature of this very world itself'. Withington highlights the 'perennial tensions' (dualisms all) that came into play as words such as 'modern', 'society', 'company', and 'commonwealth' sidled into use—all of them at much the same time as tobacco became a significant feature of the European intoxicant landscape. These include the tensions between received wisdom and personal experience; between reform and resistance; between public service and private profit; between the common good and its political organization; between idealism and power; between the social and the natural worlds.[50] We could add Bacon's 'reality' and 'imagination' to this list.

For Bruno Latour, attempting to champion one binary and ignoring the other results in the development of an even stronger hybrid relationship between the two. Through these means, one half of the polarity comes to assume some of the attributes of the other, be it nature–culture, reality–imagination, object–subject or tobacco–people. This is because as soon as one tries to become 'modern' by splitting the world into binaries such as 'nature' and 'culture', so these hard-fought distinctions are breached and the things we would call things become people, and the people we call people become things. We can see this development in the extraordinary eruption of non-human 'object'- or 'it'-narratives on

the eighteenth-century English literary scene which I shall now go on to explore. The 'poetry of attention' likewise is a genre in which I argue nicotian influences are strong.

'It'-Narratives and the Poetry of Attention—Changing Perspectives?

Although there are isolated instances of objects being given the power of speech in earlier literary history, in eighteenth-century English literature things started vocalizing as never before. 'Can the thing speak?' the anthropologist Martin Holbraad asks with an avant-garde rhetorical flourish in 2011.[51] Well, in eighteenth-century English literature things were positively gabbling. The object- or 'it'-narratives featuring a non-human voice were satirical pieces of prose, the protagonists and narrators of which were 'mundane material objects such as banknotes, corkscrews, shoes, and coins that circulate through human society, commenting upon and damning it as they go'.[52] While we might associate such a genre today with literature for children, the initial audience was overwhelmingly adult. The genre's popularity is exemplified by the fact that one of the first examples, Charles Johnstone's *Chrysal: Or the Adventures of a Guinea*, went into a third edition within three years of its first publication in 1760.[53]

These non-human 'it'-narratives are a fascinating genre, particularly given the potential of tobacco to influence cosmological perspectivism and in the context of Latour's remarks about modernity. The complex modern relationship that was developing between man and nature, the human and non-human, is reflected in the philosophical dissolution of 'nature' and 'culture' in Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, published in 1690. Using arguments reminiscent of Lucretius, Locke argues that we cannot determine whether thought occurs in our souls, or in 'some systems of matter fitly disposed', such as our brains. It is perhaps no coincidence, given this shift to more material connections, that James Arbuckle commented in 1719 on the likeness between the tobacco leaf and the human brain.[54] John Hill, cautioning against the immoderate use of snuff in 1761, argued that the nose offered a direct path to the brain, its nostrils 'covered, in a manner, with branches of nerves: and these so thinly guarded from the air, that the brain itself may be said to lie almost naked there'.[55]

The 'sentient matter' question, as it came to be known, revolved around whether sentience derived from a soul (as the immaterialists believed), or whether man was nothing more than matter whose thought occurred in and through the brain (as the so-called 'free thinkers', or materialists, argued). The immaterialists, attempting 'to maintain the ontological privilege of humanism',[56] could only accept matter as passive. An early lecture series endowed by the chemist Robert Boyle featured a sermon delivered by Richard Bentley entitled 'Matter and Motion cannot Think: or, a confutation of atheism from the faculties of the soul'. Bentley aimed to reconcile science with the rational belief in God and was strongly opposed to the 'vulgarly received notion of nature' espoused by the materialists. 'Sensation and Perception are not inherent in matter as such', Bentley argued, 'for if it were so; what monstrous absurdities would follow? Every Stock and Stone would be a percipient and rational creature'.[57]

Locke's views, rather than Bentley's, seem to have been the imaginative touchstone for the surge in popularity of 'it'-narratives. 284 published works are recorded between 1700 and 1900.[58] With them came terms and ideas which seem highly consonant with contemporary notions of non-human agency. Indeed the term 'material agency' was first used in William Jones' essay *First Principles of Natural Philosophy* (1762) in a manner remarkably similar to how it is used by Science and Technology Studies scholars today.[59]

A diverse range of things speak in object narratives, and they go to many places. Mobile objects are at an advantage. A banknote circulates 'within the space of five pages from a milliner, to a bishop's wife, to the bishop, to a bookseller, to a printer, to a pastry cook, and to a seller of dead dogs'.[60] Alternatively static places such as a Covent Garden pub or the Bank of England are invoked, but watch and comment on the human characters that pass by them. The rupee in Helenus Scott's *Adventures of a Rupee* (1782) spends most of its time in a pawnbroker's, the novel presenting a series of portraits of visitors to the shop, whose stories are told to the rupee by the spirits of gold.[61] Like the diverse explanations for the origins of Enlightenment, the explanations posited for the eruption of the 'it'-narratives and their success with the reading public largely reflect the disciplinary interests of those who propose them. Lynch, for example, suggests they were an attempt to soften (through humanizing) the new market system 'which made English men and women uneasy'.[62] According to Hudson, they were a means of placing the old aristocracy

and the new mercantile classes on an equal footing, narratively speaking.[63] Less convincing is Flint's argument that speaking objects reflect authors' anxieties concerning the public exposure of their books.[64] However, as well as reflecting the impact of the growing class of *nouveau riche*, markets or books, 'it'-narratives offer important creative explorations of some of the philosophical preoccupations arising from the Enlightenment, such as people's increasing sense of separation from, and consequent objective interest in, the material world. This trend is predicated on an increasingly strong dissociation of the human from the non-human from the seventeenth century onwards. Insofar as tobacco is strongly implicated in the hybridization that ensued, tobacco is another explanation for the development of the 'it'-narrative form.

Another example of tobacco's influence in eighteenth-century literature is afforded by what one commentator calls 'the poetry of attention'. Koehler identifies this as an emergent poetic genre marked by 'a commitment in much of the period's poetry to teaching readers how to attend closely', a concern related 'to a more widely recognized impulse in eighteenth-century poetry to describe details and to proliferate objects… to focus on the minute, the miscellaneous, the detailed, the domestic'.[65] This description is also apt for the still life paintings so popular in the Dutch Republic at the time. One wonders whether tobacco might have had an influence on this artistic form, since one of the well-documented cognitive effects of tobacco is as a stimulus barrier, enhancing attentiveness through screening out extraneous and distracting stimuli.

The fascination with the ordinary and everyday evinced by the poetry of attention stems from what Koehler calls a 'methodical, experimental attentiveness'. The examples she uses are telling. 'How does the world look from a cat's vantage? What response does the ringing of a bell evoke from hungry sparrows? […] In these poems the ordinary is defamiliarized; it is particularized according to the perception of one attentive viewer.'[66] Note the perspectivism reverberating in the notion of animals' vantage points. As in the 'it'-narrative form, there are smoky whiffs here of the cosmological perspectivism characteristic of lowland South American life and thought. Might the attention to detail and the perspectivism that accompanies it have been heightened by the prodigious consumption of tobacco? I suggest that the insinuation of tobacco into human affairs offers an explanation for the changes we can observe in literature and the arts in Europe at this time as a result of its embodied, cognitive

effects. However the poetry of attention, unlike the 'it'-narrative form, does not seem to have caught the imagination of those working in literary studies, possibly because of a disinclination among scholars to grapple with some of its psychological theories and overtones. Tobacco may serve to 'fill the gaps' with a material substance that helps explain the cognitive developments and perspectival shifts Koehler observes.

The Silence of Tobacco

Given the literary fashion for things, plants, and animals to tell stories from particular vantage points, the apparent lack of any extant 'it'-narratives delivered by tobacco or its paraphernalia is paradoxical. Despite the acculturation of things ('nature') through narrative, tobacco, although an eminent candidate for such a task, appears to have remained steadfastly silent, rather than making its own voice heard, at least in prose. Perhaps the reason is a practical one. Unlike a coin of the realm (for example) tobacco is an inherently unreliable speaking object, since it is less likely to be passed from person to person than to go up in smoke (in the hands of a smoker) or, as became increasingly popular during the eighteenth century, to go up the nostril, as snuff. Nevertheless, a pipe, tobacco box, pouch, or snuff box would appear to be ideal objects to offer perspicacious observations in the manner so evidently enjoyed by readers of the 'it'-narrative genre.

Tobacco's 'it'-narrative silence seems doubly surprising considering there was ample precedent for its appearance as a speaking character in at least two early seventeenth-century plays. Rather than its 'eloquence and oracle', championed in the Dutch play above, it is the power of tobacco that is emphasized in the 1604 play *Lingua* (attributed to Thomas Tomkis). In this play, tobacco is variously described as 'God', 'King', and 'Emperor'. 'The great God tobacco' appears on stage in spectacular fashion. However, when it comes to its voice, the apparition speaks an incomprehensible language that only his sponsor 'Olfactus' (the sense of smell) is able to translate.

Following an eighteenth-century reprint of *Lingua*,[67] a gentleman styling himself 'William Whif' wrote to the editor of the *Gentleman's Magazine* asking 'can any of your correspondents make sense of Tobacco's language, or suggest why he uses it? The editor [of the reprint] takes no notice of it'.[68] Whif's query seems to epitomize the changing perspectives of the eighteenth compared to the seventeenth century. I think it

unlikely a seventeenth-century audience would have seriously entertained the idea that tobacco really was speaking a potentially intelligible or translatable language, or would have accepted unquestioned the opinions of other characters, that this was an Antipodean language or the language of Arcadia whose people existed 'before the Moone'.[69] William Whif's views reflect the changes occasioned by the development of Enlightenment science and the accompanying belief that things (the language of a speaking plant, anthropomorphized as the 'King of Tobacco') need to be decoded or 'described'[70] rather than taken—as Tomkis surely intended us to do—at face value or as just a bit of amusing nonsense. No correspondents to the *Gentleman's Magazine* attempted to answer Whif's query—or if they did, the editor did not publish their responses.

A tobacco-related object does speak at least once in eighteenth-century English literature. It is a tobacco pipe which argues with a perfumed wig in a 'poetic fable' published by Christopher Smart in 1752. The wig, of the 'flaunting French' sort so popular in genteel society at the time, is critical of the tobacco pipe's 'barb'rous English! horrid Dutch!' polluting breath. The pipe retorts:

> Know, puppy, I'm an English pipe,
> Deem'd worthy of each Briton's gripe [grip],
> Who, with my cloud-compelling aid
> Help our plantations and our trade.[71]

Tobacco has shifted from an exotic, monarchical presence to an everyday product, the consumption of which was fundamental to supporting the national interest. Just as tobacco served to facilitate shifting, multinatural perspectives in its lowland South American base, the 'it-narrative' encouraged a perspectival shift for eighteenth-century English readers from one 'strictly oriented by the rank and gender of the narrator'[72] to one in which the non-human was also allowed an authoritative narrative voice. Indeed, Hudson goes on to suggest the 'it'-narrative was a necessary precursor to the frequently omniscient, 'non-focalized' narrative style of the nineteenth-century novel. From the perspective of historical, comparative anthropology, it seems likely that tobacco itself might have played a part in effecting such changes.

Conclusion

I have argued for the need to add tobacco, a hitherto unrecognized or taken for granted substance, to the list of elements we should consider in seeking to explain why the Enlightenment emerged where and when it did. The 'eloquence and oracle' offered by tobacco, I suggest, helped to promote some key intellectual and literary changes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Commonalities can be discerned between the long-term entanglement of tobacco and people in lowland South America and characteristics of certain new genres of English literature in the eighteenth century. Tobacco constitutes persons, changes perspectives, and generates dualisms. All these features have echoes in the literary outputs I have identified. They seem to me as much the result of the imbroglio with tobacco as of the other religious, political, and social changes that were taking place in England at the time. All were changes that helped attune people to the concepts and principles of the Enlightenment. The psychosocial trends and developments that I have suggested relate, at least in part, to the increased consumption of tobacco include an increased awareness of self/non-self, a sense of enhanced attentiveness, and the embodied cognitive ability to shift perspective and reflect on one's own positionality. These, I have argued, can be clearly discerned in two eighteenth-century English literary genres, the 'it'-narratives and the 'poetry of attention', both of them resonant with the 'tobacco ideology' associated with a much longer cultural history of tobacco use in lowland South America.

Notes

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