

### Appendix 4.3: Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Letter to Walter Scott, 3 February 1812, from *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth* (1820)

Walter Scott (1771–1832) had published his edition of *The Poetical Works of Anna Seward* in 1810. In the “Biographical Preface,” he wrote that in her *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin* (1804) Seward

laid her claim to the first fifty verses in the Botanic Garden, which she had written in compliment to Dr Darwin, and which he had inserted in his poem without any acknowledgement. The correctness of Miss Seward’s statement is proved by the publication of the verses with her name, in some periodical publications, previous to the appearance of Dr Darwin’s poem; and the disingenuous suppression of the aid of which he availed himself, must remain a considerable stain upon the character of the poet of Flora. (Vol. 1, pp. xx–xxi)

Scott also gives an account of the plagiarism of the verses (similar to Seward’s in *Memoirs*) in a note to the poem (Vol. 2, pp. 1–2).

Richard Lovell Edgeworth (1744–1817), educational writer and engineer, was a friend of ED and fellow Lunar Society member. His best-known work, *Practical Education* (1798), co-written with his daughter Maria, emphasizes learning through doing experiments. Maria Edgeworth (1768–1849) is best known for her novels including *Castle Rackrent* (1800) and *Belinda* (1802). The family lived at times in Ireland on the family estate at Edgeworthstown in County Longford, and at times in England.

Text copied from *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Esq. Begun by Himself and Concluded by his Daughter, Maria Edgeworth*. Vol. 2. London: R. Hunter, and Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1820.

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TO WALTER SCOTT.

“Edgeworth-Town, Feb. 3d, 1812.

DEAR SIR,

“Scales and the sword are emblems as properly suited to the chair of the critic, as to the seat of the municipal justice.<sup>1</sup> I do not therefore hesitate to represent to your court. that an imputation against the fairness of Dr. Darwin’s character as an author has been sanctioned by your tribunal, without sufficient evidence to support it.

“It had been said by Miss Seward, that the Doctor had inserted some of her poetry in his Botanic Garden, without making any acknowledgement of his having received it from her; and hence it is concluded, that he meant to pass her verses for his own.

“I was at Lichfield when the lines in question were written by Miss Seward, and I considered them as complimentary to the Doctor, but not as an offering of assistance. The Doctor had not at that time formed the scheme of the Botanic Garden; but many of the lines, which it contains, had been seen by his friends, several years

before the garden, which became the theme of his poetry, was in existence. Doctor Darwin composed and wrote the detached pictures in his poem, as he travelled in his carriage among his patients; and these lines were shewn from time to time to his intimate acquaintance, before they were arranged, as they now appear, in one collection. Among these friends I had the honor to be ranked; and for one, I steadily combated his intention of giving to them the form and name, which are before the public. I suggested the scheme of a poetical pantheon, to which the Doctor listened; but he could not prevail upon himself to untwine the amatorial bands, by which he had married the lovesick beings of his vegetable world.

“When I received the printed copy of his work, I expressed my surprise at seeing Miss Seward’s lines at the beginning of

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the poem. He replied, that it was a compliment, which he thought himself bound to pay to the lady, though the verses were not of the same tenor as his own.

“Miss Seward’s ode to Captain Cook stands deservedly high in the public opinion. Now, to my certain knowledge, most of the passages, which have been selected in the various reviews of that work, were written by Dr. Darwin. Indeed they bear such strong internal marks of the Doctor’s style of composition, that they may easily be distinguished by any reader, who will take the trouble to select them. I remember them distinctly to have been his, and to have read them aloud before Miss Seward and Doctor Darwin, in presence of Sir Brooke Boothby,<sup>2</sup> who will corroborate my assertion.

“I knew the late Dr. Darwin well, and it was as far from his temper and habits, as it was unnecessary to his acquirements, to beg, borrow, or steal, from any person on earth.

“The indifference of friends to living friends is frequently to be deplored. Fewer still will risk any thing, to support the fame of the deceased. I cannot however refrain from endeavouring, to rescue the moral character of a friend, when it is in my power to give perfect evidence, that it has been misrepresented. If I can by any means rescue Dr. Darwin’s name from an unmerited censure, I shall think that I have done for him, what, in a similar situation, I am sure he would have done for me.

“I have the honor to be,

“Dear Sir,

“Your most obedient servant,

“RICH. LOVELL EDGEWORTH.”

Perhaps the matter in dispute may not even by this evidence be decided in the minds of some, and it may be thought by others not worth debating further; but at all events, this letter, which was returned to me by the kind-

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ness of Walter Scott, is so characteristic of the warmth of my father’s heart, that it ought not to be suppressed.

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<sup>1</sup> Scott was called to the bar as an Advocate in 1792 and practiced law. He also became Sheriff-Depute of Selkirkshire in 1799 and Clerk of Session in 1806, holding both positions for the rest of his life.

<sup>2</sup> Brooke Boothby (1744–1824), author, traveller, and exotic plant collector, was part of ED’s circle of literary friends in Lichfield, and a member of the Botanical Society of Lichfield. He is best known for the 1781 portrait Joseph Wright painted of him reclining in a woodland setting with a volume of Rousseau.