Appendix 4.1: from Anna Seward, *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin* (1804)

In addition to the selections below, all of Chapter 6 of Seward's *Memoirs* is dedicated to a reading of *LOTP*. The latter part of Chapter 4 (pp. 166–89) discusses *The Botanic Garden* as a whole and analyzes ED's poetic style, and Chapter 5 gives a reading of *The Economy of Vegetation*.

Selections are copied from Anna Seward, *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin, Chiefly During his Residence at Lichfield, with Anecdotes of his Friends, and Criticisms on his Writings*. London: J. Johnson, 1804.

from Chapter 1 [On Darwin as poet and physician]

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To those many rich presents, which Nature bestowed on the mind of Dr. Darwin, she added the seducing, and often dangerous gift of a highly poetic imagination; but he remembered how fatal that gift professionally became to the young physicians, Akenside[1] and Armstrong.[2] Concerning *them*, the public could not be persuaded, that so much excellence in an ornamental science was compatible with intense application to a severer study; with such application as it held necessary to a responsibility, towards which it might look for the source of disease, on which it might lean for the struggle with mortality. Thus, through the first twenty-three years of his practice as a physician,

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Dr. Darwin, with the wisdom of Ulysses, bound himself to the medical mast, that he might not follow those delusive syrens, the muses, or be considered as their avowed votary.[3] Occasional little pieces, however, stole at seldom occurring periods from his pen; though he cautiously precluded their passing the press, before his latent genius for poetry became unveiled to the public eye in it's copious and dazzling splendour. Most of these minute gems have stolen into newspapers and magazines, since the impregnable rock, on which his medicinal and philosophical reputation were placed, induced him to contend for *that* species of fame, which should entwine the Parnassian laurel[4] with the balm of Pharmacy.

from Chapter 2 [A botanical conversation]

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Dr. Darwin was conversing with a brother Botanist, concerning the plant Kalmia, then a just imported stranger in our green-houses and gardens. A lady, who was present, concluding he had seen it, which in fact he had not, asked the Doctor what

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were the colours of the plant. He replied, "Madam, the Kalmia has precisely the colours of a seraph's wing." So fancifully did he express his want of consciousness respecting the appearance of a flower whose name and rareness were all he knew of the matter.

from Chapter 3 [On the real Botanic Garden; on Seward's "Verses" and the opening lines of *The Economy of Vegetation*]

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About the year 1777, Dr. Darwin purchased a little, wild, umbrageous valley, a mile from Lichfield, amongst the only rocks which neighbour that city so nearly. It was irriguous from various springs, and swampy from their plenitude. A mossy fountain, of the purest and coldest water imaginable, had, near a century back, in-

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duced the inhabitants of Lichfield to build a cold bath in the bosom of the vale. *That*, till the doctor took it into his possession, was the only mark of human industry which could be found in the tangled and sequestered scene.

One of its native features had long excited the attention of the curious; a rock, which, in the central depth of the glen, drops perpetually, about three times in a minute. Aquatic plants border its top and branch from its fissures. No length of summer drought abates, no rains increase its humidity, no frost congeals its droppings. The Doctor cultivated this spot,

"And Paradise was open'd in the wild."

In some parts he widened the brook into small lakes, that mirrored the valley; in others, he taught it to wind between shrubby margins. Not only with trees of

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various growth did he adorn the borders of the fountain, the brook, and the lakes, but with various classes of plants, uniting the Linnean science with the charm of landscape.

For the Naiad of the fountain, he wrote the following inscription.

SPEECH OF A WATER NYMPH.

If the meek flower of bashful dye,
Attract not thy incurious eye;
If the soft, murmuring rill to rest
Encharm not thy tumultuous breast,
Go, where Ambition lures the vain,
Or Avarice barters peace for gain!

Dr. Darwin restrained his friend Miss Seward's steps to this her always favourite scene till it had assumed its new beauties from cultivation. He purposed accompanying her on her first visit to his botanic garden, but a medical summons into the country deprived her of that

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pleasure. She took her tablets and pencil, and, seated on a flower-bank, in the midst of that luxuriant retreat, wrote the following lines, while the sun was gilding the glen, and while birds, of every plume, poured their song from the boughs.

> O, come not here, ye Proud, whose breasts infold
> Th' insatiate wish of glory, or of gold;
> O come not ye, whose branded foreheads wear
> Th' eternal frown of envy, or of care;
> For you no Dryad decks her fragrant bowers,
> For you her sparkling urn no Naiad pours;
> Unmark'd by you light Graces skim the green,
> And hovering Cupids aim their shafts unseen.
>
> But, thou! whose mind the well-attemper'd ray
> Of Taste, and Virtue, lights with purer day;
> Whose finer sense each soft vibration owns,
> Mute and unfeeling to discorded tones;
> Like the fair flower that spreads its lucid form
> To meet the sun, but shuts it to the storm;
> For thee my borders nurse the glowing wreath,
> My fountains murmur, and my zephyrs breathe;
> My painted birds their vivid plumes unfold,
> And insect armies wave their wings of gold.

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> And if with thee some hapless maid should stray,
> Disastrous love companion of her way,
> O lead her timid step to yonder glade,
> Whose weeping rock incumbent alders shade!
> There, as meek Evening wakes the temperate breeze,
> And moonbeams glimmer through the trembling trees,
> The rills, that gurgle round, shall sooth her ear,
> The weeping rock shall number tear for tear;
> And as sad Philomel, alike forlorn,
> Sings to the night, reclining on her thorn,
> While, at sweet intervals, each falling note
> Sighs in the gale, and whispers round the grot,
> The sister-woe shall calm her aching breast,

And softest slumbers steal her cares to rest.

Thus spoke the *Genius as he stept along,
And bade these lawns to Peace and Truth belong;
Down the steep slopes he led, with modest skill,
The grassy pathway and the vagrant rill;
Stretch'd o'er the marshy vale the willowy mound,
Where shines the lake amid the cultur'd ground;
Rais'd the young woodland, smooth'd the wavy green,
And gave to Beauty all the quiet scene.

O! may no ruder step these bowers prophane,
No midnight wassailers deface the plain;

*By the Genius of the place is meant its first cultivator, Dr. Darwin.

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And when the tempests of the wintry day
Blow golden Autumn's varied leaves away,
Winds of the North, restrain your icy gales,
Nor chill the bosom of these HALLOWED VALES!*

When Miss Seward gave this little poem to Dr. Darwin, he seemed pleased with it, and said, "I shall send it to the periodical publications; but it ought to form the exordium of a great work. The Linnean System is unexplored poetic ground, and an happy subject for the muse. It affords fine scope for poetic landscape; it suggests metamorphoses of the Ovidian kind, though reversed.[5] Ovid made men and women into flowers, plants, and trees. You should make

* These verses, in their original state, as inscribed here, will be found in Mr. Shaw's History of Staffordshire, published in 1798, near four years before the death of Dr. Darwin; see Article *Lichfield*, page 347.[6] Their author chose to assert her claim to them in the Doctor's lifetime, since they had appeared in the periodical Publications many years before the Botanic Garden passed the press, and had borne her signature.

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flowers, plants, and trees, into men and women. I," continued he, "will write the notes, which must be scientific; and you shall write the verse."

Miss S. observed, that, besides her want of botanic knowledge, the plan was not strictly proper for a female pen; that she felt how eminently it was adapted to the efflorescence of his own fancy.

He objected the professional danger of coming forward an acknowledged poet. It was pleaded, that on his first commencing medical professor, there might have been no danger; but that, beneath the unbounded confidence his experienced skill in medicine had obtained from the public, all risque of injury by reputation flowing in upon him from a new source was precluded;

especially since the subject of the poetry, and still more the notes, would be connected with pathology.

Dr. Darwin took his friend's advice,

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and very soon began his great poetic work; but previously, a few weeks after they were composed, sent the verses Miss S. wrote in his Botanic Garden, to the Gentleman's Magazine, and in her name. From thence they were copied in the Annual Register;[7] but, without consulting her, he had substituted for the last six lines, eight of his own. He afterwards, and again without the knowledge of their author, made them the exordium to the first part of his poem, published, for certain reasons, some years after the second part had appeared. No acknowledgement was made that those verses were the work of another pen. Such acknowledgement ought to have been made, especially since they passed the press in the name of their real author. They are somewhat altered in the exordium to Dr. Darwin's Poem, and eighteen lines of his own are interwoven with them.

from Chapter 4 [On the composition and publication of *The Botanic Garden*]

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The commencement of that poem [*The Botanic Garden*] in 1779 has been previously mentioned, with the circumstance which gave it birth. It consists of two parts; the first contains the Economy of Vegetation, the second the Loves of the Plants. Each is enriched by a number of philosophical notes. They state a great variety of theories and experiments in botany, chemistry, electricity, mechanics, and in the various species of air, salubrious, noxious, and deadly. The discoveries of the modern professors in all those sciences, are frequently mentioned with praise highly gratifying to them. In

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these notes explanations are found of every personified plant, it's generic history, it's local situation, and the nature of the soil and climate to which it is indigenous; it's botanic and its common name.

The verse corrected, polished, and modulated with the most sedulous attention; the notes involving such great diversity of matter relating to natural history; and the composition going forward in the short recesses of professional attendance, but chiefly in his chaise,[8] as he travelled from one place to another, the Botanic Garden could not be the work of one, two, or three years; it was *ten* from its primal lines to its first publication. The immense price which the bookseller gave for this work,[9] was doubtless owing to considerations which inspired his trust in it's popularity. Botany was, at that time, and still continues a very fashionable study. Not only philosophers, but fine ladies and gentlemen, sought

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to explore it's arcana. This poem, therefore, involved two classes of readers by whom it would probably be purchased. Every skilful Botanist, every mere Tyro[10] in the science, would wish to possess it for the sake of the notes, though insensible, perhaps, as the veriest rustic, to the charms of poetry; while every reader, awakened to them, must be ambitious to see such a constellation of poetic stars in his library; all that gave immortality to Ovid's fame, without the slightest imitation of his manner, the least debt to his ideas; since, though Dr. Darwin often retells that poet's stories, it is always with new imagery and heightened interest.

Certainly it was by an inversion of all custom that Dr. Darwin published the second part of his poem first. The reason given for so extraordinary a manœuvre in that advertisement which led the younger sister before the elder on the field of pub-

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lic exhibition, is this, that the appearance of the first part had been deferred till another year, for the purpose of repeating some experiments in vegetation.

The Doctor was accustomed to remark, that whenever a strange step had been taken, if any way obnoxious to censure, the alleged reason was scarcely ever the real motive. His own singular management in this instance, and the way in which he accounted for it, proved a case in point. He was conscious that the second part of his work would be more level than the first to the comprehension, more congenial to the taste of the superficial reader, from it's being much less abstract and metaphysic, while it possessed more than sufficient poetic matter to entertain and charm the enlightened and judicious few. They, however, he well knew, when his first part should appear, would feel it's superiority to the earlier publication, it's grander conceptions, it's more

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splendid imagery, though less calculated to amuse and to be understood by common readers. Those of that last number who had purchased the first part would not like to possess the poem incomplete, and therefore would purchase the second. The observations of this paragraph refer to the poetry of the work, and to the two classes of readers who would value it chiefly on that account. The notes to each part must render them equally valuable to the votaries of botany, and other modern sciences.

from Chapter 5 [On sexual morality and *LOTP*]

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As to the amours of the Plants and Flowers, it is a burlesque upon morality to make them responsible at its tribunal. The floral harems do not form an imaginary but a real system, which philosophy has discovered, and with which poetry sports. The impurity is in the imagination

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of the reader, not on the pages of the poet, when the Botanic Garden is considered on the whole, as an immodest composition.

from Chapter 6 [On Ninon, *LOTP* I:125–38]

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To the picture of the Lychnis succeeds that of Gloriosa Superba, with her successive train of lovers, the second number rising to maturity when the first perish. This libertine lady of the groves introduces the story of the celebrated female Voluptuary, in the reign of Louis the Fourteenth,[11] Ninon de L'Enclos,[12] whose beauty and graces are recorded to have been trium-

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phant over the power of Time. The story of that passion, so terrible in it's consequences, with which she unintentionally inspired her natural son by Lord Jersey of England,[13] is finely told in this part; that son, totally unconscious of his birth and fatal nearness of blood to the charming Madam de L'Enclos! In the first edition of the Loves of the Plants this extraordinary woman received both personal and mental injustice from the prelude to that story. She is there represented by the Poet, as wrinkled, grey, and paralytic; circumstances incompatible with the possibility of the attachment, and contrary to the representation of her biographers. Upon their testimony we learn that Ninon retained a large portion of her personal beauty and graces to an almost incredible period; that it was considerable enough to procure her young lovers at the age of

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eighty, whose passion for her, however inconceivable, could not be interested, as she was not rich, and much too delicate in her sentiments to purchase the attention of the other sex.

When her son, by Lord Jersey, was a young officer about Court, known to her but unknown to himself, Madame de L'Enclos was scarcely forty years old, a period at which a very captivating degree of beauty and grace is sometimes found in the female sex. Of their existence at a considerably later period, the English fashionable circles, at this hour, exhibit some remarkable instances.

In the first edition of this Poem what is here *fatal* smiles was *harlot* smiles, an epithet most injurious to Madame de L'Enclos. Her attentions to her son, however affectionate, must have been purely maternal, though so deplorable in

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their consequences. The declaration by which she repulses his impious suit, entirely acquits her of the least design to inspire him with passion. Dr. Darwin was influenced by the author of this Memoir to rescue the form of Ninon from the unreal decrepitude he had imputed to it, and her principles from such unnatural excess of depravity.

If we may credit her historians, Ninon was an exception to a maxim of the Duke de Rochefaucault,[14] which has perhaps very few exceptions, viz. "Generally speaking, the least fault of an unchaste woman is her unchastity." Considering this remark as an axiom, the reason probably is, that chastity being the point of honour, as well as of virtue in women, it's violation has a strong tendency to engraft deceit and malignity upon the secret consciousness of self-abasement; a consciousness more fatal to the existence of other good qualities

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than voluptuousness itself; a consciousness too likely to produce hatred and envy towards people of spotless reputation, together with a desire to reduce others to their own unfortunate level. The great Moralist of the Old Testament says, "There is no wickedness like the wickedness of a woman;"[15] not because the weaker sex are naturally more depraved, but from the improbability that a fallen female should ever, even upon the sincerest repentance, regain the esteem and confidence of society, while it pardons a male libertine the instant he seems disposed to forsake his vice, and too often during it's full career.

But the fault of Madam de L'Enclos was single, and surrounded by solid virtues. Truth, sincerity, disinterested friendship, economy, generosity, and strict pecuniary justice, marked her commerce with the world, and secured to her the friendship and countenance of the most eminent

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people of that epoch, both as to talents and character.

The rigid and pious Madame de Maintenon[16] never ceased to be her avowed and intimate friend, as appears from a most interesting dialogue which passed between them after Maintenon became the wife of Louis the Fourteenth. It will be found in the Memoirs of Madame de L'Enclos, which are elegantly translated from the French into our language, and were published by Dodsley in 1761.[17] It is a very brilliant and entertaining work.

from Chapter 6 [On Mrs. Delany, *LOTP* II:155-164]

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The venerable and celebrated Mrs. Delany,[18] sometime deceased, and her miraculous Hortus Siccus, are here introduced as a simile to Papyra; but describing a totally different art from hers, even that of a mere artificial flower-maker, this simile, which bears so little resemblance to writing and printing, forms one of the most censurable passages in the whole poem. Mrs. Delany, in her representation of plants and flowers, native and exotic, and which fill ten immense folio volumes, used neither the wax, moss, or wire, attributed to her in this entirely false description of her art. She employed no material but paper, which she herself, from her knowledge of chemistry, was enabled to dye of all hues,

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and in every shade of each; no implement but her scissors, not once her pencil; yet never did painting present a more exact representation of flowers of every colour, size, and cultivation, from the simple hedge and field-flower, to the most complicated foliage that Horticulture has multiplied. This lady, once Mrs. Pendarvis, the friend and correspondent of Swift, and in her later years honored by the friendship and frequent visits at Windsor, of the King, Queen, and Princesses, began this her astonishing self-invented work at the age of seventy-four. The Poet here misrepresents her as being assisted by her virgin train. She had no assistant; no hands, but her own, formed one leaf or flower of the ten volumes. Her family were mortified by a description which they justly thought degraded her peculiar art; and remonstrated with Dr. Darwin on the occasion, expressing a wish that future editions might con-

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tain it's more just picture on his poetic page. He said, the description in the note was accurate; but that truth in this, as in many other instances, being less favourable to poetry than fiction, he did not cho[o]se to alter the text.

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[1] Mark Akenside (1721–1770), poet and physician, best known for *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744), a three-book philosophical poem in blank verse with notes. He finished his medical studies at Leiden a few months after it was first published. He had difficulty establishing himself in a medical practice, but there is no evidence that his having published poetry was to blame. He went on to hold positions at St Thomas's Hospital and Christ's Hospital, and in 1761 became physician-in-ordinary to Queen Charlotte.

[2] John Armstrong (1708/9–1779), poet and physician, best known for *The Oeconomy of Love* (1736), a poem of sex advice, and *The Art of Preserving Health* (1744), a medical poem in blank verse in four books about air, diet, exercise, and the passions, respectively. There is no sign that publishing poetry actually had a negative effect on his medical career, but Armstrong perpetuated the idea in a sarcastic third-person retrospective on his career at the end of *Medical Essays* (1773), where he writes, "But for that distempered excess of sensibility he might have been as much renowned as almost any *Quack*---notwithstanding even his having imprudently published a system of what every body allows to be sound Physick---only indeed that it was in verse" (p. 38), and "His having written a Poem upon a subject reckoned of no inconsiderable consequence to the health of mankind was, as some say, sufficient alone in this age and meridian, to have ruined him as a Physician" (p. 39). When Armstrong's medical career was destroyed in 1765, it was due to the College of Physicians summoning him for practicing without a license.

[3] A reference to Homer's *Odyssey* 12.

[4] In the classical world, Parnassus was sacred to the Muses and held the source of poetic inspiration; the laurel was awarded for poetic prowess.

[5] Cf. *LOTP*, Proem.

[6] *The History and Antiquities of Staffordshire* (1798–1801), by Stebbing Shaw (1762–1802), a historian and topographer who knew ED's friend William Bagshaw Stevens. (Shaw had been a student at Repton School in Derbyshire where Stevens was headmaster.) Seward's page reference is found in Vol. 1.

[7] The poem does not appear in the *Annual Register* for 1783, the year in which it was published in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, nor can it be found in the *General Index to Dodsley's Annual Register from its Commencement in 1758 to the year 1819* (1826).

[8] A light open carriage seating one or two, often covered; also, light carriages generally.

[9] A contract from 20 February 1790 has Joseph Johnson paying ED £300 for the copyright of *LOTP* and £400 on the publication of *The Economy of Vegetation* (King-Hele, ed., *Letters* 84-10n.)

[10] Beginner.

[11] Louis XIV of France, who reigned from 1643 to 1715.
[12] Ninon (Anne) de l'Enclos (1620–1705) was a French courtesan and writer; she held a *salon* in Paris attended by literary and political luminaries.
[13] Presumably Edward Villiers (1655–1711), first earl of Jersey.
[14] François, duc de La Rochefoucauld (1613–1680), best known for his *Réflexions ou Sentences est maximes morales* (1665, 1678). Seward refers to Maxim 131: "Le moindre défaut des femmes qui se sont abandonées à faire l'amour, c'est de faire l'amour."
[15] Ecclesiasticus 25:19.
[16] Françoise d'Aubigné (1635–1719), second wife of Louis XIV. She had been the governess of his illegitimate children; they married secretly in 1683. She was previously married to the writer Paul Scarron (bap. 1610–d. 1660)and involved in his salon. In 1674–1675, with the help of the King, she obtained the estate of Maintenon and its title. In 1686, she founded a school for girls at Saint-Cyr.
[17] *The Memoirs of Ninon de l'Enclos, with her Letters to Monsr de St Evremond and to the Marquis de Sevigné. Collected and Translated from the French, by a Lady.* 2 vols. (1761), Vol. 1, pp. 116–26.
[18] Mary Delany (1700–1788), formerly Pendarves, née Granville, though without fortune herself, was well connected in court, society, and the intellectual world, corresponding with figures such as composer George Frideric Handel (1685–1759), philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), and writers Jonathan Swift (1667–1745) and Frances Burney (1752–1840). She also received a house and a pension from George III. Her uniquely observant letters have been drawn upon by historians as documentation of eighteenth-century life and material culture. She was adept in several crafts including embroidery, shellwork, painting, and silhouettes. From 1768 until 1785, Delany lived much of the year at Bulstrode in Buckinghamshire, the home of her friend Margaret Cavendish Bentinck (1715–1785), duchess of Portland (owner of the Portland Vase which figures prominently in *The Economy of Vegetation* (II:320, Additional Note XXII—Portland Vase, and accompanying illustrations by William Blake (1757–1827)). Together they enjoyed crafting and natural history pursuits. It was there, in 1772, that Delany began making the paper mosaics of flowers and plants which are her major work, produced over the course of a decade and collectively called the "Flora Delanica". They are collages of colored paper with watercolor and bodycolor (opaque watercolour), and sometimes include plant material. Many are now held in the British Museum Prints and Drawings department. (See Alicia Weisberg-Roberts, "Introduction (1): Mrs. Delany from Source to Subject" in *Mrs. Delany and Her Circle* ed. Mark Laird and Alicia Weisberg-Roberts (2009), pp. 1–19.)