

Appendix 5.13: Elizabeth Moody, “To Dr. Darwin, On Reading His Loves of the Plants” (1798)

Elizabeth Moody (1737–1814), née Greenly, initially circulated her poems privately. At age 40 she married Christopher Lake Moody, a dissenting clergyman with literary interests. She then began to publish poems in magazines, including the *St. James's Chronicle* (co-founded by her husband with Ralph Griffiths who was the editor of the *Monthly Review*) to which she contributed reviews. *Poetic Trifles* is her only book.

Text copied from Elizabeth Moody, “To Dr. Darwin, On Reading His Loves of the Plants.” In *Poetic Trifles*. London: Printed by H. Baldwin and Son for T. Cadell, Jun. and W. Davies, 1798.

[p. 8]

TO DR. DARWIN,
ON READING HIS LOVES OF THE PLANTS.

No Bard e'er gave his tuneful powers,
Thus to traduce the fame of flowers;
Till Darwin sung his gossip tales,
Of females woo'd by *twenty* males.
Of *Plants* so given to amorous pleasure;
Incontinent beyond all measure.
He sings that in botanic schools,
Husbands* adopt licentious rules;
Plurality of Wives they wed,
And all they like—they take to bed.
That Lovers sigh with *secret* love,
And marriage rites clandestine, prove.
That, fann'd in groves their mutual fire,
They to some *Gretna Green*¹ retire.

Linneus things, no doubt, reveal'd,
Which prudent *Plants* would wish conceal'd;

* See classes of Flowers, Polygamy, Clandestine Marriage, &c.

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So free of *families* he spoke,
As must that modest race provoke.
Till he invaded Flora's bowers

None heard of marriage among flowers;
Sexual distinctions were unknown;
Discover'd by the Swede alone.
He blab'd through all the list'ning groves,
The mystick rites of *flow'ry loves*.
He pry'd in every blossom's fold,
And all he saw unseemly—told.
Blab'd tales of many a *feeble* swain;*
Unmeet to join in Flora's train;
Unless appointed by her care,
Like Turkish guards to watch the fair.
These *vegetable monsters* claim,
Alliance with the Eunuch's name.
In every herb and tree that grows;
Some frail propensity he shows.

But then in prose Linneus prattles,
And soon forgot is all he tattles.

* See class—Vegetable Monsters and Eunuchs.

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While memory better pleas'd retains,
The frolicks of poetic brains.

So when the Muse with strains like thine
Enchantment breathes through every line;
That Reason pausing makes a stand,
Control'd by Fiction's magic hand.
Enamour'd we the verse pursue,
And feel each fair delusion true.

Luxuriant thought thy mind o'ergrows;
Such painting from thy pencil flows;
Warm to my sight the visions rise,
And thy rich fancy mine supplies.
Thy themes rehearsing in my bower;
From those I picture ev'ry flower;
With thy descriptive forms imprest,
I see them in thy colours drest;
Rememb'ring all thy lays unfold,
The snow-drop* *freezes* me with *cold*.

* How snow-drops cold and blue eye'd hare-bells blend

Their tender tears as o'er the stream they bend;
The love-sick violet, and the primrose pale,
Bow their sweet heads and whisper to the gale,

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I hear the *love-sick* violet's sighs,
And see the hare-bell's *azure eyes*.
See *jealous cowslips* hang their heads,
And *virgin lilies*—pine in beds.
The primrose meets my tinctur'd view,
Far paler than before—she grew.
While Woodbines *wanton* seem to twine,
And reeling shoots the *maud'ling** vine.

If e'er I seek the *Cypress* shade,
Whose branches contemplation aid.
Of learned lore my thoughts possest,
Might dwell on mummies in a chest.
Unperishable chests 'tis said, }
Where the Egyptian dead were laid, }
Are of the *Cypress* timber made. }
And gates of Rome's fam'd church they say,
Defying mould'ring time's decay;

With secret sighs the virgin lily droops,
And jealous cowslips hang their tawny cups.
DARWIN'S LOVES OF THE PLANTS.²

* "Drink deep, sweet youths," seductive *Vitis* cries,
The maudlin tear-drop glittering in her eyes. DARWIN.³

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From Constantine to Pope Eugene,
Eleven hundred years were seen,
In perfect state of sound and good,
Form'd of this Adamantine wood.
Then, DARWIN! were it not for thee,
I sure must venerate this tree.
But as his boughs hang o'er my head, }
I recollect from you I read, }
*His wife he exiles from his bed.**

Since thus thy fascinating art,
So takes possession of the heart,
Go bid thy Muse a wreath prepare,

“To bind some charming Chloe’s hair.”⁴
But tune no more thy Lyre’s sweet powers,
To libel harmless trees and flowers.

* Cupressus dark disdains his dusky bride,
One dome contains them—but TWO beds divide.

DARWIN.⁵

¹ The typical destination for young English people seeking clandestine marriages, Gretna Green is a village in Scotland close to the border with England. Scottish law allowed marriage without banns or a marriage license, presiding clergy, or parental permission for those under twenty-one, which were required in England with the Marriage Act of 1754.

² *LOTP* I:11–6.

³ *LOTP* III:355–56.

⁴ Matthew Prior (1664–1721), “The Garland” (1718), line 4: “To deck my charming Cloe’s Hair.”

⁵ *LOTP* I:73–4.