

The Botanic Garden by Erasmus Darwin: Volume I (The Pickering Masters)



The career of Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802) affords an extraordinary glimpse into the intellectual ferment of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Britain. As a popular poet, practicing physician, inventor of speaking machines and mechanical birds, essayer of natural history from geology to meteorology, and proponent of an evolutionary theory that inspired his famous grandson Charles, he left a lasting impression on almost every branch of knowledge. His magnum opus, and the synthesis of his myriad interests, is *The Botanic Garden* (1792) ? an epic poem that aims to enlist the Imagination under the banner of Science. Part I, *The Economy of Vegetation*, sings the praises of British industry as a dance of supernatural creatures while part II, *The Loves of the Plants*, wittily employs metaphors of human courtship to describe the reproductive cycles of hundreds of flowers. Darwin supplements his accomplished verses with (often much longer) philosophical notes that offer his idiosyncratic perspective on the scholarly controversies of the day. Despite a recent surge of academic interest in Darwin, however, no authoritative critical edition of *The Botanic Garden* exists, presenting a barrier to further scholarship. This two volume set comprises a complete, meticulously transcribed, reading text ? including all the poetry, prose apparatus, and illustrations ? along with extensive commentary that situates Darwin within contemporary debates about the natural sciences. This set will be of interest to readers as the definitive reference edition of *The Botanic Garden* and due to its efforts to make the work more practically and intellectually accessible to seasoned and novice readers alike. The first volume presents a wide ranging and authoritative introduction to *The Botanic Garden*, detailing the background to the work and the various contexts in which it should be

understood. These include: aesthetic theory and practice, the science of the mind, love and sexuality, politics, spirituality, the natural sciences, and evolutionary theory and the two Darwins. The full text of Part I of the The Botanic Garden, The Economy of Vegetation, then follows accompanied by the editors annotations, discussion of illustrations and textual notes.

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