

Appendix 1.4: “Apology” from *The Economy of Vegetation* (1791)

The “Apology” first appears in the front matter of the first edition (1791) of *The Economy of Vegetation*, Part 1 of *The Botanic Garden*, from which the following is transcribed.

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A P O L O G Y.

IT may be proper here to apologize for many of the subsequent conjectures on some articles of natural philosophy, as not being supported by accurate investigation or conclusive experiments. Extravagant theories however in those parts of philosophy, where our knowledge is yet imperfect, are not without their use; as they encourage the execution of laborious experiments, or the investigation of ingenious deductions, to confirm or refute them. And since natural objects are allied to each other by many affinities, every kind of theoretic distribution of them adds to our knowledge by developing some of their analogies.

The Rosicrucian doctrine of Gnomes, Sylphs, Nymphs, and Salamanders,¹ was thought to afford a proper machinery for a Botanic poem; as it is probable, that they were originally the names of hieroglyphic figures representing the elements.

Many of the important operations of Nature were shadowed or allegorized in the heathen mythology, as the first Cupid springing from the Egg of Night, the marriage of Cupid and Psyche, the Rape of Proserpine, the Congress of Jupiter and Juno, Death and Resuscitation of Adonis, &c. many of which are ingeniously explained in the works of Bacon, Vol. V. p. 47. 4th Edit. London, 1778.² The

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Egyptians were possessed of many discoveries in philosophy and chemistry before the invention of letters; these were then expressed in hieroglyphic paintings of men and animals; which after the discovery of the alphabet were described and animated by the poets, and became first the deities of Egypt, and afterwards of Greece and Rome. Allusions to those fables were therefore thought proper ornaments to a philosophical poem, and are occasionally introduced either as represented by the poets, or preserved on the numerous gems and medallions of antiquity.

¹ See editor's note to *LOTP* I:1.

² ED refers to *The Works of Francis Bacon* published by Rivington et al. in 1778. The page number is incorrect: it should be p. 470, where Proserpine is discussed in an essay interpreting classical mythology symbolically, entitled “De Sapientia Veterum” or “The Wisdom of the Ancients” (pp. 439–72).