

Appendix 4.4: Anna Seward, “Verses written in Dr. Darwin’s Botanical Garden near Lichfield,” *Gentleman’s Magazine* 53 (1783)

Text copied from *Gentleman’s Magazine* 53 (May 1783): p. 428.

Mr. Urban,¹

I SEND you, for the entertainment of your poetical readers, some very elegant lines, the composition of the ingenious MISS SEWARD.—They were written before her publications had enranded her in the first class of English poets. I do not know that they have been presented to the public eye.

M.C.S.²

VERSES WRITTEN IN DR. DARWIN’S
BOTANICAL GARDEN NEAR LICHFIELD.

“OH come not here, ye proud, whose breasts infold
Th’ insatiate thirst of glory, or of gold!
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 spread their wings unseen.
Thou! o’er whose mind the well-attemper’d ray
Of Taste and Virtue sheds a purer day;
Whose finer sense each soft vibration owns,
Mute and unfeeling to discordant tones;
Like the fair flower that spreads its lucid form
To meet the sun, and shuts it to the storm;
For thee my borders nurse the glowing wreath,
My fountains murmur, and my zephyrs breathe;
To charm thy eye, amid the chrystal tide,
With sinuous track my silver nations glide;
My choral birds their vivid plumes unfold,
And insect-armies wave their wings of gold.
And if with thee some hapless maid should stray,
Disastrous Love companion of her way,
Oh lead her timid step to yonder glade,
Whose arching rock incumbent alders shade!
There, as meek Evening wakes her temperate breeze,
And moon-beams glimmer through the trembling trees,
The rills that gurgle round shall sooth her ear
The weeping well shall number tear for tear.
And, as sad Philomel,³ alike forlorn,
Sings to the night, reclining on a thorn,

While at sweet intervals each falling note
Sighs in the gale, and whispers through the grot,
The sister-woe shall calm her aching breast,
And softest numbers steal her cares to rest.”

Thus spoke the Genius, as he stepp'd along,
And bade these lawns to Peace and Truth belong:
Down the steep slopes he led, with modest skill,
The willing pathway, and the vagrant rill;
Stretch'd o'er the marshy vale yon willowy mound,
And bade the wave reflect the cultur'd ground;
Rear'd the young woodlands, smooth'd the wavy green,
And gave to Beauty all the quiet scene.

Winds of the North! restrain your icy gales,
Nor chill the bosom of these hallow'd vales!
Thou, gentle Botany! assume thy reign,
And fill with beauteous families the plain!
From giant oaks, that wave their branches dark,
To the dwarf moss that clings upon their bark,
Thy beaux and belles shall crowd the gaudy grove,
And woo and win their vegetable loves;⁴
With fairest fruits the sweetest foliage twine,
And deck with lavish pomp Hygeia's⁵ shrine.

¹ The alias of the editor of the *Gentleman's Magazine* was Sylvanus Urban, beginning with its first editor Edward Cave (1691–1754). The editor in 1783 was John Nichols (1745–1826).

² According to Seward's 1792 letter to Mrs. Jackson, it seems to have been ED's friend William Bagshaw Stevens who sent the verses to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, though these initials do not correspond. Stevens (1756–1800) was a schoolmaster at Repton School in Derbyshire, and also a minister in the Church of England. He published two books of poetry, and his journal was published in 1965. He wrote commendatory verses for *The Botanic Garden* which appeared in Part 1, *The Economy of Vegetation* starting in 1791 (see Appendix 1.5).

³ The nightingale. In Greco-Roman mythology, Philomela was raped by her sister Procne's husband, Tereus, who then cut out her tongue. Philomela sent her sister a tapestry that revealed the crime. Procne stabbed her son to death, served his flesh to his father, then presented the boy's severed head. When Tereus drew his sword to slay the sisters, he was turned into a hoopoe, Procne into a swallow, and Philomela into a nightingale (though in some versions Philomela is the swallow and Procne the nightingale). The story is most famously told in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (6:401–674).

⁴ Cf. *LOTP* I:7–10.

⁵ Goddess of health in Greek mythology.