



The Poetry of Erasmus Darwin: Enlightened Spaces, Romantic Times

Martin Priestman

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While historians of science have focused significant attention on Erasmus Darwin's scientific ideas and milieu, relatively little attention has been paid to Darwin as a literary writer. In *The Poetry of Erasmus Darwin: Enlightened Spaces, Romantic Times*, Martin Priestman situates Darwin's three major poems - *The Loves of the Plants* (1789), *The Economy of Vegetation* (1791) and *The Temple of Nature* (1803) - and Darwin himself within a large, polymathic late-Enlightenment network of other scientists, writers, thinkers and social movers and shakers. Interpreting Darwin's poetry in terms of Darwin's broader sense of the poetic text as a material space, he posits a significant shift from the Enlightenment's emphases on conceptual spaces to the Romantic period's emphases on historical time. He shows how Darwin's poetry illuminates his stance toward all the major physical sciences and his well-formulated theories of evolution and materially based psychology. Priestman's study also offers the first substantial accounts of Darwin's mythological theories and their links to Enlightenment Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry, and of the reading of history that emerges from the fragment-poem *The Progress of Society*, a first-ever printed edition of which is included in an appendix. Ultimately, Priestman's book offers readers a sustained account of Darwin's polymathic Enlightenment worldview and cognate poetics in a period when texts are too often judged by their adherence to a retrospectively constructed "Romanticism".

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