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"The World as a Wardian Case"

Brown, Kate



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In 1829, Nathanial Bagshaw Ward, a London doctor, placed the pupa of a sphinx moth, some dirt, and a few leaves in a glass bottle and clamped on a lid. As Luke Keough describes in The Wardian Case, Ward watched as condensation formed inside and slid down the walls. In time, the moth hatched. As he reached in to retrieve it, the doctor noticed two fine slivers of green on the soil. He capped the bottle again and left it on a windowsill. Soon a sprig of grass and a tiny fern uncoiled. Ward was astounded. For years he had tried to grow ferns in his garden. Inside the bottle, the fern and grass created a tiny microcosm, generating their own atmosphere, recycling water, and drawing energy from light. The bottled plants, he reasoned, took root because they were sealed

from the London soot that killed his outdoor plants. Ward's London, heated by coal fires, suffered from a smog that generated lung disease, one of the chief causes of death in the city in the nineteenth century. (From the article)

This article was originally published in *Springs: The Rachel Carson Center Review* . The journal is an online publication featuring peer-reviewed articles, creative nonfiction, and artistic contributions that showcase the work of the Rachel Carson Center and its community across the world.

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