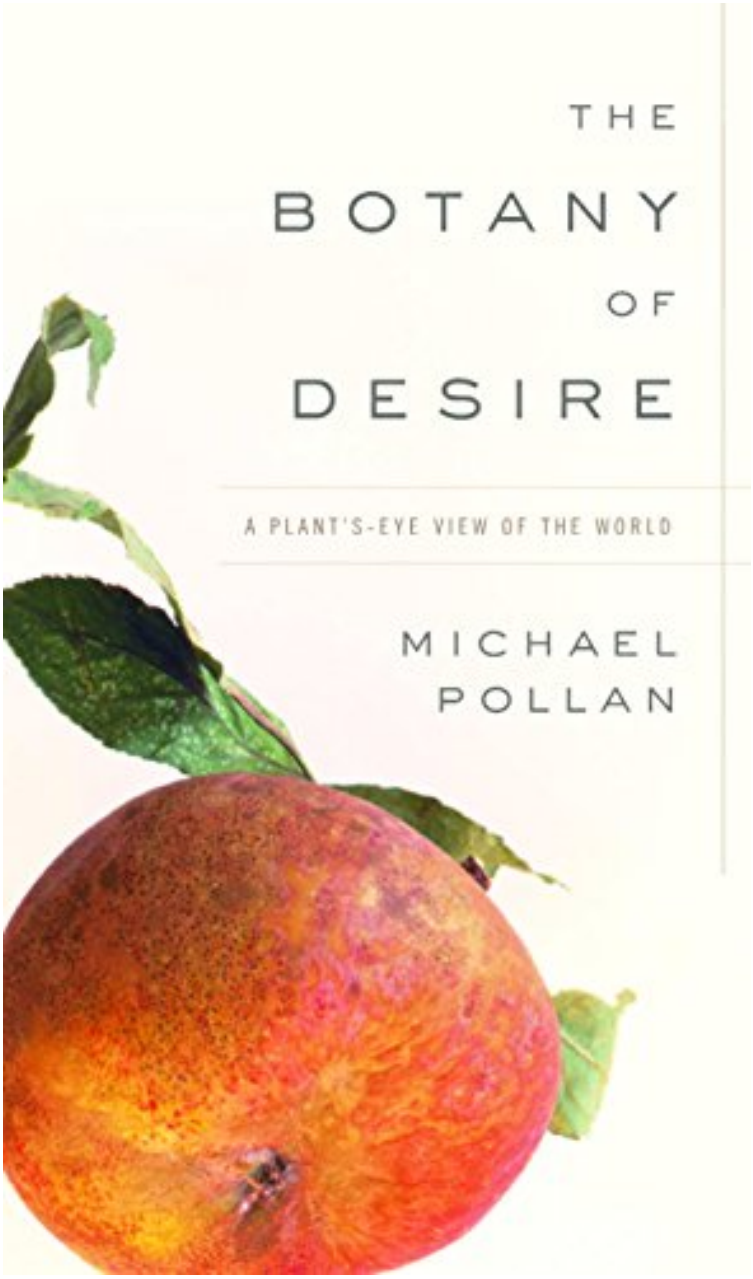
The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World



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[Mobile book] The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World

Par Michael Pollan : The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World:

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe book that helped make Michael Pollan,theNew York Timesbestselling author ofCookedandThe Omnivores Dilemma,one of the most trusted food experts in AmericaIn 1637, one Dutchman paid as much for a single tulip bulb as the going price of a town house in Amsterdam. Three and a

half centuries later, Amsterdam is once again the mecca for people who care passionately about one particular plantthough this time the obsessions revolves around the intoxicating effects of marijuana rather than the visual beauty of the tulip. How could flowers, of all things, become such objects of desire that they can drive men to financial ruin? In The Botany of Desire, Michael Pollan argues that the answer lies at the heart of the intimately reciprocal relationship between people and plants. In telling the stories of four familiar plant species that are deeply woven into the fabric of our lives, Pollan illustrates how they evolved to satisfy humankindss most basic yearningsand by doing so made themselves indispensable. For, just as weve benefited from these plants, the plants, in the grand co-evolutionary scheme that Pollan evokes so brilliantly, have done well by us. The sweetness of apples, for example, induced the early Americans to spread the species, giving the tree a whole new continent in which to blossom. So who is really domesticating whom? Weaving fascinating anecdotes and accessible science into gorgeous prose, Pollan takes us on an absorbing journey that will change the way we think about our place in nature.From the Hardcover edition.ExtraitChapter 1Desire: SweetnessPlant: The Apple (Malus domestica)If you happened to find yourself on the banks of the Ohio River on a particular afternoon in the spring of 1806somewhere just to the north of Wheeling, West Virginia, sayyou would probably have noticed a strange makeshift craft drifting lazily down the river. At the time, this particular stretch of the Ohio, wide and brown and bounded on both sides by steep shoulders of land thick with oaks and hickories, fairly boiled with river traffic, as a ramshackle armada of keelboats and barges ferried settlers from the comparative civilization of Pennsylvania to the wilderness of the Northwest Territory.The peculiar craft youd have caught sight of that afternoon consisted of a pair of hollowed-out logs that had been lashed together to form a rough catamaran, a sort of canoe plus sidecar. In one of the dugouts lounged the figure of a skinny man of about thirty, who may or may not have been wearing a burlap coffee sack for a shirt and a tin pot for a hat. According to the man in Jefferson County who deemed the scene worth recording, the fellow in the canoe appeared to be snoozing without a care in the world, evidently trusting in the river to take him wherever it was he wanted to go. The other hull, his sidecar, was riding low in the water under the weight of a small mountain of seeds that had been carefully blanketed with moss and mud to keep them from drying out in the sun.The fellow snoozing in the canoe was John Chapman, already well known to people in Ohio by his nickname: Johnny Appleseed. He was on his way to Marietta, where the Muskingum River pokes a big hole into the Ohios northern bank, pointing straight into the heart of the Northwest Territory. Chapmans plan was to plant a tree nursery along one of that rivers as-yet-unsettled tributaries, which drain the fertile, thickly forested hills of central Ohio as far north as Mansfield. In all likelihood, Chapman was coming from Allegheny County in western Pennsylvania, to which he returned each year to collect apple seeds, separating them out from the fragrant mounds of pomace that rose by the back door of every cider mill. A single bushel of apple seeds would have been enough to plant more than three hundred thousand trees; theres no way of telling how many bushels of seed Chapman had in tow that day, but its safe to say his catamaran was bearing several whole orchards into the wilderness.The image of John Chapman and his heap of apple seeds riding together down the Ohio has stayed with me since I first came across it a few years ago in an out-of-print biography. The scene, for me, has the resonance of mytha myth about how plants and people learned to use each other, each doing for the other things they could not do for themselves, in the bargain changing each other and improving their common lot.Henry David Thoreau once wrote that it is remarkable how closely the history of the apple tree is connected with that of man, and much of the American chapter of that story can be teased out of Chapmans story. Its the story of how pioneers like him helped domesticate the frontier by seeding it with Old World plants. Exotics, were apt to call these species today in disparagement, yet without them the American wilderness might never have become a home. What did the apple get in return? A golden age: untold new varieties and half a world of new habitat.As an emblem of the marriage between people and plants, the design of Chapmans peculiar craft strikes me as just right, implying as it does a relation of parity and reciprocal exchange between its two passengers. More than most of us do, Chapman seems to have had a knack for looking at the world from the plants point of viewpomocentrically, you might say. He understood he was working for the apples as much as they were working for him. Perhaps thats why he sometimes likened himself to a bumblebee, and why he would rig up his boat the way he did. Instead of towing his shipment of seeds behind him, Chapman lashed the two hulls together so they would travel down the river side by side.We give ourselves altogether too much credit in our dealings with other species. Even the power over nature that domestication supposedly represents is overstated. It takes two to perform that particular dance, after all, and plenty of plants and animals have elected to sit it out. Try as they might,

people have never been able to domesticate the oak tree, whose highly nutritious acorns remain far too bitter for humans to eat. Evidently the oak has such a satisfactory arrangement with the squirrelwhich obligingly forgets where it has buried every fourth acorn or so (admittedly, the estimate is Beatrix Potters)that the tree has never needed to enter into any kind of formal arrangement with us.The apple has been far more eager to do business with humans, and perhaps nowhere more so than in America. Like generations of other immigrants before and after, the apple has made itself at home here. In fact, the apple did such a convincing job of this that most of us wrongly assume the plant is a native. (Even Ralph Waldo Emerson, who knew a thing or two about natural history, called it the American fruit.) Yet there is a sensea biological, not just metaphorical sensein which this is, or has become, true, for the apple transformed itself when it came to America. Bringing boatloads of seed onto the frontier, Johnny Appleseed had a lot to do with that process, but so did the apple itself. No mere passenger or dependent, the apple is the hero of its own story.Revue de pressePollan shines a light on our own nature as well as on our implication in the natural world.The New York Times[Pollan] has a wide-ranging intellect, an eager grasp of evolutionary biology and a subversive streak that helps him to root out some wonderfully counterintuitive points. His prose both shimmers and snaps, and he has a knack for finding perfect quotes in the oddest places.... Best of all, Pollan really loves plants.The New York Times Book A wry, informed pastoral.The New YorkerWe can give no higher praise to the work of this superb science writer/ reporter than to say that his new book is as exciting as any youll read.Entertainment WeeklyA whimsical, literary romp through mans perpetually frustrating and always unpredictable relationship with nature.Los Angeles Times