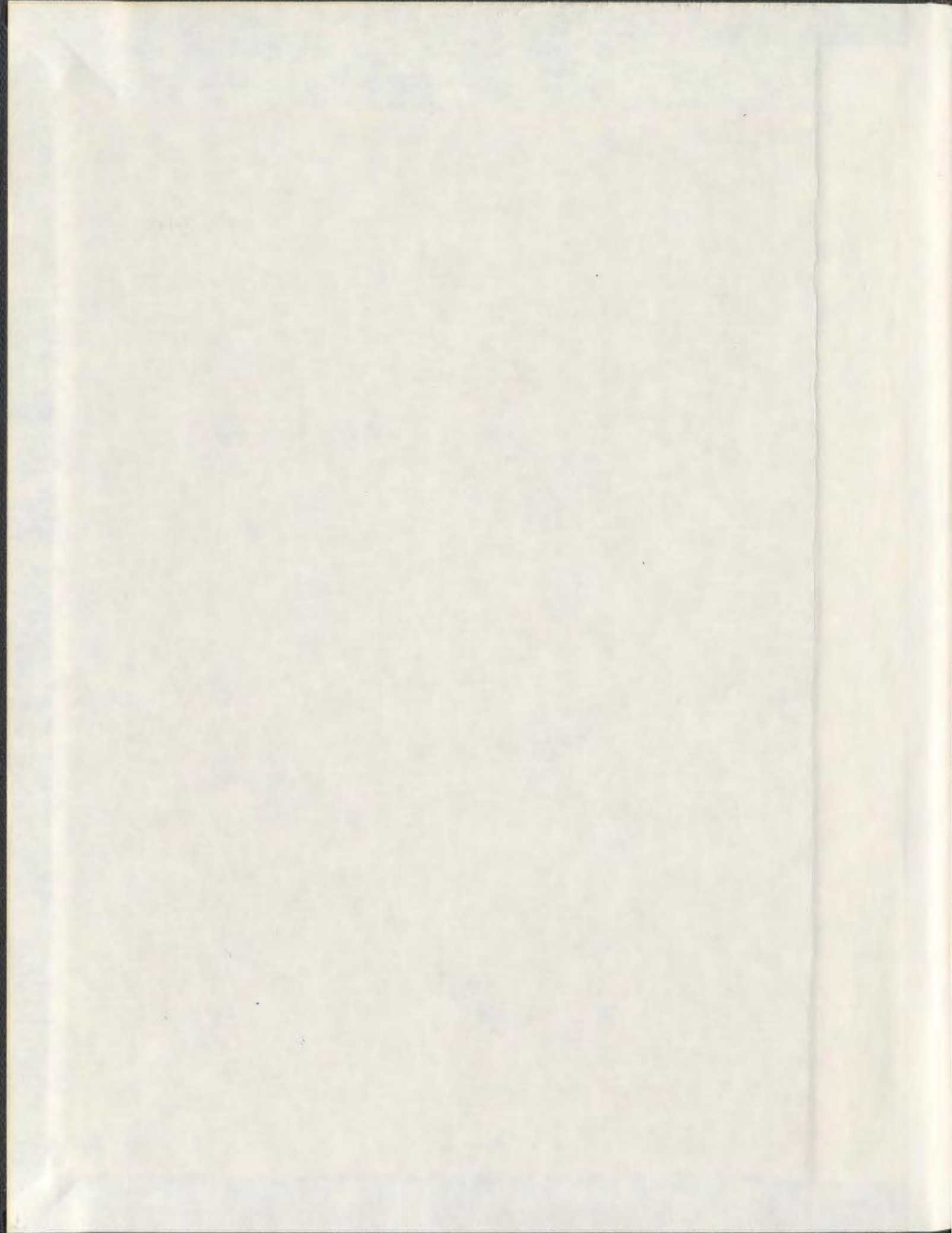


READING WOMEN'S HOME AND GARDEN LIVES:  
A FOLKLORISTIC EXAMINATION OF THE ENGLISH  
GARDENING BOOKS OF MARION CRAN

CYNTHIA BOYD





**Reading Women's Home and Garden Lives: A Folkloristic Examination of the  
English Gardening Books of Marion Cran**

**by**

**Cynthia Boyd**

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**Department of Folklore**

**Memorial University of Newfoundland**

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## **Abstract**

Building on scholarship from folklore and literature, everyday autobiography, women's traditional culture, and women's garden history, this thesis examines how Marion Cran documented home and garden experiences in Surrey and Kent through a series of gardening books she wrote between 1913 and 1941.

While providing useful information on plants and gardening practices, Cran's writing was fragmented and tangential: her books were filled with planting references suffused with culinary tips and recipes and traditional lore that evoked meaning and "encoded memories" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989). Although Cran was fascinated by garden styles indicative of the period, such as the English cottage garden, she also valued individuality in garden making, and implored her readers to create gardens that fulfilled their own expectations.

In her everyday autobiographies, Cran revealed her innermost thoughts based on her own experiences and what she learned through her observations of and interactions with fellow gardeners and homemakers. Cran inspired a predominantly female audience to create and maintain homes and gardens that benefited their own lives as well as those of their families and members of their communities. In direct correlation, women corresponded with Cran, confiding to her their own home and garden experiences whether they lived in England or South Africa. While exploring Cran's appeal to women readers, this thesis focuses on several themes: community and fellowship in gardening practices, implicit coding, female performativity, and women's sense of empowerment through creating a home and garden.



This thesis examines not only how Cran and her books inspired gardeners and homemakers' lives during the interwar period, but also, it recognizes her relevance to contemporary readers and present-day gardeners. Not unlike many gardeners today, Cran was committed to natural gardening practices and growing her own produce. Cran can be found not only between the pages of her books, but through the existence of her former home and garden, "Coggers," in Kent. By preserving Coggers and welcoming visitors, the current residents have fostered a growing community of readers and gardeners whose enthusiasm in Cran and her writings will continue her legacy for future generations. Marion Cran and her garden literature offer folklorists an alternative resource through which to understand and appreciate how women expressed themselves creatively through common, everyday tasks in homes and gardens of the early twentieth century.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Sixteen years ago, I found myself in a second-hand bookstore in downtown Victoria, British Columbia looking for a copy of a gardening book by Marion Coffin, an early twentieth century landscape architect from the United States. I had read a sample of her writing in a book entitled *The Small Place: Its Landscape Architecture* (Rehmann 1918, 107-117) in which she and several other landscape architects had contributed, but I wanted to learn more about Coffin and her work. Unfortunately I did not discover anything written by Marion Coffin that day in Victoria. I did, however, find a number of gardening books written by Marion Cran, an English garden writer, also popular in the early twentieth century. Intrigued by the similarity in the two women's names and the coincidence that they were both writing about gardens and/or landscapes in the same period, I decided to take a closer look at the books by Cran. Although a well-known proverb advises that one should "never judge a book by its cover," I confess that the books I held in my hand that day captured my attention not for their covers, but for their titles. Riveted by what might lie between the covers of *The Garden of Ignorance: The Experiences of a Woman in a Garden* (1913) and *The Story of My Ruin* (1924), I purchased Cran's books and headed back to my in-laws for supper. Later, when I happened to read through the first few pages of each book, I was struck by how much this

writer's evocative prose was grounded in the folklore of her life: her descriptions of the plants she loved and the garden spaces she was creating were both intimate and practical. Cran appeared to be inviting me into her home and garden and into her everyday life, where elements of traditional culture, particularly women's traditional culture were everywhere. As I read on, I became hooked. She spoke to me both as a gardener and as a folklorist.

I soon discovered that the two books I had picked up described Cran's earliest gardening adventures: first in Surrey (*The Garden of Ignorance* (1913)) and later, in Kent (*The Story of My Ruin* (1924)). Coincidentally, I was only just beginning to garden myself, on a postage stamp-sized plot in St. John's, Newfoundland, and the author and her gardening books quickly became an interest of mine. Like Cran, I had no prior gardening experience. I knew only what I had learned from my mother in her flower and vegetable gardens, as well as what I observed of my grandparents in their gardens (my mother's parents cultivated extensive flower, vegetable, and fruit gardens in Iowa, while my father's mother tended flower gardens in Quebec). Although I had always been interested in flowers and herbs, my obsession with gardens and gardening became acute shortly after the birth of my first son, Seamus. In hindsight, I believe that gardening and thinking about gardening enabled me to adjust to my responsibilities as a new mother. I also became involved in the Newfoundland Horticultural Society through its monthly meetings and workshops, and then I took on the role of editor of the Society's newsletter,



*Down to Earth*. In editing and writing articles for that small publication, I read voraciously on all gardening topics, but I also continued reading antiquarian garden literature. While I especially loved discovering women garden writers who were Cran's contemporaries, it was Marion Cran who emerged as my favourite British garden writer of the interwar period.

In the midst of my volunteer work editing the newsletter, I gave birth to my second son, Angus. As a mother of two busy and active boys, I again escaped into gardening and garden literature as a release from my daily responsibilities. In reading Cran's informal gardening narratives, I was struck by how often she remarked on balancing her home, her garden, and her writing career while she cared for a young daughter. Although nearly a century separated me from this garden writer, I identified with her. I felt connected to her because we shared common, everyday pursuits as gardeners and homemakers, and we both wrote about gardens and gardening. Although we were living, writing, and gardening in different time periods, we shared common interests and balanced similar responsibilities. Overall, what I appreciated most about Cran and her writing was her ability to weave a story about plants or garden spaces while providing practical tips or techniques using plants grown in the garden or found in the countryside. What occurred to me was that Cran, as a homemaker herself, was aware of the needs and concerns of her readers, especially women readers.

When Angus started to attend school on a full time basis, I decided to return to

graduate school with the goal of completing a PhD in folklore. For many years I had been interested in women's traditions and now I also wanted to learn more about gardening traditions and the folklore of plants. The two interests merged in Marion Cran's work and after taking Dr. Pat Byrne's Folklore and Literature course in my first semester, I decided that Cran's garden writing could be the topic of my thesis.

Beyond my passion for gardening, Marion Cran's work reinvigorated my interest in folklore, especially how folklore informed her garden writings. Although she wrote gardening articles, it was in her books that she integrated folklore best, such as personal experience narratives, customs, occupational folklife, and material culture. By way of explanation, I would like to demonstrate here how Cran incorporated these folklore genres into the pages of her books; however, they will not be the focus of this thesis.

Building on Sandra K. D. Stahl's interpretation of personal experience stories, I recognized that Cran found, in her own home and garden experiences, something that was "story worthy" (1983, 268-269). Unlike oral narrators who tell personal experiences which are subject to "varying contexts" (Stahl 1983, 269), Cran's recollections of personal experiences could not anticipate different audiences or contexts because her stories could only be read from the printed page. Not unlike those who tell personal experience stories, Cran was writing about everyday events focused on her home and her garden; her personal experiences served to educate and entertain her readers, and these stories identified her as a passionate gardener and a dedicated writer. In replicating local

dialect in her stories, Cran attempted to re-create day to day conversations she had with fellow villagers and gardeners, allowing her readers to imagine how she learned about plants and gardening traditions. In reading these stories in her books, however, I realized that because Cran's recollections and experiences were sometimes interwoven with those of other gardeners, friends and family, it was not always clear who had told the stories originally.<sup>1</sup>

Other folklore genres that Cran incorporated into her books were much easier to interpret. In particular, Cran often referred to the customs surrounding plants and their origins. Although Cran was fully versed in botanical Latin, she tended to refer to plants by their vernacular plant names because they connected her to earlier gardening traditions and linked her with England's rural past. She recalled names like "heartsease" and "Johnny jump-up" for pansies (*Viola*), "honesty" and "money plant" for *Lunaria*, and "lad's love" for the herb, southernwood (*Artemisia abrotanum*) (Cran 1924, 213; 1925, 106).<sup>2</sup> Beyond her fascination with vernacular names, Cran recognized how traditional lore, custom, and belief played a significant role in how people learn about plants and gardening practices. In identifying how plant names and origins differed from one English county to another, she helped perpetuate (and document) plant customs and beliefs as an important part of the collective knowledge passed on by active and passive bearers of tradition.<sup>3</sup>

In her books, Cran included occupational folklife and material culture, for she

respected the expertise of local craftsmen and women whose handmade objects she used in her own home and garden. From gardening aprons to “idle boys” (handmade boot scrapers), Cran described the self-sufficiency of villagers and labourers in the communities in which she lived and worked (see Cran 1913, 28; 1924, 224; 1929, 72; 1941, 186 and see figure 2.20). While Cran promoted these craftsmen and women, and the products of their labour, she also paid particular attention to the occupations themselves, such as the hop pickers of West Kent. As the result of her own employment as a hop picker during the Second World War, Cran’s ethnographic descriptions (see Cran 1941, 150-183) surrounding the “canon of work technique” (McCarl 1986, 71-72) of hop picking are comparable to other writers’ observations of this occupation (O’Neill 2006).

Although Cran and her books revealed that she was a keen observer of folklore in her neighbourhood and in nearby communities, I found that the scope of this folklore material varied tremendously from one book to the next. From my perspective, Cran’s use of folklore was inconsistent and I wanted to do more in this study than create a catalogue of the folklore items she incorporated in her books.

In retrospect, I must confess that I have often struggled to shape Cran and her writing into a folklore thesis. From the beginning I was stymied when trying to describe or classify Cran’s writing. As she expressed her thoughts openly and retold personal experiences that she had as a gardener, along with the interactions she had with fellow gardeners, her work seemed to fall into several writing genres, including country life

writing, prescriptive garden literature, and “garden autobiography” (Seaton 1979). In truth, Cran and her writing could fit into any one of these popular genres, yet, I felt that what most characterized this writer’s work were her frequent reflections on her own home and gardening experiences. It reminded me of how, as folklorists, we appreciate ways in which our own “reflexivity” can become a strong component of our writing and research. Although Cran was respectful of fellow gardeners and villagers in her community, she did not collaborate with them in the ways that present-day ethnographers do. She acknowledged the influence that other gardeners and homemakers’ experiences had on her writing, including their vernacular gardening techniques and their knowledge of herb and flower folklore, but there is no doubt that Cran was *the* voice in her writings. Nonetheless, one of Cran’s contributions was to capture forms of traditional knowledge and skills for future generations of gardeners, homemakers, garden writers, and researchers like myself. While Cran did not have professional training in journalism or horticulture, or folklore for that matter, her uncanny ability to observe and document home and garden practices that interested and fascinated her is revealed in the pages of her books. She integrated traditional knowledge that she gathered about the home and garden into her work and I argue this remains one of her lasting contributions.

As I demonstrate in this thesis, many of Cran’s readers corresponded with her, and she includes portions of their letters in her books. Part of what this popularity indicates about Cran and her writing, however, is that she wrote books that were highly fragmented

with practical gardening advice, cookery ideas and recipes, gardening experiences, and readers' commentary. The resulting multidimensional nature of her work appealed to a wide readership. Considering the fragmented, transient nature of her writing, it is not surprising that Cran wrote retrospectively of her own home and garden spaces. From her writing desk, Cran provided a lens into a world where daily pursuits and practices relied on the interrelationship of the home *and* the garden.

In revealing aspects of her day to day life, and that of other gardeners and homemakers, I believe Cran's writing can be considered as "everyday autobiography," a term I have borrowed from Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (1996, 2). Smith and Watson argue that every one of us constructs personal stories of ourselves and our lives through our bodies and through our expressions in art and music (1996, 2-3). Cran recalled stories as a gardener and a homemaker, not just as a writer, and this appealed to the interests and skills of her readers. She particularly attracted women readers as I will explain briefly in this introduction and later, in Chapter Five.

With so many home and garden topics to choose from on the pages of Cran's books, I tried to focus on particular characteristics of her writing by asking myself questions as I read her work. How could Cran's everyday autobiographies be analyzed from the perspective of folklore and literature studies? How did Cran represent women's lives in her writings? To what extent was Cran as both a writer and a gardener influenced by vernacular gardening traditions and garden styles indicative of the period? I realized



that Cran wrote as much about the home as she did about the garden. From her many books and photographs, I was aware that Cran had lived in and visited many kinds of homes and gardens throughout her lifetime. She recalled childhood memories of homes she shared with her parents and siblings in South Africa and in England and revealed that her greatest attachments were to homes and gardens that she created and maintained in Surrey and Kent. In focusing on Cran and the everyday autobiographies she shared, I remembered an astute comment I had read in an article entitled “Women Garden Writers: “Gardening, Reading about Gardening, and Writing about Gardening are all One,” by Susan E. Schnare. Schnare reflected: “The lack of records makes the work of women writers even more significant. Unwritten events may be forgotten, but the work of even the least popular writer will be found on some library shelf to shed light on the lives of women and their concerns” (1995, 83). I felt that even though Cran was a relatively unknown woman garden writer, her work represented an untapped but rich resource through which to explore how English women expressed themselves creatively in common, everyday tasks in their homes and gardens in the early twentieth century.

When I began to examine Cran more critically, I realized that her words reflected concepts that went well beyond her personal experience. I recognized that her celebration and interpretation of the English cottage garden was both informed by and in turn helped shape her notion of an idealized English past. Her books shed light on the nature of women’s lives, specifically how their work as homemakers and gardeners merged on a

daily basis. By applying “implicit coding” (Radner and Lanser 1993) in her books, Cran advocated how women could acquire plant knowledge and practice gardening skills that benefited themselves, their families, and members of their communities. As a gardener and garden writer committed to natural gardening methods, Cran and her gardening books continue to be relevant to present-day homemakers and gardeners intent on growing plants safely and organically. These are some of the major themes I explore in future chapters of this thesis.

### **My methodology and sources**

This thesis is based primarily on Cran’s writing in over fifteen gardening books and her personal correspondence, as well as library and archival research and ethnographic interviews. While Cran’s books and garden writers’ anthologies (Cook 1991) and biographies (Lawrence 1966; 1979) provided a general overview of Cran’s life as a garden writer and later, a broadcaster, I knew I needed to travel to England to visit her homes and gardens and to find relatives and/or friends who still remembered her.<sup>4</sup> Although I will elaborate further on Cran’s homes and gardens and the people I spoke with who remembered this garden writer, I will first explain how I felt compelled to find Cran’s gravesite. During my first research trip to England, I found myself remembering the sage advice of Edward “Sandy” Ives, who suggested in “Common-man Biography: Some Notes by the Way,” that if we choose to study someone’s life, then we will never

quite feel “settled” with that person until we have visited their gravesite (1976, 257). I did follow Ives’ advice, and it was pleasant to find that Cran’s grave resembled a miniature garden, albeit a partly overgrown one. I set to work clearing weeds from around the grave, which was fitting because I was a gardener tending a fellow gardener’s grave.

Weeks after that visit, I was at the British Library where I spent many hours searching for Cran’s gardening articles that I knew she had written for London-based periodicals. This was a long process but it had been impossible for me to acquire these articles from libraries in Canada because the demand for these dated periodicals is relatively low and so, they are not readily available in digital formats. Throughout the months of September and October, 2007, I read and photocopied articles. Upon further examination, however, I discovered that many of her articles were revised from material that originally appeared in her books. I decided then that I would focus on her books in this thesis. In addition to my study of Cran’s books, I approached Dr. Brent Elliott of the Royal Horticultural Society Lindley Library in London. Through Dr. Elliott’s encouragement, I accessed the Lindley Library’s un-catalogued collection of Cran’s personal photograph albums--which I will refer to as the Marion Cran Album Collection in this thesis. The albums and some miscellaneous correspondence had been donated by Dodie Masterman and Marian Andersen, who had initially been given the items by Cran’s second daughter, Lesley Templeton.<sup>5</sup>

In the earliest stages of my research, I believed that there was little chance I would find anyone who could remember Marion Cran, but thankfully I was incorrect on that point. Through the assistance of Cran's extended family, I discovered that her nephew, Dudley Graeme (1914-2012), lived in an assisted living home in Chichester, West Sussex. When I first met with Mr. Graeme, he was in his mid-90s. Despite some short-term memory loss, Mr. Graeme was then the only living family member who remembered his Aunt Marion because he had spent time with her as a child and later, as a young man. Over a period of several days in early September, 2007, I conducted ethnographic interviews with Mr. Graeme, in which I gathered as much contextual background as I could about Cran's personal life and any information surrounding her work as a writer. Later, I also interviewed Mr. Graeme's daughter, Sue Sandison in Marlow. While Cran had died before Mrs. Sandison had had the opportunity to meet her, she did recall Cran's younger brother, "Uncle Ben," with fond memories. Ben Dudley (1883-1973) had owned "Bledlow" a home and garden in a small village in Oxfordshire where he displayed two of Cran's garden statues. One statue featured a bust of Marion Cran and the other was a small girl statue called Sally (see Chapter Four). These became Dudley Graeme's after he and his wife Nita became owners of Bledlow upon Ben's death. Following Nita's death and Mr. Graeme's move to Chichester, Mrs. Sandison inherited Cran's statues and a collection of her books that included a number of her favourite cookery books. While interviewing Mrs. Sandison, I learned that even though she had not known Cran, she felt

an attachment to her aunt through these items as part of her family's folklore and history.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, another family member was contacted for this research and that was Cran's grandson, Robert Sternenberg who resides in Montgomery, Alabama. Although I was not able to meet Mr. Sternenberg in person, we corresponded by mail and had telephone conversations. He and his late wife Erin were extremely helpful to my research by providing important biographical details of Cran's life that were unavailable from any other source. While I will provide a more detailed interpretation of Cran's personal life in Chapter Two, I would like to explain that Mr. Sternenberg is Cran's only known grandson from her first daughter Maidie. When Sternenberg was completing a degree in landscape architecture, he and his grandmother rekindled their familial connection through personal correspondence. Although Sternenberg recalled how he and his grandmother had made plans to reunite in England, the Second World War intervened and Cran died shortly after. Before her death, however, Cran sent her grandson a scrapbook she had made full of newspaper clippings, book reviews, and press releases, representing the culmination of her writing career from 1913 until 1934. Mr. and Mrs. Sternenberg kindly sent me a photocopy of this scrapbook which has been invaluable to my research.

Besides Cran's family members, I conducted interviews with members of the Masterman family--Fairless Masterman and the late Dodie Masterman (1918-2009) in October, 2007. As I mentioned earlier, they had been friends with Lesley Templeton. After I had seen the photograph albums at the R.H.S. Lindley Library, I met with Fairless

and his mother, Dodie, because I believed that they could shed some light on Cran's life as a gardener and as a writer.<sup>7</sup>

### **Visiting the homes and gardens of Marion Cran**

Although I had the opportunity to visit Cran's first garden at Steephill Cottage in Farnham, Surrey, I must admit that after ninety years the garden had changed irrevocably. With the permission of Mr. and Mrs. Carter who own what is now called the Little Vicarage, I walked through what was left of Cran's terraced garden and the pine woods which surrounded it. But it was Coggers, Cran's second and last property in Kent that was remarkably intact thanks to the efforts of the current owners, Arianwen and Christopher Neve. I had the pleasure of interviewing Arianwen Neve in October, 2007, and then Christopher Neve a year later in September, 2008.<sup>8</sup> Their admiration and appreciation for Cran can be seen in their outward preservation of her home and garden that they have maintained to reflect as closely as possible the interwar period when Cran lived and gardened at Coggers. Christopher Neve had lived at Coggers as a young boy because his mother and stepfather became owners of the property in 1947, five years following Cran's death. After his mother passed away, Christopher decided to move back to Coggers with his wife and young son. Although the house was in good shape, the couple had to tackle the garden, which had been neglected when the late Mrs. Neve had been ill. Other than the basic "bones" of Cran's original garden--the two ponds, dovecot,

the small fruit orchard, several well-established hedges, shrubs, and trees--it had gone the way of all gardens bereft of their creators. By consulting Cran's books, the Neves attempted to re-create garden features that once belonged at Coggers. Because of their dedication to Cran and Coggers, the Neves have enabled many contemporary readers, gardeners and admirers to re-discover the home and gardening life of a nearly forgotten woman garden writer.

Together the interviews I conducted with relatives, friends, librarians, and the Neves have provided specific information that so easily could have been overlooked while I attempted to piece together the contextual background of this once prolific garden writer.

### **Literature review**

From the late nineteenth century into the early twentieth century, there were literally hundreds of women garden writers on both sides of the Atlantic, but only recently have they attracted the attention of scholars interested in documenting earlier women's daily lives. Women's fiction writing has received some attention for its treatment of everyday practices in the home, garden, and nearby countryside, albeit through fictional female characters. In defining what constitutes gardens of the American South, for example, folklorists and historians have frequently referred to the fictional representations of Southern gardening traditions in the writings of Eudora Welty, Harper

Lee, and Alice Walker, in addition to the non-fiction writings of such renowned Southern garden writers as Elizabeth Lawrence (Galle 2011, 81-82; Boykin 2009, 105-106). Susan Haltom and Jane Roy Brown point out in their extensive study of novelist Eudora Welty's Mississippi garden, that Welty often featured gardening traditions and practices of Southern women gardeners in her novels and short stories (2011, 105-113). While influenced by her mother's passion for flower gardens, Welty also was a keen observer of African-American gardens which she discussed in her fictional depiction of a black plantation settlement in her novel *Delta Wedding* (Haltom and Brown 2011, 180). Similarly, in her essay, "Gardening as 'Women's Culture' in Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's Short Fiction," Susan Garland Mann establishes how the American writer Mary Freeman evoked floral imagery both in the titles of her stories and in the names of her characters (1998, 38-39). Significantly, Mann reads Freeman's fictional use of women's gardening traditions as evidence of women's real-life practices:

In the stories of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, we not only can view how one author used horticulture as a central metaphor in her work, but we can gain insight into the importance the activity had for women in this time period, that is, the second half of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth (1998, 38).

While few examples exist outside the Southern United States, these sources are important because they do reflect how women writers were influenced by their own and other women's gardening traditions.<sup>9</sup> Yet I found myself asking why scholars have not looked more closely at women's non-fiction garden writings? Undoubtedly Freeman and Welty



wrote from experience, but there have been so many other, female non-fiction authors who gardened, raised families, and wrote about their gardens.<sup>10</sup> To understand how women in the past created homes and garden spaces through common, everyday tasks like pruning, gathering, and preserving, it struck me that scholars should also examine women's garden writing.

In the discipline of folklore studies, it is perhaps not surprising to discover that women's garden writing has not attracted much attention when one considers that the more general practices of gardening and homemaking have not been well examined by folklorists. In his important early essay, "The Folk Art of Landscaping," folklorist E. N. Anderson explains, "Perhaps because of their very commonness, the commonest folk arts have received little or no attention from scholars. Among the most conspicuously ignored is the almost universal pursuit known as gardening, or more formally as landscaping" (1972, 179). It is important to note that since Anderson made that initial observation, there have been studies devoted to gardeners, their gardens and gardening practices. Throughout the 1970s for instance, contributors to the American based *Foxfire* series documented common practices like vegetable gardening and berry picking, but the gardeners who gardened and foraged were not always given the opportunity to indicate why they created the gardens they did or why they harvested fruit and herbs for food or medicine (Wigginton 1975; 1977). Several other more contextually based analyses of women's gardening contributions can be seen in the work of folklorists beginning in the

1980s. For example, in an unpublished Masters' thesis, entitled *The Expression of Tradition: Perennial Gardening in St. John's, Newfoundland* (1985), folklorist Penelope Houlden encapsulated how middle class women in St. John's expressed themselves creatively through gardens they designed, using a combination of gardening traditions that had been passed orally through family in England and in Newfoundland (1985). It is also significant to note that folklorists have examined yard art and yard artists more extensively than gardening (see Thomas 2003, 56-112 and Nokes 2010).

While not always focused directly on women's gardening traditions or women's garden writings, garden historians and garden activists have produced a sizable scholarship. Works such as *City Bountiful: A Century of Community Gardening in America* (2005) by Laura J. Lawson and *The Earth Knows My Name: Food, Culture, and Sustainability in the Gardens of Ethnic Americans* (2006) by Patricia Klindienst explore the impact of urban gardens and allotments in bringing together people from diverse ethnic communities. In the twenty-first century, present-day gardeners' concern for the environment, along with the current trend to support farmers by eating locally grown produce, have encouraged folklorists, garden historians, and citizens to study and document earlier and revitalized practices that still form a bond between people and garden spaces within rural and urban communities such as root cellars, farmers' markets, and city-wide beautification programs (Elton 2010; Kingsolver 2008; Tullock 2012).

As collections of English vernacular gardening practices, plant lore, and culinary

and medicinal herbal remedies and recipes, Cran's books provide a valuable glimpse into the multidimensional nature of women's domestic lives in the early twentieth century.

My analysis of Cran and her books draws on several literatures including those on everyday autobiography, folklore and literature, history of women's gardening traditions, history of women's garden writing, and women's traditional culture.

### **Folklore and Literature**

Despite the lack of scholarly research examining the connections of folklore and garden literature, the theories and methods of folklorists such as Richard M. Dorson, Francis A. de Caro, Carl Lindahl, Pat Byrne, and Mary Ellen B. Lewis inform this thesis. For example, I have been guided by Dorson's influential essay, "The Identification of Folklore in American Literature." Dorson's three areas of evidence for folklore and literature studies--biographical, internal, and corroborative--have been useful in determining how folklore exists within the pages of Marion Cran's gardening books (1957, 5, 7, 8). Just as helpful was Mary Ellen B. Lewis's observation that writers inherit "traditional manifestations of culture" (1976, 344) in their own lives. Lewis argued that, in turn, they incorporate familiar aspects of folklore into their work (1976, 344). Cran wrote about vernacular gardening traditions that were passed on to her by members of her family and by members of her community through word of mouth; her books reveal how her own and others' cultural backgrounds influenced how she gardened and how she

wrote about gardening and homemaking. In addition to biographical evidence, Cran's writing also reflects internal and corroborative evidence for although she was not an original resident of the villages where she lived and worked, Cran observed and described the skills of neighbouring farmers and village bee keepers who assisted her in her own gardening and bee keeping efforts (1913; 1920; 1924).

In his essay "Approaches to the Study of Folklore and Literature: Old Cruces and New Possibilities," Pat Byrne provides a thorough assessment of folklore's history as an academic discipline (1999). He indicates how scholars have long upheld the assumption that "oral" or "verbal" folklore was more authentic than "written" folklore, having originated from the traditions of illiterate members of society such as the peasants or common folk (Byrne 1999, 42, 46-47). Written folklore, having been filtered through literate, educated and elite members of society, was not considered "pure." Similarly, in challenging the divisions between oral and written folklore forms, Carl Lindahl indicated that although "most critics now admit that literary and oral artistry overlap...there are many who hold that oral and written art are so fundamentally different that no individual can possibly master both forms of expression"(1978, 95, 98).

In "On the Borders of Oral and Written Art," Lindahl refers to various criteria, such as "fixity versus fluidity," among other categories, that he believes would assist in re-defining the boundaries separating the oral and written "narrative" art of storytellers, balladeers, and writers, but I believe his remarks can also be applied to non-fiction garden

writing (1978, 95, 99). As Lindahl observed “folklore in literature is a detective game: its object is to find traces of oral tradition buried in written art” (1978, 95). By sharing her own and others’ gardening traditions with her readers, Cran was passing on “oral” garden folklore through the “written” medium of garden writing, thus demonstrating how oral and written folklore continuously overlap. In this instance, garden folklore, whether expressed in an oral or a written form, reflects Toelken’s “Twin Laws” of dynamism and conservatism (1996, 39, 43). Within her books, Cran described how gardening traditions and plant lore were passed on to her through conversations with other gardeners, as well as through her observations of gardeners working in the countryside near her home. She gratefully received “orally transmitted” gardening knowledge from active tradition bearers and converted it into “written” folklore; presumably, these traditions were then disseminated by her readers--both passive *and* active bearers--who were anxious to use and adapt them within their own garden spaces. These written gardening traditions would probably revert back to oral tradition once they had been shared with others, in the “over the garden fence” exchange between gardeners. As Francis A. de Caro remarks, “folklore sometimes finds its way into print, while what has been born in print may pass into oral tradition” (1983, 411).

Importantly, Cran’s garden literature was not all that dissimilar from the work of English country life writers, such as George Sturt (a close neighbour of Cran’s), Flora Thompson, and Richard Jefferies, among others who W. J. Keith examines in his

fascinating work titled *The Rural Tradition: A Study of the Non-Fiction Prose Writers of the English Countryside* (1974).<sup>11</sup> In her books, Cran retold her own gardening experiences and communicated the traditional gardening practices of neighbours and friends in her community and nearby communities. In “The relevance of the rural tradition,” Martin Lovelace comments that English country life writers were essentially “self-trained ethnographers” who “never claimed the identity of folklorist” and “were to varying degrees ignorant of, or immune to, its governing paradigms...”(1997, 66-67). In reading her books, it is clear that Cran’s ability to recognize, remember, and recall plant morphology, botanical detail, and gardening lore reflected her fascination with the natural world, but it was also because she had trained herself to write perceptively when she was a journalist in her early twenties. Cran and her writings can be compared to the collecting and writing efforts of early women ethnographers, such as Helen Creighton, in Nova Scotia, and Zora Neale Hurston, in Florida. In her article “‘A Very Lone Worker’: Women’s Oral Narrative Centered Thoughts on Helen Creighton’s Career as a Folklorist,” Diane Tye provides a rich account of Creighton’s determination to meet family responsibilities while collecting ballads and folksongs in rural Nova Scotian communities (1993, 107-117). Both Tye and Graciela Hernandez in her essay “Multiple Subjectivities and Strategic Positionality: Zora Neale Hurston’s Experimental Ethnographies,” indicate that early women ethnographers received little official training but were dedicated to documenting the folklore and traditions of their own cultural

surroundings (Hernandez 1995, 148-165; Tye 1993, 107-117). Using Cran and her books as a case study, I focus on how one writer documented her own experiences as a gardener and homemaker while encouraging and inspiring women to create and maintain homes and gardens to benefit their own lives as well as the lives of their families and members of their communities.

### **Women's gardening traditions**

In studies analyzing the home and its relationship to women's lives, historians, folklorists and women's studies' scholars have examined cookery books, private recipe collections, and household and conduct manuals of the nineteenth and twentieth century for evidence of "women's traditional culture" (see Greenhill and Tye 1993; Hughes 2006; Levin 1993; Theophano 2002; Tye 2010; and Ulrich 1982). Although women's garden writing has not yet attracted as much attention as women's writing on cookery and housekeeping, evidence suggests that the genre is being taken more seriously.

Publications on women's garden history such as Sue Bennett's *Five Centuries of Women & Gardens* (2001), Jennifer Bennett's *Lilies of the Hearth: The Relationship Between Women & Plants* (1991), Catherine Horwood's *Women and Their Gardens: A History from the Elizabethan Era to Today* (2010), Ann Shteir's *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora's Daughters and Botany in England, 1760 to 1860* (1996), and Rozsita Parker's "Unnatural History: Women, Gardening and Femininity" (2005) point out that

by the mid-nineteenth century, gardening books were penned *by* women and *for* women with advice and suggestions on growing plants for household and culinary purposes (Bennett 1991, 41-42, 121, 142; Bennett 2001, 96-100, 114-119; Horwood 2010, 255-260; Parker 2005, 91-92; Shteir 1996, 99-114).<sup>12</sup> In particular, the work of scholars such as garden historian Beverley Seaton and folklorist Dianne Harris has been immensely important to this thesis (1994; 1979). In her essay, "Cultivating Power: The Language of Feminism in Women's Garden Literature, 1870-1920," Harris focuses on nineteenth and twentieth century English and American women's garden writing from the perspective that the women's gardening practices allowed for the formation of a women's network (1994, 113). This network served to connect and empower women garden writers *and* the women who read their gardening books (Harris 1994, 115). Based on the same historic period, Beverley Seaton's "The Garden Autobiography" (1979) concentrates on gardening books, written primarily by women. Seaton argues that these writers described plants and garden making in such a personal manner that their work should be termed "garden autobiography" (1979, 101-120). In her more recent study, "'Making the Best of Circumstances': The American Woman's Back Yard Garden," Seaton delves deeper into the lives of women gardeners and garden writers by exploring the back yard garden and "its role in the lives of average American women" (1988, 90-104). Building on the framework which Harris and Seaton have provided, I decided to explore the writings of one woman garden writer in depth even though there are many, relatively unknown



women garden writers from the nineteenth and twentieth century whose work I could have chosen to examine.<sup>13</sup>

While Cran's books accomplish many things, including advising readers on specific plant varieties and instructing them on particular gardening techniques, her continual references to the home remain at the forefront of her discussions about the garden. Hidden among her descriptions of vegetables, herbs and fruit ideally suited for the garden are Cran's suggestions of what could be grown in the garden or gathered in the hedgerow that might be cooked, eaten, dried or preserved. Thus I indicate in this thesis how this writer applied what Joan N. Radner and Susan S. Lanser (1993) describe as "implicit coding" in her books. Cran stressed to women readers what herbs and fruit that they should plant or gather because such plants were essential for culinary, household, or medicinal purposes. Cran also described how gardens could be aesthetically pleasing and she made recommendations to gardeners to plant ornamental flowers and herbs simply for their beauty and fragrance. Her suggestions and recommendations encouraged readers to recognize the garden as an extension of the home.

Although gardens were often considered public arenas for home owners and their family and friends, Cran noted in her books how they could also act as private spaces where women gardeners, in particular, could find peace and relaxation. Cran showed how the practical, aesthetic, and private features of garden spaces allowed women the flexibility of disconnecting from, reconnecting with, or completely resisting domestic

responsibilities, simply by stepping from the house into the garden. The garden's proximity to the home allowed women to retreat into the garden where they could easily complete necessary garden tasks like pruning the roses and thinning out the carrots without appearing to ignore gender-based household duties. Gardening tasks had long been associated with women's daily activities within the home and so gardening practices were considered an appropriate sphere of activity for women according to turn of the century standards for gendered behaviour (see Bennett 1991; Harris 1994; Parker 2005; Shteir 1996). Knowledge of botany and gardening was seen as an appropriate female accomplishment. In her books, Cran directly encouraged women readers by linking their potential as gardeners to their skills as mothers and nurturers. As a product of her time, Cran appeared to marginalize women's contributions to that of the domestic sphere, but she also identified how women's strengths in multi-tasking could enable them to experience the pleasures of gardening within the confines of household pursuits. Cran believed that home and garden tasks encouraged women to be productive, while also serving as outlets for women's creativity; they represented an important way that women engaged in "female performativity" (see Butler 1999). As I will explain shortly, writers and scholars who explore women's gardening experiences across a diversity of cultural and ethnic communities indicate how home and garden related practices improved women's lives and that of their families. Women's day to day contributions as gardeners, homemakers, market gardeners or farmers were important ones.

Writing less than twenty years after Cran was an American garden writer, Elizabeth Lawrence. In one of her least prescriptive Southern gardening books, titled *Gardening for Love: The Market Bulletins* (1987), Lawrence reflected on the experiences of Southern women who expressed themselves through flower and vegetable gardens while balancing domestic duties and farming tasks. A well known and respected garden writer whose writings had a strong impact on Southern gardeners (Lacey 1987, 2), Lawrence corresponded with many Southern farmers' wives in her writing career through "market bulletins." Published throughout the Southern United States, market bulletins were weekly and/or monthly publications that allowed farm women the opportunity to earn extra cash by selling seeds and cuttings from their own gardens (Lacey 1987, 4-5). As indicated previously, Eudora Welty who wrote many novels depicting Southern gardening traditions and practices, also subscribed to the market bulletins and introduced Lawrence to them. Lawrence discovered that these bulletins were excellent sources for locating unusual or old-fashioned plants (Lacey 1987, 4-5). Like Welty, Lawrence exchanged letters with farmers' wives about the plants she purchased and she learned from these women through their vernacular gardening traditions, plant lore, and useful garden tips and herbal remedies. Additionally, Lawrence sensed the immense pride and pleasure that women took in tending flower and vegetable gardens despite how hard they worked on their farms (Lacey 1987, 36, 64, 149). In replying late to her letters, these women apologized to Lawrence, describing illnesses, family deaths, and domestic

responsibilities that kept them from responding. An example is Mrs. Lucy Stamps from Mississippi who indicated that she had “been canning” (Lacey 1987, 64).

In addition to Lawrence’s writings on women’s lives as farmers and gardeners in the South, I explored the work of contemporary novelist Alice Walker, especially after I realized that she too had written fiction and non-fiction that acknowledged women’s creative expression through flower and vegetable gardens. In her evocative essay “In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens,” Walker reflects on the contributions made by hardworking African-American women. She describes her own mother’s everyday life that included her silent and resilient tending of a profusion of flowers in their family yard, even after a long day’s work in the fields alongside her husband (1983, 241). Walker remarked that “because of her creativity with her flowers, even my memories of poverty are seen through a screen of blooms--sunflowers, petunias, roses, dahlias.... I hear again the praise showered on her because whatever rocky soil she landed on, she turned into a garden” (1983, 241).

In this thesis, I have also relied on interpretations of women’s gardening experiences from other cultures. Unfortunately thus far these Middle-Eastern, African-American, and Latina women have been poorly represented for they did not produce garden literature, at least not always in English (Alon-Mozes 2007, 315). That said, scholars’ interpretations of these women’s garden stories and experiences provide a fresh counterpoint to my study of a white, middle class garden writer’s depiction of women’s

lives and experiences in the home and garden. Like Cran, the women tended gardens and created networks with other women gardeners that allowed them to contribute to the well-being of their families and communities even when in many circumstances they were being marginalized within male dominated societies.

African-American vernacular gardens in Georgia, South Carolina, and Alabama, have been meticulously researched by Richard Westmacott. In his thorough ethnographic and historic study, *African-American Gardens and Yards in the Rural South* (1992), Westmacott revealed how the front yard once served as a “kitchen extension” within African-American households without running water, for the “wellhead” became the central station for many activities such as cooking, canning, washing and soap making (1992, 25). Although these front yards evolved to include flowers and decorative container plantings, they still functioned as areas where women could complete household tasks. They were considered public spaces where rest, repose, and social interactions occurred among friends and neighbours (Westmacott 1992, 31).

In the early twentieth century, Jewish women living in Palestine created and nurtured small, “utility gardens” which allowed them to contribute to the Zionist movement as well as providing them a means to support themselves as they resettled into their ancestral homeland (Alon-Mozes 2007, 313). Because their gardens reflected the Zionist ideology of working the land, they received financial support so they could create gardens of their own devising without male assistance, tending colourful and useful

gardens of perennial and annual flowers, vegetables, and fruit trees (Alon-Mozes 2007, 318-320). Similarly, Spanish women settlers, moving into Mexican-American neighbourhoods in Tucson, Arizona, nurtured and maintained “barrio gardens,” which they identified as garden “spaces of their own” (Waldenberger 2000, 235). Although they have all but vanished, the walled, urban gardens were once the private spheres of Latina women, created as a “necessary and practical part of everyday existence, producing food and beauty for the home” (Waldenberger 2000, 236). Despite living within a male dominated culture, Latina women contributed to their families and communities by growing herbs, spices, and chiles “essential to the table” and flowers, which were used in celebrations and religious holidays (Waldenberger 2000, 236, 238).

These cross-cultural studies of women’s gardening experiences as well as the work of contemporary American women writers writing about women’s gardens, provide important information about how women have designed, nurtured, and maintained private and public garden spaces as part of their everyday domestic responsibilities. Yet, women’s gardening practices have also served to benefit them in alternative ways, including as an outlet for their creativity and a vehicle for forming informal female networks.

### **Women’s garden history**

Although this thesis has benefited greatly from scholarship on early twentieth

century women's garden literature and women's gardening experiences, contextual evidence surrounding the historical period in which Cran wrote has been enhanced by the work of contemporary garden historians and garden writers, especially Martin Hoyles' opus tracing the history of garden literature, *Bread and Roses: Gardening Books from 1560-1960 (Part II)* (1995). Besides the impressive contributions of many garden historians on women's garden history that I have already discussed (see Bennett 1991, Bennett 2001, and Shteir 1996), I have also relied on historical research and published diaries surrounding women's first artistic and scientific publications on botany and natural history, especially the work of Barbara Gates, *Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Living World* (1988), Jack Kramer, *Women of Flowers: A Tribute to Victorian Women Illustrators* (2005), Molly Peacock's *The Paper Garden: Mrs. Delany {Begins Her Life Work} at 72* (2010), and Edith Holden's *The Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady* (1906).

This thesis also grows out of the scholarship of social historians, cultural geographers, and art historians who have researched the specific garden styles and artistic and nationalistic movements that informed Cran's gardening world. In particular, Anne Helmreich's *The English Garden and National Identity: The Competing Styles of Garden Design, 1870-1914* (2002), provided essential information surrounding the influence of the English cottage garden style, a style that made a significant impact on Cran's garden and garden writing. English gardeners' regard for the cottage garden of the late

nineteenth and early twentieth century can be compared with English folklorists' disregard for forms of folklore that did not adhere to the image of a "merrie" England of a golden past (Bennett 1993, 77-78). At least features of the cottage garden, however much it has been mythologized and venerated, have been preserved unlike many forms of English vernacular material culture that were once indicative of rural life (Widdowson 1990, 139-140). Similarly, sociologist Raymond Williams, in his landmark study, *The Country and the City*, traces the evolution of how English writers and poets sought the image of Old England, a rural England of a golden period to inspire their creative outpourings (1973, 9, 12).

In addition to these scholars and their insightful perspectives, I draw on the works specifically by English garden historians. These improved my understanding of English garden history up to and including the Second World War. For example, Stephen Constantine's essay on "Amateur Gardening and Popular Recreation in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries" (1986) is one of the few garden history publications dedicated to the study of middle class domestic gardens as well as one of the only publications, besides Jenny Uglow's *A Little History of British Gardening* (2005), that actually acknowledges Marion Cran's existence as a garden writer and broadcaster in the 1920s and 1930s (1986, 399; 2005, 257). Other garden histories have provided additional perspectives for my research, such as Charles Quest-Ritson's *The English Garden: A Social History* (2003) and David Crouch and Colin Ward, *The Allotment: Its Landscape and Culture* (1997).



Still other texts helped me to establish how certain individual garden designers and artistic movements had an impact on the home and garden lives of the middle and upper classes. These include the garden history work of Judith B. Tankard and Martin A. Wood in *Gertrude Jekyll at Munstead Wood: Writing, Horticulture, Photography, and Homebuilding* (1996) and Tankard's more recent study, *Gardens of the Arts and Crafts Movement* (2004). Home and garden histories such as *Suburban Style: The British Home, 1840-1960* (1987) by Helena Barrett and John Phillips, *The Pleasure Garden: An Illustrated History of British Gardening* (1979) by Anne Scott James and Osbert Lancaster, and the unpublished doctoral thesis by Monica Mary Brewis, "*The Garden That I Love*": *Middle Class Identity, Gender and the English Domestic Garden, 1880-1914* (2004), have influenced this thesis by providing perceptive discussion surrounding the gardens, gardeners, and writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

### **Cran's home and garden legacy**

In analyzing Cran and her gardening books, I felt early on that she had created a legacy for future generations of homemakers, homeowners, and gardeners in her writing, but I did not immediately identify how or why she continued to appeal to modern day readers. By re-reading her books, I began to notice that she often reflected on birds and other forms of wildlife in her garden, and that she attempted to inspire her readers to encourage wildlife to come to their own gardens. It was not only the pleasure she derived

from having birds, bees, and other beneficial insects in her garden, it was also the practical, ecological reasons she mentioned in her books. I came to believe that Cran was incredibly progressive in her writing and thinking. Thus, I decided to consult present-day gardening books to compare how they encouraged readers to garden naturally and organically. The most useful and encouraging garden book was *The Way We Garden Now* (2007) by Katherine Whiteside because it best exemplified twenty-first century gardening in both rural *and* urban communities. Like Cran, Whiteside wrote from her own personal love of gardens and without technical jargon. She provided practical hints and tips using recipes from natural sources such as dried herbs and spices, and basic household items like cooking oil and soapy water. As a further comparison to Cran's early twentieth century approach, I also consulted several books edited by Abigail Gehring such as *Back to Basics: A Complete Guide to Traditional Skills* (2008), and *Homesteading* (2009), to gauge how twenty-first century writer(s) approached the current interest in re-learning gardening and homemaking skills. As an avid reader of gardening periodicals, over the last decade I have been inspired by the perspectives shared on the pages of nearly every issue of the following periodicals: *Organic Gardening*, *Heirloom Gardening*, *Canadian Gardening*, *Horticulture Magazine*, *Garden Design*, *The Garden*, *Gardens Illustrated*, *The Herb Companion*, *BBC Gardeners World*; *The English Garden*, *The English Home*, *Homes and Gardens*, and *Country Life*.

In order to define how Cran and her writing made an impact on contemporary

readers of her books, I consulted with Arianwen and Christopher Neve at Coggers because they both share my passion (and many others I was to learn) for Cran and her writings. Just as Cran had, the Neves appreciated Coggers because of its medieval heritage and the surrounding countryside of Benenden within the Weald of Kent. As a result of the Neves' preservation of Coggers, new generations of readers have visited Cran's former home and garden. The Neves have been central to the creation of a community of Cran admirers. They have allowed some of Cran's present-day followers the opportunity to see for themselves what fascinated Cran about Coggers and the garden spaces that surrounded it. Many of these contemporary readers and admirers have linked their interest in Cran, her books, and her home, with memories of their mothers and grandmothers who originally read Cran's everyday autobiographies. Applying Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's approach in "Objects of Memory: Material Culture as Life Review," I consider how Cran and her readers found layers of meaning hidden in plants and garden spaces from their past and present lives. I believe Cran's experiences as well as the memories of plants and gardens that she shares in the pages of her books represent "encoded memories and stimulated life review" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989, 329). This inspired readers of her time and attracted contemporary readers who identify with Cran today. In order to comprehend how a community of Cran's admirers was formed, I approached scholarship surrounding yard artists because their yard art ensembles involved members of their communities in the on-going arrangement and re-arrangement

of these objects and displays. Specifically, I consulted Jeanne Banks Thomas's analysis of the "Fence of Shoes" in Colorado within her eye-opening text, *Naked Barbies, Warrior Joes, and Other Forms of Visible Gender* (2003), and Jill Nokes's Texas-based research, *Yard Art and Homemade Places* (2010). These authors show how people find expression and a sense of community through their creation and/or connection with yard art displays or ensembles. Marion Cran's writing, as well as her former home in Kent, provide a means for present-day readers and admirers to come together through their common interest in and passion for Cran's writing and gardening life.

To set the context for an analysis of aspects of Marion Cran's garden writing, in **Chapter Three** I present an overview of women's garden history. Here I specifically consider the roles women played in the garden from the medieval period until the early twentieth century. In order to situate Cran within English women's garden history, I provide an analysis of women's garden writing history stemming from botanical writings and illustrations produced by women as early as the eighteenth century. Directly related to women's garden history and women's garden writing history was the initiation of horticultural training programs and schools designed specifically for female students at the turn of the twentieth century. Although Cran herself never had the opportunity to attend a professional program in horticulture, she had a real interest in them; some of her readers expressed curiosity about these programs or attended horticultural schools for women, and her daughter, Lesley, earned a Royal Horticultural Society diploma through

her attendance at a private horticultural school.

Following this historical overview, in **Chapter Four** I concentrate on the origins of the English cottage garden style and its influence on Cran as a gardener and a writer. Artists, garden designers, craftsmen and women gardeners all have identified the cottage garden as a tangible remnant of English folklore and more recently, contemporary scholars have linked this garden style with nostalgic and romantic sentiments surrounding the quintessential thatched cottage and old fashioned garden, indicative of English rural life prior to the First World War. Here I explore how Cran's own interpretation of the English cottage garden was influenced by garden writers such as Gertrude Jekyll and William Robinson who re-discovered and popularized cottage gardens in the 1900s. I consider how Cran's garden spaces grew out of her understanding of the English cottage garden style but also reflected her own individuality.

In **Chapter Five**, I examine Cran's appeal to women readers of the English middle classes. Drawing on her books and personal correspondence, I explore how Cran specifically identified with women readers through discussions of her own everyday life surrounding the home and garden. In this chapter, I demonstrate how Cran wove several inter-connected themes and/or concepts within the fabric of her writing. The first of these themes is Cran's demonstration of women's female performativity through tending and maintaining home and garden spaces. A second inter-related theme is how Cran used implicit coding in her writing to encourage women to become empowered through their

skills and abilities. The third theme of community building that emerges in Cran's work does not directly address the mandate of a community garden, but it certainly touches on concepts surrounding fellowship and sharing that occur through home and garden practices.

In **Chapter Six**, I focus on Cran and her writing legacy, specifically from the perspective that she inspired gardeners of her day and continues to inspire present gardeners. Although Cran's writings were most popular during the author's lifetime, she is still appreciated by a following of devoted readers. Here I reflect on Cran's lasting popularity and her relevance for contemporary readers.

Finally, I conclude this thesis with a summary of the main points made in each of the preceding chapters and by reflecting on the value of garden literature by writers like Marion Cran for folklorists.

Before proceeding to any of this discussion, however, it is important to introduce the woman at the centre of this study. The next chapter sets the stage for readers who have no prior knowledge of Marion Cran or her writings. Here I turn to a presentation of Cran's life and a chronological overview of her writing career.

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<sup>1</sup> For examples of Cran's conversations and the personal experience stories revealed in those conversations, see various examples from her books (1927, 111-112; 1929b, 123-124; 1931, 39-41). In her books, Cran described many gardening experiences of her own,

but she also remembered the people who visited her home and garden, first in Surrey and later, in Kent. She also told stories in her books that indicated the experiences of men and women who, she claimed, fell in love or rekindled lost love while staying at Coggers (1929b, 123-124; 1931, 306-313). In her books, she recalled the gardening experiences of women who had painstakingly created garden spaces in relatively unpopulated areas of South Africa, far from their English homelands (1927, 268-269). In an entire book devoted to *Gardens in America* (1931), Cran described the gardening stories and memories of men and women who spent years creating home and garden spaces throughout the United States that she toured in the 1930s. Overall, Cran revealed personal experience narratives that were truly her own experiences of her home and garden, but she also incorporated the stories of others she admired and wanted to share with her readers.

<sup>2</sup> Coombes 1994, 16, 110, 190.

<sup>3</sup> Cran included many customs and beliefs surrounding plants' origins and nomenclature throughout her books. For examples please see Cran 1924, 245-246; 1927, 120; 1929b, 76, 79, 85-87.

<sup>4</sup> Although I had seen Coggers first, I eventually sought out Cran's first garden in Farnham, Surrey on October 1, 2008. As I had not known who lived there, I arrived unannounced at "The Little Vicarage" (Steephill Cottage) and was welcomed most kindly by the current owners, Mr. and Mrs. Carter. I did not interview this couple, but I did converse with them on a number of issues, not least of all was whether or not they had attempted to preserve any remnants of Cran's garden. They indicated that several previous owners of the property had made changes. Later, I corresponded by mail with Mrs. Primrose Carter. As a gardener, what I observed was that time had changed what was "Steephill Cottage" irretrievably, and yet I noted that the "bones" of this garden's design so carefully executed by Cran in approximately 1910, were still in evidence...but only just.

<sup>5</sup> In the captions describing the majority of the photographs illustrating this thesis, I have referred to this collection as the Marion Cran Album Collection, courtesy of the Royal Horticultural Society (R.H.S.) Lindley Library, London. Unfortunately, there were very few photographs that had dates, therefore, I have estimated when certain pictures might have been taken based on my knowledge of Cran's life in Surrey and Kent.

<sup>6</sup> I spoke with Sue Sandison at her home in Marlow in early October of 2007. Although Sally was featured in descriptions and photographs in Cran's books, the bust of Marion

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Cran was never discussed. I discuss Sally in Chapters Four and Six.

<sup>7</sup> Although the late Dodie Masterman remembered some information, several strokes and other illnesses had played havoc with her memory. I was grateful to her son, Fairless, for filling in the gaps whenever possible for he was particularly close to Lesley Templeton. I interviewed them both on October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2007 at Mrs. Masterman's former home in St. John's Wood, London.

<sup>8</sup> In the bibliography, these interviews appear as A. Neve 2007 and C. Neve 2007 for clarity.

<sup>9</sup> In addition to the body of comparative literature I have presented from the Southern United States, there has been scholarly attention paid to women writers in Canada and New England whose works reflected their everyday lives as gardeners and homemakers. In particular, scholars have analyzed how Lucy Maud Montgomery integrated women's traditional culture into the famed fictional world of Anne Shirley (see Tye 1993) and Montgomery's descriptions of foodways and gardening have also been interpreted for the significant role they play in this writer's journals (see Buchanan 1999). Through her well-known portrait of pastoral New England in the early twentieth century, Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896) has been analyzed because of its depiction of women's domestic roles as well as their efforts to safeguard nature in the late nineteenth century (see Norwood 1993, 195-196).

<sup>10</sup> As Beverley Seaton (1979) indicates Cran was one of over a hundred garden writers (most of which were women) who penned "garden autobiographies" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in England, and in the United States. But there were untold numbers of women garden writers publishing articles and books throughout North America. For further information on relatively unknown women garden writers, please consult the work of May Brawley Hill, *Grandmother's Garden: The Old-Fashioned American Garden, 1865-1915* (1995) and Virginia Tuttle Clayton, *The Once and Future Gardener: Garden Writing from the Golden Age of Magazines, 1900-1940* (2000). Specific women writers that I consulted in my research include Helena Rutherford Ely (1858-1920), Mabel Osgood Wright (1859-1934), and Louise Beebe Wilder (1878-1938). Some of their gardening books are listed in the bibliography as well.

<sup>11</sup> W. J. Keith in *The Rural Tradition: A Study of the Non-Fiction Prose Writers of the English Countryside* (1974) was one of the first scholars to draw attention to overlooked country life writings of Richard Jefferies, George Sturt, W.H. Hudson, Mary Russell Mitford, and Flora Thompson. While Keith's work spanned the nineteenth and early



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twentieth centuries, Glen Cavaliero later studied 'the rural tradition' in the fictions and semi-autobiographies of rural novelists prior to the Second World War in his work, *The rural tradition in the English novel, 1900-1939* (1977).

<sup>12</sup> Significantly, garden literature became more prevalent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the result of more technologically advanced printing and photographic services which allowed an increase in publications on plants, gardening and garden design. For further information please see the introduction in Clayton's *The Once & Future Gardener* (2000), especially pages xv-xvii.

<sup>13</sup> During the same period in which Cran was writing gardening books in England, Ely, Wright, and Wilder were writing and publishing gardening books in the United States. While these authors' books were informative, well written, and nicely illustrated, they include only a few personal experiences about their own homes and gardens. When Cran visited public and private gardens in the United States and Western Canada in the early 1930s, she described meeting with Louise Beebe Wilder in her book *Gardens in America* (1931).

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **MARION CRAN: HER LIFE AND WRITING CAREER**

#### **Part One: Marion Cran's Life**

Marion Cran was born Edith Marion Dudley in September, 1875 in Queenstown, South Africa to Henry and Emma Dudley. Cran's father, Henry Ernest, was sent as a Church of England missionary to attend to parishioners at St. Michael's Church in Queenstown (Graeme 2007a). Although Mr. Dudley was originally from England, his wife, Emma Jane [Smith] was of Welsh descent. Cran's favourite sister Alice was also born in Queenstown. Shortly before Cran's brother Albert was born, the family returned to England where Henry resumed his work as a vicar. He served first at All Hallows Church in Whitchurch, Hampshire and then at All Saints Church in Little Billings, Northamptonshire. Marion's mother eventually had two other children, Ben and Josephine.<sup>1</sup>

When she was eleven, Cran attended St. Mary's Hall (1836-2009) in Brighton (Lawrence 1978, 422). Founded in 1836 to educate "daughters of poor clergy," St. Mary's Hall was one of England's oldest private schools for girls. In the early stages, St. Mary's Hall was dedicated to training young women to become governesses, and the school prided itself on educating them in all subject areas.<sup>2</sup> On occasion, Cran mentioned her school days as extremely dull and rigid with many rules and regulations, however, she did profess an interest in their excursions to the seaside (1913, 62). Although Cran never

mentioned receiving botanical training at school, early photographs of St. Mary's Hall depicted female pupils tending small garden plots on the grounds in the 1900s.<sup>3</sup>

Although very little is known about Cran's first marriage to an older man, she became pregnant at the age of seventeen or eighteen, and nearly died giving birth to a daughter (1941, 257). Cran divorced this first husband and decided that Maidie (short for "Maid Marion") should be raised by her paternal grandparents (Sternenberg 2006). Just before the First World War, Maidie left England for the United States. Although Maidie and Cran were never close, Cran did visit her and her son, Robert when he was still a baby (1941, 257-259).

Shortly after her divorce, Cran trained for her nursing diploma at the Rotunda Hospital in Dublin. In the early 1900s, however, Cran lived in London and began writing for a number of periodicals (see figure 2.1). Through her work as a journalist, she met Lewis Noad, a barrister with whom she had an affair and became pregnant with her second daughter, Lesley, who was born on November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1902 (Masterman and Masterman 2007; Elliott 2007). As Mr. Noad was married at the time of the affair, he elected to remain with his wife and showed little interest in his illegitimate daughter (Masterman and Masterman 2007).<sup>4</sup>

In the midst of her complicated personal life, Cran continued to pursue what was becoming a successful writing career. After meeting George Cran, a wealthy solicitor, the two were married in March of 1905. It is likely that after she married George, Marion's standing in society improved (see figure 2.2). Evidence of this is found in her first gardening book, *The Garden of Ignorance* (1913), where Marion referred to her

husband as “King Cophetua” (Cran 1913, 4; Cran 1924, 18).



Figure 2.1 – Marion Cran. 1908. Courtesy of Dudley Graeme.



Figure 2.2 – George and Marion Cran. 1911-1912. Courtesy of Dudley Graeme.

Although she might have used this name to keep her husband's identity secret, the inherent meaning of the title, "King Cophetua," would have been recognized by some of her readers of the period. The character of "King Cophetua" originated from a medieval romance in which a North African ruler, Cophetua, became a leader of a Greek Colony. Cophetua fell passionately in love with a beggar girl, Penelophon and after King Cophetua married Penelophon and made her his Queen, she lost her lowly status.<sup>5</sup> The story served as inspiration for pre-Raphaelite painter, Edward Burne-Jones, who produced a painting titled "King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid," as well as for Shakespeare, Tennyson, and George Bernard Shaw.<sup>6</sup> These works perpetuated the story of the two lovers so that in the 1920s, Agatha Christie's 'Miss Marple' referred to the "King

Cophetua-complex” in *The Body in the Library* when she attempted to solve the murder of a poor, young woman who had infatuated a rich, older man (1942 (repr. 2011), 96-97). When George married Marion she was naïve and impressionable and he was older, wealthy and successful. While it is impossible to say for certain, Cran’s jesting reference to George as “King Cophetua” might have reflected feelings of inadequacy which she harboured because she came from a much humbler background than her husband.

Shortly after their marriage, Marion and George Cran lived in a large flat in Sloane Square, but later, they rented ‘The Old Court House’ in the Chelsea area of London.<sup>7</sup> In response to the late nineteenth century “Back to the Land Movement,” the Crans, like other urban dwellers, desired a house and garden in the country where they could escape on the weekends (Cran 1913, 4; Barrett and Phillips 1987, 94-95).<sup>8</sup> In 1907, George leased “Steephill Cottage,” (figure 2.3) a late Victorian house with three acres on Vicarage Lane in the “Bourne,” a small neighbourhood within the market town of Farnham, Surrey. When they first commuted between London and Farnham, the Crans travelled by train from London Waterloo Station. Although they eventually purchased a motor car, Cran indicated that she still commuted to London by train in order to pursue her writing career (Cran 1913).

The property that surrounded Steephill Cottage consisted of several garden spaces along with an acre of pine woods (figure 2.4); Cran strung hammocks between these trees in order for family and guests to sleep under the stars (Cran 1913, 200) (figure 2.5). Although the land surrounding the cottage accommodated an extensive flower garden, rose garden, and kitchen garden (with herbs and lettuces) and a vegetable garden (with

fruit), Cran continually struggled with the loose, sandy soil on which the Scots pines (*Pinus sylvestris*) grew so well (Coombes 1994, 144).



Figure 2.3 – Steephill Cottage, Farnham, Surrey. 1912. Marion Cran Album Collection. Courtesy of R.H.S. Lindley Library, London.

While Cran might have found it difficult to work with the acidic soil in her garden, there was a concentration of nurseries in north-west Surrey--including Farnham, Godalming and Chertsey--that used such soil conditions to their advantage by successfully cultivating *Rhododendrons* in the first half of the twentieth century (Quest-Ritson 2003, 235-236). Despite the challenges Cran faced, her garden resembled what the English referred to as a “cottage garden,” a subject I will expand upon in Chapter Four. In addition to growing edible and ornamental plants, Cran maintained bee hives, a dovecote, an aviary, and several outbuildings for her goats (1913; 1920). And yet Cran indicated that she often

relied on the expertise of local villagers for their knowledge of herbs and bee keeping because she admitted she had little experience in these areas when she began living and gardening at Steephill Cottage (Cran 1913, 195-197).



Figure 2.4 – Cran's cottage garden at Steephill Cottage in 1910. Marion Cran Album Collection. Courtesy of R.H.S. Lindley Library, London.

Not far from her cottage, Cran met her neighbour, George Sturt (1863-1927), a well-known country life writer who maintained the wheelwright shop in Farnham, following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather.<sup>9</sup> Sturt's famous books on Surrey craftsmen and women were avidly read and admired by Cran, especially his writings on his gardener, Frederick Bettesworth (1913, 146; Sturt 1911; 1901). In the early years at Steephill Cottage, Cran also had the opportunity to meet Gertrude Jekyll (1933, 72-77),



decades after reading Jekyll's gardening books (1913, 58, 73). Jekyll (1843-1932) was one of the most revered female garden designers and garden writers of the twentieth century who lived near Cran in Godalming (see Helmreich 2001; Tankard and Wood 1996; Tankard 2004). With the steady influence of garden and country life writers around her and the potential of a great garden before her, it is not surprising that Cran began gardening in earnest and that she proceeded to write about her gardening experiences shortly after.

### **Cran as amateur photographer**

In addition to gardening and garden writing, Cran also enjoyed amateur photography. At the time when Cran began taking photographs with a folding camera, likely produced by the Eastman Kodak company, many Edwardian women had taken up the hobby. With advertisements depicting women photographers such as the familiar "Kodak Girl," it is no surprise that even more women became avid photographers, taking pictures of family, friends, and home and garden spaces (Pols 2002, 43). Undoubtedly, Cran took photographs of plants and garden features to illustrate her books, but her photograph albums indicate that both she and her daughter Lesley found pleasure in amateur photography as well.<sup>10</sup> Fortunately, many of Cran's photographs still exist in albums in both private and public collections.<sup>11</sup> Created ostensibly by Cran, these photograph albums documented aspects of her life for which there is no other record.<sup>12</sup> Cran's photographs are a testament to the everyday activities she participated in, in Surrey (and later, in Kent); they depict everyday activities from picking flowers to

gathering wild berries (discussed in Chapter Five). As can be seen in the illustration depicted here (figure 2.6), Cran was sometimes photographed by members of her family while she, herself, was taking pictures. Sometimes Cran photographed her jobbing gardeners, Clippie and later, Moffat, as they engaged in various gardening tasks (see figure 2.10) (Cran 1913, 153). Cran's exterior photographs focused not only on her garden and her family but on large numbers of pets and other domesticated animals who lived at Steephill Cottage and then, at Coggers. Beyond the sheepdogs, Siamese cats, goats and geese, one of the more unusual pets that she photographed was a large raven she and George trained to live on the grounds of Steephill Cottage (figure 2.7) (Cran 1913, 66-68).

Interior photographs of the house suggest Cran's taste in furnishings and décor. For example, a photograph of her living room appeared to reflect her interest in traditional English interiors indicative of a cottager's home with a spinning wheel in the corner and copper warming pans hung from the wall (figure 2.8); while the Windsor-backed chairs encircling a drop-leaf table and chintz curtains hung from the windows connected Cran with her own middle class lifestyle (figure 2.9).<sup>13</sup>



Figure 2.5 – Cran's family and friends in hammocks under the pines. 1912. Courtesy of Dudley Graeme.



Figure 2.6 – Cran taking photographs in her garden. 1914-1915. Marion Cran Album Collection. Courtesy of R.H.S. Lindley Library, London.



Figure 2.7 – Cran's pet raven and the sheepdogs on the grounds of Steephill Cottage, Farnham. 1910-1913. Courtesy of Dudley Graeme.



Figure 2.8 – Interior of Steephill Cottage. Living room. 1912-1914. Marion Cran Album Collection. Courtesy of R.H.S. Lindley Library, London.

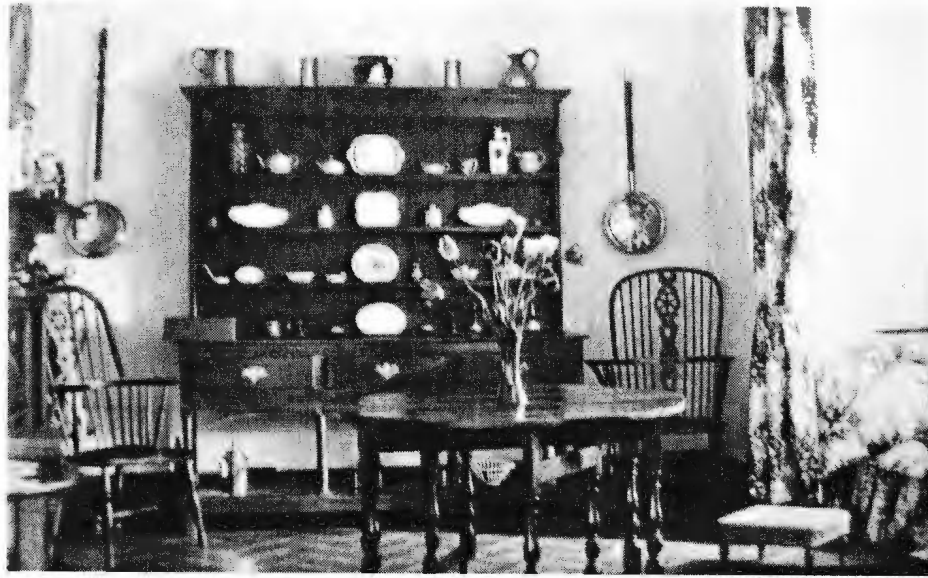


Figure 2.9 – Interior of Steephill Cottage. Dining Room. 1912-1914. Marion Cran Album Collection. Courtesy of R. H.S. Lindley Library, London.



Figure 2.10 – Cran's jobbing gardener "Clippie." 1914-1916. Courtesy of Dudley Graeme.





Figure 2.11 – Cran, Lesley, Bouncer, and roses. Steephill Cottage. 1913. Courtesy of Dudley Graeme.

In her photography, Cran was obviously experimenting with light and texture because many of her most creative photographs featured her daughter, Lesley (and sometimes herself),<sup>14</sup> bedecked in a lavish cotton frock and sunbonnet perched near flowers or next to the garden sundial. Lesley was so often the subject of her mother's photographs that it appears she was practically her mother's muse (figures 2.11 and 2.12). According to historian Rebecca Preston, amateur photographers were advised by early twentieth century photography manuals and periodicals to take photographs of children and women outdoors "in a garden" because they would be less likely to notice the camera, appearing "more at home in the open air" (2009, 789).



Figure 2.12 – One of Cran's more creative photographs of Lesley. 1912. Marion Cran Album Collection. Courtesy of R.H.S. Lindley Library, London.

As early as 1910 women had access to hand-held cameras which were highly portable for taking photographs in outdoor spaces (Preston 2009, 788). Often, Cran took hundreds of photographs<sup>15</sup> of plants and gardens for her books, but she also took advantage of the "real-photo" postcard to send photographs of her garden and her family to other family members. Dudley Graeme allowed me to view a collection of photograph albums that had once belonged to his mother, Alice. I noticed that on the backs of some of the photographs which had begun to tear away from the pages of the albums, many featured the "divided-back" of a postcard.<sup>16</sup> When the "divided-back" postcard first became available in the UK in 1902, Kodak suggested that photographs be printed onto the postcard, becoming the "real-photo" postcard and an "attractive form of personal

communication” for “sending between homes” (Preston 2009, 782).

Although Cran was thoroughly occupied by her family, her garden, her photography and her writing, she also had a keen interest in the countryside around her home. Not always having access to her husband’s car meant that she often walked short and long distances, usually with her dogs for company. She traipsed across meadows and fields and along hedgerows to keep abreast of the changing seasons in what was, ostensibly, rural countryside. Her walks took her to the outskirts of Farnham, where she discussed plants with Arthur and Samuel McBride, who owned and operated a small garden nursery, specializing in roses (Cran 1913, 116-117). Cran was also cognisant of local artists and potters living near Farnham, including sculptor Fergus Scott Hurd-Wood (1872-1936) (Cran 1913, 192; Cran 1917, xxvii-xxx) with whom she developed a long friendship (and eventually married) (figure 2.13).



Figure 2.13 – Fergus Scott Hurd-Wood at Steephill Cottage. 1913. Marion Cran Album Collection. Courtesy of R.H.S. Lindley Library, London.

At the onset of the First World War, Cran watched George, her younger brother, Ben, and



Fergus enlist as soldiers. She herself played a part in the war effort by providing a refuge for soldiers on leave (figure 2.14). Steephill Cottage became a place for wounded, convalescing, and disabled soldiers who sometimes regained enough strength to assist Cran with garden and household chores (Cran 1917, xii-xv). Sadly, many of the soldiers Cran welcomed at Steephill Cottage did not always return; many were killed in action. Not long before the war ended, however, Cran employed her earlier nursing skills as matron at Whitmead Sanatorium.<sup>17</sup>

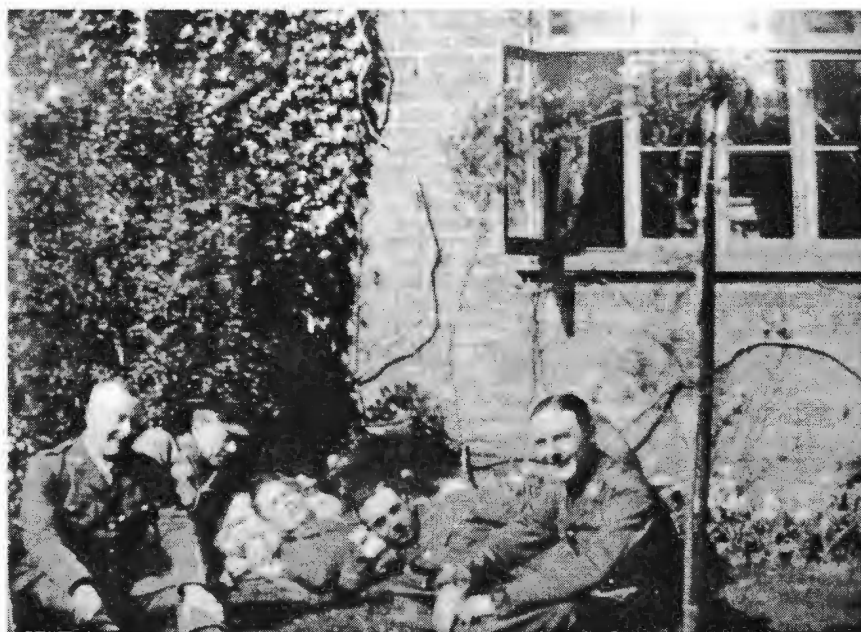


Figure 2.14 – First World War soldiers relaxing at Steephill Cottage. Marion Cran Album Collection. Courtesy of R.H.S. Lindley Library, London.

In recognition of her contributions to the war effort, as well as for her work on migration within the Empire, the Imperial Association for Assisting Disabled Naval & Military Officers thanked Cran with a dinner in her honour at the Trocadero building, in London,

on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1921 (figure 2.15).<sup>18</sup>



Figure 2.15 – Menu card for a dinner held in Cran’s honour at the Trocadero. Marion Cran Album Collection. Courtesy of R.H.S. Lindley Library, London.

Shortly before she received this honour, Cran welcomed home from Vancouver her sister, Alice and five year old son Dudley (figure 2.16 and 2.17). Alice’s husband Percy had died following his years of service in the war. Filled with compassion for her sister, Cran insisted that Alice and Dudley return to England to live with her for at least a year before they returned to British Columbia. Dudley vividly recalled the Christmas he spent at Steephill Cottage with his cousin Lesley, his mother, and many servicemen milling about when all of a sudden the candles on “‘Aunt Marion’s’ Christmas tree caught fire” (Graeme 2007a).



Figure 2.16 – Dudley Graeme. 1917. Vancouver, B.C. Courtesy of Dudley Graeme.



Figure 2.17 – Alice Graeme. 1920s. Courtesy of Dudley Graeme.

### **Marion Cran's move to West Kent**

When George returned to Steephill Cottage at the end of the war, he told his wife that he loved another woman. As Cran remarked in the introduction to her third book, *The Story of My Ruin* (1924), "I learned a soldier's farewell kiss; he took unto himself one less belligerent, an alien beggar maid much younger and nicer-looking than this old wife" (1924, 18). By 1919, Marion and George were divorced and because she had practically transformed the garden and property at Steephill Cottage, the owners decided to raise the rent (Cran 1924, 18). Without George's financial support, she could no longer afford to lease Steephill Cottage. Reluctantly, Cran decided to search for another property with garden potential, preferably in the surrounding countryside. Her close friends, Lewis Hind, an art critic, and his wife, Hetty indicated that they too had been looking for a home in the country. In their search, they discovered a very dilapidated medieval house with a large garden that they thought might be appropriate for Cran. Hetty enlisted another friend to drive Cran to Benenden, in the Tunbridge Wells District

of West Kent in order for her to view this ramshackle “ruin” called “Coggers” and its over-run garden (Cran 1924, 11-13, 19). At first sight, Cran fell in love with Coggers (figure 2.18). Later, she returned on her own, having walked several miles to Benenden from the nearest railway station at the time, which was Cranbrook (Cran 1924, 19-21). During her journey, she had troubled to carry along some *Muscari* bulbs (grape hyacinths) originally from Steephill Cottage to transplant into the garden at Coggers (Cran 1924, 19). Obviously, she had already begun to think of Coggers as *her* home and garden.

As Coggers had been left abandoned for many years, Cran wrote that there were barn swallows and squirrels nesting in the crumbling plaster, cows had once slept beneath the large oak beams which supported the house, and trees were growing up through the floor boards of the main living room (Cran 1924, 13-14). The local villagers even indicated in hushed whispers that Coggers was “haunted” (Cran 1924, 93). Despite such hurdles, Cran was determined to make the house a comfortable home again (figure 2.19). She hired a host of carpenters and other workmen to restore both the interior and exterior of this fifteenth century timber-framed “Wealden-type house” which I will discuss further in Chapters Four and Six (see Cran 1924; Pollard and Strouts 2006, 18). Consequently, Cran’s resources first went into the reconstruction of the house and not the garden. She did eventually re-organize the garden, growing plants from seed and dividing large clumps of perennials which she replanted in other garden spaces.



Figure 2.18 – Coggers during restoration work. 1920s. Courtesy of Dudley Graeme.

In the tradition of all gardeners, Cran's family, friends, and neighbours passed along plants, shrubs, and roses as gifts for her new garden. Despite financial constraints, Cran created impressive flower gardens (figure 2.20), a kitchen garden, small orchard, and a landscaped area around two naturalized ponds on the property.



Figure 2.19– Coggers restored. 1926-1928. Marion Cran Album Collection. Courtesy of R.H.S. Lindley Library, London.





Figure 2.20 – Marion Cran in front of Coggers with spring borders of tulips. 1930s. Note the “idleboy” next to her for cleaning muddy boots. Marion Cran Album Collection. Courtesy of R.H.S. Lindley Library, London.

While working on the garden at Coggers, Cran continued to write gardening books, lecture for women’s clubs and gardening groups, judge flower shows and cat shows, and broadcast garden talks on the radio.<sup>19</sup> Between 1928-1929, Cran spent many months away from Coggers travelling to various cities and towns in Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and North America, visiting and writing about private and public gardens and commercial fruit farm enterprises (see Cran 1927, 1929, 1931).

After years as friends and companions, Cran and Fergus--her “soldier-sculptor” as she referred to him in her books--married on Mid-summers Eve in 1933 (Cran 1913, xxvii-xxx; Cran 1933, 171). Soon after, the couple started a commercial business called The Premier Squab Farm at Coggers. They raised and bred “squabs,” or table pigeons whose plucked and trussed bodies were sent to local stores and delivered to London

restaurants where they were bought and/or served as a delicacy to wealthy clientele (see Cran 1934, 1935).<sup>20</sup>

Tragically, Cran and her husband had very little time together before he died suddenly of a heart attack in 1936. In an effort to escape the pain of losing Fergus, Cran travelled to Kenya in 1937 to visit Lesley where she was now living with her husband, Thomas “Tempy” Templeton. After she returned to Coggers in 1938, Cran continued to write. Shortly before 1939, Dudley arrived from Vancouver to visit his aunt and assist her with tasks around the house. He remembered scything the meadows behind her house, pruning the fruit trees, and helping her with black-out requirements prior to the outbreak of the Second World War (Graeme 2007a). With war looming, Dudley decided to remain in England and he enlisted first in the fire brigade and later in the Royal Air Force. After Dudley became a bomber pilot during the Second World War, he tried to take as much leave as he could manage to return to Coggers and spend time with his aunt (Graeme 2007a).

In 1940 Cran began to experience a number of health problems. Following a small heart attack, she had to be cared for by friends near Tunbridge Wells. In addition to her health, she was having financial difficulties maintaining Coggers and was encouraged by her bank to lease her home and garden to tenants. When I spoke to him about these issues, Dudley recalled that his aunt had never been very wise in managing her money (Graeme 2007a). Staying with friends and being away from Coggers took their toll on Cran, however. It was especially difficult because Cran’s writing commissions had all but vanished. She decided that she would have to find work if she was to “win Coggers



back” (Cran 1941, 136) but was disappointed when she applied to the Ministry of Information only to be asked to open a war-time food exhibition in London as a *volunteer* (Cran 1941, 139). Realizing that her experiences as a writer and broadcaster meant nothing in war-time London, she had to search for some form of paid work back in Kent. At a flower show in Cranbrook, she met an old acquaintance who knew of a local hop garden whose proprietors were in dire need of hop pickers (Cran 1941, 146-147).

Along with many other women desperate for employment, Cran began picking hops in the autumn of 1940 (Cran 1941, 146-147).<sup>21</sup> Although Cran found hop picking back breaking work, she liked the freedom it allowed her to be out in the countryside and she enjoyed the camaraderie she shared with other female pickers from Kent and from London. Naturally, she asked questions and learned the nuances of hop picking from “stripping the bines to moving the sets” (Cran 1941, 156-158).



Figure 2.21 – Cran’s photograph of a hop picker’s children for *Hagar’s Garden* (1941). Courtesy of Dudley Graeme.

She also revealed how she and fellow hop pickers often huddled together in nearby ditches where they witnessed frightening air battles and watched German and British planes falling from the sky (Cran 1941, 183). Through her ethnographic descriptions and photographs in her last book, *Hagar's Garden* (1941), Cran paid tribute to the occupational folklife of Kent's hop pickers and their families (see figure 2.21).<sup>22</sup>

Cran eventually returned to Coggers a year before her death. In her 67<sup>th</sup> year she suffered another heart attack, but this time it was fatal. Although friends and family recalled how Cran died alone at Coggers, other evidence suggests that Cran died in a nursing home on September 2, 1942.<sup>23</sup> Just beyond the large village green in the heart of Benenden, Cran is buried next to Fergus in the cemetery of St. George's Parish Church. Carved on a bevelled edge all around the raised flat stone that marks Cran's grave are the words: Marion Cran and Fergie; Fergus Scott Hurd-Wood (1872-1936) well beloved in undying love, Edith Marion, his Wife (1875-1942).<sup>24</sup>

## **Part Two: Marion Cran's writing career**

For over thirty years, Marion Cran was a popular garden writer whose output totals fifteen gardening books, a garden diary, one animal husbandry/cookery book, two novels, a book of poems, several dramatic scripts, garden and animal calendars, one biography, and an untold number of articles for newspapers and monthly journals. This overview of Cran's writing career is based primarily on her garden books and articles, with a brief reference to her radio broadcasts for the BBC.<sup>25</sup>

In her books, Cran frequently referred to her "days on Fleet Street," London's

stomping ground for journalists and writers in the early twentieth century. Judging from what little information is available of her earliest days as a journalist and writer, it seems that Cran began by writing features for periodicals before she moved on to short-term editorial positions. Between 1901 and 1902, she held the position of sub-editor of *The Connoisseur*, and in 1903 she was appointed art editor for *The Burlington Magazine* (Lawrence 1978, 359). Nearly twenty years later, long after she had published several gardening books, Cran was offered the position of garden editor for *The Queen* from 1925 to 1930 (Lawrence 1978, 359; 1966, 117). Throughout her writing career, Cran contributed to British newspapers, specifically *The Bystander*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, *The Star*, and *The Standard*, and magazines, such as *Harper's Bazaar*, *Good Housekeeping*, *House and Garden*, *Homes and Gardens*, *Girls' Own Annual*, and *Women's Magazine* (Lawrence 1966, 117). Although researchers like myself have no way of knowing how popular Cran became as a writer and broadcaster, she did regularly receive publicity in newspapers throughout the British Isles whether it was because she had opened a flower show, published another gardening book, or because she had an article in an upcoming issue of *The Queen* or *Good Housekeeping*.<sup>26</sup> In rare instances, Cran was even referred to in newspaper advertisements. For example, the *Western Daily Press* repeatedly ran an advertisement in October of 1933 for a Bristol based garden nursery, Luke Rogers & Sons, who wanted its patrons to send for a free gardening booklet that their firm had produced. In the advertisement they state that Marion Cran wrote the foreword and that the booklet was "invaluable to every keen gardener."<sup>27</sup> One of the more unusual circumstances in which Cran's popularity as a garden writer became

evident was the publication of a poem penned by Reginald Arkell (1852-1959) that recognized both herself and another garden writer, Beverley Nichols:

*Single-handed*

Beverley Nichols  
And Marion Cran,  
Hadn't been born  
When the world began.

That is the reason,  
I must confess,  
The Garden of Eden  
Was not a success (1945, 85).

Whenever I met someone--typically, an older British gardener--that was interested in my research and I referred to Marion Cran, the first thing that came to the person's mind was the first four lines of this poem. It is not surprising that Cran had a poem written about her, for she had many talents and interests before she became a successful garden writer. As an active member of dramatic societies and poetry groups, she formed many friendships with actors and playwrights. Her friend, Herbert Beerbohm Tree (1852-1917), who was both an actor and playwright, asked her to write his biography.<sup>28</sup> Cran wrote *The Life of Herbert Beerbohm Tree* which was published in 1907. She did eventually publish her own volume of poetry, but first she received an unusual commission that was far removed from her writing career. In approximately 1908, she was offered the position of "emissary" for the Dominion of Canada to report on the conditions of British women who had emigrated to become farmers. Although the Canadian government paid her travel expenses and the Canadian Pacific and Canadian

Northern Railways supplied her with train passes, Cran did not receive a salary for this work (Cran 1910, 17). While travelling across the Canadian prairies, she made various stops to speak with both male and female farm owners. She was particularly interested in the lives of female farmers (Cran 1910, 37-40; 59, 101) and her most significant detours included her address to women journalists of the Winnipeg Free Press and her meeting with agricultural specialists at the Experimental Farm in Ottawa (Cran 1910, 41-43; Jackel 1982, 147). Her observations and findings were compiled into her first book, *A Woman in Canada* which was published simultaneously in Toronto and London (Musson 1910). In the midst of writing *A Woman in Canada*, Cran produced her only book of poetry, titled *Song of a Woman* (1909).

### **Marion Cran's popular gardening books and her garden style**

Cran's garden writing can be divided into two periods: the first extends from 1908 until 1920 when she lived and gardened in Farnham, Surrey, and the second spans the years from 1920 until 1942 when she lived and gardened in Benenden, West Kent. Her nom de plume from 1910 until 1919 was "Mrs. George Cran," followed by Mrs. Marion Cran, and then simply Marion Cran from 1920 onward.

Her first gardening book, *The Garden of Ignorance: The Experiences of a Woman in a Garden*, was published by Herbert Jenkins Ltd., the press who would eventually publish most of her books. Several editions of *The Garden of Ignorance* followed, including what publishers Herbert Jenkins Ltd. referred to as the "popular edition" in 1914 and the "edition de Luxe" in 1926 which included watercolour illustrations

throughout the text instead of Cran's photographs (Lawrence 1978, 263).<sup>29</sup> *The Garden of Ignorance* discussed Cran's first garden at Steephill Cottage where she and at least two hired "jobbing gardeners" worked to make a large flower and vegetable garden (see figure 2.10). Cran always referred to this garden as "the Garden of Ignorance" (Cran 1917, xi), but whether she was experienced or not, this book based on her first gardening experiences very quickly launched her career as a popular garden writer and horticultural expert. This is evidenced by the fact that she was elected a Fellow of the Royal Horticultural Society in 1913, an honour bestowed on few women garden writers of the period.<sup>30</sup> With the publication of her second book, *The Garden of Experience* (1921), Marion Cran became a household name in England. *The Garden of Ignorance* and *The Garden of Experience* described Cran's first gardening experiences from when she was truly "ignorant" of plants and gardens to the point when she was able to envision and put into place a semi-formal cottage garden complete with a stone wall and terrace (figure 2.22), and separate rose, kitchen and herb gardens.

Although cottage gardens will be discussed thoroughly in Chapter Four, I will provide a very brief description of what defines Cran's garden style and introduce several garden-related terms that I use in this thesis. Whenever I needed clarification on plant nomenclature in this thesis, I consulted botanist, Allen Coombs, in his *A-Z of Plant Names: Botanical Names and Their Common Name Equivalents* (1994). Cran grew flowers, vegetables, fruit, and herbs in her gardens. She particularly appreciated what gardeners often referred to (and still refer to, to this day) as "old-fashioned flowers" such as pansies (*Viola*), foxgloves (*Digitalis*), hollyhocks (*Alcea rosea*), pinks (*Dianthus*), and

sweet peas (*Lathyrus*) to name a few (Coombs 1994, 59-60, 90, 102, 190). These flowers have had a long association with cottage gardens (Scott James 1979, 83-86), a gardening style that has preoccupied the minds and hearts of Western gardeners since the end of the nineteenth century.

Like Cran's gardening interests, a cottage garden often consisted of flowers, vegetables, and herbs. On occasion, cottage gardens also contained an apple tree and/or strawberries or bramble fruit. Many cottage gardens, even today, boast vines like honeysuckle (*Lonicera*) winding around latticework or an archway over a cottage door (Coombs 1994, 109). As with most cottage gardeners, Cran was passionate about roses (*Rosa species*), especially older, fragrant varieties like gallica and damask roses (*Rosa gallica*; *Rosa x damascena*) and wild roses (*Rosa rugosa*) that bloomed at different times throughout the summer and autumn months (1913, 94-119; 1924, 111-144; Coombs 1994, 161-162).

In whatever garden she tended, Cran grew flowering perennials, annuals and biennials: perennials return year after year (*Peonies* for example); annuals can self-seed but they generally die in the first season (such as sweet peas (*Lathyrus*)); biennials (like hollyhocks (*Alcea*)) sown in the spring only produce leaves but will bloom the following season. Cran created gardens in the "cottage garden style" but she also enjoyed trying new, modern plant varieties, such as ornamental shrubs (lilacs (*Syringa*), *Hydrangea*, and crab apples (*Malus*)) that became popular during the interwar period (Coombs 1994, 92, 114, 178-179). Initially, during her garden writing career, Cran was a great proponent of the "herbaceous border," a flower border consisting of densely planted perennials (and

sometimes annuals) often with taller blooms placed behind shorter blooming plants.



Figure 2.22 – Part of Cran’s cottage garden in Farnham with the “Rude boy” sculpture in the center of a flagged stone garden filled with herbs, roses, and many notable conifers in the background. 1913. Courtesy of Dudley Graeme.

Eventually, Cran grew tired of herbaceous plantings because they require high maintenance; they demand a gardener’s full attention because when one plant finishes flowering, another has to bloom to replace it or the appearance of the border suffers. Cran tended her vegetable garden with help from a hired gardener or handyman, who completed heavy tasks for her on a semi-permanent basis. Yet she created and maintained a small kitchen garden, filled with salad greens and herbs such as thyme (*Thymus*), rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*), hyssop (*Hyssopus officinalis*), marjoram (*Origanum vulgare*), summer savoury (*Satureja hortensis*), lemon balm (*Melissa*



officinalis), tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*) and lavender (*Lavendula*), largely on her own (see Cran 1913, 1920, 1924, 1929b; Coombs 1994, 94, 117, 131, 162, 166, 180, 182).<sup>31</sup>

Importantly, I should mention that there is no evidence to indicate that Cran worked from garden plans of any kind, and yet she did create at least two small garden designs which were published in two of her books. The first was her design for a children's garden, inspired by her daughter's interest in having a garden of her own; this garden plan was published in *The Garden of Ignorance* (1913, 233). Cran's second known design was for a "winter garden," but the actual plan was drawn by Christopher Smithells for *Garden Talks*, a published collection of Cran's radio broadcasts (1925, frontispiece) (figure 2.23).

In the midst of her writing career, from approximately 1919 to 1920, Cran was hired as an "envoy" by the Imperial Association for Assisting Disabled Officers. As one newspaper reported it, Cran was offered this assignment because she had worked at the Association's headquarters during the war, interviewing officers who had applied for assistance from the Association. Her job would be to follow up on these officers by reporting first hand "on the conditions, the homes, and the prospects, the degrees of disablement, and the work and progress of disabled officers whom the Association has enabled to start a new life in various parts of the Empire."<sup>32</sup> Not long after she had finished her assignment with the Imperial Association, Cran became the first host of the radio gardening program, "Garden Talks" in 1923. The show aired on what was then referred to as "2L0," a radio studio in London prior to the organization of the British Broadcasting Corporation (Cran 1925, vii). She was not only the first gardening radio

broadcaster, but she was also the first woman broadcaster (Uglow 2005, 257).

As indicated previously, Cran's broadcasts were later published as *Garden Talks* (1925). In the early 1930s garden writer C. M. Middleton replaced Cran as the next gardening broadcaster for the BBC (Uglow 2005, 257; Quest-Ritson 2003, 265).<sup>33</sup>

Despite her popularity, Cran often down-played her reputation as a gardening expert by indicating that she was "a learner talking to fellow-learners" (Cran 1925, vii). Cran's down-to-earth attitude and her open and honest writing style undoubtedly contributed to her large following.<sup>34</sup>

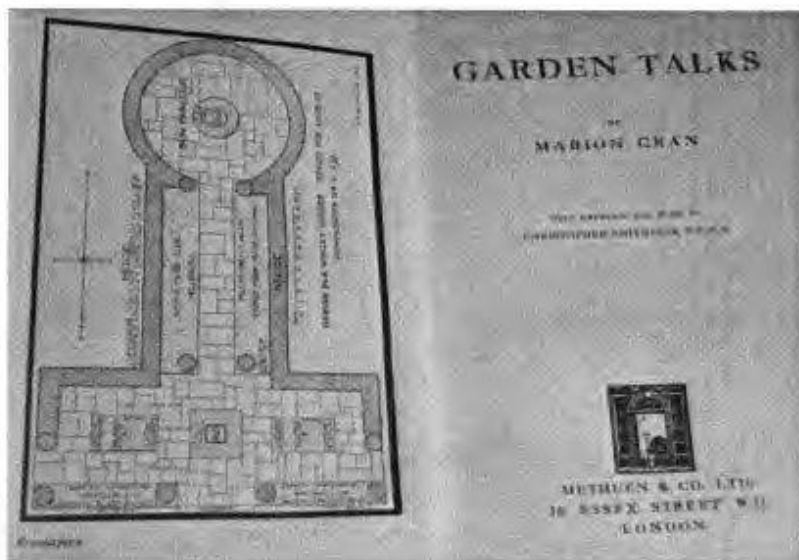


Figure 2.23 – Garden design for a winter garden drawn by Christopher Smithells for Marion Cran and *Garden Talks* in 1925. Photograph by Cynthia Boyd.

Cran's writing and broadcasting career placed her in high demand: she was asked to officiate at horticultural events, speak at women's clubs, and judge city-wide gardening competitions, to name a few.<sup>35</sup> Several flowers were named for her, including the Marion

Cran Iris, Crocus, Gladiolus (1931, 244-245), and Delphinium.<sup>36</sup> Her name was also given to at least two Hybrid Tea roses by nurserymen in England and Ireland (Cran 1913 (repr. 1924), xx; 1925, 78; Macself 1934, 313). Several other “spin-offs” resulted from Cran’s popularity as a writer and radio broadcaster. After she spoke on the air about feeding wild birds in her winter garden using a home-made bird-table, a Surrey pottery guild re-created this table in terra-cotta, calling it the “Marion Cran Bird Table” (Cran 1925, 125-126). In addition, Herbert Jenkins Ltd. worked with Cran to publish a garden diary titled *The Garden Register* that was designed as a record keeper for both new and experienced gardeners. It contained specific sections for listing what flowers, vegetables, herbs, fruit, and/or bulbs the gardener planted; it included a separate entry section for recipes using garden and hedgerow harvests (Cran 1925-1941). In the late 1920s, Herbert Jenkins Ltd. created annual calendars bearing her name. *The Marion Cran Garden Calendar*, and shortly after *The Marion Cran Animal Calendar*, were both published until at least the mid-1930s (Cran 1931).<sup>37</sup>

The second period of Cran’s writing career was marked by changes. Following her divorce from George in 1919, Cran left Surrey and the “Garden of Ignorance” (Steephill Cottage) and moved to Benenden where she purchased “Coggers.” Cran felt compelled to rescue this house and its rambling garden, thus, her bond with Coggers could be seen as symbolic. Its ruinous state represented how Cran herself felt; both house and woman were broken and in need of tender loving repair. Having lived in small villages previously, Cran felt at home in the village of Benenden and was perhaps attracted to it as a place where she could heal from her failed marriage, but her

motivations for restoring the ruin were many. Cran recognized the importance of saving Coggers for its medieval heritage and its historic presence in the Kentish landscape. Moreover, she bought Coggers with her own earnings so that she could claim it as *her* home and refuge for writing and contemplation. Cran's third gardening book, *The Story of My Ruin* (1924), described the work Cran put into saving Coggers.

After this publication, much of Cran's written output was shaped by her visits to private and public gardens across the globe. Regardless of their widening focus, Cran's books still included prescriptive chapters on specific plant varieties as well as gardening techniques. Cran's experiences in her own English garden represent a common thread woven throughout all her books. On some occasions, Cran indicated that her gardening books were a continuation of a chronicle, a chronicle about her gardening life amidst all the gardens she had ever visited and the gardeners she had known over the course of her writing career (Cran 1941, 11).

In 1926, Cran re-visited the place of her birth and wrote *The Gardens of Good Hope* in which she recalled her travels over many areas of South Africa and meetings with enterprising gardeners, most of them women, who had embraced the South African climate by growing flowers or fruit as marketable commodities (Cran 1926, 58, 89).

Returning home, Cran published another book that featured English gardens and gardening titled *The Joy of the Ground* (1929b). Shortly after, Cran's book *Wind-Harps* described the author's progress with her flower garden, ponds, and small orchard since the publication of *The Story of My Ruin*. *Wind-Harps* also brought readers up to date on aspects of Cran's personal life, specifically the professional singing career of her daughter

Lesley (1929a, 32-36). In 1930, Cran briefly broke from her trend of non-fiction writing with the publication of her novel, *The Lusty Pal*. In this book, she related the story of two sisters, Elda and Alice (Cran 1930). Dudley Graeme believed that this novel was very likely a fictional rendering of the late Victorian childhood of Alice (his mother) and her sister, Marion (Graeme 2007b). Cran's second work of fiction, *Piper's Lay* (1936b), was a semi-biographical story based on the soldiering life of her closest friend and third husband, Fergus Scott Hurd-Wood (Cran 1937, 27, 32). According to Dudley Graeme, *The Lusty Pal* (1930), and *Piper's Lay* (1936b), garnered more income than any of her gardening books.<sup>38</sup>

In between her fictional works, Cran was commissioned to write about gardens in the United States. *Gardens in America* (1931) presented Cran's observations on both ornamental and commercial gardens of the east and west coasts of the U.S., as well as several gardens in British Columbia. According to book collectors in the United States, *Gardens in America* has remained one of Cran's most collectible books simply because it is a useful reference tool for period garden historians reconstructing American gardens which Cran observed and recorded in the 1930s (Lyon 2005).<sup>39</sup> Cran's next book, *I Know a Garden* (1933), provided readers with a fascinating examination of English private gardens from Oxford to North Yorkshire.

In 1934 and 1935, Cran produced two books about her new commercial enterprise, "The Premier Squab Farm" at Coggers. With the publication of *The Squabbling Garden* (1934), Cran recalled how she and Fergus designed a "columbarium," or dovecote, to house the squabs (1934, 40-50). This book also consisted of Cran's

personal experiences about plants and gardening techniques, filled with stories about people and pets as was characteristic of Cran's writing style. *Making the Dovecote Pay* (1935) provided more in-depth information on raising table pigeons from housing, feeding, plumage and diseases to cooking the squabs. Advertisements in the back of the book indicate that Cran offered training to a limited number of interested "pupils" on squab-care and breeding for a nominal fee (1935). Shortly after the death of her husband, however, Cran's squab business was no longer mentioned in her future publications.

In the mid-1930s, Cran wrote feature articles each month for *Women's Magazine*, which was a branch publication connected to *Girl's Own Annual* (which was referred to as *The Girl's Own Paper* prior to 1924). Cran discussed individual plant species each month in 1935 for *Women's Magazine* under the series title "How They Came to My Garden."<sup>40</sup> A year later, she began another series titled "Other People's Gardens" which incorporated many of the visits she made to others' gardens throughout Britain and across the globe (1936). According to an editorial in *Women's Magazine*, contributors were not paid for their writing; whatever profits were made by the magazine were donated for missionary work (Marshall 1939, 2). It is understandable, therefore, that Cran sometimes revised chapters from her books for periodicals like *Women's Magazine*. While Cran no longer worked for the BBC, she was occasionally asked to provide radio talks on garden topics. In one instance, she gave a radio talk on "window box gardening" produced in 1934 by the BBC. Cran's broadcast was aired in conjunction with three other garden-related broadcasts by more well-known garden writers Vita Sackville-West (1892-1962), Beverley Nichols (1898-1983), and novelist Compton Mackenzie (1883-1972). All of

these radio broadcasts were then revised to form chapters of a publication edited by Nichols and titled *How Does Your Garden Grow?* (Allen 1935).

At this period, Cran's daughter, Lesley decided that she no longer wanted to pursue her singing career and instead she sought horticultural training at Thatcham Fruit and Flower Farm, a private gardening school for women (Meredith 2005).<sup>41</sup> Although Cran noted how pleased she was by her daughter's formal gardening education, it may have rankled her. Despite her popularity as a garden writer, Cran had never had the opportunity to be professionally trained in horticulture and this was a point she belaboured on more than one occasion (1921, 204; 1934, 235-237). As previously mentioned, Lesley married Thomas Templeton, a retired army sergeant. Templeton, or "Temy," as he was better known, and Lesley left England shortly after their marriage to start a new life in Kenya, where Temy was to manage a tea plantation (Cran 1937b). Cran's book *The Garden Beyond* (1937b) recalled her stay with Lesley at her home, "Kericho," as well as describing other Kenyan gardens nearby (Masterman and Masterman 2007).

Cran's next publication *Gardens of Character* (1939) focused on English gardens much like her previous titles *The Joy of the Ground* (1929b) and *I Know a Garden* (1933). In 1939, Cran was awarded a "civil list pension" of seventy-five pounds from the British government for her services to literature (Jackel 1982, 124). Two years later, Cran was awarded a "supplementary" list pension of twenty-five pounds, again for services to literature.<sup>42</sup> A year before she died, she completed her final gardening book, *Hagar's Garden* in 1941. Cran's discussions in this book revealed that her finances had

dwindled, her writing was no longer marketable, and her health was failing. Although Cran could not have predicted that she would be dead within a year, this book consisted of even more candid reflections than before, often about members of her family, such as the estrangement that existed between her and her daughter, Maidie (1941, 255-274). Yet Cran's characteristic spirit shines through in *Hagar's Garden*, especially in her experiences observing garden flowers in others' garden spaces, everyday village life and hop picking, all of which comforted her amidst the atrocities of the Second World War (Cran 1941, 146, 183).

Almost ten years after Marion Cran's death, two anthologies of her writings were published. *Garden Wisdom from the Writings of Marion Cran* (1948) and *Bedside Marion Cran* (1951) were edited by Leonard Grimble for Herbert Jenkins, Ltd. In his introduction to *Garden Wisdom*, Grimble reflected on Cran in that "everything in a garden had meaning for her" (1948, 19). Further, Grimble indicated that "to read her pages is to enter a garden with her and to discover her as a genial companion whose mood is infectious" (1948, 19). Notably, this woman's garden writing still continues to be rediscovered and enjoyed by contemporary gardeners and admirers. Before reflecting further on Marion Cran's contributions as a garden writer and the nature of her appeal to readers, the next chapter traces the history of English women as both gardeners and garden writers.

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<sup>1</sup> As there is little documentation available about Marion Cran's personal life, this chapter was based on ethnographic interviews and/or correspondence with Cran's nephew, Dudley Graeme in Chichester, West Sussex (2007a and 2007b). I also interviewed Lesley Templeton's friends, Fairless Masterman and the late, Dodie



Masterman (2007). The interviews with Mr. Graeme and the Masterman family members were conducted in September and October, 2007. I have been in correspondence with Dudley Graeme from 2007 through 2012; he died in September, 2012. In addition, I have had correspondence and many phone conversations with Robert Sternenberg and his late wife, Erin Sternenberg since March of 2006. For other details surrounding Cran's life, I referred to Alberta Lawrence's *Who Was Who Among English and European Authors Volume 1: 1931-1949* (1978) and *Who Was Who Among Living Authors of Older Nations Volume 1, 1931-1932* (1966).

<sup>2</sup> Information about St. Mary's Hall School is based on the school's alumni association website [www.smhassociation.org.uk](http://www.smhassociation.org.uk) as well as the website for the East Brighton Bygones Local History Society, [www.bygones.org.uk](http://www.bygones.org.uk) both of which I accessed on March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2013. This school eventually closed its doors to students and merged with Roedean Junior School in 2009. The buildings remain in place but they currently house the administration offices of the Royal Sussex County Hospital.

<sup>3</sup> This particular photograph can be seen at the website for East Brighton Bygones Local History Society, [www.bygones.org.uk](http://www.bygones.org.uk).

<sup>4</sup> Dodie Masterman and Fairless Masterman. Personal communication. St. John's Wood, London. October 6, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> This detailed explanation consists of a description I found in London's Tate Gallery of the painting by Edward Burne-Jones (see the following endnote for more information) and an interesting anecdote that Agatha Christie referred to as "the King Cophetua syndrome" in *The Body in the Library*. As Christie's well-known sleuth Miss Marple stated:

It's like King Cophetua and the beggar maid. "If you're really rather a lonely, tired old man, and if, perhaps, your own family have been neglecting you" - she paused for a second - "well, to befriend someone who will be overwhelmed with your magnificence...well, that's much more interesting. It makes you feel a much greater person - a beneficent monarch" (Christie 1942 (repr. 2011), 97).

<sup>6</sup> The websites that I used to find information about the Edward Burnes-Jones painting, King Cophetua and The Beggar Maid, were the following (I accessed these websites on March 20, 2008): <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/burne-jones-king-cophetua-and-the-beggar-maid>; <http://allart.biz/photos/image/EdwardBurneJones>.

<sup>7</sup> While searching through a tin box of Cran's ephemera in Dudley Graeme's apartment, I noticed a calling card with a reference to Marion and George Cran's London residence, "The Old Court House," Chelsea dated 1911-1912. When I asked Mr. Graeme about it during our interviews in September, 2007, he replied that he was living in Vancouver

with his mother, Alice at that time and was too young to remember that particular residence. He believed, however, that the Crans lived there only for a brief period. It is also known that the Crans lived in an apartment in Sloane Square in the Chelsea district of London.

<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the “Back to the Land Movement” please consult Jan Marsh’s *Back To the Land: The Pastoral Impulse in Victorian England from 1880 to 1914* (1982), an excellent study of this movement in England’s history.

<sup>9</sup> In *Change in the Village* (1912, (repr. 1969)), Geoffrey Grigson provides an insightful introduction to Sturt in which he states: “It was his grandfather who had purchased the wheelwright’s business at Farnham, in Surrey, in 1800; his father took over the business in 1865...” (1969, ix).

<sup>10</sup> I noticed in several photographs found within the Marion Cran Album Collection at the Lindley Library that Lesley has been photographed as she is taking photographs herself, which would indicate that her mother allowed her to use the camera.

<sup>11</sup> This information is gleaned from Cran’s personal photograph albums. For more information, please see the following endnote.

<sup>12</sup> Three photograph albums exist in the Royal Horticultural Society’s (R.H.S.) Lindley Library, Vincent Square, London. These albums have not been officially catalogued at the time of writing, however, they are within the public domain; throughout this thesis, these albums are referred to as the Marion Cran Album Collection. These albums were Marion Cran’s personal albums that her daughter Lesley had owned after her mother’s death; Lesley Templeton left them to her friends Dodie Masterman and Marian Anderson. They, in turn, donated these albums to the Lindley Library. Two other photograph albums were in the private collection of Dudley Graeme, whose mother, Alice, had originally owned the albums. Since Dudley Graeme’s death (2012) I believe that his children, Sue Sandison and David Graeme must have possession of these photograph albums. Through recent correspondence I received from Ms. Sandison, however, materials relating to Cran (photograph albums, miscellaneous papers) have been passed on to her nephew, Philip Graeme in Toronto. Many of the photographs found in Cran’s personal albums in the Lindley Library are very similar to those now owned by Philip Graeme.

<sup>13</sup> This photograph is located in the Marion Cran Album Collection. Courtesy R.H.S. Lindley Library, London.

<sup>14</sup> Although I have no evidence, I believe that Cran staged many of her photographs; perhaps she set the photograph up and because she wanted herself in the photograph, she had another person actually take the picture.

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<sup>15</sup> Based on the large quantity of loose photographs placed in between the pages of four large photo albums in the Marion Cran Album Collection, I believe there were at least 250 photographs, but likely there were many more. In addition, I had the opportunity to see another collection of photographs owned by Dudley Graeme (now owned by Philip Graeme).

<sup>16</sup> When I reviewed the photographs in the Marion Cran Album Collection, I noticed that many of the photos had originally been designed as postcards. What became evident was that the glue used to attach the photo to the album had dried out, and the photos were coming away from the pages of the album revealing the type of paper used for real-photo postcards, as mentioned in this chapter. In addition, the Cranbrook History Museum and Archives also had a number of real-photo postcards depicting Cran's home and garden in Benenden, Kent which could be accessed in the archives' collections. I did not find an accession number on these postcards. I located these collections with the assistance of Betty Carmen, Archivist for the Cranbrook Museum and Archives, September 22, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Anonymous. 1929. *Express & Star*. July 3.

<sup>18</sup> Within one album of the Marion Cran Album Collection, I found a small folded menu card which had been fastened to the inside of the front cover of the album. All details surrounding the dinner Cran attended--the food items served, toasts, presentations and musical entertainment--are carefully and artistically listed on this menu card. Please see the photograph (figure 2.15) included in this chapter.

<sup>19</sup> For articles and notices referring to Cran's flower show activities, I consulted Cran's scrapbook 1913-1934 which is in my personal possession. Many of the articles are noted in the bibliography under "Anonymous" as many of these newspaper notices do not list an author. See Swaffer, Hannen as an example of one of the few notices that does carry an author's name.

<sup>20</sup> Through interviews with Cran's nephew, Dudley Graeme and one of the owners of Coggers, Christopher Neve, I received information about Cran and Fergus Scott Hurd-Wood's squab enterprise. See Graeme 2007b and C. Neve 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Many women picked hops in Kent in the 1940s, but these women were often from the East End of London according to Gilda O'Neill in her ethnographic portrayal of hop picking Londoners, *Lost Voices: Memories of a Vanished Way of Life* (2006). Cran did recognize that many of her fellow pickers were Londoners, but she also acknowledged that there were other, middle class women like herself who lived in Kent and needed the employment. For more details, see Cran's last publication, *Hagar's Garden* in which she described her own and others' hop picking experiences (1941, 146-196).

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<sup>22</sup> Cran was thorough as a participant observer of hop picking. As I indicate in the previous endnote, readers may be interested to investigate this material further by reading chapters 11 through 14 in *Hagar's Garden* (1941, 146-196) and O'Neill, 2007.

<sup>23</sup> According to the newspaper, *Gloucestershire Echo*, on September 2, 1942, "Miss Marion Cran (Mrs. E. M. Hurd-Wood), the gardening novelist, died in a nursing home at Brenenden [sic], Kent, today, age 67."

<sup>24</sup> I visited Cran's gravesite in October, 2007 with Arianwen Neve who owns Coggers with her husband.

<sup>25</sup> For a listing of some of Cran's articles and all of her books, please see the bibliography.

<sup>26</sup> Although I only recently discovered the British Newspaper Archives online service, I found that a quick search for Marion Cran revealed snippets of information that suggested how newspapers, in particular, promoted her popularity. But these little pieces of information still do not provide the actual numbers of people who read her books or listened to her radio broadcasts.

<sup>27</sup> Anonymous. 1933. *Western Daily Press*. October 11, 12, and 17.

<sup>28</sup> While interviewing Dudley Graeme between September 6 and 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007, he indicated that although he had heard that Cran and Beerbohm Tree were friends, he had never understood how she was asked to write his biography. He also had no idea why she was selected to become an emissary for the Dominion of Canada. In the case of Herbert Beerbohm Tree, I believe that this man and Cran had become friends while they were members of a poetry society. Importantly, Cran had already written and published dramatic plays and poetry before she was asked to write this biography. In the second case, it is not surprising to me that Cran was chosen to become an emissary; she was, at that time, a successful journalist, and she had also acquired a diploma for maternity nursing in Ireland. Considering the combination of her professions, Cran was an excellent choice.

<sup>29</sup> A copy of the "edition de Luxe" version of *The Garden of Ignorance* can be viewed by patrons in the R.H.S. Lindley Library, Vincent Square, London. I looked at the book in September, 2007.

<sup>30</sup> The reference to Marion Cran becoming a "fellow" of the Royal Horticultural Society was found on the pages of *The Royal Horticultural Society 1913 List of Victoria Medalists; Honorary, and Corresponding Members; Fellows; Associates; and Affiliated*

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*Societies*. She is listed as Mrs. George Cran at SteepHill Cottage in Farnham, Surrey (1913, 90). Dr. Brent Elliott, Librarian at the R.H.S Lindley Library, indicated to me that very few women were elected as fellows at that time and even fewer women garden writers were elected. He also indicated that at least two existing members of the RHS had to elect someone before they became a fellow (Elliott 2007).

<sup>31</sup> Botanical names for herbs that include the word “officinalis” refer to the first, official documentation of these plants; the term “vulgare” is used in a plant’s name to indicate that it is the “common” variety.

<sup>32</sup> Anonymous. 1919. *Evening Telegram* (UK). November 27.

<sup>33</sup> Although both Quest-Ritson (2003) and Uglow (2005) indicate that Mr. Middleton replaced Cran in 1930, there is evidence that Cran was still providing radio “garden talks” as late as 1932. A very brief sound recording of Cran exists in the British Library Sound Recording Collection; the air date is from May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1932. For more information, please see the next endnote.

<sup>34</sup> An extremely short portion of a “Garden Talks” radio broadcast held by the British Library Sound Recordings Collection captures the essence of Cran’s voice – husky, romantic, wistful – in under a minute. Although this is so short a recording, I was certainly able to understand how Cran enticed an audience keen to garden and appreciate the natural world around them; the brief segment featured Cran discussing the garden area surrounding her small pond at Coggers. I was fortunate to record this sound recording from a copy owned by Dudley Graeme. While there was an accession number listed on Mr. Graeme’s tape recording, I have not been successful in my search through the British Library Sound Recording Collections to actually see the item listed. The accession number was indicated as #CLN 811/8877-0016 but I would caution readers that it may no longer be available under this catalogue number.

<sup>35</sup> Marion Cran’s grandson, Robert Sternenbergh photocopied Cran’s personal scrapbook and sent it to me from Alabama. The contents of this scrapbook were a veritable goldmine of information on Cran’s writing career, and I am forever grateful to have received it. The scrapbook includes book reviews, articles, and newspaper notices of Cran’s garden lectures, flower show openings, and miscellaneous writings. Cran began pasting clippings into the scrapbook around 1913 when her first book, *The Garden of Ignorance* was published, and she continued to do so until the early 1930s after *Gardens in America* was published.

<sup>36</sup> Anonymous. 1932a. *Western Daily Press*. February 26.

<sup>37</sup> Not surprisingly, very few examples of these calendars still exist, however, the British

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Library has a copy of her Animal Calendar for the year 1931. Each month depicted a sketch of an animal by an artist along with a quoted passage from a well-known country life writer or poet of Cran's choosing, as well as a number of quotes immortalizing Cran's pets, quoted from her own books.

<sup>38</sup> Graeme 2007a. Unfortunately, there is little evidence to support this claim.

<sup>39</sup> Bradford Lyon of Woodburn Books (Rare and antiquarian garden and horticulture books; [www.woodburnbooks.com](http://www.woodburnbooks.com)) in Hopewell, New Jersey provided this information when I asked her about Cran's books, October 12, 2005. As a specialty bookseller, she has been selling *Gardens in America* to North American admirers and collectors of Cran's books since the 1980s. Initially, she sold these books through catalogues to a listing of mail-order customers, but this listing has been largely replaced by customers who access her stock through an online service. Occasionally, Woodburn Books sends out specialty catalogues to long-time customers.

<sup>40</sup> Anonymous. 1937. *Women's Magazine*. Volume 56.

<sup>41</sup> Garden historian and writer Ann Meredith found a list of students, including Lesley Dudley (this was before she was married to Tempy), who attended the private garden school Thatcham Fruit and Flower Farm, when Meredith was researching women's horticultural schools in England for a future publication and a conference paper. She provided the name of Lesley Dudley's horticultural school during the Garden History Society Study Day on *Women Garden Designers on Both Sides of the Atlantic*, Architects Association, Bedford Square, London, November 17th, 2005 in which we were both presenters. For further information on early twentieth century English horticultural schools for women see Meredith, 2003.

<sup>42</sup> Anonymous. 1941. *Evening Telegram* (UK). April 23.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### A BRIEF HISTORY OF ENGLISH WOMEN'S GARDENING AND WOMEN'S GARDEN WRITING

As the outline of Marion Cran's life and work found in the last chapter attests, Cran was a prolific writer who regularly wrote columns and features on women's interests in newspapers and periodicals<sup>1</sup> in addition to the many books she published. Cran also discussed more than just the garden in her gardening books; she wrote on aspects of cookery, herbal remedies, and animal husbandry. Yet, female garden writers were a relatively new commodity in the early twentieth century when Cran achieved popularity. Prior to the eighteenth century, women were generally not published authors of books, manuals, or articles on gardening or cookery; men were the authors. From at least the sixteenth century, male writers wrote gardening and/or housekeeping manuals specifically directed at housewives, such as Thomas Tusser's *Five Hundred Pointes of Good Husbandrie* (1573) and Barnabe Googe's *Four Bookes of Husbandry* (1577) (Hoyles 1995, 77-79; Taboroff 1983, 1-5). These men wrote explicitly about the many household duties that women were expected to accomplish. This included multiple tasks surrounding the care and maintenance of domestic gardens for their families' culinary needs as well as gathering wild berries and herbs from nearby fields to procure enough ingredients for their families' (and the community's) medicinal needs. It was only in the eighteenth century that women became interested in plants to such an extent that they



found their own voice as writers (and illustrators) of books on botany, gardening, and natural history. As Deborah Kellaway reminded readers in her introduction to an anthology on women gardeners, women's voices in the garden could only be heard if "they sometimes lay down their trowels and take up the pen" (1996, ix). Why were women so long to "take up the pen" and write about herbs and flowers, when it has been well documented throughout history that women were relied upon for both their knowledge of plants and gardening skills to nourish and heal their families and members of their communities? (see Bennett 2001; Bennett 1991; Kellaway 1996, ix).

In this chapter, I answer this question by providing an overview of the historical context of the English woman's role in the garden beginning with "Mary gardens" (gardens designed in honour of the Virgin Mary) during the medieval period. Since the history of women's experiences as gardeners and botanists is invariably linked with women's opportunities to become garden writers, I will also review how women gradually became successful botanical artists, garden writers, and horticulturalists beginning in the late nineteenth century. The remainder of this chapter focuses on influential women garden writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century who crafted "garden autobiographies," an unusual genre of popular non-fiction writing that was prescriptive yet informal in its approach (Seaton 1979). Following this discussion, I focus on the work of Marion Cran, indicating how she, and indirectly other women writers, used autobiographical garden writing to express their everyday experiences within the home and the garden in ways that encouraged dialogue between themselves



and their readers.

### **Women's roles in the garden as herbalists, healers, and gardeners during the medieval period: Monasteries and Mary gardens**

Although there is little historic documentation surrounding women's roles in the garden in England and Europe much before the sixteenth century, records do exist which describe the gardening activities of women who lived in "double" monasteries during the early medieval period. Most monasteries contained a physic garden of medicinal herbs and a subsistence garden for growing fruits and vegetables, and some monastic orders also created what became known as Mary gardens (McLeod 2008, 101, 126). Because the veneration of the Virgin Mary had arisen to cult status by the twelfth century, homage was paid to her in the form of statues, paintings, festivals, and Mary gardens. Every plant grown in a Mary garden had a symbolic meaning and the species of plants were chosen because of their fragrance or because of their healing properties. In the middle ages, Mary gardens were often planted with "Marian plants" whose names were labelled with "Our Lady" or "Lady's," such as "Lady's Slipper orchid," "Lady's Smock," "Lady's Cushion," and "Lady's Bedstraw" (Bennett 1991, 78-79).<sup>2</sup> According to garden historian Gabrielle van Zuylen in her text, *The Garden: Visions of Paradise*, it was the rose (*Rosa species*) that came to be recognized (and thus, favoured for Mary gardens) as the plant most symbolic of Mary's virtue and purity (2004, 42).<sup>3</sup>

While the plants selected for Mary gardens were symbolic, the actual garden

space held the most significance when one considers women's roles in monastic gardens of the medieval period. Before the Mary garden came into vogue, monastic gardens were referred to as the *hortus conclusus* which translates as "the garden enclosed" (van Zuylen 2004, 38). This interpretation was particularly inspired by passages in *The Song of Solomon*; the enclosed or walled garden was a secret garden laid within another garden (Bennett 1991, 80; van Zuylen 2004, 38-39). The *hortus conclusus* has also been examined from the perspective of female sexuality, and specifically female chastity (Gan 2009, 31). For women who chose the cloister, living within a monastery and its enclosed garden were symbolic of the life of the Virgin Mary. In choosing the veil, women had several advantages over those who led a secular life. Without the strains of childbearing and marriage, nuns had the benefit of a structured learning environment together with their sisters. They also enjoyed the stimulus of visiting theologians and scholars (Bennett 1991, 80). In maintaining plants and herbs growing in the gardens of the monastery, these women ministered to the needs of their religious community. They could also enjoy these garden spaces, for monastic gardens were "designed for contemplation as well as for the production of medicine and food" (Bennett 1991, 80).

Visiting bishops and travelers frequently recorded their impressions of monastic gardens. One such traveler was Christine de Pizan (1364-1430). De Pizan, a pioneering French female writer whose publication, *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405), is considered one of the most important books in the early history of feminism, discussed her travels when she visited her daughter at the Dominican abbey of Poissy. While

staying at this abbey, de Pizan indicated that the gardens were an “earthly paradise” complete with enclosures where hares, wild deer and fish ponds could be seen and enjoyed (Bennett 1991, 81). This example further indicates how, in maintaining walled gardens, vineyards, and water gardens, cloistered women had more personal freedom to express themselves through “their collective delight in plants” (Bennett 1991, 80).

Outside the realm of monastic life, rural women played the essential, although much less acknowledged, role of “weeder,” of flower, herb, and vegetable gardens of large properties where they were the hired help (Bennett 1991, 33; Bennett 2000, 18; Hoyles 1995, 77). In an article titled “The Garden and the Division of Labour,” garden historian Martin Hoyles substantiates this further by indicating that “the earliest English records of women working as paid labourers in a garden are the entries in the fourteenth century rolls of Ely Cathedral “where women appear in the wages list for digging the vines and weeding” (2005, 24). Hoyles remarks that “they were paid two-pence halfpenny a day,” which was half of a male gardener’s wage (2005, 24).

In addition to paid work as weeders, these same women likely maintained their own household gardens as part and parcel of their everyday domestic duties. In *Five Centuries of Women & Gardens*, Sue Bennett remarks on the expected roles of women in home and garden:

Gardening and its attendant activities, was an occupation in which all women could participate, regardless of social status. Distilling home-made medicines and making preserves were part of women’s work, and for many women, growing vegetables and herbs was not only an important economic activity but essential for survival (2000, 18).

Beyond maintaining herbs and medicinal plants for home use, women's roles in the garden reflected their daily lives as wives and mothers. In her work *Lilies of the Hearth: The Historical Relationship Between Women & Plants*, garden writer Jennifer Bennett discusses how while men worked in the fields, hunted in the woods, or fought in wars at great distances, women remained bound to the home because they were frequently either pregnant and/or nursing small children (1991, 29, 33). Women have long had the ability to multi-task by tending, gathering, and harvesting plants at the same time as caring for their children. Small household plots or kitchen gardens were located next to the family home which allowed women easy access to herbs for making remedies or for adding to the stew pot. As has already been discussed, women grew herbs and/or gathered medicinal plants in order to administer to the culinary and curative needs of their families (Bennett 2000, 18; Bennett 1991, 28-30, 33; Parker 2005, 88; Penn 1993, 15).. While some women were ill-treated, scorned, and labelled as witches for their traditional knowledge surrounding the healing properties of herbs and other plants, evidence suggests that more generally women were depended upon for this knowledge for the well-being of not only their families but of their communities (Parker 2005, 87-88; Bennett 1991, 26, 56-57). Even if they were not gifted as healers, women usually kept a store of herbs or "simples," and natural medicines in their homes to administer when needed (Bennett 1991, 33; Ulrich 1982, 127-128).

Not surprisingly, men writing gardening and housekeeping manuals in the

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Hoyles 1995, 77-79) wholly expected that women should know how to provide food and medicine from their home gardens to benefit members of their household and village, as I will discuss in the next section.

### **Household and garden advice manuals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries**

During the period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many household and garden advice manuals were written by men and addressed to a female audience. Well known examples include Thomas Tusser's *Five Hundred Pointes of Good Husbandrie* (1573), Barnabe Googe's *Foure Bookes of Husbandry* (1577), Gervase Markham's *The English Hus-wife* (1615), and William Lawson's *Country Housewife's Garden* (1617) (Hoyles 1995, 77-79). While women of mercantile families would have been taught the rudiments of reading, women of rural agricultural families would, in all probability, sometimes have had to rely on others to read information to them from these manuals. Tusser's *Five Hundred Pointes* provided lively descriptions of garden tasks that were expected to be done by housewives, in particular. What is remarkable about this manual is that the poet Tusser gave gardening information through rhymed verse which, read aloud, would have been easily remembered by peasant women whose lives were steeped in oral traditions such as story-telling and song.

In March, May, and Aprill, from morning to night  
 In sowing and setting, good huswives delight.  
 To have in a garden, or other like plot:  
 To trim up their house, and to furnish their pot.  
 (Tusser 1573 as quoted in Hoyles 1995, 77).

Tusser provided lists of herbs for the kitchen along with a list of herbs and roots important for salads, sauces, and “to boil or to butter” (Bennett 1991, 35). His writings also indicate that a housewife’s duties included overseeing the dairy, carding and spinning flax and hemp, gathering and distilling herbs and fruit, and collecting, saving, and exchanging herb and vegetable seeds (Penn 1993, 16-17).

Good huswifes in sommer will save their owne seedes  
Against next year, or occasional needs.  
One seede for another, to make an exchange,  
With fellowlie neighbourhood seemeth not strange  
(Tusser 1573 as quoted in Bennett 1991, 35).

While Tusser created pithy rhymes on how a dedicated “huswife” should proceed with gardening tasks, still other writers revealed how a woman’s worth could be assessed based on the completion of these tasks. Googe’s *Foure Bookes of Husbandry* was one such example for he stated: “Herein were the olde husbandes very careful, and used alwayes to judge, that where they founde the Garden out of order, the wyfe of the house (for unto her belonged the charge thereof) was no good huswyfe” (as quoted in Hoyles 1995, 77). These writers and their advice illustrate that women, with their multiple roles as cooks, gardeners, and healers, were regarded as integral to a fully functioning home. While it is nearly impossible to fathom the influence that such published writings had on shaping women’s roles as family gardener and herbal practitioner during this period, we can safely surmise that without her contributions, a woman’s family would have found their day to day existence difficult indeed. A woman’s knowledge of the benefits and

uses of cultivated herbs, flowers, vegetables, fruit, and wild plants would have been very valuable, if not essential.

### **Elizabethan gardens, Bess of Hardwick, and botanical embroidery**

In the Elizabethan period, rural women living on small farms continued to grow and harvest plants in their own gardens, but noble women led a life of leisure in their gardens. With the introduction of ornamental features such as knot gardens, parterres, terraces, statuary, fountains, and grottoes on large estates, courtly ladies found great amusement by walking about the garden, gossiping with their maids, and even tending to the plants if they chose. Although most royal families commissioned male designers, such as Inigo Jones, to implement garden schemes for their properties, there were instances when wealthy countesses and certain queens orchestrated what features and specific plants were to be incorporated into the landscape (Bennett 2004, 24, 26-27). One of the most important figures in England's history, Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603), played an especially influential role in the garden. During her reign, both the Queen and flowering plants were widely depicted in art, literature, fashion, architecture, and gardens of the period as having symbolic meanings (Bennett 2004, 19).<sup>4</sup>

Much of the floral symbolism attributed to the Virgin Mary transferred to Elizabeth I with the dissolution of monastic gardens following the Reformation. Roses, spring flowers, and the month of May which were once symbolic of the Virgin, now became associated with Queen Elizabeth I, the "Virgin Queen." In many portraits, Queen

Elizabeth was painted with the red and white Tudor rose (also referred to as the York and Lancaster rose (*Rosa x damascena* “Versicolor”)), as well as the five-petalled eglantine rose (*Rosa eglanteria*) (Bennett 2004, 20; Coombes 1994, 161). In a race to win her favour, Elizabeth’s nobles competed to design elaborate palaces and gardens in her honour. Other admirers sought to demonstrate their loyalty by creating private gardens representing Queen Elizabeth I and the floral symbolism of the period. This was particularly evident in the case of Bess of Hardwick. A close friend of Queen Elizabeth, Bess or Elizabeth Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury (1527-1608), was born of gentry. After four successive marriages, she became one of the richest women in England (Bennett 2004, 22). Importantly, Bess expressed her loyalty and devotion to the Queen through her refurbishment of her home and garden at Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire.

Hardwick Hall was built in a lightly wooded landscape where deer and other game roamed freely. Bess refurbished and redesigned both the interior and the exterior of Hardwick to reflect the natural world surrounding her property (Bennett 2004, 20-22). It was Bess’s extensive collection of furnishings, tapestries, and embroideries that exhibited floral and mythological imagery redolent of the period and especially symbolic of the Queen. A series of octagonal canvas-work panels located in the drawing room were embroidered by female staff and possibly Bess herself. These panels are significant because they depict plants, herbs, and vegetables. While it is known that these embroidered panels were influenced by the botanical text of Pietro Andrea Mattioli, it is likely that the plant life they show is similar to that found in the gardens of Hardwick Hall



and the surrounding Derbyshire landscape (Bennett 2000, 20-24).<sup>5</sup> Although Bess had the foresight to have an extensive inventory created that listed the contents of Hardwick Hall (and many other properties), unfortunately, she left little documentation describing the layout and design of her gardens (Bennett 2000, 22; Levey 1998 and 2001). Still, Bess's embroidered panels and their horticultural imagery indicate that botany and gardening figured prominently in the minds and hands of women of this period.

Historically, embroidery was the occupation of women from all levels of society who were taught how to sew as young women. As a girl grew older, she mastered the art of embroidery and needlework that was recognized as the skill of an accomplished lady. From elaborate clothing to tapestry wall hangings, existing examples of Elizabethan embroidery suggest that flowers, herbs, and gardens continually inspired their handmade creation (Way 2006, 77; Johnson 1986, 16-17). One of the first things a young woman learned to embroider was a sampler. Executing an elaborate picture or applying simple motifs onto her sampler, a young woman learned more than embroidery stitches (Ring 1993). Botanical specimens, gardens, and the everyday world provided no end of inspiration to a woman keen to hone her skills and abilities with needle and thread. As women expanded their sewing skills to include quilt making, the top layer of a quilt also became an ideal canvas on which to depict flora and fauna (Pritchard 2010, 74-75, 168).<sup>6</sup> Through girlhood samplers, quilts, and embroidered panels, mastering the art of embroidery and sewing allowed women to demonstrate their knowledge of the natural world outside the walls of their rural homes or wealthy palaces.

### **Educated ladies and the study of botany in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries**

Although early garden manuals indicate that women were expected to have a working knowledge of herbs, flowers and medicinal plants in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, this perception changed by the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, especially for noble women and women from mercantile families. As represented in the literature and art of the Georgian period, women's roles in the garden became relegated to activities in the flower garden. Women's practical experience in the garden had evaporated and they were considered too delicate for anything but tending flowers. In existing examples of English estates, one finds an expansive landscape in the "picturesque" tradition with monuments, follies, and statuary dotting the land to create prospects for gentlemen owners and their guests while they walked the grounds.<sup>7</sup> In the early eighteenth century, aesthetic ideals required that kitchen and flower gardens could no longer be visible from the estate's main country house. As the flower garden was considered the gentlewoman's domain, her role was to tend her flowers and cut her roses in seclusion, "tucked away behind the house" where she was considered part of, never possessor of, the landscape (Bennett 2000, 56). In contrast, the gentleman was the proprietor of the estate and his extensive landscape teemed with garden staff to remind everyone of his success and status in society.

Garden manuals and books during this period emphasized how the flower garden served as a diversion for women. Charles Evelyn in *The Ladies Recreation or the Art of Gardening* (1719) reiterated this notion through the following observation: "The

management of the Flower Garden in particular is oftentimes the Diversion of the ladies where the Gardens are not very extensive, and the Inspection thereof doth not take up too much of their Time” (as quoted in Parker 2005, 89). In the early part of the eighteenth century women were encouraged to gather flowers or stroll through the garden as a form of entertainment.

As a result of increased educational opportunities, women were expected to read and learn about the sciences “as part of general and polite culture” (Shteir 1996, 2). Conversely, women’s traditional knowledge and home-based practices as healers and herbalists became the domain of peasant women and no longer that of genteel women (Bennett 1991, 93). Yet, women’s traditional and historical associations with plants were never entirely extinguished for these associations continued to define women, especially the perception that women, as fragile and delicate creatures, were “naturally” predisposed to study flowers and plants. It was acceptable for them to do so (Bennett 1991, 93-94; Shteir 1996, 2-3). The minds of eighteenth century gentlewomen eventually turned to the sciences, especially botany and natural history which were considered appropriate subjects to improve their intellect as well as their health and spirit (Shteir 1996, 2; Harris 1994, 114).

After 1760, when the Linnaean system of classifying plants spread within scientific circles, botany became an extremely “fashionable pursuit” in England and “conversations about plants and flowers took place both in print and in everyday life” (Shteir 1996, 2).<sup>8</sup> In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, women were actively

engaged in the study of plants; they were reading botanical works, attending lectures on botany, collecting botanical specimens, and sketching plants at home and abroad (Shteir 1996, 3-4; Norwood 1993, 1-24; Ockenga 1993, 62, 64). In their comprehension and identification of botanical specimens, women became passionate collectors of flowers, ferns, mosses, fossils, and feathers, among other natural objects. Existing Victorian records suggest that gentlewomen found pleasure in collecting specimens and placing them into albums and sketchbooks where each plant was neatly labelled according to the Linnaean system (Ockenga 1993, 64).<sup>9</sup> Publishers in the mid-nineteenth century produced albums titled "Herbarium" or "Sea Moss" which suggests that they were taking advantage of a market inspired by the interests and passions of amateur naturalists and botanists (Ockenga 1993, 64).

Significantly, women needed very little experience or expensive equipment to study and collect botanical specimens. These factors indicate that not only affluent women took part in botanical excursions.<sup>10</sup> While some carried a small microscope and a satchel filled with containers, paper, and glue in order to collect specimens or press plants, the majority brought only drawing utensils and a sketchbook into the field. Although botanical study became more accessible to women, they were still reading popular manuals written by men, such as *The Lady's and Gentleman's Botanical Pocket Book* (1800) which appealed to a wide audience (Shteir 1996, 19-20). Towards the end of the eighteenth century, however, this was about to change.

*In Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora's Daughters and Botany in*

*England, 1760 to 1860*, Ann B. Shteir states that women's botanical writing became most visible between 1790 and 1830 (1996, 4). Importantly, Shteir indicates that many women had "worked alongside their fathers," and/or were in correspondence with other naturalists and botanists before eventually capturing the attention of a female audience with their own botanical works (Shteir 1996, 4-5). Many of these amateur botanists chose to write in what Shteir referred to as the "familiar format," which consisted of a series of letters and conversations where a woman or mother figure was featured, teaching children about botany from the comfort of the home (Shteir 1996, 4). This format was extremely successful in *An Introduction to Botany* (1796) by Priscilla Wakefield (1751-1832). Wakefield's work was one of the first botanical books written by a woman "to provide a systematic introduction to the science" (Shteir 1996, 83).<sup>11</sup> Wakefield not only introduced botany to a juvenile audience, but her writing indicated that botanical study was especially beneficial to young women because it contributed to "health of body and cheerfulness of disposition, by presenting an inducement to take air and exercise" (as quoted in Shteir 1996, 19, 85). This sentiment was also expressed in later publications on botany, natural history, and gardening written by women in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

After the success of *An Introduction to Botany*, Wakefield wrote sixteen other books relating to botany and natural history, yet, it was this first title that continued to be most successful for it remained on publishers' book lists until 1841 (Shteir 1996, 86-87). In *An Introduction to Botany*, Wakefield promoted botany as a socially acceptable

discipline for young women to study because it was not heavily scientific and lacked technical details. As Wakefield's introductory book emphasized how botany improved a young woman's health and intellect, it is not surprising that it gained approval from literary and scientific circles of the period (Shteir 1996, 88).

Although Wakefield's botanical writings were influential on other female botanical writers at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Shteir 1996, 107-145), women's interests in botany and natural history were supplanted by a fascination in imported exotic plants and the phenomena of the "Language of Flowers" during the Victorian period. As women from the middle and upper classes discovered the pleasure of perfecting their own home gardens, they began to turn their attention to prescriptive garden literature authored by women writers. In the next section, I will discuss how Victorian women's fascination with plants and gardening began to manifest itself through their own garden spaces as well as through women's illustrated florilegiums, "Language of Flowers" handbooks, and garden literature.

### **Victorian women's roles in the domestic garden and women's garden writing in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries**

With industrial development, improved technology and increased rail services, life in Victorian England was marked by an unprecedented range of goods available for purchase. Plants and garden-related products were examples of this consumer phenomenon. Plant hunting expeditions in South America, South Africa, India, Australia,

China, and Japan brought unusual plants and seeds to the British Isles. Botanic gardens, such as Kew Gardens, and flower shows organized by the Royal Horticultural Society, displayed rare and unusual ferns, conifers, alpine plants and aquatic species that entertained a public eager to see the latest plant varieties. British nurseries, such as Carters and Suttons, began extensive plant breeding programs; they advertised their plant offerings and garden products in catalogues and numerous periodicals (Davies 1991, 19, 21,125; Quest-Ritson 2001, 179, 193). After 1840 “carpet bedding,” which consisted of low growing plants clipped and manicured to form specific shapes like clocks, crowns, or heraldic symbols, was widely used in parks (and public gardens) throughout Britain, often becoming “the principal benchmark of their excellence” (Quest-Ritson 2003, 205). In addition, public and private gardens featured vibrant colour combinations of imported annuals, such as scarlet geraniums (*Pelargoniums*), *Verbenas* (Davies 1991, 21), cockscomb (*Celosia argentea*), and Love-Lies-Bleeding (*Amaranthus caudatus*) (Martin 2000, 49-50).

Following in the footsteps of their eighteenth century botanical predecessors, Victorian women expressed their interest in plant life by learning to illustrate and/or paint flowers, herbs, trees, and houseplants.<sup>12</sup> In *Women of Flowers: A Tribute to Victorian Women Illustrators*, Jack Kramer indicates that although women artists were employed as illustrators for influential publications such as *Curtis’s Botanical Magazine*, their work was rarely credited (1996, 6).<sup>13</sup> Many women during this period wrote and illustrated botanical books and florilegiums or “flower books” (Kramer 1996, 34). Some women

sought out the expertise of male illustrators for training and employment. Although most women illustrators did not have the opportunity to travel to exotic locations to paint flowers in their natural habitat as their male counterparts did, the English artist Marianne North was an exception. Travelling abroad with her father, North produced incredibly detailed paintings of flowers, and after her father's death, she continued to paint flowers and landscapes in North and South America, South Africa, and the Caribbean (Bennett 2000, 100-103). More commonly, however, women illustrators did not create original flower paintings or illustrations; they more frequently emulated the work of male illustrators, as copiers or they were simply colourists (Kramer 1996, 6; Bennett 2000, 89).

There were additional formats in which Victorian women illustrators and writers expressed their passion for flowering plants and gardens. Directly related to the florilegium and the botanical book was the "Language of Flowers" handbook (Kramer 1996, 54; Bennett 2000, 89). In the early part of the eighteenth century, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu travelled with her husband to the Middle East where she learned of the greeting tradition, "Salem" (Bennett 2000, 89; Hodgson 2002, 56), in which flowers were used to add further meaning to that greeting. Inspired by Montagu, other women writers popularized floral messages through the language of flowers, often publishing these messages in a formal handbook (Kramer 1996, 54-55). The phenomenon of the language of flowers caused such a sensation among Victorian women in England that countless books on the subject were published and each successive volume was extended to accommodate new plants and their meanings. As more of these volumes began to



circulate, they became smaller and smaller, reduced to pocket sized books that fit easily into a lady's handbag or reticule. While many of these tiny handbooks were authored by a "Lady," occasionally a woman's full name did grace the pages of her publication, such as the case of *The Miniature Language of Flowers*, compiled and edited by Mrs. L. Burke in 1865. Burke's handbook contained an illustrated frontispiece voicing the following missive: "The flowers in silence seem to breathe such thoughts as language cannot tell" (1865 (repr. 2004)). Undoubtedly, such a message would have inspired no end of floral messages. Having a portable, compact, and illustrated language of flowers book at hand, one need never commit a breach of etiquette when sending or receiving these floral messages, which typically took the form of hand-held bouquets or "tussie mussies" (Laufer 1993, 2-3). As documented by one garden historian, a tussie mussie could be filled with flowers whose individual meanings were intended to signify one important message, such as a floral arrangement combining stems of chamomille (meaning initiative), larkspur (indicating swiftness), and poppies (denoting enthusiasm) that announced to the receiver the following encouraging message: "Seize the Day!" (Laufer 1993, 42).

Women of the middle classes were heavily influenced by language of flowers handbooks and garden manuals as they came to regard their domestic garden as an essential aspect of their home and of their everyday lives. This occurred, to some extent, because women were increasingly targeted as the main consumers of goods and services in the Victorian period. Many items were aimed at satisfying women's desire to decorate

and furnish the interior and exterior of their home, including the garden. Victorian women purchased garden items that allowed them to enjoy plants inside and outside the home, but they also participated in leisure activities, like gardening, because they believed these activities promoted self-improvement and amusement (Bennett 2000, 82). While both sexes engaged in gardening as a leisure activity, it was women who handled the general upkeep of the garden. As an extension of the house, the garden was considered part of women's domestic responsibilities.<sup>14</sup> Women's role in the garden in the nineteenth century was viewed as similar to that of women in the previous century: their study of and interest in plants and gardens was expected as a socially acceptable activity in line with a lady's accomplishments (Shteir 1996, 88). For many Victorian women, garden activities fulfilled their sense of duty to their families but at the same time a garden provided them with a sense of purpose. Women gained knowledge of plants and gardening techniques and they produced something that they had grown themselves which benefited their families and/or could be displayed in the home: flowers to decorate the home, herbs and vegetables for the family to eat.<sup>15</sup>

The Victorian woman considered it her duty to face home and garden tasks with alacrity and determination. As indicated by Coventry Patmore in his work "The Angel of the House," an ideal woman would happily serve her husband and family through her completion of domestic duties in the home (Waters 1988, 241-242) and just outside the home. Importantly, however, a woman's role in the garden allowed her to fulfill Victorian values indicative of her role in the home. In the words of mid-nineteenth

century garden writer, Elizabeth Watts:

A well cared for garden displays [sic]--and displays to good advantage too--the love of home, domestic taste, a wish to please, industry, neatness, taste, and all the sweet household virtues that create home wherever good women rule, and that make Englishmen, when blessed with such wives or relatives, so fond of it and of them (Watts 1866, 2).

Even popular fiction of the period reflected that the Victorian woman was expected to enjoy gardens and gardening as part of her everyday life. In *North and South* (1855), Gaskell's main character, Margaret Hale, remarked on the practical aspects of gardening. Gardening consisted of "hard work" yet the author also suggests in the following passage that gardening could be a satisfying activity for women:

Henry: "Shall you garden much? That, I believe, is a proper employment for young ladies in the country. Margaret: "I don't know. I am afraid I shan't like such hard work" (1855 (repr. 2003), 14).

In *Women, Privacy and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century British Writing*, Wendy Gan notes that female characters in both fiction and non-fiction implied that the garden functioned as an area in which to seek privacy and find an escape from domestic responsibilities (2009, 30). Garden historian Stephen Constantine argues in "Amateur Gardening and Popular Recreation in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries" that while an English middle class family demonstrated their wealth and status through the size and appearance of their house *and* their garden, "they designed their gardens as closed and private preserves" (1981, 389-390). Constantine further states that "the garden was regarded as

an extension of the private house, requiring the same preservation from the public gaze. It was in effect a private retreat” (1981, 389-390).

As will be expanded upon in more detail, however, some Victorian homes might only have one garden space located at the front of the property. Visible from a city street, a Victorian woman’s front garden bridged both public and private spaces, and she would inevitably share her garden with friends and relations outside the realm of her immediate family. Yet her garden’s design and upkeep would display to everyone her creative sense of taste and style, along with the latest fashion in plants and garden features. If the family home did have a back garden as well, then this garden could represent a private space in which a woman could retreat; the garden could become her domestic Eden.<sup>16</sup>

Abandoning themselves to small tasks like keeping flowering plants tidy, clipping and pruning, or simply reclining on a bench to read, women experienced a sense of freedom in the privacy of these garden spaces. Through exercising her body, improving her mind, and finding peace, the garden and gardening activities enabled a woman to achieve new skills that helped her to surpass the limitations of her Victorian lifestyle. In the next section of this chapter, I discuss the rise of the suburban residence in the nineteenth century. This epitomized the kind of domestic Eden a woman could create and maintain.

### **Victorian suburban gardens and the rise of Jane Loudon, England’s first woman garden writer**

In the city, middle class women’s gardening efforts were often curtailed by

pollution from the never ending smoke of hundreds of chimneys. In response, the parlours of middle class homes often included a Wardian case which was a glasshouse-garden in miniature used to enclose delicate houseplants and spring bulbs. Wardian cases were not only placed in the parlour, they were also located in highly visible bay window terraces of Victorian town residences (Uglow 2005, 189; Barrett and Philips 1987, 172). In effect, parlours and terraces increased women's abilities to garden despite the limitations of city and town living. In keeping with the period, Victorian women were keenly interested in unusual foliage plants, especially ferns, which meant that the interiors of their homes were literally festooned in plant-life.

While some middle class Victorians purchased villas with several acres on which to garden, the majority chose the less expensive alternative of living in semi-detached or double detached housing which might include both a front and back garden or only one garden space (Barrett and Philips 1987, 170-173). Still others left city and town residences by purchasing or leasing a cottage and garden in the country, discussed in Chapter Two and in Chapter Four. Although alluded to previously, Victorian garden fashions included not only carpet bedding schemes, but garden beds designed just for shrubs or a rockery featuring rare alpine plants. Most of these features could be contained in a small suburban garden space (Picard 2005, 175-177). While affluent Victorians sometimes hired gardeners to prune shrubs or meticulously weed rock gardens, most families could not afford the luxury of a gardener.

Although many women attempted to maintain their gardens themselves, the

majority of women had little gardening experience and could not improve their gardens using the available literature. In the mid-nineteenth century, this situation improved greatly. In 1840, a gifted writer and flower painter, Mrs. Jane Loudon (1807-1858), published *Gardening for Ladies* that specifically addressed the needs of middle and upper class women on the rudiments of gardening (Quest-Ritson 2001, 180).

Before she became a famous garden writer, Loudon published a futuristic novel entitled *The Mummy* (1827), which she signed J. Webb. This novel intrigued horticulturalist John Loudon (1783-1843) so much that he wanted to meet the author, whom he assumed was a man. Several months after their first meeting, they were married and took up residence in London.

As John Loudon was not the healthiest man but a consummate worker who wrote dozens of gardening articles and books, Jane found herself assisting him not only as his wife, but as his secretary, nurse, travelling companion, and fellow author (Way 2006, 139). One of his most important publications was the monthly periodical *The Gardener's Magazine*. Garden historian Charles Quest-Ritson maintained that Loudon promoted the "gardenesque" style of planting, such that "every tree and shrub...could grow and be appreciated as an individual specimen" (2001, 178). In his writings Loudon promoted the idea of the amateur gardener which became especially evident in his well-known book on the subject, *The Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion* (1838). In this volume, Loudon advocated that middle class garden owners must become better acquainted with their gardens themselves, stating that "To dig, to hoe, and to rake, are not operations

requiring much skill..." (1838, 2).

Loudon's articles and books demonstrated how he believed certain areas of the garden, such as the cultivation of fruit, were better left to men. Alternatively, he proposed that the flower garden should be the domain of women (Quest-Ritson 2001, 179). His wife, Jane, also remarked on these divisions in *Gardening for Ladies*:

Whatever doubts may be entertained as to the practicality of a lady attending to the culture of culinary vegetables and fruit trees, none can exist regarding her management of the flower garden. That is pre-eminently a woman's kind of garden labour..." (as quoted in Bennett 2000, 90).

It was only after her marriage that Jane Loudon learned to garden. Although she was tutored by her husband and attended lectures in horticulture, she wanted to find a gardening book specifically intended to teach a woman how to garden. In failing this, she realized there was obviously a need for garden literature directed at women with no prior gardening experience (Quest-Ritson 2001, 179-180) and decided to fill that niche herself. What made her gardening books immediately successful was how she wrote with conviction that women could do almost any kind of gardening job. In one instance she commented that "lady gardeners," despite "having small and delicately formed hands and feet...could learn to wield a spade properly in order to dig effectively" (as quoted in Way 2006, 140). Significantly, Jane Loudon's garden writing inspired Victorian women to believe that gardening was more than just another domestic task or ladies' leisure activity. Like others before her, she advised women that through gardening their "health and spirits [would be] wonderfully improved by the exercise, and by the reviving smell of the

fresh earth” (as quoted in Way 2006, 141). Loudon’s gardening books were practical and instructive without being condescending. She provided encouragement to middle and upper class women gardeners, as well as to young gardeners. As her books continued to be reissued well into the twentieth century, her garden writing undoubtedly inspired several generations of women gardeners and garden writers. Loudon’s impact became evident as increasing numbers of women garden writers wrote gardening books towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. As I will elaborate in the following section, the “garden autobiography” became an extremely popular literary genre emerging from the pens of women writers and gardeners in the 1890s through the mid-1920s (Harris 1994; Seaton 1979).

### **Women’s garden writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries**

Garden autobiographies combined prescriptive garden writing with highly personal details of a writer’s life (Seaton 1979). While there were several male writers who embraced this style (Schnare 1995, 92),<sup>17</sup> garden autobiography in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was predominantly a woman’s genre. It was three prominent women writers whose garden autobiographies most influenced a new generation of women garden writers. Unlike Jane Loudon, Mrs. C. W. Earle (1836-1925), Elizabeth von Armin (1866-1941), and Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932) did not aim their books specifically at women gardeners, but they had a significant impact on twentieth century garden writing by women (see Cran 1913, 1920, 1924; Ely 1903; Hampden 1913; King



1915; Lawrence 1964, 17).<sup>18</sup>

The first of the garden writers to make an impression was Mrs. C. W. Earle. At the age of sixty-one, she began a series of gardening books covering a range of topics from seed sowing to dinner table arrangements with titles that began with *Potpourri from a Surrey Garden* (1897) and continued with *More Potpourri from a Surrey Garden* (1899). In private family papers collected for a publication titled *Mrs. Earle's Potpourri*, Earle reflected that "I am merely, like so many other women of the past and present, a patient gleaner in the fields of knowledge, and absolutely dependent on human sympathy in order to do anything at all" (Jones 1982, 9). Despite such self-deprecation, Earle was long remembered by family and within social circles for her advice on gardening and home decoration which she had frequently supplied through a lifetime of letter writing (Way 2006, 146). Not surprisingly then, Earle's second collection, *More Potpourri from a Surrey Garden* read like a series of personal conversations over the garden fence, as the following example testifies:

Before cutting down our asparagus we collect the pretty red seeds, sow them at once very thickly in ordinary or fancy china pots, and keep some for later sowing. The seedlings come in well as an ornament in the greenhouse at Christmas, look green and fresh and refined, and most people do not know what they are. They have the great merit of costing nothing and of being very easy to grow... (1899, 59).

Earle's informal yet instructive writing provided gardening and cookery tips that undoubtedly appealed to women with many interests and varying levels of experience in both home and garden. Importantly, Earle's writing was also relevant to those who

gardened on suburban plots outside London as well as to those with only window gardens in the heart of the city. As Earle indicated in *Pot-Pourri From a Surrey Garden*, “it must strike everyone when driving through the streets in London in the summer how elaborately ugly is the planting of the window-boxes. What seems to me to look best is to keep the flowers as distinct and as unmixed as possible” (1897, 200).

We are fortunate that Earle pursued her writing career despite the fact that her husband had obvious misgivings, for he offered her the princely sum of one hundred pounds if she would not publish her first *Potpourri* book (Way 2006, 146). Not long after Earle’s initial publication, Mary Beauchamp von Armin (1866-1941) gained notoriety as a garden writer and later, as a fictional novelist. Following her marriage to a German nobleman, she became Countess Mary Annette von Armin. She discovered her love for gardening when she moved to the Pomeranian countryside (in present-day Poland) to reside at her husband’s family estate. After she wrote of her gardening experiences in *Elizabeth and her German Garden* (1898), von Arnim became known as “Elizabeth” in literary circles. Unlike Loudon and Earle, von Arnim had little opportunity to actually practice gardening; what gardening she did attempt, she performed in stealth:

In the first ecstasy of having a garden all my own, and in my burning impatience to make the waste places blossom like a rose, I did one warm Sunday in last year’s April during the servants’ dinner hour, doubly secure from the gardener by the day and the dinner, slink out with a spade and a rake and feverishly dig a little piece of ground and break it up and sow surreptitious *Ipomaea* [Morning Glory] and run back very hot and guilty into the house and get into a chair and behind a book and look languid just in time to save my reputation (1898 (repr. 1980), 55).

*Elizabeth and her German Garden* was a resounding success even if the author had to deny herself access to her garden in order to avoid breaches in social decorum.<sup>19</sup> In this book, von Arnim shares intimate portraits of her personal life, such as her daily outings with her children and how she enjoys her garden without the interruption of visitors. Despite her aristocratic background, von Arnim's writing touched the hearts of readers of the middle and upper classes because she provided glimpses into a woman's life through entries that read like a personal diary.

*September 15<sup>th</sup>* – This is the month of quiet days, crimson creepers, and blackberries; of mellow afternoons in the ripening garden; of tea under the acacias instead of the too shady beeches; of woodfires in the library in the chilly evenings (1898 (repr. 1980), 58).

Although von Arnim wrote a sequel to *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, titled *The Solitary Summer* (1899), and several famous novels, such as *Enchanted April* (1922), it was her intimate recollections of her garden and her precocious children in her first book that most influenced the writings of women garden autobiographers of the early twentieth century.

A year after *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* was published another significant writer entered the field: Gertrude Jekyll. As an artist, designer, embroiderer, and amateur photographer, Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932) applied her creative talents to gardening, garden writing, and later, garden design. Her first two gardening books established her position as one of the most revered garden writers of all time (Schnare 1995, 94). In *Wood and Garden* (1899) and *Home and Garden: Notes and Thoughts, Practical and*

*Critical, of a Worker in Both* (1900), Jekyll urged her readers to reconsider the beauty of old fashioned garden flowers whose merits had been forgotten in the rush of accepting so many newly imported varieties during the Victorian period (1899 (repr. 1994), 18, 347-348; 1900 (repr. 1984), 70, 74, 76; 278-280). Following the influence of William Robinson (1838-1935) and the endeavours of John Ruskin (1819-1900) and William Morris (1834-1896) of the Arts and Crafts Movement, Jekyll's garden writing and garden designs reflected her re-discovery of England's informal, vernacular garden forms, such as the labourers' cottage garden (Quest-Ritson 2001, 217, 222; Penn 1993, 70-71). She writes:

Some of the most delightful of all gardens are the little strips in front of roadside cottages. They have a simple and tender charm that one may look for in vain in gardens of greater pretension. And the old garden flowers seem to know that there they are seen at their best; for where else can one see such Wallflowers, or Double Daisies, or White Rose bushes...such well-kept flowery edgings of Pink, or Thrift, or London Pride (Jekyll 1899 (repr. 1994), 254).

The last three plants that Jekyll mentions are old fashioned perennials still grown in English cottage gardens today, but they are especially well suited to rock gardens because they spread, creating a beautiful effect as they straddle stones or rock crevices. *Armeria* or sea thrift produces lovely pink flowers on top of grass-like, six inch stems; her pink or *Dianthus* is a grey-leaved plant with pink or white flowers (Coombes 1994, 16, 59). "London Pride" is the vernacular name for *Saxifraga x umbrosa* which grows well within flower borders or rock gardens (Coombes 1994, 167). In Chapter Four, I will discuss Jekyll and English cottage gardens in much more detail, but it is significant to mention

that this garden writer and designer helped re-define the cottage garden as *the* quintessential style of gardening in England; a garden style that became influential to legions of gardeners, garden designers, and women garden writers throughout the British Isles and North America (Helmreich 2002, 156, 163).

Earle, von Arnim, and Jekyll became successful garden writers who established the garden autobiography as a highly accessible genre of writing that appealed to women gardeners. They encouraged women readers to understand that gardening held many attributes beyond the eighteenth century notion that having knowledge of botany was an important accomplishment for a lady. These women impressed upon their readers that learning how to garden was a skill to be acquired in order to garden to the best of their abilities. Jekyll, von Arnim, and Earle began a dialogue in which women writers shared their gardening experiences with readers, inviting them to consider the joys of creating a garden. It was a dialogue that other women garden writers continued into the twentieth century.

Significant events in the history of women's roles in the garden transpired to further women's involvement in gardens and gardening outside their own domestic garden spaces. It was the establishment of horticultural schools and training programs for women that assured their official involvement in the fields of horticulture and agriculture (Bennett 2001, 125-130; Meredith 2003, 67-79).

At the turn of the century, the impetus to design horticultural programs for women was a response to the "surplus woman" issue that was raised by various commentators in

periodicals and other publications in the late nineteenth century (Brewis 2004, 122). The “surplus” or “redundant” women were essentially those individuals of the middle classes who had fewer and fewer employment opportunities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Women activists of this period, especially Lady Warwick, suggested that horticulture was an area where women could find work if properly trained (Brewis 2004, 122-123; Penn 1993, 76-77). Lady Warwick was instrumental in founding Studley College for Women in 1898, as well as a journal, *Women's Agricultural Times*, that advertised employment for women gardeners and/or farmers in England and in “the colonies” (Penn 1993, 76). While Swanley Horticultural College was initially designed to educate men, it eventually opened its doors to women in 1891. Swanley’s women graduates were the first to be hired to work at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew in 1896 (Penn 1993, 79). Intending to make their female staff inconspicuous, Kew managers had them dress in the same brown “knickerbocker” suits as the young male workers. Unfortunately, news reached the public and people arrived in droves to watch the women gardeners working as lines from the famous poem “London Kewriosity” illustrated:

They gardened in bloomers, the newspapers said;  
 So to Kew without warning all Londoners sped:  
 From the roofs of the buses they had a fine view  
 Of the ladies in bloomers who gardened at Kew... (as quoted in Penn, 1993, 79).

In creating such a public sensation around women’s gardening activities, this poem likely promoted horticulture and agriculture as a viable career for young women. Beyond the programs offered by Swanley and Studley, many more horticultural schools

and private gardening programs for women were established in the early twentieth century (Penn 1993, 76-86; Meredith 2003, 67-79). Many of these programs provided women with instruction in all aspects of horticulture, from soil management to vegetable gardening. Lady Frances Wolseley, who founded the Glynde School for Lady Gardeners in 1904, was a strong advocate for women in horticulture and she wrote several gardening books aimed at the woman horticulturalist, as well as the woman gardener (Hoyles 1995, 102-103). As a product of her time, however, Wolseley voiced her opinion as to the type of woman who would best be suited to become a professional gardener. *In a College Garden*, Wolseley reflected that “rough-mannered middle class women” and “maidservants” would not do whereas the “educated women, the daughters of professional men” would be the most appropriate (as quoted in Hoyles 1995, 103). Familiar in seventeenth and eighteenth century garden writing, Wolseley reflected that so much of gardening, required “the dainty touch of a woman” and “the lighter side of gardening, which needs so much patience, is best understood by women” (as quoted in Hoyles 1995, 102). Wolseley was not the only garden writer to profess such opinions. The image of the delicate woman gardener continued to foreshadow the efforts of those trying to bring equality to women in more than just the field of horticulture. At the time when wealthy women such as Lady Warwick and Lady Wolseley were advocating for women’s rights to be trained as professional horticulturalists, they and other feminist campaigners and “suffragettes” also fought for women’s right to vote (Brewis 2004, 122-124). Clearly, women’s role in the garden and in the home was beginning to progress far

beyond the flower borders.

Women who trained at Glynde, Studley, and Swanley did find employment, especially during the First World War when women were desperately needed to maintain the farms and gardens of large estates bereft of men who had enlisted in the army (Hoyles 1995, 103-104). Eventually, women fulfilled positions as farmers and gardeners regardless of whether they had professional training or not. Despite Lady Wolseley and her narrow perspective on who was the right kind of woman to become a professional gardener, women were recruited to join the Women's Land Army during both world wars, regardless of their status in society. Women who joined the Land Army were from every class and had little or no training in horticulture yet their roles as gardeners and farmers became essential to the survival of the nation during war time (Hoyles 1995, 105-106). A steady increase in women's garden writing continued prior to the First World War and throughout the interwar period, which undoubtedly coincided with the success of women's training programs in horticulture (Hoyles 1995, 98). Many of these writers discussed how the fields of horticulture and agriculture were viable career choices for women in their books, which undoubtedly encouraged even more women to consider such occupations (see Cran 1927, 1929, 1934; Wolseley 1916; Harris 1994).

At the beginning of the twentieth century however, women's garden writing revealed much more than women's horticultural opportunities; women garden writers communicated to women readers their thoughts and opinions on a myriad of subjects. Interspersed throughout their discussions of ideal soil conditions and lilies for the small



garden, authors expressed their opinions, frustrations, and ideas surrounding politics and family life. In effect, their writing encouraged a dialogue between the writer's experiences of everyday life in her own home and garden, and those of the reader. In some instances, women garden writers compared a woman's gardening skills with a man's in order to convey their impressions of women's rights to equality. In *Every Woman's Flower Garden* (1913), Mary Hampden used the medium of garden writing to convey her opinions on women's abilities. Hampden stated, "all gardening, however, is well within the capacity of a woman of average health and strength, and some of the best home Edens of England are those managed wholly by their Eves" (1913, 3).

Marion Cran emerged as a strong voice on women's position in society. In one of her first gardening books, Cran's opinions on women's many contributions to their homes and families, as well as to their country, were presented through a discussion in which the author instructed her daughter on the planting of her own garden. In using this experience as a jumping off point to support and promote women's independence, Cran remarked: "I look forward to the day when women are in the heart of the State instead of in the lap of it as they are now..." (1913, 240). Twenty years later, Cran continued to express her opinions on such topics, albeit reflecting the changes that had ensued since women had become successful professional gardeners and had been given the right to vote:

But what a fight it was for a woman to earn her own living not so *very* long ago! When horticultural colleges for women started, about forty years since, there was a tremendous amount of prejudice and misconception about the business of training women to be practical gardeners. It was "unwomanly"--it was too "rough"--it was indeed another step on the slippery downward path to that pit of

disaster, woman's independence, and so on and so forth. Then the war came...many women overdid their physical strength in those days. But they proved that they could make good gardeners, and blazed the trail for girls who followed" (1934, 235-236).

Despite the fact that some women had become professional gardeners in the early 1900s, Marion Cran was not among them. Cran had already begun her writing career by the time women's horticultural colleges had opened their doors. As a first time gardener and journalist, she wrote a series of articles about her gardening experiences in Surrey for periodicals like *The Lady* and *The Queen*, whose contents were dedicated to women's interests (Cran 1913; 1920; 1929). Despite her knowledge and experience, she, like so many women garden writers of the period, often professed a lack of knowledge (see Loudon 1840; Earle 1897; Jekyll 1900; Cran 1913). Cran, in particular, openly remarked to readers that she was "ignorant" of even basic gardening techniques which was reflected in her naming both her first garden and her first gardening book "The Garden of Ignorance" (Cran 1913). According to Dianne Harris, in her essay, "Cultivating Power: The Language of Feminism in Women's Garden Literature, 1870-1920," women writers used language, such as "ignorant" and "ignorance," in order to present themselves as "overly modest" and "subservient" (1994, 115).<sup>20</sup> They did so, she contends, because they wanted to appear "self-deprecating...as a defense against their predominantly male professional critics, as an ingratiating technique to appeal to their female audience by making themselves appear to be 'average women'" (1994, 115). In admitting that they began as novice gardeners, women garden writers were less likely to intimidate female

readers and beginning gardeners. Jane Loudon, who wrote gardening books in the mid-nineteenth century, and Marion Cran writing in the early twentieth century, began their careers with very little gardening experience. As noted earlier, Loudon was not able to find an appropriate book for a beginning gardener like herself. With the publication of *Gardening for Ladies*, she voiced her opinion that "...it may appear presumptuous of me to teach an art of which for three-quarters of my life I was entirely ignorant; it is in fact that very circumstance which is one of my chief qualifications for the task..." (1840, as quoted in Bennett 2000, 91). Nearly sixty years later, Cran described to her readers that she was fed up with "smug garden books" that reiterated "ever more the same, same tale-- 'Now is the time to'--'Thus and thus must you do'" (1925, viii). By the time both these women had mastered the art of gardening with a half dozen or more publications behind them, their writing had opened up a dialogue between gardeners and non-gardeners, undoubtedly inspiring generations of women on the joys of tending a bit of earth.

Although Loudon was highly influential in teaching middle class women to understand the fundamentals of gardening, Cran utilized her personal experiences to illustrate her writings about plants and gardening techniques. If she learned a useful tip or gardening hint from a fellow villager, she shared this knowledge with her readers for Cran wrote as she lived. Echoing the work of women from the eighteenth century who used a "familiar format" (Shteir 1996, 4) in their writing to educate young readers in the fields of botany and horticulture, Cran also incorporated familiar formats such as diary entries and gardening conversations to encourage women to consider creating a garden to beautify

their homes, benefit themselves and their families, and connect them to an entire community of gardeners (Shteir 1996, 86). She inspired women gardeners in her books to reconsider the importance of gardening skills and plant knowledge that their mothers and grandmothers once used in their daily lives (Bennett 1991, 67; Shteir 1996, 3). Cran wanted women to appreciate the significance of everyday experiences, traditional gardening techniques, and creative expression through home and garden making. In Chapter Five I explore how Cran and her everyday autobiographies held a special appeal to women readers. I realized through my reading and analysis of Cran and her books that this writer, through her own life as a mother, wife, and working woman, attracted the attention of women she referred to as “good housewives” everywhere. Women readers identified with her and her experiences as a fellow homemaker and gardener. Before turning to this topic, however, I discuss the history and meanings of the English cottage garden. The next chapter situates Marion Cran in this context.

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<sup>1</sup> In Cran’s personal scrapbook, there were numerous newspaper articles that Cran had written on art, gardening, and cookery for London-based periodicals such as *The Lady*, *The Gentlewoman*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *The Queen*. Because the articles were placed in the scrapbook, Cran did not always provide the date of these publications. In addition to these periodicals, Cran wrote for *Girls Own Annual* and *Women’s Magazine* which I consulted in the periodical holdings of the British Library. These publications appealed to women readers of all ages; *Girls Own Annual* (and also, *Women’s Magazine*) ceased publication in the mid-twentieth century. I believe Cran also published articles in *Woman’s Own*, but I have not found any of these in my research. This magazine is still in print and recently, it celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

<sup>2</sup> Lady’s Slipper orchid is referred to as *Cypripedium* (Coombes 1994, 55), and not usually cultivated in gardens as it is a wildflower. Lady’s bedstraw or yellow bedstraw (*Galium verum*), was a strewing herb in the medieval period; Lady’s cushion is more

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commonly known as sea thrift (*Armeria maritima*), a perennial planted in rock gardens; Lady's smock or the cuckoo flower (*Cardamine pratensis*) is a wildflower made famous by Shakespeare. For further information about these and other Marian plants, please see Judyth A. McLeod, *In a Unicorn's Garden: Recreating the mystery and magic of medieval gardens* (2008, 110-125).

<sup>3</sup> Mary gardens continue to inspire the grounds of churches and cathedrals today. For more information on the prevalence of present-day 'Mary gardens' please see McLeod, 2008, 126-127.

<sup>4</sup> There are many examples of royal women who influenced the design of gardens after Queen Elizabeth, in particular Queen Mary (1662-94), who, with her husband, William of Orange, worked passionately on the vast landscapes and individual flower gardens surrounding Hampton Court Palace near London during the seventeenth century. For more information, please see Sue Bennett, *Five Centuries of Women & Gardens* (2000, 38-39).

<sup>5</sup> There has been extensive research surrounding Bess of Hardwick and her embroidery collection, which is on display at Hardwick Hall. For more information on the collection, please see Santina M. Levey, *Elizabethan Treasures: The Hardwick Hall Textiles* (1998). It should be noted that embroideries were also created through the work of hired embroiderers, as well as the work of household staff. Many women referred to pattern books for embroidery designs as indicated in Pauline Johnson, *Three Hundred Years of Embroidery, 1600-1800* (1986, 16-17). Johnson denotes that sixteenth century embroideries often depicted flowers and foliage (1986, 18).

<sup>6</sup> In the authoritative *Quilts 1700-2010: Hidden Histories, Untold Stories*, contributor Linda Parry described how quilt-makers often found inspiration for their quilting patterns from flowers and wildlife: "One Lancashire example represents a fertile and exuberant summer garden. Dated 1812 with the initials 'E.I.', the coverlet's central medallion is part of an early eighteenth-century bedcover embroidered in silk with floral sprigs" (Pritchard 2010, 74-75). The American quilt making tradition also demonstrated a propensity for floral imagery. Please see Ricky Clark, *Quilted Gardens: Floral Quilts of the Nineteenth Century* (1994) and Patricia Crews Cox, *A Flowering of Quilts* (2001) for more information.

<sup>7</sup> For information surrounding the gardens and landscapes of Stowe and Stourhead which are existing examples of the Georgian period, please see Christopher Quest-Ritson, *The English Garden: A Social History*, 2001, 147-148.

<sup>8</sup> Not only in England were middle and upper class women pursuing the study of botany; women in the United States also became fascinated with the subject in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As indicated in Vera Norwood's, *Made From This Earth: American Women and Nature*, especially Chapter One, "Sources for American Women's Nature Study, The English Tradition, Sentimental Flower Books, and Botany" (1993, 1-24), there is ample evidence that American middle class women engaged in discussions with English women botanists and naturalists, while producing their own publications on botany and natural history.

<sup>9</sup> In *On Women & Friendship: A Collection of Victorian Keepsakes and Traditions*, author and photographer Starr Ockenga provides a huge sampling of albums, sketchbooks, and journals in which Victorian women kept specimens of plants, with detailed notes of their Linnaean classification. These albums had come from private collections and museums (1993, 62-77).

<sup>10</sup> In Lynn L. Merrill's *The Romance of Victorian Natural History* she emphasizes how "thousands of Britons of all social classes were avid amateur natural historians..." (1989, viii).

<sup>11</sup> Although I will discuss Dianne Harris and her work on women garden writers (1994) towards the end of this chapter, I feel it is significant to mention that she refers to Priscilla Wakefield as one of the first women to write a botanical book, but she indicates that Maria Elizabeth Jackson and her *Botanical Dialogues Between Hortensia and Her Four Children* (1797) was also an influential, early publication on botany by a woman writer (1994, 114). Jackson used a 'familiar' format to explain botany by providing a series of conversations between a mother and teacher (Hortensia) and her offspring (see [www.lib.msu.edu/exhibits/botany/hortensia](http://www.lib.msu.edu/exhibits/botany/hortensia) which I accessed on March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> In the eighteenth century, Mary Delany created extremely accurate botanical collages out of paper. Beginning in her seventies, Delany produced over 1000 collages using the Linnaean system of classification; they are housed in the British Museum, London. For further information, please refer to Bennett 2000, 67 and Molly Peacock's fascinating biography of Delany's life and art: *The Paper Garden: Mrs. Delany {Begins Her Life's Work} At 72* (2010).

<sup>13</sup> Kramer provides case studies of over thirty known women botanical artists and illustrators in his book *Women of Flowers: A Tribute to Victorian Women Illustrators* (2005) as well as describing the work of anonymous artists.

<sup>14</sup> Although I have already discussed Preston's examination of "real photo" postcards and

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women's representation through photography in the early twentieth century (2009, 781-800) in Chapter One, I feel Preston's comments on women's garden spaces are significant to mention here. With regard to women and their amateur photography in the garden, Preston indicated that the garden "offered an attractive and potentially symbolic extension of domestic space which connected with new ideas about women's activity and leisure" (2009, 783).

<sup>15</sup> As indicated in Waldenberger's study of Latina women and their role in "barrio gardens" in the south-western U.S., they cultivated flowers for decorative uses at religious festivals and community events while growing herbs, chiles and other vegetables to fulfill their families' culinary needs in the early twentieth century (2000, 236, 238).

<sup>16</sup> Sarah Bilston in her article "Queens of the Garden: Victorian Women Gardeners and the Rise of the Gardening Advice Text" refers to both Patmore and Ruskin in regard to the Angel of the House; she also analyzes the notion of private and public spheres in the Victorian garden (2008, 1-19).

<sup>17</sup> At the end of the nineteenth and mid-twentieth century, some male authors' writings could be characterized by their "garden autobiography" style such as Alfred Austin, Dean Hole, and Beverley Nichols (Seaton 1979; Schnare 1995, 92).

<sup>18</sup> This list includes American garden writers Helena Rutherford Ely and Mrs. Francis King because their gardening books were especially influenced by Gertrude Jekyll. For more information, please see the bibliography for gardening titles by Ely, King, and Hampden.

<sup>19</sup> This book has remained in print since its first year of publication in 1898.

<sup>20</sup> Harris specifically refers to Marion Cran and *The Garden of Ignorance* to illustrate how women garden writers used terms like "ignorant" to describe their lack of gardening experience (1994, 115-116).

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE ENGLISH COTTAGE GARDEN**

As mentioned in the last chapter, Marion Cran lived and gardened on two properties: Steephill Cottage in Surrey and later, Coggers in Kent. When she moved to Kent, she had nearly four more acres on which to garden, yet she chose to create a very similar style of garden to what she had in Surrey. While Cran enjoyed growing new plants from seeds and cuttings, she was heavily influenced by the English cottage garden style which defined garden making in the early twentieth century with its profusion of colour, carefree beauty, and pleasant fragrances. To this end, she cultivated roses and many old-fashioned flowers that I have already mentioned in Chapter Two (see Cran 1913, 32, 47, 78-79, 187-188, 251), as well as many late Victorian favourites such as zonal geraniums (*Pelargonium x hortorum*) and night flowering tobacco (*Nicotiana sylvestris*) (1929a, 99, 167; Coombes 1994, 125, 137). At Coggers, Cran designed several interlinked garden spaces that surrounded her home which did resemble an English cottage garden with its “casual mixture of vegetables, flowering plants, fruit-trees, and shrubs” (Jellicoe & Jellicoe, Goode, and Lancaster 2001, 128).

In this chapter, I provide an historical overview of the origins of England’s cottage garden and the rural labourer’s efforts to grow flowers, herbs, and vegetables in order to feed his family and beautify his impoverished surroundings (Darley 1979, 151-153). In the late nineteenth century, garden designers, artists, and homeowners of the middle and



upper classes recognized that cottage gardens provided a link to English rural life of an earlier, golden age. Together with vernacular cottage architecture, cottage gardens evoked what scholars have referred to as the “cottage ideal,” an emotional and nostalgic concept that incorporates a mythical image of an idyllic, rural England of the past (Darley 1979, 151; Helmreich 2002, 66).

Cran wrote everyday autobiographies that reflected her experiences and interactions with fellow gardeners and villagers. While folklorists have analyzed how fictional writers “draw upon recent experiences or childhood memories when relying on and incorporating folklore into their fiction” (Georges and Jones 1995, 4), I argue that writers of non-fiction might also be influenced by a lifetime of traditions and customs which would be included in their writings. As Mary Ellen B. Lewis reminds us:

Folklore is everywhere; it is a cultural universal. Since all authors come from a culture, they inevitably reflect folkloric elements in any work of literature, because folklore is a pervasive aspect of life....An author may consciously depict the world around him/her and folklore becomes a major way of doing so....(1976, 346).

Lewis furthered her discussion by indicating that “an author may actively seek folklore from written documents or by conscious collecting” (1976, 346). In her work, Cran described plants and gardening experiences that often reflected what she had learned through her own research because she was an avid garden reader who consulted volumes on her own bookshelf as well as from what she discovered in local libraries. Within the vicinity of her home and garden, Cran was a keen observer (and collector) of plant

folklore and gardening traditions, and her neighbours and fellow gardeners shared plants and planting tips with her on an everyday basis. In her books, Cran revealed gardening traditions just as self-taught ethnographers of the day--the country life writers--discussed "the rural tradition" in their writings (Keith 1974). In his analysis of early country life writers, Lovelace advocated how these writers need to be examined because their "non-specialist, paradigm-free accounts may show a broader picture of folklore genres than we might get from the paradigm-bound orthodox folklorists of the period" (1991, 66-67). Significantly, Cran described gardening experiences that often reflected what she had learned through her research and observations of plant folklore and gardening traditions that were used and shared by her neighbours and fellow gardeners within her community.

This chapter is comprised of three sections: first, I provide an introduction to the English cottage garden, its origins along with the artistic movements and influential figures that were central to its rediscovery as the foremost gardening style in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Secondly, I reflect on the cottage garden's connection to the "cottage ideal" and finally, in the last section, I discuss how Cran and her everyday autobiographies associated her and her home and garden life with the "cottage ideal" (Helmreich 2002, 66).

### **Section I: The origin of the English cottage garden**

While this chapter will focus primarily on cottage gardens in the nineteenth and twentieth century, it is necessary to explain the historical connection between the English

cottage garden and the allotment as evidenced in eighteenth and nineteenth century documents. For example, one eighteenth century pamphlet, or “tract,” described the difficulties of poor labourer Britton Abbot, who was driven off his land by the enclosure of his village of Poppleton (Darley 1979, 152-154). Despite his hardships, Abbot was allowed to grow vegetables and fruit trees on a few acres of land that a local squire eventually assigned to him (Darley 1979, 153-154). Importantly, it is the title of this pamphlet that most substantiates the link between cottage and allotment gardens: *An Account of a Cottage and Garden Near Tadcaster. With Observations upon Labourers having Freehold Cottages and Gardens, and upon a Plan for Supplying Cottagers with Cows* (1797) (Darley 1979, 152). Further documentation linking the cottage garden with the allotment is found in the Allotment and Cottage Gardens Compensation for Crops Act of 1887, which defined an allotment as “any parcel of land of not more than two acres...held by a tenant under a landlord and cultivated as a garden or...partly as a garden and partly as a farm--attached to a cottage” (Spencer 1901, 111 as quoted in Helmreich 2002, 68). In *The Allotment Chronicles: A Social History of Allotment Gardening*, Steve Poole describes how the provision of allotments “arose indirectly from the social upheaval caused through the Enclosure of the English countryside between 1750 and 1850” (2006, 13). The Parliamentary Enclosures directed that most open fields and commons be consolidated and brought under the ownership of individual land holders. This resulted in the small peasant farmer or land squatter being forcibly removed from the land on which he had once made a living (Helmreich 2002, 72; Poole 2006, 13; Way

2008, 7). While the enclosures allowed for greater productivity, they caused massive agrarian change which had a far reaching impact on the “common” land and its inhabitants. Ancient landscapes and the ancient rights surrounding those landscapes were all but swept away (Poole 2006, 13; Way 2008, 7). Poole writes:

Bereft of the right to pasture a cow or keep pigs and geese on the commons and cut gorse or wood, the peasants were left with nothing other than to sell their labour and that of their families. Although rural poverty had always existed, it had, until enclosure, been lessened by the right to ‘common’ (2006, 13).

In order to quell social unrest from landless labourers, the private landowners sought initiatives in providing portions of land--allotments--to the rural poor. As David Crouch and Colin Ward reveal in their extensive study, *The Allotment: Its Landscape and Culture*, it was in fact “the rise of poor relief that obliged Parliament to authorize the provision of land for the poor, just as it had authorized their deprivation” (1997, 47). In 1806, the first Enclosure Act was awarded to the village of Great Somerford in Wiltshire, whereby allocated land was to become the “‘poor’s’ [sic] allotments” (Crouch and Ward 1997, 48). It was not until the General Enclosure Act of 1845 that made the provision of allotments mandatory, that wardens of the Acts were permitted “to set aside land as ‘field gardens’ (limited to a quarter of an acre in extent)” for the labouring poor (Crouch and Ward 1997, 48). Although shopkeepers and market farmers disagreed with Enclosure Acts because they wanted labourers to be beholden to them for produce, the politicians, philanthropists, clergymen, and the landowning classes believed that allotment gardens encouraged important moral values among rural labourers. As Way comments: “A man

with a crop of potatoes to dig, they reasoned, was less likely to spend his time in the alehouse and thus more likely to turn up for work on time” (2008, 10).

Allotments were not only designated for the rural poor, however. Shop-owners and skilled members of the working classes who had flocked to industrial cities in Birmingham, Nottingham, Coventry, and Sheffield established the need for urban allotments in the early nineteenth century (Way 2008, 12-13). As the “newly urbanized respectable classes,” they demanded the ability to rent allotments on which to grow their own vegetables (Way 2008, 13). The urban allotments also became known as “town” or “pleasure” gardens. As they combined flowerbeds and a small area devoted to growing vegetables and fruit trees, such features were later adopted by gardeners of the late nineteenth century who created what was referred to as cottage gardens.

### **English Cottage Gardens**

In the mid to late nineteenth century, landowners of large estates were being swayed by garden fashions of the Victorian period, especially “carpet bedding” schemes which I mentioned previously in Chapter Three. Landowners insisted that their staff replant the flower borders with recently imported annuals such as zonal geraniums (*Pelargoniums x hortorum*), *Calceolaria*, coleus (*Solenostemon*), *Fuchsia*, *Zinnia*, *Begonia*, African daisies (*Arctotis*), and marigolds (*Tagetes*) which were cultivated into geometric groupings of discordant colour (Scott-James 1979, 72).<sup>1</sup> Farmers, cottagers, and clergymen working and living on or near these estates collected slips and seeds from

the plants that had been discarded, placing them in their own gardens. If it were not for the thrift and ingenuity of these men and their families, many older varieties of flowers, vegetables, and herbs might not have survived and been lost to cultivation (Scott-James 1979, 78, 83).

During this period, the traditional English cottage garden tended by rural labourers consisted of flower filled herbaceous borders, roses, fruit, herbs, and vegetables. Fruits and vegetables typically grown in the cottage garden included apples, plums, pears, rhubarb, currants, blackberries, strawberries, asparagus, carrots, leeks, onions, cabbage, and potatoes (Scott-James 1979, 82-83). In the cottage garden, a small “kitchen garden” was designated to grow culinary herbs such as parsley (*Petroselinum*), chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*), thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*), lovage (*Levisticum officinale*), and rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*), in addition to the vegetables mentioned above (Jellicoe and Jellicoe, et al. 2001, 128-129).<sup>2</sup> Often a path led from a neighbouring lane to the cottage door, likely edged with perennial and annual flowers, and in some cases, aromatic herbs such as chamomile (*Anthemis*), lavender (*Lavendula angustifolia*) and southernwood (*Artemisia abrotanum*) (Coombes 1994, 12, 16, 103). Depending on locally available natural materials, this pathway could consist of crushed pebbles, flag stones, or bricks. Cottage gardens were usually fenced and on occasion, enclosed by hedges. These gardens paid homage to highly fragrant flowers such as sweet williams (*Dianthus*), sweet peas (*Lathyrus*), peonies (*Paeonia*), lily-of-the-valley (*Convallaria*), mignonette (*Reseda odorata*), forget-me-nots (*Myosotis*), and pansies (*Viola*) (Scott-James 1979, 83; Hunt

1964, 68).<sup>3</sup> The majestic proportions of hollyhocks (*Alcea*), foxgloves (*Digitalis*), and *Delphiniums* (Coombes 1994, 8, 57, 60) towering over the flower border, provided the illusion of grandeur in an otherwise, humble cottage dwelling. In some cottage gardens, bee hives, a dovecote, and a paddock with pigs or goats might also be found depending on the size of the garden. On the other hand, the presence of a large expanse of green grass was unusual.

Very few cottage gardens were devoted entirely to flowers, as Flora Thompson (1876-1947) indicates in her autobiographical trilogy, *Lark Rise to Candleford* (1945 (repr. 1988)). Thompson explains the utilitarian functions of the cottage garden through her main character “Laura” (likely, Thompson herself). In the trilogy, Laura describes how cottage gardens were “reserved for green vegetables (peas, beans, celery), currant and gooseberry bushes, and a few old fashioned flowers” (1945 (repr. 1988), 63). This character also remarks that the women in the *Lark Rise* community tended their small flower gardens which usually consisted of “a narrow border beside the pathway” filled with “all the sweet old-fashioned flowers, pinks...love-in-a-mist, wallflowers and forget-me-nots in spring and hollyhocks and *Michaelmas* daisies in autumn” (1945 (repr. 1988), 115).<sup>4</sup> Finally, Thompson comments that women in *Lark Rise* had an “herb corner” devoted to growing culinary and medicinal herbs for household uses (1945 (repr. 1988), 115).

Thompson’s description of the cottage garden reveals traditional gardening practices of the rural working classes, albeit from the perspective of a middle class

woman. For many people of the middle and upper classes, the cottage garden, accompanied by its quaint cottage, came to represent a romanticized image of rural English life. Many homeowners of this period were also highly influenced by artists' paintings that depicted thatched-roof cottages, blowsy flower borders, and labourers' wives and children gathering flowers in the garden or along country lanes. One of the most prolific watercolour painters of cottages and cottage gardens in the nineteenth century was Helen Allingham. Her fascination with home and garden spaces of the labouring poor was evident in her paintings which she based on actual examples, although she admitted she had to "edit" them on occasion to depict more flowers than cabbages (Helmreich 2002, 77). In his assessment of Allingham's "charming" depictions of "prettified nature," art historian William Sharp remarked skeptically "that we are at any rate...persuaded to accept her watercolour drawings of English rural life as authentic representations" (1902, 129). Sharp's opinions were not common, however; Allingham's work was widely cherished, coveted and emulated by garden designers, architects, and members of the public who yearned to recreate such cottage garden imagery in their own work and/or within their own homes and gardens (Helmreich 2002, 77). The concept of the cottage ideal was especially endorsed by a number of artistic and cultural movements, notably the Back to the Land Movement and the Arts and Crafts Movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the next section, I discuss these movements as well as the artistry and craftsmanship of three essential figures of the Arts and Crafts Movement: William Morris (1834-1896), Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932) and William



Robinson (1838-1935). These individuals were responsible for reviving an appreciation for vernacular architecture and cottage gardens.<sup>5</sup>

### **Back to the Land Movement and the Arts and Crafts Movement**

As a result of an agricultural depression in villages caused by the Enclosures, England's cities staggered under the influx of rural labourers and village shopkeepers seeking new livelihoods. Although many middle and upper class professionals were happy to raise their children in town residences or suburban houses of the period, others were becoming disenchanted with city life where constant competition for goods and services, and pollution and overcrowding prevailed. As Jan Marsh describes in *Back to the Land: The Pastoral Impulse in Victorian England from 1880-1914* (1982), urban professionals were beginning to experience a wave of nostalgia for the English pastoral of the countryside that represented tranquility and healthy living in contrast to city life which was viewed "as physically and morally corrupting" (1982, 4). The nineteenth century Back to the Land Movement resulted in a "steady procession of urban emigrants to the countryside" who were financially able to purchase or lease cottages or country houses because of rural depression (Marsh 1982, 4).

Some of the most popular destinations to escape city life were villages in the "Home counties" of Surrey, Sussex, and Kent (Helmreich 2002, 81; Marsh 1982, 4). The ability to own or lease a residence in town and a home and garden in the countryside was made even easier by the expansion of railway services to and from London, as well as

with the arrival of the motor car. Escaping to a country home, even for the weekend, was strongly encouraged by railway companies whose colourful advertisements posted in train compartments and station platforms boasted the merits of a neat and tidy cottage amidst meadows and green spaces in villages within commutable distance to London (see figure 4.1).<sup>6</sup>

The Back to the Land Movement was just one of many artistic and cultural movements that influenced the middle and upper classes to consider an “ideal” home life in the country. Another of the artistic movements of the late Victorian period was the Aesthetic Movement. As with the Back to the Land Movement, the Aesthetic Movement strongly appealed to the middle classes, who no longer favoured the dark and sombre colours and heavy ornamentation of the Victorian period. The Aesthetic Movement’s concept of “The House Beautiful” encouraged the creation of artistic houses “characterized by the lightness of their interiors and decorated with beautiful objects” (Tankard 2004, 9). In conjunction with the Aesthetic Movement, the Queen Anne Style influenced the architecture of London’s fashionable suburbs such as Chelsea and Bedford Park. Red brick houses decorated with turrets and gables characterized Queen Anne style, a style presided over by leading architect, Richard Norman Shaw (1831-1912) whose work was inspired by the traditional half-timbering of older English houses (Tankard 2004, 9-10).

While the Aesthetic Movement and the Queen Anne Style were both influential in the late Victorian period, the Arts and Crafts Movement made a more lasting impression

on the decorative arts, architecture, and garden designs from the 1870s onwards. The fundamental characteristics of the Arts and Crafts Movement included simplicity, unity, harmony, utility, and the belief that “manual work could be personally fulfilling” (Tankard 2004, 15). Many facets of England’s pre-Industrial past, especially the vernacular architecture, leisurely pursuits, country landscapes, and traditional crafts, inspired artists and craftsmen and women of the Arts and Crafts Movement to the extent that they incorporated these traditional forms into the design of their own homes and gardens. One of the most influential individuals of the Arts and Crafts Movement was William Morris (1834-1896), an artist and craftsman whose original designs continue to be used in home interiors in the current century.<sup>7</sup> Although trained in both architecture and the fine arts, Morris excelled in the area of the decorative arts. He designed and created wallpapers, tiles, furniture, carpets, carvings, and stained glass for homes and churches.

Following in the footsteps of John Ruskin (1819-1900), whose essays in *The Stones of Venice* (1851-1853) had a profound impact on the Arts and Crafts Movement, Morris preferred all things created by hand. Morris despised mid-Victorian values which considered “machine-made” objects far superior to individually hand-crafted items (Barrett and Phillips 1987, 98). Founder of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and an active member of the Socialist League, Morris believed in the future of England as a “village-based society,” as discussed in his political work *News from Nowhere* (1891 (repr. 1986); Barrett and Phillips 1987, 98). Through his artistic

associations with the pre-Raphaelite painters, Morris's career in the decorative arts flourished and led to the formation of his company, Morris & Co.

In direct correlation with his dislike of modern manufacturing, Morris "condemned bedded-out gardens because the privileged masses of brightly coloured florist flowers," were imbued "in commercialism and industrialism" (Helmreich 2002, 47). Morris utilized "old-fashioned" flowers indicative of the English countryside such as snowdrops (*Galanthus*), primroses (*Primula*), daisies (*Chrysanthemum*), wild roses (*Rosa rugosa*), columbines (*Aquilegia*), and *Clematis* in his designs on textiles and wallpapers (Helmreich 2002, 47-48).<sup>8</sup> In *The Flowers of William Morris*, Derek Baker observes that gardens and orchards featured prominently in the designs of Morris's garden at Red House (1996, 16, 41).<sup>9</sup> Before his marriage to Jane Burden, Morris purchased an orchard and meadow at Bexley Heath, near the village of Upton, Kent in 1858, where he enlisted the architectural services of Philip Webb to design Red House (Tankard 2005, 33). As evidenced in the romantic impressions of Morris's early biographer, John W. Mackail, the garden surrounding Red House had features characteristic of an English cottage garden. Mackail noted:

Red House garden, with its long grass walks, its midsummer lilies and autumn sunflowers, its wattled rose trellises enclosing richly-flowered square garden plots, was then as unique as the house it surrounded. The building had been planned with such care that hardly a tree in the orchard had to be cut down; apples fell in at the windows as they stood open on hot autumn nights (Mackail as quoted in Baker 1996, 42).

Morris applied the highest level of craftsmanship in his domestic interiors

believing that one should have nothing in the home that he (or she) did not consider to be beautiful (Barrett and Phillips 1987, 99). Following the Arts and Crafts Movement, Morris's craftsmanship and artistry continued to inspire other artists, designers, gardeners and homeowners. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, two prominent garden designers, William Robinson and Gertrude Jekyll, aspired to follow in Morris's footsteps through their endorsement of vernacular architecture and traditional crafts, as well as their promotion of the English cottage garden. In the next section, I describe how Robinson and Jekyll increased people's awareness of and interest in preserving tangible remnants of English rural life through their passion for older plant varieties and the cottage garden style.

### **William Robinson and Gertrude Jekyll**

In his work and writing, Irishman and talented gardener, William Robinson (1838-1935), strongly advocated for a more "natural" approach to garden design (Jellicoe and Jellicoe et al. 2001, 129). Like Morris, Robinson did not condone the prevalent use of imported plants indicative of the Victorian period and he especially disliked the commercialized varieties grown specifically for carpet bedding. While Robinson considered certain modern species useful in domestic gardens and public landscapes, he was much more interested in old fashioned flowers and wild flowers, especially those varieties he recalled from the prose of literary figures like Shakespeare and Shelley (Helmreich 2002, 48). Robinson became famous for his gardening book, *The Wild*

*Garden* (1870), in which he extolled the virtues of planting “old favourites,” such as lilies, marigolds, wild roses, and columbines, as they were deemed hardier and required less care than newer plant varieties (Helmreich 2002, 47). From Robinson’s perspective, the natural beauty of older flower varieties recalled the image of cottage gardens, especially in Kent and Sussex and in villages in England which he considered to be “little Elysiums, where the last glimpses of beautiful old English gardening may yet be seen” (Robinson 1870, 4 as quoted in Helmreich 2002, 47). Not surprisingly, Robinson created a traditional cottage garden and a wild garden on the grounds of his private estate, Gravetye Manor, in rural Sussex (Tankard and Wood 1996, 31).

Robinson’s friend and fellow garden designer, Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932), shared a similar fascination with old-fashioned flowers and herbs and labourers’ cottage gardens. Although Jekyll became *the* most famous woman garden designer in England and North America, her early interest in plants and gardens stemmed from her multiple talents as a painter, embroiderer, wood carver, and amateur photographer (Tankard and Wood 1998, 2). Plagued with poor eyesight, Jekyll decided to concentrate her creative efforts on garden design; beginning with her mother’s garden at Munstead House and later, with her own property, Munstead Wood, in Godalming, Surrey (Helmreich 2002, 164). Like Robinson, Jekyll was impressed by the vernacular architecture of cottages and the informal design of cottage gardens that she witnessed while touring around her village on her pony and trap (Tankard and Wood, 1996, 6). The following passage from her first gardening book, *Wood and Garden* (1899), describes her initial impressions of the cottage

gardens that she grew to admire so much:

I have learnt much from the little cottage gardens that help make our English waysides the prettiest in the temperate world. One can hardly go into the smallest cottage garden without learning or observing something new. It may be some two plants growing beautifully together by some happy chance, or a pretty mixed tangle of creepers...(1899 (repr. 1994), 18).

Deeply affected by villagers' cottage gardens in Surrey, Jekyll simply expanded upon them to create her own cottage garden style which she then applied to the gardens she designed for large manors and country houses in England and in North America.<sup>10</sup> At the height of her career, Jekyll was not only a garden designer, but she also wrote and illustrated gardening books and magazine articles that provided in-depth instruction on everything from rock gardens to herbaceous borders. As will be explored shortly, Jekyll influenced the work of Cran and other women garden designers and writers of the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup>

Through her earliest writings, *Wood and Garden* (1899), *Home and Garden* (1900), and *Old West Surrey* (1904), Jekyll fully endorsed English folklore and material culture by advocating the preservation of hand-crafted objects, rural occupations, cottage architecture and gardening traditions (Tankard and Wood 1996, 150). Through the gardens she designed, Jekyll encouraged an appreciation for the cottage garden. She helped make it the foremost gardening style of the middle and upper classes in the late nineteenth and throughout the twentieth century (Tankard 2004, 4).

## Section II: The Cottage Garden as cottage ideal and revived folklore

Notwithstanding that traditional gardening practices such as sharing seeds, plants, or gardening ideas and techniques, have been experienced among gardeners for thousands of years (Hoyles 1995, 4-5), certain garden styles, such as the English cottage garden, have made an indelible mark on the history of garden design (Brown 1986, 1982; Hoyles 1995; Tankard 2005). The re-discovery and revitalization of the cottage garden by members of the middle and upper classes indicated how the cottage garden made a connection between modern homeowners and gardeners with England's past customs and traditions (see Darley 1979; Helmreich 2002; Jekyll 1899, 1901, 1904; Scott-Thomas 1979; Thompson 1980). While Robinson and Jekyll were keen observers of rural traditions amidst rapidly changing agricultural practices, it was Jekyll who documented the material culture of local craftsmen and women, as well as farmers and their families in her books and articles. For example, in *Old West Surrey*, Jekyll described "the common things of daily use" from sewage pumps to homemade candlesticks (Tankard and Wood 1996, 150-151). Like folklorists and anthropologists of the period, Jekyll recognized the importance of recording what remained of such "survivals" before they vanished completely (Boyes 1993; Dorson 1968; McKay 1994, xv, 4, 9).<sup>12</sup>

Just as folklorists were collecting and preserving Child ballads and English folk songs and documenting practices such as Morris dancing and Maypole celebrations (Boyes 1993), cottage architecture and cottage gardens were being "preserved" by artists, designers, and homeowners (Helmreich 2002; Jekyll 1899, 1904, 1912; Morris 1891;



Robinson 1898; Taylor 2000). Folklorist Gillian Bennett considered how England's folklore and literary scholars of the early twentieth century "increasingly constructed a dream of Merrie England" in which the countryside "was bathed in mellow hues: inhabited by contented yokels with picturesque customs, and glorying in a checkered landscape of fields and woods and quiet farms" (1993, 78). Similarly, Darley wrote how the cottage garden reflected "an odd mixture of myth and reality," as its imaginative essence evoked not only a feeling of nostalgia but a strong emotional response to an "ideal" rural life characterized by quaint cottages and softly swaying flower gardens (1979, 151). In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams reflected on how an idealized view of "an organic community of Old England" had been glorified and romanticized in the literature as far back as the sixteenth century (1973, 9-10).

In light of Williams' commentary, one has only to return to the nineteenth century literary classic, *Jane Eyre*, to recognize an organic, pure community through the image of a peaceful, older English garden. Bronte's depiction of Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester's brief sojourn after a harrowing evening helping the wounded Mr. Mason, featured the garden as a place of escape and retreat, along with a deep appreciation for English flora and fauna:

"Come where there is some freshness, for a few moments," he said; "that house is a mere dungeon... Now here (he pointed to the leafy enclosure we had entered) all is real, sweet, and pure."

He strayed down a walk edged with box; with apple trees, pear trees, and cherry trees on one side, and a border on the other, full of all sorts of old-fashioned flowers, stocks, sweet-Williams, primroses, pansies, mingled with southern-wood,

sweet-briar [roses], and various fragrant herbs (Bronte 1847 (repr. 2000), 320-321).

In this short passage, Bronte captured how important a cottage garden was in the minds and hearts of English people long before scholars, garden designers, and garden writers had any inkling of its future significance as a symbol of traditional rural life.

Nearly a hundred and fifty years later, at least one garden historian argued that the cottage garden was a significant building block for English nationalism, as an “invented tradition,” to borrow the term used by Eric Hobsbawm (Helmreich 2002, 66, 73).<sup>13</sup> As Handler and Linnekin explain, however, “...there is no essential, bounded tradition; tradition is a model of the past, and is inseparable from the interpretation of tradition in the present” (1984, 276). In reclaiming the tradition of the cottage garden, middle and upper class homeowners adjusted its form to suit their needs, while believing that it still represented a part of England’s past. As Helmreich indicated, the cottage garden “implied continuity with the past as well as membership within the exclusive club of Englishness...” (2002, 4). While not everyone could acquire an old thatched cottage and a cottage garden complete with pristine views of the countryside, many homeowners had enough space to incorporate characteristics of a cottage garden, such as older rose varieties and fragrant annuals, within a small, domestic garden.

Enthusiasts could also experience cottage architecture and cottage gardens from the comfort of their homes by reading publications dedicated to the preservation of private country homes and gardens (Helmreich 2002, 78; Musson 1999, 4). Within the

early twentieth century, the majority of the books and articles about older houses and gardens in England were produced by Batsford publishers and *Country Life* magazine, the longest running weekly magazine devoted to English country living (Helmreich 2002, 77). These publications produced well written essays and unforgettable images that firmly reinforced the “cottage ideal” in the minds of its readers. Romantic and idyllic images of country cottages and gardens re-defined the meaning of the English home for readers living in Britain as well as for those living abroad (Helmreich 2002, 86). Stewart Dicks remarked in *The Cottage Homes of England* (1909), that the “old English cottage” stood at the center of English life; its building style was characterized by simplicity while its accompanying cottage garden “was the most familiar garden of all” (1909, 228). Based on the words and images provided in *The Cottage Homes of England* along with those found on the pages of other books and magazines of the period, the cottage garden “represented what Englanders were in their minds--domestic, home loving, and in touch with nature--if not in practice” (Helmreich 2002, 73).

Besides Jekyll and the writers at *Country Life* magazine, there were a number of other notable garden writers to promote the cottage garden style at the height of its popularity, and many of these writers were women. As I have indicated previously, little attention has been paid to women garden writers and gardening readers of this period, with a few exceptions (Harris 1994; Seaton 1979). Overlooked as well were the ordinary, domestic gardens tended by women (and sometimes men) on a daily basis. More often, garden designers, historians, and artists focused instead on the “monumental” estates with

extensive landscapes and meticulously maintained herbaceous borders (Bell 1990, 481). Living and gardening in the early twentieth century, the work of writers like Cran can provide valuable insight into the impact certain garden styles and gardening traditions had on gardeners and homemakers as they created small gardens in villages, towns, or suburbs.

In applying Lewis's folklore and literature scholarship to Cran and her everyday autobiographies, I see her garden writing as reflective of not only the historical context in which she was living, but of her culture and traditions. Cran wrote about home and gardening experiences to which she presumed her readers would feel a connection. In her illustrations and descriptions of old fashioned flowers, an English meadow, or the fruitful bounty found within the hedgerows, Cran evoked a sense of nostalgia for the English countryside, and for rural English life. Not surprisingly, journalists and writers commented that her writing and gardening life reflected "olde world charm" (Royce, 1929, 23).<sup>14</sup> Through her books, Cran encouraged readers to consider that tending a garden and maintaining a home connected them to the folklore and traditions in the present day, as well as the gardening traditions and customs of their past.

## **Part Two: Marion Cran's garden and the cottage ideal**

Having had experience as an arts editor and garden writer for London-based periodicals in the early 1900s, Marion Cran was undoubtedly aware of the artistic and literary imagery surrounding cottage architecture and cottage gardens, especially through

the illustrations, photographs and essays found in the pages of *Country Life* magazine. Cran indicated that when she first began gardening she devoured the words and pictures in E. T. Cook's *The Gardens of England* (1911), "the book which made me long for a dovecote and a daffodil walk..." (1913, 9). She also must have read Cook's reflection that cottages and gardens gave the English countryside its character, and that "...there is nothing that strikes a foreigner more forcible than the cottage gardens, with their aspect of homely comfort" (Cook 1911, 3 as quoted in Helmreich 2002, 89). Despite her admiration for Cook and his writings on cottage gardens, Cran was more influenced by the work of Jekyll and of Robinson. She claimed:

Gertrude Jekyll did more than any living person, always excepting Mr. William Robinson, to transform the English garden in method and design; she brought all her artist heart and ageless enthusiasm to liberate us from the strait-jacket of "bedding-out"; and that is not to say she did not love and enjoy growing geraniums! (1933, 76).

Cran explained to her readers that Jekyll's *Wood and Garden* (1899) and *Home and Garden: Notes and Thoughts, Practical and Critical of a Worker in Both* (1900) had made a strong impression on her and her own writing. Once she created her first garden at Steephill Cottage, Cran began writing her own books describing these garden experiences (1913, 58, 73; 1933, 73, 76). Notably, Cran indicated that "books of inspiration, like Jekyll's, are those which start a desire to 'go and do likewise'" (1933, 78). Very few garden writers had the opportunity to meet Jekyll, but Cran felt fortunate to have met her and to have assisted her on one occasion at Munstead Wood:

I do not know what exactly I expected, but I found a large old lady in Victorian

dress wearing strong spectacles on half-blind eyes. She opened the door to me herself and welcomed me very sweetly, with a charm of other, statelier days than this....When some other visitors came she flushed and trembled, asking me to take them through the grounds and pour out tea for them...

There were blue poppies out in a shady glade; drifts of gentian; a carpet of lilies of the valley; trilliums, azaleas in glory...Miss Jekyll's garden! "I have tried to make a little peace and some surprises," she said at parting (1933, 73-74).

Although Cran recalled that her appreciation for English wild flowers and orchard fruit occurred at her father's side (1913, 185; 1924, 52-53), her knowledge of old-fashioned flowers, cottage gardens, and natural history were likely the result of her avid interest in Jekyll's work (1913, 58, 73), and the country life writings of George Sturt, W. H. Hudson, and Richard Jefferies (1913, 146-148; 1924, 69, 95; 1929a, 142).

### **Cran and her gardens in Surrey and Kent**

As I have already indicated in Chapter Two, George and Marion Cran established a country residence shortly after their marriage in 1905. While no family members can recall why the Crans leased Steephill Cottage, it is possible that they were influenced by the Back to the Land Movement of the period. This Movement coincided with artistically commissioned rail advertisements posted along transportation routes to and from London which encouraged urban dwellers to live in the countryside, as I mentioned previously. Importantly, there was a poster specifically designed to feature the beauty of Farnham, Surrey (figure 4.1) which the Crans would have seen in their travels long before they leased Steephill Cottage. This advertisement depicted an evocative image of village life

while inviting viewers with a caption that described a pleasant market town:

Live in Farnham.  
Surrey lanes. Pinewoods and Heather.  
Frequent fast trains between Farnham and London.  
Cheap Season tickets.  
See railway announcements.  
Southern Railways. Waterloo and Sons, Ltd.<sup>15</sup>



Figure 4.1 – Rail poster advertising Farnham, Surrey. 1928.

While Cran attempted to commute for at least five years between Farnham and London, eventually she elected to remain in the country, devoting herself fully to writing and gardening in Surrey.

In her first two gardening books, *The Garden of Ignorance* (1913) and *The Garden of Experience* (1921), Cran provided a general overview of her first garden. The discussion that follows draws on these publications as well as the photographs that Cran took to illustrate her books and additional images found within private photograph

collections.<sup>16</sup> From the main entrance of Steephill Cottage, Cran and her husband constructed a pathway whose edges were planted with flowering spring bulbs and summer and autumn blooming perennials. This pitched stone pathway led to a stone wall and a circular set of stairs heading downward towards another garden area. On either side of the main stairway, Cran had a series of decorative oval granite balls mounted (figure 4.2 and 4.3). Below the stairs, a flagged-stone sunken garden could be seen; this sunken garden was separated into four compartments which were abundantly planted with herbs and roses. In the center stood a sculpted fairy-like figure--Cran's "rude boy"--that stood on a large stone ball with applied carvings of ivy leaves and roses (see figure 4.3). A large cedar (*Thuja*) and several other conifers provided a strong visual accent to the left of the sunken garden (see figure 4.2). The most impressive backdrop to the entire garden design, however, was the stand of Scotch pine trees (*Pinus*), on whose trunks Cran strung hammocks and under which her family had tea (figure 4.4). To the right of the pine woods, an American serviceman had built a set of bee hives during the First World War (figure 4.5). This same serviceman then built low stables to house Cran's Anglo-Nubian goats. In addition to bees and goats, Cran's garden provided shelter to a large number of domesticated pigeons, a tame raven, and a multitude of Siamese cats and sheepdogs (figure 4.6). Cran provided a very brief summary of what her garden consisted of in 1913:

It is only three acres of rough pine wood and sandy scrub which in four years, through sloughs of direst mistake, have evolved into a rose garden, a terrace set with herbaceous beds, a tiny rock garden, herb garden, croquet lawn, orchard,



asparagus beds and kitchen garden (1913, 21).

While Cran indicated that she preferred old-fashioned flowers, she also found herself under the spell of new plant varieties available through mail order nurseries. And, as she became a popular garden writer, nursery owners supplied her with plants to try in her garden, knowing that she would share which plants were most successful with her readers. Her first garden, with its inclusion of newer plant varieties, may not have conformed entirely to the cottage garden ideal but it did have many of its features and the English cottage garden style remained its underlying inspiration. Like many gardeners, Cran knew that older varieties were hardier and less demanding than newer plants and she was interested in the folklore and traditional uses of such plants, especially herbs. She openly admired the labourers' cottages and cottage gardens:

Whenever I dream of an English cottage garden, I see a little lane of Madonna lilies leading to the humble door, and many an exquisite moment of dreams-come-true has been mine when I have found the cottage and the lane! They are by no means uncommon. Our British workman has in him a beautiful love of gardens. So by millstream, by roadside, by hayfield, you will find the thatched, half-timbered cottage, and leading to its creeper-clad portal an avenue of Madonna lilies, often backed by hollyhocks, edged with lavender. And how they grow, those stately lilies with their golden throats (1913, 30).<sup>17</sup>



Figure 4.2 – Main garden at Steephill Cottage. 1914-1915. Ornamental concrete balls can be seen at the top of the stairway that enters into the lower terrace. Irises (*Iris*) and roses (*Rosa*) can be seen while a large cedar (*Thuja*) presides over the garden. Courtesy of Dudley Graeme.

In one particular section of her Surrey garden, Cran practiced a gardening technique whereby she created a temporary bed to propagate slips and cuttings she could not find room for. Cran referred to this bed as “the muddle bed,” for, in her eyes, it was purely a hodgepodge of plants she loved and could not do without. She writes:

The whole idea of a herbaceous border came instinctively when I set apart a wide space to take the “muddle” (everything was a “muddle” when I wanted some of it and had not space to make a special garden of it, like a peony garden or iris garden); snapdragons, Canterbury bells, pinks, phloxes, sweet Williams, all the other indispensables were put, without method into this large space till the illuminating day when someone said, “You have quite a good herbaceous border coming along here” - and a fact was added to the diary - “The muddle bed is a herbaceous border.” In the core of my heart, where technical terms are disliked, it has always remained the muddle bed (1913, 26-27).<sup>18</sup>



Figure 4.3 – The “Rude Boy” overlooking the flagged stone terrace garden at Steephill Cottage. 1915-1916. Courtesy of Dudley Graeme.



Figure 4.4 – Cran's daughter, Lesley enjoying the shade of the pine woods at Steephill Cottage. 1912-1913. Courtesy of Marion Cran Album Collection, R.H.S. Lindley Library, London.



Figure 4.5 – Bee hives at Steephill Cottage. 1912-1913. Courtesy of Dudley Graeme.



Figure 4.6 – Lesley and Bouncer standing outside a hutch for other family pets. 1915-1916. Steephill Cottage. Courtesy of Dudley Graeme.

In his *English Gardens in the Twentieth Century, From the Archives of Country Life*, garden historian Tim Richardson reflects that “Cran wholeheartedly advocated the cottage-garden look for its lack of pretension and planning...” listing her “muddle bed” as evidence (2005, 84). The contents of Cran’s muddle bed were remarkably similar to the contents of most cottage gardens of the period and Cran’s recognition of cottage gardens and vernacular architecture indicated that she, like Jekyll, had been influenced by traditional English folklore in and around her Surrey village.

Like her neighbours, Cran learned how to garden through oral transmission, in which the folklore and traditions of plants and garden practices were passed on from one

family member to another or from one villager to another. Cran regarded the lives of local labourers, craftsmen and women with interest because of her familiarity with the country life writing of her neighbour George Sturt (Bourne) that featured the traditional folklife of rural labourers in and around Farnham (1913, 146; Sturt 1901, 1912). Sturt has been lauded by contemporary folklorists because his writings provided some of the earliest ethnographic descriptions of traditional English occupations before the First World War (see Keith 1974; Lovelace 1983; 1994; Pocius 1980). Sturt's diaries revealed that he was not impressed with Cran or her garden writing probably because he did not believe her work contributed to the preservation of rural England, its customs or its traditions. He implied that he had no great desire to maintain a friendship with Cran as she was just another "resident tripper," a Londoner who established her or himself in the country but had no familial connection to the village (Mackerness 1961, 592-595). Conversely, Cran, who appeared to have no knowledge of Sturt's quibbles with her, confessed a deep admiration for Sturt and his writing:

...I never cease to thank Providence that it took it into its head to make George Bourne and to let him loose on the world in my own day; for it is one of my proudest privileges to know him personally. Providence gave with a lavish hand to me in this matter, for it set George Bourne and his garden within a stone's throw of my garden, and sometimes...I go down the lilac-grown garden path to his front door and drag him from his books for an hour in the garden 'Bettesworth' tended (1913, 146).

It is unfortunate that Sturt read little of Cran's work because if he had, he would have discovered that Cran had a sincere appreciation for skilled, local villagers--farmers, herbalists, labourers--whom she valued for their assistance in the maintenance of her

home and garden (1913; 1920; 1924). In one instance, Cran described how she observed a labourer constructing a path for Sturt's garden. By watching him, Cran learned how to lay her own "pitched stone path," which she described for readers in *The Garden of Ignorance*:

Pitched paths are a little more complicated, but even these I have laid with no more instruction than watching a local labourer for five minutes in George Bourne's beautiful garden on the hill. I saw that the man hammered each stone beside its fellow the long way down, so that only the small worn narrowest surface showed, and then after hammering a yard or so he swept sand across the stones. It was obvious that patience, a straight eye, and a little regard for the slope of drainage at the sides were all that was necessary to lay the stones. I have pitched the whole of the terrace since, and though the nobbly stones are not the most comfortable surface to walk on in thin slippers of an evening, the effect is undeniably picturesque (1913, 189-190).

From labourers and cottagers residing near her home and garden, Cran learned how to recognize the soil needs of different types of plants from rhododendrons to herbs. Many villagers gave her plants, but others sold her slips and seedlings of plants she admired in their gardens. In her interactions with fellow gardeners, Cran found that "every cottager will give his hint for the best upbringing of this and that, every gardener lends a willing ear to a knotty problem" (1913, 24). Just when Cran believed she had mastered the knowledge to grow a certain species, along came another that required entirely different growing conditions. After one fairly productive gardening season, Cran was pleased because she felt she was now able to recognize that specific plants required certain soil conditions, when a village farmer observed what she was doing and saved her from ruining an herb bed by adding too much "loam" (what gardeners today would



describe as mulch and/or compost):

‘Old Deadman’ came up in the evening...and found me hospitably enriching a long strip of ground with the new loam. He watched approvingly and then asked what was going in there.

‘Hyssop,’ I said, in hot energy. ‘I want to make herb borders to all these turf paths; rosemary for some, and sage, and lavender for others.’

‘Doan’t you go cloggin’ of ‘em up with this ‘ere; this is fit for roses, this is, and heavy doers, like sweet peas. Rosemary, and them there, like the sand, they do. They don’t want no loam.’ I looked at the old man with ravenous interest. Another flash to lighten my darkness. Then flowers and plants had individuality, temperament...it was not enough to give them all loam. Some sickened with rich fare, some pined without it. What patience, what skill were needed to make a happy garden (1913, 13-14)!<sup>19</sup>

Although Cran attempted to recreate her conversation with this gardener exactly, her careful rendering of local dialect reflected her background writing romantically of a local labourer for what was probably a predominantly middle class readership.

Regardless, Cran valued this man’s knowledge and no matter where she lived and gardened, she wrote of her appreciation for other gardeners because they offered her advice and recommended worthy plants.

Shortly after the First World War, Cran left Surrey and moved to West Kent where she purchased Coggers, a rambling and derelict medieval house with seven acres of land situated in the small village of Benenden. In her third gardening book, *The Story of My Ruin* (1924), Cran described her experiences rescuing this “ruin” and the long and expensive process of making it livable again. In reading of her experiences with builders, plumbers, and tile-layers, Cran’s readers (and wireless listeners) would have understood why the reconstruction of her home took priority over the re-creation of her garden (1924,



87-110).

Cran was an unusually successful and gutsy woman to be able to purchase and restore her own home, but she was certainly not the only member of the middle classes to search for an older, historic property after the War. Most Englishmen and women were cognizant of the large number of country houses and estates that had fallen into disrepair or had been abandoned completely (see Aslet 1982 and Musson 1999). Tragically, many of the young men who were entitled to inherit the properties from their fathers and grandfathers had been killed in the War. The men who did survive did not always return to their positions on an estate or in a country house. Manor houses and estates required a large staff from gardeners to domestic servants to gamekeepers. After the War, it became increasingly hard to find enough staff to maintain these massive properties. Often, families were forced to sell their houses or estates simply because they could no longer afford the upkeep. Like many properties on the market, country houses had passed out of family's hands into that of strangers with little or no connection to the property. Yet, these new homeowners were no longer the "resident trippers" of Sturt's time because they made an effort to preserve the houses they bought and restored, paying particular attention to the original interior and exterior features (Musson 1999, 7, 11, 25).

Cran, herself, bought Coggers without any personal connection to the property or to the village in which it was built. Yet she adored and admired Coggers because of its vernacular architecture and its association with regional history. She worked hard to restore it, to make it a comfortable home with features characteristic of "Wealden-type

houses” (Pollard and Strouts 2006, 18) found in Kent *and* in Sussex (Addison 1986, 93-94). Although slightly overwhelmed by Coggers’ derelict state, Cran was won over by her home’s rustic charm, not to mention the potential she saw in the property for making a substantial garden and small fruit orchard. As Jeremy Musson indicated in his tribute to *The English Manor House*, “the older manor houses and smaller country houses of the pre-Industrial age were admired for a variety of qualities: their Englishness, their sense of rural retreat and the beauty of weathered and ancient fabric. Such houses and such qualities suggested restfulness, a repose...” (1999, 7). Although Cran believed Coggers was built as early as 1320 (1929b, 19), architectural historians have indicated that this particular example of medieval “hall-house” was built between 1460 and 1490 (Pearson et al., 1996, 12; Quiney 1990, 90). Cran respected the yeomen farmers who built Coggers of oak which once grew abundantly in Benenden. Like other farm and manor houses of the Weald, Coggers “had been built with upper floors jettied out from end to end” (Addison 1986, 98). Beyond its 2-bay hall, Coggers still features combed plaster which was used extensively throughout the interior by local craftsmen of the period (Pearson et al., 1996, 12). Cran elaborated further on the traditional craftsmanship that built Coggers and maintained it over many centuries. She wrote:

The walls are very wonderful. As I sit here under the wide oak rafters I can feel the sway of wind and wave. The ancient house rocks like a ship at sea...the oak in it creaks and groans as of old before the elements, and remains safe as of old in every trial. My little crooked house was built by Wealden men...out of tough wood of the Weald. They fitted the oak frame together cunningly, balancing the weight, and set it down upon the clay without foundations; it is supple and strong...Clay shifts a lot under weather. The old house cuddles to the earth out of

which its materials grew... (1924, 87-88).

Despite years as a shelter for livestock, songbirds, owls, and squirrels, much of Coggers' half timbering and cruck framework has remained intact through the centuries (figure 4.7). In her writing, Cran often emphasized that even in the midst of its reconstruction, her house used materials that were as close to the original as possible:

The tiles of the roof are hand-made of clay; they are wavy, deeply weathered with gold lichen and brown stains of time. Starlings and swallows love the old roof. The new cottages up the road are roofed with tiles made from the same clay. Only they are loudly new, very prim and straight, not wavy and cockled like mine (1924, 89).



Figure 4.7 – Coggers in 2007. Photograph by Cynthia Boyd.

In his study of *Farmhouses in the English Landscape*, Sir William Addison provides a more detailed description of the type of clay tiles used on Wealden-type houses like Coggers:

Old tiles were thicker and more unevenly burnt, giving them an irregularity of texture and colour which adds immeasurably to their appearance by softening the

contours and providing channels and plains to enhance the play of light across them. The colours with which they become dappled by time and weather range from tea-stain browns to orange, terra-cotta and even vermillion... (1986, 100).

While Cran respected the skills and traditional practices of local craftsmen and women, she also found great value in her daily experiences in Benenden because they were often marked by informal conversations she had with neighbours and villagers. In her first everyday autobiographies about life at Coggers, Cran revealed these conversations, along with her discoveries living and gardening in Benenden as it was all completely new to her (see Cran 1924, 1925, 1929a). It is not surprising, therefore, that she wrote enthusiastically about the hop gardens and fruit orchards which were characteristic of the Kent countryside in which she lived. Although she had no relations there, Cran wrote how living, gardening, and writing at Coggers gave her a sense of belonging to a community of gardeners and farmers. In the following passage, Cran painted an unforgettable image of the countryside where bees and fruit trees featured prominently. While not exactly like the imagery associated with the cottage ideal, her depiction of an English spring time, invited readers to experience the countryside surrounding their own homes and communities. In addition, Cran provided practical information for gardeners which she communicated along with the wise words of an older village resident:

Whenever I speak of apple-bloom I think of sheep in grass orchards, and of bees. After spring flowers comes fruit blossom, and with that the hive-task of brood-rearing is in full swing. All through the fairy petalled orchards one may hear the hum of ceaseless contented toil - a beautiful sound to the ear of poet and farmer alike. I learned how blessed a sound when I came to the orchards of Kent. Leaning on my gate one day, I watched the pear-blossom white against a deep

blue sky, and whiter still where this old red roof drove a warm wedge of colour into the snow bank of bloom. An aged man came and stood beside me, basking companionably in the same sun-ray. 'Thankful to see they bees about,' he said; 'blessin' the flowers and settin' the fruit...'

Many varieties of our fruit trees are self-sterile, which means that the flowers must be pollinated from other sorts in order to become fertile and bear fruit. It is easy to see how welcome the orchardist [sic] and the bee, therefore, are to each other" (1924, 281).

In her writing about Coggers, Cran was an attentive homeowner whose observations and photographs of the men (figure 4.8) who reconstructed, retiled, and replastered her home were ethnographic in detail (1924, 54, 96-97, 216-217, 230). Cran sometimes recalled how these labourers performed other tasks for her, such as on the occasion when she asked the men to remove what appeared to be a tree stump growing right next to the house. While Cran thought they had destroyed it, she later discovered it had sprouted leaves a few weeks afterward. Realizing it was a common elder (*Sambucus nigra*),<sup>20</sup> one of the labourers suggested why she might consider keeping it:

The builder's men had hacked and hewed at a stump that got in their way, and I thought it was only an ugly, troublesome root which must be removed as soon as we started to level and lay the flag stones. But all of a sudden it burst into extravagant life, flinging out long sappy branches and rushing into leaf...I revolved around it in some perplexity...this was the place for a choice fruit-tree, and the elder tree did not fill the bill by any manner of means. One of the workmen saw me looking at it, and remarked: 'I thought he was dead; but they are hard to kill, seemingly. These old houses nearly always have an elder in front of the dairy door.' Now that has aggravated me quite a good deal. Why did they have an elder by the dairy door? (1924, 54-55).

Eventually, Cran learned that elders were planted not far from the kitchen of a house or in earlier times, the dairy, because it was believed that this shrub, which could

grow into a tree, discouraged flies and other pests. In *The Gardener's Folklore*, Margaret Baker documented that the customary uses for elder were still practiced in Kent in the 1970s when she described how a Miss Olver who lived in Cranbrook, near Benenden, stuck elder twigs into the ground near her broad beans to ward off aphids (1977, 148).



Figure 4.8 - Craftsmen who restored Coggers featured in *The Story of My Ruin* (1924). Courtesy of Dudley Graeme.

According to tradition, it was the rank smell of an elder that was effective in discouraging insects (Baker 1977, 148). Before she knew its uses in the garden, Cran decided to keep the shrub on her property because "...it has a meaning and must stay where it was put to write its little line of history into the tale of this old house" (1924, 55). Some of Cran's

readers were interested enough in this story that they responded to her queries about elder by describing their own experiences, like the following missive from a female reader:

I wondered if it would interest you to know that in a village in Yorkshire where I lived a few years ago the elder was called buttery, and as the elder is well known to keep flies away, perhaps that was why it was planted near dairies. I remember about it so well as I was a nannie then, and used to drive my charges out in a pony cart, and one day I made the remark that the flies were very troublesome. I was told to pick some buttery-wood and stick it in the harness... (1925, 142-143)

Cran incorporated this letter into her writing to inform and inspire other gardeners, for as she indicated "I never knew till I received this letter that another name for that useful shrub is buttery-wood" (1925, 142-143). As this suggests, Cran was passionate about plants and the folklore and traditions associated with them. Although Cran read widely on plant and garden history, she was also a keen observer and appreciated when other gardeners and homemakers, such as the reader above, shared their vernacular knowledge with her (1925, 142, 146; 1929b, 276). In another example, Cran recognized the skill and knowledge of a self-taught gardener who maintained a woodland garden dedicated to difficult plants, such as ferns:

She pointed out a handsome hart's tongue, and called it a "centipede fern." It set me guessing; the generic name is derived from *Scolopendra*, a centipede; based, I think, upon the arrangement of the spore-heaps. She was...no botanist, but a nature-lover with enough imagination to have seen the resemblance to centipedes' legs for herself. It may have been the local name for hart's tongue: I never found out, but I asked her if she liked ferns, and she said "Aye," and took me round to the back of her cottage, where she had a carpet of miniature bracken growing, very dainty and lace-like, on a rough little rock-garden...most people think of hart's tongues only as a handsome green ribbon, and have no notion of the great tendency to variation which gives an individuality to the whole family...She had found tasselled, crested and fanned forms...(1937b, 147-148).

Cran's high praise of this woman's practical and vernacular knowledge is not exaggerated for growing ferns successfully in any garden deserves recognition. As Cran expressed adamantly in *The Garden Beyond* (1937b), she had learned more from this "cottage woman" than any textbook or botanist could have taught her about these shade-loving plants.<sup>21</sup>

Like this woman, Cran had not been trained professionally in horticulture, but she was willing to learn by doing, and this approach shone through in her writing. When the reconstruction of Coggers had come to an end, Cran then attempted to re-establish the garden. She confessed that dwindling finances meant that she would have to raise new plants from seed and divide existing plants. For many English gardeners with only small suburban gardens in the mid-1920s, Cran and her sensible suggestions for designing a garden on a budget would have been appreciated by many readers (Ugnow 2005, 251).<sup>22</sup> Importantly, Cran provided practical and helpful ideas without dampening her readers' spirits:

The pleasant art of garden-making is to plant in sympathy with existing features, to choose our colours with restraint and, having made thoughtful choice, to use them in a big way. If we cannot buy a great deal at once, we can always enlist the help of kind Time, the gardener's mate, and he will increase for us if we will have patience. There is more fun in waiting than people will realize... (1924, 152).

In the garden at Coggers, Cran incorporated old and new rose varieties (*Rosa* species), fragrant lilacs (*Syringa*) and more unusual perennials such as torch lilies or Red Hot Pokers (*Kniphofia*) (figure 4.9), in addition to apple (*Malus x domestica*) and cherry



(*Prunus cerasus*) trees she planted in her orchard (Coombes 1994, 100, 114, 151, 179).

Like most gardeners, Cran struggled to keep herbs and vegetables from encroaching into her flower beds. While most of the garden spaces at Coggers had characteristics of an English cottage garden, Cran took the opportunity to incorporate other features simply because she liked them. On this property, Cran re-established two ponds which provided a natural habitat for birds, amphibians, and fish.



Figure 4.9 – Cran admiring her torch lilies. 1930s. Marion Cran Album Collection. Courtesy of R.H.S. Lindley Library, London.

After Cran purchased a garden sculpture called “Sally,” she often photographed the “little pond” because with Sally presiding it had become a special garden space. Sally was designed by Anne Acheson, a well-known Irish sculptor who made only six copies of each of her designs.<sup>23</sup> When Cran first acquired Sally from Acheson, in the 1920s, Cran described in *The Story of My Ruin* (1924) how she placed Sally in different locations in

the garden, trying to find the right place for her, until "...suddenly I knew where Sally ought to be...in a paved centre place, on a seemly pedestal, laughing deliciously over the strawberries and the asparagus and peas and beans and all!" (1924, 297). As can be seen in Cran's photograph of Sally (see figure 4.10), the author was not satisfied with her among the fruits and vegetables after all. Sally continues to keep watch over garden spaces; at present, she resides in Marlow, in a modern townhouse garden owned by Cran's great-niece, Sue Sandison (figure 4.11).

Over the years that she lived and gardened at Coggers, Cran's books about this home and garden revealed that she was no longer confined by specific styles or fashions. As Cran became a more confident gardener, and an even more successful writer, she began to express herself more freely through her garden and in her writing. For Cran, her home and garden at Coggers became a more private and reflective space where she could write on the passing seasons while enticing readers to appreciate their own surroundings as well as the nearby countryside:

I linger under the stars to enjoy the last reposeful, lazy moment before the morrow brings the planting time. There will be all the autumn flood of garden work to face before one has time to look round much longer; and there is still so much to enjoy. Rambler roses are out in the gardens of the Weald; phlox and dahlia, hollyhocks, carnation, lily, rose; all out in the big and little gardens; colour and perfume are everywhere: even in my wild land tall meadowsweet gleams in the ditches, ivory-pale against purple loosestrife and dainty willow herb...There is light and colour and perfume everywhere these lovely days, in the tended garden and the garden of the wild places (1924, 254).



Figure 4.11 - Cran's statue, Sally, can be seen in front of the "little pond" at Coggers. 1925-1930. Courtesy of Dudley Graeme.

Cran's readers and contemporaries may well have identified her as a proponent of the English cottage garden style but hers was a creative interpretation, especially as her gardening experience grew. Although Cran held onto the folklore and traditions indicative of the English home, the cottage garden, and the rural countryside, her keen observations of and appreciation for others' knowledge and traditions allowed her to extend the cottage garden and to understand how the past and the present figured in everyday life. In her books and articles, broadcasts and lectures, Cran shared with readers not only her own knowledge and experiences, but that of others with whom she interacted. As her writings particularly emphasized, Cran felt a kinship with fellow gardeners, and Englishmen and women, whether they were part of the circle of gardeners who lived in her village or were one of her many "garden friends" around the world who shared her passion for home and garden making. Cran's appeal to women readers is the

subject of the next chapter.



Figure 4.11 – Sally in Marlow. 2007. Photograph by Cynthia Boyd

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<sup>1</sup> I consulted Allen Coombes, *A-Z of Plant Names: Botanical Names and Their Common Name Equivalents* for clarification in this chapter and in the rest of the thesis. The botanical plant names I list here can be found in Coombes (1994, 15, 22, 31, 46, 77, 137, 179, 194).

<sup>2</sup> See Coombes 1994, 8, 105, 139, 162, 182 for further information concerning these herbs.

<sup>3</sup> See Coombes 1994, 47, 59, 102, 122, 133, 156, 190 for further information concerning these plant names and their origins.

<sup>4</sup> As I have indicated in earlier sections of this chapter, the common name, “pinks” refers to *Dianthus*, small rock garden plants that spread by creating a mounding effect; they also have a slightly spicy fragrance (Coombes 1994, 59). “Love-in-the-mist” refers to *Nigella* (Coombes 1994, 126); this is a medium sized annual with blue or white flowers whose blooms when finished create interesting seed pods. Wallflowers (*Erysimum cheiri*) are fragrant biennial flowers that are typically orange or yellow in colour (Coombes 1994, 69). Forget-me-nots (*Myosotis*) are biennials but they spread quickly by repeatedly self-sowing themselves everywhere and hollyhocks are also biennials but extremely tall and majestic (*Alcea*) (Coombes 1994, 8, 122). Michaelmas daisies are actually *Aster novae-angliae* (Coombes 1994, 19) a North American species; they bloom in late summer in England, but in most parts of Canada and the Eastern United States, they bloom in the fall.

<sup>5</sup> Morris, Jekyll, and Robinson have continued to influence home and garden styles, even into the twenty-first century. Cottage gardens, in particular, have been at the forefront of domestic garden designs; the English cottage style and cottage garden style are prevailing fashions in the interiors and exteriors of homes and gardens. In the twenty-first century, home fabrics, tableware, furniture, and garden designs are continually influenced by “the cottage ideal” begun in the late nineteenth century; one has only to look at England’s magazines *Homes and Gardens* and *House and Garden* and their North American equivalents, *House Beautiful* and *Southern Living* to see just how often cottage gardens are regularly featured.

<sup>6</sup> These advertisements were particularly prevalent in the early twentieth century as indicated in a recent article of *BBC Homes and Gardens* magazine titled “Metroland,” which described the 1920s trend of suburban rail commuters working in London and living in suburban and semi-rural English villages. Please see Natasha Goodfellow

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(2007).

<sup>7</sup> William Morris designs continue to be used today in fine stationary, clothing and upholstery fabrics, and stained glass.

<sup>8</sup> See Coombes 1994, 14, 41, 43, 77, 150, 161 for information on the botanical names for these plants. Although many daisy varieties were once categorized within the *Chrysanthemum* family, this is no longer the case. Many daisies now have botanical names beginning with *Tanacetum*, *Dendranthema*, and *Leucanthemum*. Based on Morris's artistic and decorative depictions of daisies, I suspect that he would have modeled his daisies on traditional wild daisies of the *Chrysanthemum* family, and more specifically on perennial daisies such as *Bellis perennis* (Coombes 1994, 23).

<sup>9</sup> In Judith Tankard's *Gardens of the Arts and Crafts Movement*, readers can learn about Morris's second house and garden at Kelmcott Manor in Berkshire, England (2005, 38-40).

<sup>10</sup> Jekyll's success as a garden designer was directly influenced by her partnership with a young architect named Sir Edwin Lutyens. Together, they filled many commissions, primarily for grand houses and gardens, but they also worked on smaller country houses as well (Tankard and Wood 1996, 132). The most comprehensive study analyzing the working relationship between Jekyll and Lutyens is *Gardens of a Golden Afternoon, The Story of a Partnership: Edwin Lutyens & Gertrude Jekyll*, by Jane Brown (Allen Lane: London, 1982).

<sup>11</sup> Jekyll's designs were influential to women garden designers on both sides of the Atlantic. In North America, Jekyll inspired the designs of Beatrix Farrand, one of the first women landscape architects, who happened to visit Jekyll's garden in 1895. No doubt because of her admiration of Jekyll, Farrand recognized the importance of Jekyll's papers and garden designs after Jekyll's death. Farrand acquired them in an auction and brought them back to the United States; eventually they were placed, along with Farrand's own papers, in the School for Landscape Architecture, University of California, Berkley, but they were not "discovered" again until 1974 by a graduate student who used the material to write her thesis (Tankard and Wood 1998, 161-163). Marion Cran was just one of many garden writers who found inspiration from Jekyll's writing as is discussed in the second part of this chapter. It is almost impossible to fathom the number of female (and male) garden designers, writers, and artists who were (and are still) influenced by Jekyll's work.

<sup>12</sup> Indelibly connected with E. B. Tylor's theory (1871) that "survivals" are linked to

how cultures evolve through three stages--savagery, barbarism, and civilization; these residual forms of expressive culture have survived to be practiced by civilized individuals and/or groups in societies. Forms of expressive culture which remained included traditional song, games, narratives, and customs. Following Tylor's work, William Wells Newell, who played a crucial role in the founding of the American Folklore Society, advocated (in the first volume of the *Journal of American Folklore*) that folklorists (and anthropologists) should be collecting the "fast-vanishing remains of Folk-Lore in America" which included survivals or as he described them: the "Relics of Old English Folk-Lore" (ballads, tales, superstitions, dialect, etc.). Newell continued by indicating that other areas for study and documentation included the Lore of the Negroes...Lore of the Indian tribes of North America...Lore of French Canada, [of] Mexico... (Zumwalt 1988, 14). While many folklorists and anthropologists did follow his lead, there were others who explored folk and cultural groups in communities and villages at great distances to such an extent that their own traditions and customs were neglected. As a result of his involvement in a joint meeting of the American Folklore Society and the American Anthropological Association, Marius Barbeau, an anthropologist from Quebec, had the opportunity to have lunch with Franz Boas, whose work surrounding the American Eskimo through the American Museum of Natural History was well-known in the early twentieth century. While Boas and Barbeau had a common interest in Native American traditions, Boas suggested that Barbeau consider "his own Francophone culture," a suggestion that led to Barbeau's impressive and far-reaching collection and documentation of narratives, beliefs, and artifacts from French Canada (Pocius 1991, xiv).

<sup>13</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (1983, 1-2).

<sup>14</sup> Cran had collected numerous reviews of her books that she clipped from newspapers from the British Isles and in South Africa. While many of these reviews were recorded with dates and newspaper titles, few of them listed an author. These clippings were primarily found in her scrapbook--Cran's scrapbook 1913-1934--which I have consulted as part of my private collection of materials about Cran.

<sup>15</sup> When I visited Farnham in my search for Cran's original garden at what was Steephill Cottage (now referred to as 'The Little Vicarage,' according to the current owners, Mr. and Mrs. Carter), I also visited Farnham Museum where I noticed this railway poster. Based on a reproduction of a 1928 original, the poster can be purchased from the Farnham Museum, Farnham, Surrey for a few English pounds. Designed by Herbert Grandy (1857-1934) for Waterloo and Sons, Ltd., the Chamber of Commerce, Farnham, and Southern Railways, the poster depicts a colourful illustration of sheep and cows walking up the main street (likely, the High Street) of Farnham with Farnham Castle in

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the background. I accessed the website [www.scienceandsociety.co.uk](http://www.scienceandsociety.co.uk) on February 22, 2013 for a copyright-free reproduction of this rail poster advertising Farnham, Surrey.

<sup>16</sup> Dudley Graeme loaned photographs to me from his private collection for my thesis research. As indicated in Chapter Two, the R.H. S. Lindley Library, Vincent Square, London has an un-catalogued collection of Cran's personal photograph albums (Marion Cran Album Collection); many of the photos illustrating this thesis come from that collection.

<sup>17</sup> Madonna lilies are white, fragrant lilies (*Lilium candidum*) that have been commonly grown in North American gardens for centuries (Coombes 1994, 106; Lloyd and Bird 1999, 60).

<sup>18</sup> As Cran has provided common names for most of the plants in her "muddle bed," readers may be interested to know the botanical names: Canterbury bells (*Campanula medium*), phlox (*Phlox paniculata* (upright); *Phlox divaricata* (low growing)), sweet William (*Dianthus*), and snapdragon (*Antirrhinum*) (Coombes 1994, 13, 33, 59, 141). Many of these plants are annuals, but in the temperate climate of England (as opposed to colder regions like most of Canada) they often self-sow, returning to the garden in spring. Peonies are perennials and can live in a garden for at least a hundred years, whereas irises, although they are perennials, tend to crowd each other and stop flowering. They need to be lifted and separated in order to thrive over long periods of time in a garden.

<sup>19</sup> Most of these plants have been discussed in this chapter, however, hyssop, is *Hyssopus officinalis* and sage is the common culinary sage, *Salvia officinalis* (Coombes 1994, 94, 165). Cran also grew other sages because she liked their colours and textures and because they attracted beneficial insects to her garden.

<sup>20</sup> See Coombes 1994, 165.

<sup>21</sup> Although Cran spoke in much more detail about this woman than I felt it necessary to include here, it may interest readers to know that growing ferns in any small or large garden requires more attention and care than most gardeners are willing to provide. This woman's fern garden deserves high merit! The "spore-heaps" that Cran describes are the "spores" (similar in theory to a seed) that are formed along the ridges of fern fronds (as opposed to leaves) from which gardeners can propagate more ferns. While propagating ferns is a difficult task, fern collectors enjoy the challenge immensely. The hart's tongue that Cran's friend grew was a European version, *Asplenium scolopendrium*. According to C. Colston Burrell in *Ferns: Wild Things Make a Comeback in the Garden*, there are many variations of hart's tongue whose fronds have crests and tassels, wavy margins,



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and/or ruffles (1995, 47). During the late Victorian period, fern collecting became a mania referred to as Pteridomania or “fern craze” which also included collecting objects with fern imagery, from embroidery to silverware (see Davies 1991, 188). Perhaps this might explain why ferns and depictions of ferns are still featured on decorative art today.

<sup>22</sup> As has been mentioned already in the Introduction and in Chapter 4, Cran’s predominantly female readership lived with their husbands and families in “new” homes that they owned after the First World War (see Uglow 2005, 253). Many of these first time home owners had no previous experience as gardeners. Cran’s books and broadcasts were extremely useful to these women (and some men), as were the creation of garden groups, clubs and guilds during this period. Cran was a founding member of The National Gardens Guild, and she served voluntarily as their consultant by being at Guild events, ready to answer questions or hand out leaflets to new homeowners. Cran assisted at the Guild’s flower shows; her presence brought confidence to the fledgling organization, as well as larger audiences who were anxious to meet the woman whose voice could be heard on the BBC (see articles listed in the bibliography authored by anonymous). As a result of her role in this Guild (honourary treasurer, among others), she would write articles and present illustrated talks specifically designed for beginning gardeners (see Chapter Five).

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of the work of Anne Acheson and her creation of “Sally,” see Cran’s book, *The Story of My Ruin* (1924, 297-298). For more information on this sculptor’s life and work, please see David Llewellyn, *The First Lady of Mulberry Walk: The Life and Times of Irish Sculptress Anne Acheson* (2010).

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CRAN AND WOMEN'S LIVES**

Why should folklorists be interested in the garden writing of a nearly forgotten English author like Marion Cran? I argue that Cran's work, based on her experiences of making a home and creating a garden in the English countryside, represents an untapped, autobiographical resource that can help folklorists interpret women's everyday lives in the early twentieth century. One of the central concepts to emerge from Cran's books was that of "home." This writer's definition of home was all encompassing; it was connected to feelings of comfort, peace, and beauty for she stated: "Home is our kingdom and our wonderland, the place where all the beautiful things of life flow round us" (1924, 87). Cran expressed feelings that were connected to the pleasures and challenges she experienced maintaining the land surrounding her home. She demonstrated that almost everything that occurred in a garden and/or the nearby countryside could be woven into the practices and activities of the home: vegetables could be grown to fill the larder and pantry; herbs could be harvested and dried or cooked for household purposes; and wild berries could be gathered to make preserves. Through her books, Cran implied that for women like herself, the garden was an extension of the home.

As mentioned previously, Cran and her work bore a strong resemblance to English women's "garden autobiographies" of the early twentieth century; however, I would not define her writing solely as garden autobiography (Seaton 1979). Rather, as suggested in

Chapter One, I would consider Cran's personal experiences of home and garden as "everyday autobiography" (Smith and Watson 1996, 2). In *Getting a Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography*, Smith and Watson note that, "We are habitual authenticators of our own lives. Every day we are confessing and constructing personal narratives in every possible format: on the body, on the air, in music, in print..." (1996, 2). In her gardening books, Cran authenticated what she was experiencing in her everyday life as a gardener and homemaker. Within the context of her discussions on dividing plants or using herbs in the home, Cran often revealed the interactions she had with other women gardeners, neighbours, and craftspeople in her neighbourhood as well as in nearby communities. Jean M. Humez remarked that "If cultural historians are to construct a fully inclusive and historically accurate picture of all women's creative heritages," then they should consider "sources outside the relatively small body of writings generally acknowledged as Literature..." (1991, 125). I suggest that Cran's texts provide a glimpse into the home and garden lives of women living and working during the interwar period.

With few exceptions, scholars have not considered women's garden writing as everyday autobiography (Seaton 1979; Harris 1994) nor as evidence of "women's creative heritage" (Humez 1991, 125). Yet folklorists have analyzed creative forms such as recipe cards and cookery books both as women's everyday autobiography (Tye 2010, 3) and as intergenerational culinary collaboration (Theophano 2002, 8-9). In this thesis I have been influenced by the folklore scholarship of Diane Tye, specifically her work *Baking as Biography*, where she recognized that the texts of her mother's recipe cards

contained essential “clues” to understanding her mother’s life story; they represented her everyday autobiography (2010, 32). Each hand-written recipe not only provided an enduring connection to her mother, but represented a memory of a person, place and/or an event in her mother’s day to day life (2010, 32). Just as Tye indicated that recipe cards “represent a site where women are able to tell some of their life stories in their own words” (2010, 32), I maintain that garden writing was a creative outlet for women that enabled them to convey the story of their lives, and indirectly the stories of other women’s lives.<sup>1</sup>

As part of women’s traditional culture (Greenhill and Tye 1993), household knowledge, herbal remedies, gardening skills, and recipes have a long history of being shared informally. In their written format, recipes are tangible reminders of household skills that are exchanged among family members. Yet recipes are flexible, evolving and changing, depending on the availability of certain ingredients or upon individual taste. While gardening traditions and skills can be passed from one gardener to another, gardening techniques and planting suggestions that are written and published cannot be changed. However, gardeners can choose how they use, adapt, or disregard a garden writer’s recommendations depending on their own interests and needs, and the specific conditions of their garden. Although Cran’s gardening books cannot be altered in the printed format, her planting tips and hints, as well as her anecdotes and stories might have had an influence on her readers whether or not her ideas and suggestions were taken up directly and applied to their day-to-day gardening practices. Much of the home and

garden advice that Cran shared on the pages of her books was probably exchanged orally between gardeners. As a gardener myself I know that I cannot always recall from whom or from what source I have learned gardening advice. Information from books or magazines merges with that shared by relatives or neighbours to become what *I* know about gardening. Thus I contend that Cran's ideas and suggestions were eventually assimilated in the knowledge and practices of successive generations of gardeners until her gardening advice became someone else's advice; this was then written down and published in a new format (such as an internet blog, website, or a new gardening book) to assist an entirely different group of gardeners and homemakers.

Cran's gardening advice may be added to other writers' gardening knowledge over time, but her experiences, and that of others she described, were unusually intimate. Her personal affirmations allow her books to stand apart from other women's gardening books that treat gardening more distantly. Cran's books grew out of her daily responsibilities; they described the family and work commitments that shaped her multifaceted life. Cran frequently slid into and out of different topics in her writing, whether she spoke of gardening or cooking, flower shows or wildlife. Admitting her failure to stay on one subject for very long, she often chastised herself and apologized to her readers in her books, urging them to skip ahead if they were not interested in the present discussion.

The fragmentary nature of Cran's writing is characteristic of women's private writing, such as that found in letters and diaries (see Jelinek 1980). Significantly, Cran

often departed from her own text to quote from readers' letters. She wanted to share her correspondents' gardening experiences and questions when she felt they might be of interest to readers. As I described earlier, Cran frequently recollected conversations with other gardeners; these interactions mirrored the familiar exchange that occurs between gardeners in daily life. Based on what correspondence exists, Cran's female readers seemed to particularly respond to her observations and requests by sharing their own home and gardening experiences or plant recommendations in letters (1925, 141-150) or by turning up at her door with gifts of plants and seeds (Cran's scrapbook, 1913-1934). Undoubtedly, some of Cran's readers were frustrated by her fragmented writing style, while others would have been comforted by the inclusion of such a familiar and ordinary item as the portion of a letter. Through the use of personal narratives and anecdotes, bits of remembered conversations with fellow gardeners, and excerpts from letters, Cran created a reciprocal relationship with her readers which would have had a lasting impact long after her pen stopped writing.

Although the reciprocal relationship Cran encouraged with her readers was often directed at female gardeners and homemakers, she reflected on the commonalities that bound all gardeners and she often referred to a "community of gardeners" (1924, 79-81; 1929b, 19-23, 236-245). In England, Australia, New Zealand, and in parts of North America, garden city movements, suburban housing schemes, and women's organizations encouraged gardening for its multiple benefits in improving lives and communities since the mid-nineteenth century (Philips and Barrett 1987, 94-95; Lawson 2005, 95, 96). As a

keen supporter of the National Gardens Guild based in London, Cran was certainly cognizant of how garden spaces featured in people's lives whether they lived in cities or rural communities (1929b, 236-245).<sup>2</sup> Cran enlightened her readers on how gardens and garden-making allowed for a human connection. As one writer anonymously reported, "it is not only the technical knowledge Miss Cran gives out that makes her famous, but the curiously human and intimate way she treats her subject" (Anon.1932b).<sup>3</sup> Although Cran often described how gardeners shared gardening techniques or exchanged seeds or plants, she also believed that gardeners maintained a more basic connection to each other through their common interest in tending a small bit of earth. In the following section, I discuss how Cran promoted a sense of fellowship and community through her garden writing.

### **A community of gardeners**

Because Cran believed in sharing what she sometimes referred to as "garden secrets" (Gribble 1951, 15) with her readers, she led her audience to understand that all gardeners had different techniques that they could share. As a homemaker, as well as a gardener, Cran often provided practical suggestions as well as personal recommendations surrounding what plants could be grown in the garden but also what could be used in the home. Whether her helpful hints on preserving fruit or growing specific herbs was based on her own experience or that of others, Cran shared as much information as she could with readers. Underlying all of the gardening advice was the sense that author and

readers belonged to a community of gardeners and homemakers who worked together to improve their lives both inside and outside the home.

Undoubtedly Cran experienced a sense of community through her own gardening adventures, but I would suggest that her notion of a gardening community began when she was a young girl observing her father and his keen interest in gardening. When writing about her experiences as a first time gardener, Cran remarked that initially she had little knowledge or experience of gardening: “I knew nothing at all of gardening; never did anyone know less” (1913, 6). Yet Cran often contradicted herself, and on more than one occasion she recollected how she had acquired a knowledge of gardens and wildflowers through members of her family, such as her father, who had first taught her about plants (1913, 185; 1924, 52-53). He also encouraged her, by his own example, how to be a considerate gardener and neighbour. Like many English clergymen of the late nineteenth century, Cran’s father, Henry Dudley, was a self-taught gardener and keen naturalist (Scott-James 1979, 75-76). Judging by Cran’s photographs, Reverend Dudley was a formidable man whose presence commanded respect and admiration (see Figure 5.1). Yet Cran recalled how she used to enjoy walking with her father on his visits to local parishioners in the villages they lived in when she was a young girl. On their walks, the Reverend taught his daughter the names of wildflowers and grasses growing in the lanes and meadows (1924, 52-53). In the vicarage gardens that Reverend Dudley tended, Cran recalled how her father trained roses in one bed and strawberry plants in another. She also remembered the care and attention he paid to fruit trees. She indicated how her



father “planted in every garden to which he went as Curate or as Rector at least two good fruit trees for the comfort of those who should come after him” (1934, 71). She continued:

The old-established apples, plums and pears which he took over from predecessors were assiduously tended, and they always yielded good harvests of jam and puddings to his husky, hungry youngsters; but he was far-sighted...he would manage somehow to secure a healthy little bush, espalier, or standard to leave behind him... (1934, 71).

As this passage reveals, Cran was aware of both her father’s kindness and practicality. She also learned early on that gardening was something to be shared: good gardeners considered the needs and interests of other gardeners. When she began gardening in Surrey, Cran discovered that the very act of gardening enabled an individual to become part of a community of gardeners. While she attended flower shows in London and read gardening literature on plants and garden design, she also became a more informed gardener by asking her neighbours, villagers, and friends about gardening. In the following passage, Cran praised the generosity of experienced gardeners and advised her readers to ask questions of them in their own communities:

Gardening seems like no other art - it engenders the kindest fellow-feeling everywhere; indeed the countryside is an open book for the ignorant beginner; every cottager will give his hint for the best upbringing of this and that...There is nothing mean in them, nothing but immense comradeship and fellow feeling, so that the learner is armoured from the start if he will take trouble to ask questions fearlessly (1913, 24-25).



Figure 5.1 - Reverend Henry Dudley with his grand-daughter, Lesley at Steephill Cottage. 1912. Courtesy of Dudley Graeme.

In *The Garden of Ignorance* (1913), Cran described occasions when she spoke with other gardeners that she met while admiring their gardens. This occurred when she walked about her village in an attempt to see what kinds of plants grew best in the neighbourhood (1913, 12-13, 30). As the following passage indicates, Cran interacted with gardeners who not only gave her plants from their gardens but shared their gardening knowledge with her. Moreover, in her efforts to make plants thrive, Cran found that “sometimes it has meant a rare lot of asking and reading to find what is wanted” (1913, 14). She recalled:

I remember the day I went dreaming down a lane and stopped to lean on a low stone wall because the garden below flaunted a radiant troop of sapphire and violet “flags”; the old woman leaned on her spade and watched me; we talked of her pretty garden, and when I turned to go she offered me a root of the admired flag [iris].

I thanked her, handling awkwardly and reverently the curious thick rhizome from which hung coarse fibres. She saw inexperience in my manner.

You’m from the hill...ain’t you? You’ll need to gie ‘un a bite o’ loam. ‘Tain’t

giving ‘un a fair chanst to put ‘un in that thick sand o’ yourn up there’ (1913, 10-11).

I believe Cran included this conversation (in her book) to demonstrate to readers that gardeners help other gardeners, especially if a gardener with more experience recognizes that another is a beginning gardener. Cran often described how gardeners shared and exchanged gardening information because she, herself, passed on to her readers whatever she learned from her own experiences as well as what she learned from other gardeners. Although there is little documentation surrounding her work as a radio broadcaster, Cran did, on occasion, discuss her radio experiences in a few of her books. In particular, Cran wrote of some radio experiences in *The Joy of the Ground* (1929b) several years after she had finished broadcasting. In this book, she described a much larger fellowship of gardeners and potential gardeners who listened to her radio program throughout the 1920s and early 1930s (Uglow 2005, 257). As evidence of her own appreciation for the loyalty shown to her by this gardening community, during a final broadcast Cran offered listeners a small root of a plant she had discovered in a lane near her garden. This plant was a variety of *Vinca*, a ground cover commonly referred to as periwinkle by past and present day gardeners. Cran referred to this *Vinca* as “Joy of the Ground” in reference to its vernacular name during the Tudor period which she noted in her battered copy of John Parkinson’s *Paradisi in Sole Paradisus Terrestris* (1629) (1929b, 19). As Cran indicated in *The Joy of the Ground*, she offered to send the cutting to any listener “who would give it the best home” (1929b, 20). In the spirit of generous gardeners everywhere, Cran

stressed that she had only one condition: she would send a root of the plant to whoever requested it, provided they also agreed to share it freely with other gardeners:

Before sailing I divided my thriving plant into as many as I could and sent them off the little slips, keeping one for my own garden to greet me on my return. The plants were, of course a free gift, and I made one request--which was that those who received it should keep it as a free gift. That they should give, but never sell it. That they should keep sacred from barter and commerce the 'joy of the ground,' which truly cannot be bought, but truly can be shared (1929b, 20-21).

Cran had no idea that approximately 6000 requests would deluge the mail rooms of the BBC (1929b, 23), but before she left on a voyage to South Africa, she indicated how she, herself, had responded to as many requests as possible.<sup>4</sup> Cran's story reflects yet another way--through sharing this plant--that she created a sense of community among her listeners. By encouraging them to share the plant among fellow gardeners, neighbours and family, she encouraged the formation of an even wider gardening community. In *The Joy of the Ground*, Cran recollected a conversation she had with a man who had, inadvertently, been given this variety of *Vinca*:

There came another day when I was wandering about in a far-off village looking at the pretty cottage gardens, and spied a patch of creeping green periwinkle leaves; an old man was pottering about with a watering can. I leaned over the gate and asked him if it was the red sort, and he said it was. His daughter had sent it to him, because he liked the colour. She had it 'off the wireless,' he said, and I must say it sounded a bit miraculous, put that way.... We sat beside it in the sun and talked of his daughter, who had carried a bunch at her wedding. The periwinkle made us a peaceful, happy afternoon (1929b, 21-22).

In recalling this personal exchange in a stranger's garden, Cran indicated how plants and gardens enabled people of diverse backgrounds to interact and connect through a common

interest.

As a founding member of the National Gardens Guild, Cran volunteered in this organization, served as treasurer, wrote gardening leaflets, and promoted the interests of this amateur gardeners' group through her writing and radio broadcasts (1929b, 229-237; 1934, 228-229). Cran encouraged readers to join this organization because of the value it placed on creating a gardening community in schools, villages, suburbs, and cities:

One by one lovely villages will learn the way to make use of this large amateur movement...will see the beauty of a national vision for the planting of roads, protection of wild flowers, and community planting.... The Guild works in schools, teaching a love of flower culture to the children; it teaches the new tenant in the rapidly increasing new suburbs how to make the best of his patch of land.... It gives advice and opens the way to the healthiest of hobbies for the leisure hours of workers in shops, offices, and factories, a hobby in which every member of the family can share (1934, 228-229).

At the same time that Cran was writing and actively involved in the National Gardens Guild, she had her hand in a number of other organizations such as the Women's Institutes, Roads Beautifying Society, Wild Flower Conservation Board, and the Council for the Preservation of Rural England.<sup>5</sup> She also wrote in her books as well as in separate articles of her interest in preserving rural villages and conserving English wild flowers (see Cran 1928, 50-51, 112; 1928b; 1929a; 1937b). All of the groups she was involved with were intent on educating people through community-wide promotion of home gardens, roadside beautification, and the preservation of the countryside (Cran 1934, 224). Because of her popularity as a writer and broadcaster, as well as her involvement in the National Gardens Guild, Cran provided illustrated talks on garden-related topics and

officiated at flower shows throughout Britain (Swaffer 1928).<sup>6</sup>

On one occasion when she travelled near Salisbury, Cran "motored" through a village whose gardens and public spaces all contained an abundance of Madonna lilies (*Lilium candidum*) (1924, 79-81; 1929b, 236-237; Lloyd and Bird 1999, 60). Seeing this floral spectacle, it struck her that individual towns and villages should adopt one kind of flowering plant that everyone could grow in their gardens. As she noted enthusiastically:

The idea of community planting...where a town or village adopts a particular genus of flower, tree or shrub as its own sign, and every waste piece of ground is planted with it and every garden grows at least one or more species of it as its contribution to the communal picture... (1929b, 240).

Despite her public encouragement of this idea in her writing and broadcasts, very few communities followed through with her suggestion. Regardless, Cran's proposal further encouraged her readers and listeners to consider how plants and gardens connected people and created gardening communities (1929b, 242-243). She suggested that,

...the children of to-day, when they have become grown men and women far flung across the Empire, happening upon the flower of their home village...will remember with sudden sweetness, the beauty of that flower in the Old Country; thoughts of mother, father, brothers, sisters and early friends, will come back...(1929b, 243).

By encouraging readers to consider how their interest in gardening was shared among family, neighbours and friends in their own communities and by fellow countrymen and women across the British Isles, Cran merged feelings of nationalistic pride with those of community pride. Cran was more progressive than most garden writers in her promotion

of a gardening community. On the whole, however, Cran remained focused on the importance of gardening to a close knit community of gardeners, especially among women gardeners.

### **Themes in Cran's writing: Women's traditional culture and female performativity**

Through her informal, fragmented, and intimate writing, readers felt as if they were being invited into Cran's home, into her garden, and invariably into her life. She wrote about daily occurrences in her home and garden as if they were happening at the very moment in which she was writing them down. For example, in the opening sentences of a chapter from *The Squabbling Garden*, Cran described the particular events of one day, while inadvertently voicing the frustrations of a distracted writer and implying how women, like herself, multi-tasked as homemakers and gardeners on a continual basis. The beginning paragraphs introduced a scene that described how Cran was attempting to write an article on a hot summer day when a guest brought her a handful of raspberries, thus indicating that the berries now needed to be picked and made into jam. At the same time, her husband desired some attention and the dog wanted to play ball. It was just another day for a busy woman. Cran wrote:

It is too hot to move; almost to write. The fish are still in the ponds, buried deep in cool mud or larking under lily leaves; the birds are silent...the lettuces droop, and roses wilt...this is a very hot summer. Our indefatigable Pixy has come in with a large gathering of Lloyd George... 'When do you cut the canes?' he asks. 'Early in August most of them, and some in spring for November fruit,' I shout... It is too hot to think of jam: yet I know I must; the little Boston terrier invites me to throw his ball for him to show off a bit, but it is too hot...I look at the

raspberries; and hate Lloyd George - turning up on a day like this...

My lord comes into the study looking very elegant in khaki shorts, a primrose shirt and beret. 'You had better stop writing. It's too hot,' he says firmly, and then beholds Lloyd George. 'Oh Heavens...' he mutters. 'I know,' I say. 'I don't know how to face it - but they can't be wasted. They will have to be jam: I simply cannot go through all that bottling business.' I should think not!' he says, and that is all very fine, but the day will come in dark cold winter when we shall be very glad of bottles of the fresh and fragrant raspberries with thick rich cream...he likes fruit pies, but he hates gardening and bottling (1934, 240-241, 244-245).

In between expressing intimate details of her everyday life, Cran did not hesitate to include practical insight on cutting raspberry canes nor did she neglect to mention the importance of bottling fruit--what gardeners would traditionally describe as "putting food by"--for the winter (Greene, Hertzberg, and Vaughan 1973 (repr.2010), 1).

This example illustrates not only the fragmentary nature of Cran's writing, but also the multiple roles she juggled. At least some readers would have recognized the all too familiar features of their own lives mirrored in Cran's writing, namely, the need to find time to balance leisure and work activities. In her analysis of women's "informal gatherings" in Cape St. George, Newfoundland, Marie-Annick Desplanques noted how women had to schedule time to meet and interact with other women because of the nature of the tasks and responsibilities they were expected to accomplish in a rural fishing community (1997, 234-235). In negotiating time to socialize, these women also gathered "to work on collective or individual projects" which meant that the women interacted through work activities (Desplanques 1997, 238). Similarly, Cran described the social interactions she had with women, neighbours, friends and relations with whom she



accomplished domestic tasks centered around common interests in gardening, cooking, and preserving.

By incorporating practical information in her anecdotes of home and garden experiences, Cran's readers found helpful advice carefully placed within the lines of a story. Reflecting upon memories of her own experiences as a first time gardener and homemaker, Cran acknowledged how women rely on traditional plant knowledge, abilities and skills with which to accomplish tasks in the home and garden. With regard to gardening skills, Cran indicated how "women's hands have the delicacy of touch which is part of a 'green finger,' they have a lively imagination, and if they care for the simple and vitalizing ways of the earth [they will] find a passionate happiness in the garden routine" (1934, 236). In her writing, Cran specified that a woman's natural attention to detail and nurturing tendencies allow her to manage finite gardening tasks much more effectively than men:

There is hardly anything more amusing than to have a little secret playground of seedlings in one's garden; to begin with, there is the instinctive mother-sense in seed-raising; women nearly always excel at that part of gardening; and many enjoy it more than any of the more surgical operations beloved by men...grafting, budding, dividing...(1940, 190).

Cran reflected that many women of her generation still valued the garden as an area where they could excel, partly because the garden was in such close proximity to the home. She encouraged women to use their domestic skills and what she referred to as their "mother-sense" in the home and garden. As the following example indicates, Cran

incorporated the gardening experiences of women she knew into her writing to further encourage the potential gardeners and homemakers reading her books. In this passage, Cran described the gardening and "mothering skills" of her friend Mrs. Keen:

Whenever I think of her I feel afresh how mothering her instinct was with plants. One did not find that great drift of blue catmint under the standard cherry trees pared down in autumn to look 'tidy'--the raggle-taggle of its dead brown wood was left until green shoots appeared again; tidy or untidy, Mrs. Keen knew it protected the plants from the winter frosts, and there it stopped, and the same with the blue hardy geraniums in the border, where she blended her scheme of blues and mauves, her...violas, irises, delphiniums.... The sense of abundant growth was ever in her garden.... And all the wild birds crowded round Olivers; they seemed to know that what ruled there was the heart of a mother (1933, 181).

The weaving of practical hints into the telling of stories about gardeners and gardening characterized Cran's writing. She encouraged and complemented women and their talents, conveying the important message that regardless of their prior experience, women made great gardeners. Although she would not have been fully aware of it at the time, Cran's recognition of women's skills and creative expression was an appreciation of what folklorists refer to as "women's traditional culture" (Greenhill and Tye 1993, 309). Unlike the high level of performance evident in tale-telling or folk singing, Cran's recollected conversations and personal anecdotes surrounding her own and others' homemaking and gardening experiences represented low levels of performance (Greenhill and Tye 1993, 311, 330). Cran used expressions such as "old country wife" or "country folk" to refer to the vernacular gardening traditions she had learned by listening to and observing other gardeners in her neighbourhood and village. Her expressions were linked

to the more well-known turn of phrase “old wives tales” which Theresa A. Vaughan defined as the “stories, anecdotes, and/or beliefs handed down through generations of women...” (2009, 452). Vaughan indicates that “old wives tales” consisted of “the accumulated knowledge of women in the areas of folk medicine and traditional healing,” which was linked to women’s wisdom and curative powers (2009, 452). Despite the negative associations and connotations reflected in such expressions, Greenhill and Tye are convinced that “old wives’ tales,” and “other forms of women’s folklore are accurate and significant interpretations of women’s experiences and are central to an understanding of women’s culture...” (1993, 309). In her books, Cran drew on women’s traditional culture and then passed on that knowledge to her readers:

A few weeks ago my friend the bee woman gave me some parsley seeds out of her garden. It’s a queer thing how one misses parsley from the kitchen if it is not to be had. There was none in my garden when I came last March, and so I was very pleased with her seeds. Looking at the hard featured little specks, rather like caraway seeds with humped backs, and striped...I remembered the old country wife’s tale of how parsley goes down to hell and comes back again before it will show above ground, expressing thereby a long process of germination (1924, 245).

As this passage demonstrates, Cran’s texts could have multiple layers. Beyond her initial description of the seeds themselves, Cran included practical tips and folk beliefs surrounding this herb by suggesting how fresh parsley was a kitchen necessity but that it might prove difficult to grow. In *Discovering the Folklore of Plants* (2005), folklorist Margaret Baker denotes how gardeners once believed that the only way to sow parsley successfully, without Satan’s interference, was to pour boiling water over the soil in

which the seed was to be set (2005, 118). This was in keeping with another belief that parsley must make a journey “two, three, seven or nine times to Satan” before it can come back up and sprout through the earth (Baker 2005, 118). In her discussion, Cran advocates how gardeners find inspiration through the efforts of other gardeners, and helpful gardening advice will always be passed down through generations of gardeners. Additionally, Cran’s recollection identified how women maintained relationships with other women by performing femininity through seasonal tasks and common interests, such as sowing seeds in the garden and using herbs for culinary purposes.

Considering Cran’s personal background as well as the historical context in which she was writing, her everyday autobiography could not help but reflect the changes she was experiencing in her life and within the world around her. With the onset of the First World War, Cran’s books began to include anecdotes and stories surrounding her new found interest in cookery in addition to the gardening experiences and planting suggestions her readers had come to expect. Not surprisingly, Cran described her homemaking experiences because she spent a great deal of time learning how to cook and clean when her servants left for more lucrative employment in munitions factories (1921, 211; Beckett 2006, 80-93). In *The Garden of Experience* Cran described how she had little knowledge of cooking, and yet, she confessed that without servants, she was free to cook and eat what she wanted without the constraints of her servants’ habits and routines (1921, 211). The novelty of having no cook, however, wore thin and Cran wrote, “I had not an idea of anything--I could not boil a potato...” (1921, 210).<sup>7</sup> An older villager who

sometimes helped Cran in the garden with heavy digging took pity on her by suggesting that his wife could offer her rudimentary lessons in cooking and housekeeping (1921, 210). Following these lessons, Cran had a new appreciation for certain vegetables and fruit that she could grow in her garden for use in her cooking and preserving. As she described it:

The garden has become a new wonderland; we [Cran and her family] gather treasure there like Aladdin in his cave, at our own sweet will, knowing now many things we only dimly guessed at in our much-served days--that the spires of shallots stand for orderly rows of glass jars in the store cupboard, where later globed brown bodies will jostle each other in spicy vinegar, waiting for cold-meat days to proclaim them; that the terracotta jars, like big bells, hide pale pink stalks of rhubarb, and that the little round radishes, ivory and red like chessmen, will shine for us in salads... (1921, 262).

Like other women, Cran experienced war time food shortages which caused her to “make do” growing vegetables and herbs, and gathering whatever fruit and nuts she could from the nearby countryside. As a result, Cran’s experiments in the garden were well-matched by her experiments in the kitchen, most of which she shared in her writing. One autumn when fruit was particularly scarce, she enthusiastically told readers how she made homemade jam using tomatoes which happened to be plentiful:

One war-year, in a painful shortage of fruit we evolved a very nice tomato jam; here is the recipe for it. Peel 12 lbs of tomatoes in the usual way, viz. by steeping in boiling water for a minute or so, then peeling. Add the juice and rind of 6 lemons, peeled very thin; 6 oz of hard stemmed ginger, bruised well with a hammer and tied in little muslin bags... (1921, 270).

Although she wrote this a few years after the War was over, her suggestion to make jam using tomatoes, lemons and ginger would have been a welcome alternative to what was

available. I suggest that Cran included recipes in her books, complete with ingredients and detailed instructions, because women readers, especially, would have appreciated new ways to use produce from their own gardens or from the gardens of friends and neighbours during the interwar period.<sup>8</sup>

Using and sharing recipes was familiar to Cran's readers as a way that women performed femininity as homemakers and gardeners. As mentioned earlier, recipes and recipe cards can be conceived of as a form of women's private writing, similar to diaries and letters (see Bloom 2001; Jelinek 1980; Tye 2010). When cookery became an integral part of Cran's life, it found its way into her everyday autobiography. Importantly, her recipes would have educated her readers, increasing their knowledge and thus, allowing them to become more resourceful in their day-to-day lives within the home and the garden (Beckett 2006, 119).

Consistent with her own life and gardening experiences, Cran connected household tasks and daily events in her writing. As revealed in *The Garden of Experience*, Cran recollected how she and members of her family often gathered berries for jam, an event that became an expedition which included members of her family, her friends and many dogs. Although Cran used photographs to illustrate some of her experiences (figure 5.2), her descriptions alone provided a vivid portrait of women's camaraderie while completing harvest and cookery tasks. Woven into her description of berry picking is a recipe for jam:

As the whortleberries take on their blue-black bloom in the deep gullies where

they grow among the heather, baskets, dogs, babies and grown-ups collect in a splendid troop and set forth to despoil the low growing bushes away over the hill where woods and heather meet. Less adventurous souls sit in the kitchen and pick over all the beady black currants, for one of our best jams is made of  $\frac{3}{4}$  lb sugar to  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb each of whortleberries (commonly called 'hurts' in Surrey) and black currants (1921, 269-270).<sup>9</sup>

Women's tasks inside and outside the home often merged in Cran's life, and probably, in the lives of the women who read her books. Through her words (and photographs), Cran created an image with which women readers could identify; she revealed how women, like herself, performed femininity within the realm of home and garden by accomplishing tasks that benefited their own lives and those of their families. In this example, Cran advocated for women's knowledge and traditional skills, subtly implying how their roles as gardeners and homemakers empowered them, allowing them to become more resourceful through combining domestic tasks with leisure activities.

Cran's suggestions to gather fruit in the countryside or grow herbs in a kitchen garden were practical and do-able for most of her readers. On the other hand, most of her readers would not have had the space, time, or inclination to erect bee hives in their backyards or to build sheds for a few goats as she did. This did not deter Cran from describing her experiences of extracting honey from hives to serve at breakfast or milking stubborn goats before afternoon tea (1920, 144, 167-168), and there is evidence that her less conventional homemaking ideas sometimes encouraged and inspired readers.



“The picking of jam-fruit is the excuse for many a happy day.” *Chap. XIV.*

Figure 5.2 - Lesley and friends gathering berries in a hedgerow near Farnham. The photograph appeared in *The Garden of Experience* (1921, 267). Courtesy of Dudley Graeme.

One woman wrote to Cran of her and her husband's experiences as new gardeners and goat keepers referring to Cran's gardening books as their inspiration:

When we bought *The Garden of Ignorance* we were just beginning to realize that we might make something of a wee garden in the corner of an orchard. Then we started to read it aloud, in every spare minute till late at night. It had an inspiring effect upon us; we wanted to rush into the garden at once. Ponds and paths and plans resulted.... Then we were given *The Garden of Experience*. The result being, one of us returned home yesterday to find the other had bought a nanny from a passing herd for eight shillings! We need hardly mention we have no field, no land, only our minute garden... (1925, 145-146).



While Cran and her books had clearly made a strong impression on this couple, it is the portion of the letter where the woman described how she and her husband “wanted to rush into the garden at once” that revealed the effect Cran’s writing had on even the most inexperienced gardeners. Letters such as this one support my belief that Cran inspired “would-be” gardeners and homemakers as well as those women (and some men) already engaged in home and garden pursuits.

### **Implicit feminist coding and Cran’s “good housewives”**

Cran frequently used the term “good housewives” presumably in recognition of what she felt women knew or *should* know. Arguably, in relying on this description, Cran employed what Joan N. Radner and Susan S. Lanser have denoted as “strategies of coding” within women’s culture (1993, 1-2) specifically that of “implicit coding.” This form of feminist coding raises “complex questions about the creator’s conscious and subconscious intentions and about the interpretations that may be constructed both by the original receiving community and by outside observer-analysts...” (Radner and Lanser 1993, 6). I believe that Cran used “implicit coding” to awaken in her female readership the desire to become better informed and more resourceful gardeners and homemakers, and thus, more empowered women through their home and garden experiences. For Cran, tending a garden and growing certain plants played an essential part in the creation of a home.

As mentioned previously, Cran's interest in growing fruit stemmed from her experiences in childhood gardens where her father cared for apple trees (*Malus x domestica*), black currants (*Ribes nigrum*), and strawberries (*Fragaria* species) (Coombes 1994, 76, 114, 160). In her writing, Cran highlighted that housewives already knew that picking fruit from one's own garden or gathering berries in the nearby countryside would be preferable to store bought produce for making jam. Using the following passage as an example, I suggest that Cran was using implicit coding to emphasize that women--as "good housewives"--should consider growing their own fruit because it was essential for home consumption:

...I frankly declare....to any who care to listen, that no fruit we buy from a shop window has the same sweet zest as that fruit we pluck from the trees we ourselves have planted. In the matter of berries, every good housewife knows full well that the jam we make straight from the garden is richer in flavour than that made of the pulpy uncertain berries which have passed through picker's, packer's...middle man's hands before they come dusty and bruised to our cook pots. Therefore, both from the sentimental and practical points of view it is a lovely and pleasant thing to grow fruits in the garden (1934, 70).

Although Cran was fortunate to have land in Kent on which to grow apples (*Malus x domestica*) and other orchard fruit like pears (*Pyrus communis*) and quince (*Cydonia oblonga*), her sentimental *and* practical points of view surrounding home-grown fruit were progressive (Coombes 1994, 114, 154-155). Six years after Cran encouraged readers to grow fruit in their own gardens, the British Government implored women and their families to grow their own produce and "Dig for Victory" during the Second World War (Quest-Ritson 2003, 239-241; Middleton 1942 (repr., 2008)).<sup>10</sup> Until then, Cran

expressed that “the picking of jam fruit is the excuse for many a happy day...We have always entertained a fierce prejudice as a family for home-made jam...A prejudice shared, I know, by most good housewives” (1921, 267, 269). While some readers would have looked past Cran’s references to “good housewives,” other women would have identified with this role. Still others might have acquired knowledge by reading Cran’s books and become more resourceful by learning what kinds of fruit they could grow or harvest within their own communities.

In effect, a woman’s proficiency in growing and cooking vegetables and fruit could provide her special status among her peers. In *Gardens of Character* (1940), Cran recalled for her readers the circumstances surrounding a pickle recipe that emphasized how women performed femininity through their contributions in the home and garden. In her story, Cran described how “Granny Wood”--not a member of Cran’s family--shared similar interests as she did in gardening, cooking, and preserving. Importantly, Granny Wood had created a green tomato pickle recipe that had long been coveted by Cran. As the story unfolds, Cran implies how women in her life formed supportive networks through their knowledge and skills as homemakers; skills which empowered them in their everyday lives. In the passage that follows, Cran describes how she was able to acquire the recipe and produce her own version of Granny Wood’s green tomato pickles to share among friends who appreciated the significance of the recipe (73):

[Jean]: “Oh,” she breathed, “a pot of those pickled tomatoes. How can you spare it [?]. Did she give it to you?”

For years and years I had enjoyed Granny Wood's green tomato pickle sweet and spicy; and for years I had been promised the recipe, but somehow it had always been forgotten when green tomatoes were hanging on their boughs in clusters thick as grapes in everyone's garden. This last year I had been in Guildford again when Mrs. Goodwyn...penned the recipe down in words on paper so at last I had it... (1940, 73).

Reading this passage, one is struck by Cran's ability to weave a story while expressing how women performed femininity through seasonal or everyday tasks. Cran recognized the nature of women's day to day experiences; women shared food and conversation but sometimes recipes remained secret and the making of certain delicacies distinguished one homemaker from another. As Tye described in *Baking as Biography*, her mother became such a proficient and popular baker of cookies to her children and the neighbourhood children, that she distinguished herself from among her peers (2010, 94). While Cran acquired the recipe and made the pickles herself, she expressed, through implicit coding, that Granny Wood should be respected because it was she who created the recipe in the first place: "Granny Wood looked so pleased when I told her I had made some experimental pots" (1940, 73). Through her emphasis on Granny Wood and her special status as an accomplished homemaker, Cran implied how women found empowerment through their skills in the home and garden and through their support of one another because of their skills. In her books, Cran not only stressed the significance of growing fruit and preserving vegetables and herbs, she indicated that these plants were necessary in one's own garden for creating a sense of home. For Cran, Granny Wood's green tomato pickle recipe was, in her words, a "special house-joy" (1940, 73). Similarly, in

recalling fruit trees from the gardens of her childhood, as well as admiring ones she enjoyed in her Kent garden, Cran reflected on how fruit trees were a blessing in one's garden and for one's home:

And bless is a word one may use with true deliberation in speaking of fruit; it is the only one that expresses what good orchard trees will give to a house--beauty of blossom, shelter for birds, nectar for bees, and rich offerings at the table of the homestead. They take their place in the happenings of the home, and become part of it (1934, 72).

As this example demonstrates, Cran wrote about plants, gardens and everyday life from the perspective of a woman whose home and garden were integral to her life as a writer, gardener and homemaker. In the mid-1930s, Cran received a commission to explore public and private gardens across the United States, which she eventually described in *Gardens in America* (1931). Despite her excitement in meeting Americans and discussing their gardens, homesickness struck her from time to time, particularly when she noticed plants that reminded her of England. In this passage, Cran remembered the emotions she felt seeing primroses in a garden in Santa Barbara, California:

...and suddenly I saw some polyanthus blooming at my feet!...though they were few and...precious in that soil and climate they linked my swoon with Kent, and restored my courage. How they must be blooming now in that misty England-Isle! Mrs. Oakleigh-Thorne, sympathetic and sensitive, saw my reaction to the bunch primroses. She smiled. 'They take you home.' They did indeed (1931, 102).

Cran's anecdote would have evoked similar thoughts of home in the hearts and minds of gardeners reading this story, and her intimate recollection would have appealed to readers with or without English roots. Sometimes Cran's women readers penned long letters full

of detail regarding their own gardening experiences, as well as relating the specific plants that they grew. In some instances they ended their letters in apology for writing such lengthy missives by saying “I am afraid my love of flowers carried me away” (1925, 145). Others remarked honestly, “if you could only have any idea of the pleasure your books have given me....”<sup>11</sup> After sixteen years reading Cran’s books and corresponding with her, one Gloucestershire woman wrote “thank you for sharing your secrets” and ended another letter by saying “I trust you will forgive me writing to you like this, only I feel I know you so well” (Gribble 1951, 15-16). As these letters attest, some readers felt that they knew Cran personally and they could trust her and her judgment as a fellow gardener but more importantly, as a woman.

### **Women’s resourcefulness through herb gardening**

In her books, Cran indicated that herbs were often the most interesting and helpful plants a woman could have in her garden. As an avid herb gardener herself, she revealed that her fascination with herbs stemmed from their versatility as well as their history and folklore. Whether she acquired vernacular gardening tips on growing herbs from other gardeners or discovered a herbal hint in Gerard’s *The Historie of Plants* (1597), Cran shared whatever she learned with her readers (1913, 132-140). In her writings, broadcasts, and lectures, Cran also referred to modern herb specialists such as Eleanour Sinclair Rohde and Mrs. Maude Grieve whose writings on herbs were especially well known to gardeners during the interwar period (1929b, 94; Grieve 1931 (repr. 1994);

Rohde 1946). As evidenced in several newspaper clippings found in the pages of her scrapbook, Cran also supported small herb growing enterprises, especially those organized by women. According to the *Leeds Mercury*, Cran opened an exhibit in late October of 1932 that featured the “herbal preparations, fragrant lotions and face creams” of a woman herb farmer in Kent.<sup>12</sup>

Cran often wrote about her experiences gardening with herbs first in Surrey where the soil conditions were ideal and later in Kent, where the overly fertile soil offered challenges to herb growing. In this passage, Cran recollected her delight in the beauty of sage (*Salvia*) as an ornamental plant (Coombes 1994, 164-165), thus implying how herb growing was an essential skill to be learned by both gardeners *and* homemakers:

Sage has a beautiful purple flower; a planting of it in the border or along the kitchen-garden paths will enchant one with its flower in August. I remember how I discovered this for myself, many years ago. I wanted some sage in the kitchen-garden, sowed a packet of seed in a lonely place and forgot all about it. Then one day I found a large plantation of strange purple flowers lighting up a dim place, and I was very excited about it; I brought people to see the new plant. When someone, a bit brighter than myself, found out it was sage, I had to change all my ideas of this kitchen drudge, and accept it as an ornament as well (1925, 104).

Besides describing the merits of commonly grown herbs, Cran advocated for the inclusion of less well-known herb species in the garden because of their fragrance, the texture of their leaves or because they attracted bees and other pollinators. As with flowers, Cran often described herbs in sentimental terms, defining them as “homely” and “generous,” but she also reflected on their associations, especially through scent and memory (1920, 199). Although I will explain more fully in Chapter 6 how Cran linked

plants with memories, this next example reveals how Cran focused readers' attention on certain herbs because of their familiar uses in the home:

In a corner of the kitchen garden grows a flat mat of fern-like leave, and from it there come up rounded heads of creamy flowers. When people touch the mat, even very lightly, aromatic breath gushes out from the whole plant. It is one of which I am considerably proud, for it is not commonly found in gardens nowadays, being the true chamomile--*Anthemis nobilis*. Around that perennial herb clings a definite tradition of healing. Whenever one shows the plant it is respectfully received. A questioning hand reaches down to find the authentic chamomile smell, and nearly always a word is murmured about the chamomile tea of nursery days...I dare say a good many will share with me a lively memory of the pungent bitter tea our mothers rejoiced to give us long ago; a large wine-glass of chamomile tea, 'to cool the blood,' was our portion before going to bed, and the taste remains with me to this day (1929b, 90-91).<sup>13</sup>

In recalling chamomile's many home applications, Cran likely inspired readers to remember their own experiences with this herb. By weaving memories of a plant--recognized by most of her audience--with practical advice, Cran connected with readers on a personal level and potentially her words would have had a stronger impact than if she had simply stated facts surrounding the herb's uses in the home and garden. When Cran wrote about herbs, she often implied how an understanding of these plants would particularly benefit and improve women's lives and that of their families. For example she wrote:

It is easy for the home-lover to keep her linen-cupboard fragrant if she has a garden on warm light soil where lavender and rosemary grow well...they do not like cool, rich clay, and it was but a few months ago that I came across the idea of using [lemon] balm as a substitute for lavender. For fifteen years I gathered lavender crops light-heartedly from a Surrey garden, and strewed them in drawers and cupboards, taking the easy harvest as a matter of course - one of the pleasant routine acts of home-making (1929b, 89-90).



Here, Cran conveyed how fortunate she was to have the right kind of soil conditions on which to grow lavender while she lived in Surrey. While she complained in her earlier gardening books how difficult this dry, sand-based soil was for growing her favourite flowers, Cran never realized until she began to garden in Kent that the clay-based soil at Coggers would be excellent for peonies but difficult for cultivating certain herbs (see 1913, 1921, 1924).<sup>14</sup> Regardless of these contextual details, Cran's experiences growing and harvesting herbs for household purposes demonstrate how she relied on implicit feminist coding as she informed women how to keep linen-cupboards clean and fragrant in the home using dried lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) or lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*) (Coombes 1994, 103, 117). For Cran, this task fell within the realm of a woman's responsibility however, she implies that it could be accomplished with pleasure rather than with a sense of duty. While it is impossible to know for certain if female readers (or listeners) followed her suggestions, there is evidence to suggest that some of Cran's ideas and practices were certainly popular. At the opening of a flower show in London in which Cran presided, *Daily Express* journalist Hannen Swaffer remarked: "Mrs. Marion Cran, who opened the exhibition, was afterwards surrounded by scores of women who had heard her gardening talks on the wireless, and who, in London gardens, had profited by her advice" (1928). Based on a more obscure example, evidence indicates that some of Cran's herbal recipes were used by readers and listeners. Cran created a recipe using dried tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*), rosemary (*Rosmarinus*), pennyroyal (*Mentha pulegium*), and cloves which interested readers after she described it

in *The Garden of Experience* (1921, 198).<sup>15</sup> As I will describe in more detail in the next chapter, Cran used this herbal mixture in her home to deter moths naturally from stored clothing. What was significant was that this recipe was requested so often by readers and listeners that Cran began producing small packets of *The Marion Cran Moth Mixture* for mail order.<sup>16</sup>

Cran believed that the contents of a woman's garden reflected upon her as a person. In one instance, she firmly stated that "every subtle spirit with the temper and twist of a personality will have her herb garden, whatever else she lacks" (1921, 197). Although opinionated, Cran demonstrated in this comment that she believed women needed to express their individuality in the garden without compromising how they performed femininity within the domestic sphere of the home. Importantly, Cran recognized that potentially the garden was the only place that a woman could enter and find privacy. With family and friends flitting in and out of her own home and garden, and with domestic chores looming, Cran sometimes revealed that she needed to escape into the garden and sit on a bench away from everyone and everything. She stated that "the nicest seat of all is a simple bench hidden away in a green and shady corner on a high place where no one ever thinks of coming, and where the garden unfolds its picture in a hidden solitude under the eyes of this dreamer" (1934, 206). While the garden was often the one area available to retreat from family and household responsibilities, its close proximity to the home allowed women an acceptable space where they could claim a few minutes peace or as an outlet for their creativity. In *Women, Privacy and Modernity in*

*Early Twentieth Century British Writing*, Gan reiterated this point adding that by escaping into the garden “a woman could affirm a self other than her domestic identity” (2009, 8). Although Cran conceptualized home and garden as linked rather than separate, she was cognizant of women pursuing professions in horticulture and she encouraged her female readers to extend the boundaries of their lives through new opportunities that were opening up for women as professional gardeners and farmers.<sup>17</sup>

Cran maintained that writing gave her the opportunity to meet women who created homes and gardens all over the world, including those who had trained professionally in the fields of horticulture and agriculture. Although she regretted her own lack of horticultural training, she was proud of other women who had achieved professional status, especially her own daughter, Lesley. Because of her daughter, Cran learned as much as she could about horticultural schools and training programs offered to female participants. In several of her books, Cran described some of the more well known schools in response to requests she received from women readers (see 1929b; 1934; 1937b). In some instances, readers asked Cran to help them find gardening positions in England, and she was more than happy to encourage these women to seek employment opportunities beyond the gates of their own homes and gardens. She commented:

I find women who have been through the mill and trained, do not all, by any means, take posts as gardeners; they go adventuring overseas to South Africa, Canada, New Zealand, and so on; there I have found them, far from home, but mighty merry and busy. They take up nursery gardening, or become small holders, and many of them get good posts as instructors in schools and colleges (1934, 239).

Writing in the late 1920s through the 1930s, Cran indicated that Coggers had become the main focus of her life as a writer, gardener and homemaker. Still, she took advantage of writing commissions that allowed her the opportunity to travel far distances, meeting with women gardeners who lived very different lives than herself and most of her readers in England. Although I have already referred to some of the letters that Cran received, her correspondence from women working abroad deserves mention. In these letters, women described their experiences living and working as market gardeners, flower farmers, and orchard growers in South Africa, Kenya, Canada, Fiji, and the United States (see Cran 1927, 1931, 1937). In some instances, they also described living and working alongside their husbands, and raising families albeit in distant locations. After writing to invite Cran to Gum Tree Farm in South Africa, a Mrs. Boddam-Whetham indicated that, "We are only farmers in the hills near the Basutoland border, we grow fruit and sheep, but I love my garden and should be so happy if you will come and see us in the back of beyond" (1927, 243). When Cran, herself, received a commission to travel to South Africa to observe and report on private gardens, market gardens, and nurseries, she took the opportunity to visit women who had written to her about their experiences as working gardeners. As she indicated in *The Gardens of Good Hope*, one particularly keen market gardener wrote to her, describing her first commercial experiences as a flower grower in Suffolk which she left to start a "flower farm" in South Africa (1927, 12-13). A short sample of her letter confirms that this woman, like Cran, was an excellent observer of everyday life as a working gardener and homemaker:

In front of the cottage on a hill-side, in the full sun, are sheets covered with flowers of the most gorgeous hues - golden wattle spread out thinly to dry...watsonias in every shade of pink...children...stream up all day with bags, baskets and paraffin tins on their heads, always the same cry: 'Flowers, missis!' The flowers are weighed and put out to dry, the children are paid, and they run off to pick more. The flowers will reappear in Bond Street...as potpourri, splashes of South African colour and sun relieving the monotonous greyness of London..." (1927, 12).<sup>18</sup>

In selected letters that Cran shared with her readers, Cran revealed how British women now living in South Africa were empowered both by new professional opportunities and their creation of homes and gardens. Upon visiting the English women of the "flower farm in the hills," Cran wrote admiringly that "these women had transplanted a Suffolk industry to a distant country utterly unknown to them" declaring how "there was vision in that" (1927, 58). In describing her stay with Miss Stanford and her assistant, Miss Bolus, Cran provided a glimpse into the lives of these women and their everyday tasks as flower growers and gardeners:

They grow sweet herbs and dry them for the shops; they candy flower-petals and fragrant leaves for London; grow violets and carnations for the Johannesburg market.... While we were talking of the potpourri the telephone rang and an order for Cape gooseberries came through, so we set out to pick them. Everything the girls grow is profitable; the tomatoes, melons, artichokes and sea kale as well as the sweet smelling herbs (1927, 66).

As Cran alluded to in this passage, these women maintained their flower farm business by growing food and creating other products that were marketed locally. While self-employed farmers, they were living an independent life that few women experienced in England during the interwar years. In describing how Stanford and Bolus lived and

worked in South Africa, Cran showed that this life was also possible for other women, like those reading her books. Many months after Cran toured gardens in South Africa, one of the flower farmers came to visit her at Coggers.



Figure 5.3 – One of the English flower farming women in South Africa. 1929. Courtesy of Dudley Graeme.

While they walked around her property, Cran learned that Miss Bolus wanted to build a new home for herself when she returned to the Cape Province. Through sharing her experiences visiting with these enterprising women, Cran presented her female readers

with new possibilities, including the idea of becoming a professional gardener abroad.

Cran established a connection with her readers who were either gardeners or "potential" gardeners and homemakers. In her books, which I consider to represent a form of everyday autobiography, Cran provided examples of how women should perform their femininity, become empowered and resourceful, and develop a sense of community through their creation and maintenance of a home and garden. While Cran acknowledged emerging professional opportunities for women in horticulture, I believe that one of the author's greatest contributions was her ability to encourage and inspire women. In one instance, a journalist reviewing *The Garden of Ignorance* (1913), reflected on Cran's influence on herself and other women: "[I] was inspired by the accomplishments of a fellow homemaker...this book is for the woman who wants to make her small patch of ground flourish and give forth, the woman who loves flowers and wishes practical hints as to how to grow them and care for them" (Anon. 1913). Cran enabled female readers to believe in themselves because she recognized the value of their contributions to the home and garden, as well as to their communities. Her books revealed that tending even the smallest garden meant a life filled with the "intimate happenings" of a home (Cran 1940, 268).

Marion Cran's reputation significantly declined after her death and she is no longer the household name she once was among English gardeners. However, her impact has not disappeared and the next chapter explores the meanings present day readers and gardeners make of her work.

<sup>1</sup> In her analysis of women's garden literature in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Dianne Harris (1994) indicated that women writers and readers formed a network through prescriptive garden literature. I discuss Harris and her work as it pertains to my research in Chapter Three.

<sup>2</sup> In her scrapbook (Cran's scrapbook 1913-1934), many newspaper clippings revealed that Cran often provided talks on gardening topics, representing the National Gardens Guild; she visited branches of the Guild all across the British Isles. For home owners with limited garden space, Cran provided what was probably a very useful talk in London, entitled "The Small Garden" as mentioned in *Radio Times* (see Anon. 1929c).

<sup>3</sup> This comment was made anonymously in a newspaper article that Cran included on the pages of her personal scrapbook (Cran's scrapbook 1913-1934), but the clipping does include Cran's handwriting, indicating that it came from the *Leeds Mercury* and was dated October 13, 1932. See Anon. 1932b.

<sup>4</sup> Although there is no evidence to suggest that there were *exactly* 6000 requests for the plant, Cran states: "Over six thousand roots were sent out in Great Britain, and plants have gone to Canada, South Africa and the United States of America" (1929b, 23). I would suspect that even more requests were sent to the BBC and to Cran personally.

<sup>5</sup> Cran was an active speaker at meetings of various branches of the Women's Institutes throughout the British Isles. Her involvement in other organizations was primarily as a member and strong supporter. See also several bibliographic references to anonymous journalists' tributes to Cran and her activities in various organizations, like the National Gardens Guild which I have already mentioned.

<sup>6</sup> Again, please see the bibliography for several short newspaper articles with anonymous authors who make reference to Cran's presence at flower shows and garden-related events.

<sup>7</sup> Cran was one of many middle and upper class women who lost domestic servants because of more lucrative employment opportunities for them in factories during and after the First World War. For further information please see Ian Beckett's *Home-Front 1914-1918: How Britain Survived the Great War* (2006, 83).

<sup>8</sup> The British government introduced rationing as late as 1917, but everyday food commodities, like meat, dairy, and sugar were in short supply and their prices fluctuated drastically; these factors greatly affected the lives of women and their families from all classes. For more information on the extensive history of food and clothing rationing in England during the First and Second World Wars, please see Patricia Nichol's *Sucking*



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*Eggs: What Your Wartime Granny Could Teach You About Diet, Thrift and Going Green* (2009) and Beckett's *Home-Front 1914-1918: How Britain Survived the Great War* (2006).

<sup>9</sup> In *Edible Plants of Newfoundland and Labrador* (2010), Peter Scott maintains that "traditionally, in some parts of Newfoundland, the Blueberry has been called Hurts or Ground Hurts...Hurts is an older spelling of Whorts, which is the name used for Blueberry in England" (21). It is interesting that Cran combines both vernacular names in this passage. Black currants are referred to botanically as *Ribes nigrum* (Coombes 1994, 160).

<sup>10</sup> In *The English Garden: A Social History*, Charles Quest-Ritson described wartime gardening efforts in which the British Government's "Dig For Victory" campaign encouraged people to grow their own vegetables, fruit, and herbs on their properties and/or in allotment gardens, especially during the Second World War (London: Penguin Books, 2003, 239-241). In the 1930s, gardening expert, C. M. Middleton, replaced Cran as the BBC's gardening broadcaster. "Mr. Middleton," as he was known, became extremely popular for his weekly broadcasts, *In Your Garden*. Unlike Cran, however, Middleton's contributions have been well documented by garden historians (please see Quest-Ritson, 2003, 256; Uglow 2005, 257 and a collection of Middleton's 1942 broadcasts recently reprinted as *Digging for Victory: Wartime Gardening with Mr. Middleton* (London: Aurum Press Ltd., 2008)).

<sup>11</sup> This portion of Mrs. Waller-Sawyer's letter was made available to me by Sue Sandison (Cran's great niece and Dudley Graeme's daughter) in October, 2007; the postmark date on the envelope was from 1935 and it was found inserted in a cookery book once owned by Cran but now in Sandison's personal collection.

<sup>12</sup> Cran's scrapbook, 1913-1934. Anonymous. 1932c. "Marion Cran opens herb exhibit." *Leeds Mercury*. October 31.

<sup>13</sup> Mrs. Maude Grieve remarked that doses by the "wineglassful" of dried chamomille steeped in boiled water could be used to reduce headaches and lessen fevers (1931 (repr. 1994), 188).

<sup>14</sup> See Coombes 1994, 102, 161.

<sup>15</sup> See Coombes 1994, 118, 162, 180. The mint in Cran's moth mixture would have been "pennyroyal" (*Mentha pulegium*) (Coombes 1994, 118). Cloves are important spices that

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originate from the “dried, unopened flower bud of the tropical evergreen clove tree (*Syzygium aromaticum*)” according to Sharon Tyler Herbst in *The New Food Lover's Companion* (2007, 146).

<sup>16</sup> I noticed that Cran had inserted a small news clipping into her scrapbook that featured an advertisement for “The Marion Cran Moth Mixture.” Unfortunately she neglected to write the date or the name of the publication from which she had clipped the advertisement, but I would hazard a guess that it was in 1929 as many of the other clippings on that page of her scrapbook were dated from that year (Cran’s scrapbook 1913-1934). Unfortunately, there are no records to indicate how many packets of moth mixture she sold before her death in 1942.

<sup>17</sup> As I mentioned briefly in Chapter 2, Cran was commissioned by the Dominion of Canada to visit with English women who had emigrated to Canada to become farmer’s wives and market gardeners, especially in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and in British Columbia in the early 1900s. Just as women were attending horticultural schools and/or had begun to practice horticulture as professionals in England, Cran was writing of English women’s experiences as working farmers and gardeners in Canada in her first publication, *A Woman in Canada* (1908).

<sup>18</sup> *Watsonia* is a South African flowering perennial, whereas “golden wattle” is actually an Australian shrub with thorns and yellow flowers (*Acacia*) (Coombes 1994, 2, 192). Cran travelled to Australia and New Zealand in between trips to South Africa in the 1920s, therefore it is quite possible that she confused the golden wattle from Australia with another plant in South Africa.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **MARION CRAN'S LEGACY AND 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY GARDENING**

Glancing through the pages of a recent book titled *Homesteading in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, I was amazed to find Marion Cran quoted in a section of the book devoted to creating organic matter for the garden: "If I wanted to have a happy garden, I must ally myself with my soil; study and help it to the utmost, untiringly.... Always, the soil must come first" (*Gardens of Character*, 1940, 90, as quoted in Nash and Waterman, 2011, 164).

Although it is certainly not uncommon for contemporary garden writers to refer to the words of wisdom found on the pages of older gardening books, I was surprised to find Cran briefly mentioned in a book dedicated to twenty-first century homesteading. I wondered how Cran and her writings from nearly seventy-five years ago could still be useful to gardeners and hobby farmers in the present-day. This chapter explores Cran's relevance for contemporary readers.

#### **Sustainable living**

There is a rising interest among writers, homeowners, and gardeners in learning how past generations planted, harvested and preserved their gardens. New generations want to relearn the skills and acquire the knowledge of earlier generations whose lifestyles did not as adversely affect the landscape surrounding their homes and communities.

Consequently, a veritable flood of literature reflects this current fascination in all things natural, organic, local, and sustainable. For example, John H. Tullock, a twenty-first century urban farmer and garden writer, argues that anyone can learn skills to re-create a happier, healthier lifestyle. As he indicated on the back cover of his book:

There's a lot we can learn from previous generations. *The New American Homestead* teaches you simple survival skills that, in an earlier time, were known and practiced by almost everyone. You can join the new breed of American homesteaders with a different concept of 'living well' in a city, town or suburb, a concept based not on consumption but on self-sufficiency (2012).

Although there is every indication that the present interest in living simpler, more sustainable lives draws some of its inspiration from a sense of nostalgia for older gardening traditions and ancient farming practices, today's gardeners and homemakers are attempting to meet their daily needs without jeopardising future generations. For some individuals, living a simpler, more self-sufficient lifestyle has meant abandoning city and town living by becoming homesteaders or hobby farmers. This was true for Helen and Scott Nearing whose evocative writings of their experiences "living the good life" helped inspire the Back-to-the-Land movement in the United States in the 1960s (see Nearing 1970). While the majority of people in this century do not have the ability to completely abandon urban or suburban living, they can choose a "greener," more sustainable lifestyle through practices that simplify their lives while assisting others. These practices might include supporting local farmers, growing herbs on an apartment windowsill, or maintaining a small vegetable plot within a community garden.

Individuals, families, and groups who consciously want a more self-sufficient life,

participate actively in their neighbourhoods and communities without being completely dependent on computers and hand-held communication devices to fulfill their every need. While modern technology provides gardeners with tips and hints on home and garden maintenance with the click of a button, it eliminates face to face interaction. More and more people, therefore, have been returning to domestic pursuits such as baking, crafting, and gardening, in order to reconnect with friends and family and members of their communities, and the natural world.

Conversations about plants with a neighbour, working side by side with other gardeners in a community garden, or meeting with fellow crafters to knit or quilt together are common creative activities that connect people in cities and suburbs throughout the Western world. The process of creating something by hand, such as a small herb garden or a hand knit scarf, helps gardeners and homemakers to form a tangible link with the material culture and vernacular traditions of the past. It also allows them to re-discover a need for these traditions in the present day.

Cran awakened in readers an appreciation for gardening traditions and homemaking practices that were creative, self-sufficient, and natural. Not unlike many gardening writers today, she demonstrated an early understanding of biodiversity and environmentalism by choosing to garden using organic methods whenever possible. By describing childhood gardens and the plants and gardening traditions that linked her with family and friends, Cran recognized the importance of home and garden spaces within her own life as well as the daily life experiences of her readers. Today a new generation is

finding relevance in Cran's books and Coggers, her last home and garden in Kent, has become the focal point for a group of gardeners, admirers, writers and researchers.

### **Home and garden as simple and sustainable**

Cran shared home and garden experiences that reflected her interest in a domestic life that was simple and self-sufficient. Although the words sustainable and self-sufficient were not part of Cran's gardening lexicon, she did raise her own vegetables, herbs, and fruit to satisfy the culinary and medicinal needs of herself and her family. Cran grew plants largely without pesticides and few chemical fertilizers despite their availability since the late nineteenth century. As I described in the previous chapter, Cran recalled war time food restrictions and economic constraints that had an impact on how she lived, gardened and wrote about gardening. Overall, however, Cran followed in the footsteps of her frugal and thrifty parents; she grew edibles, harvested wild and cultivated fruits, and preserved whatever she could to fill her pantry. In 1938 when her nephew Dudley visited Coggers and assisted her with numerous tasks, Cran described how much she harvested and preserved, in part, because berries were so plentiful in her garden and within the hedgerows of the nearby countryside:

Severe late spring frosts had ruined most of the apples, plums and pears but the berried fruits were superb. Raspberries, loganberries, strawberries...and when it came to blackberries they were gathered by the ton! I made jam of them in quantities, with bullace, with apple, jelly of crab-apples enriched in colour and fragrance by the good blackberries. The hedges of all the lanes and fields were purple with them. We had every kind of pie and pudding; I made blackberry vinegar as well and bottled them in syrup so that the larder shelves looked very complacent, well-found and snug (1940, 152).<sup>1</sup>

Considering the time period in which Cran wrote this, it is not surprising that she felt the necessity to preserve fruits and vegetables. Again, Cran's gardening practices likely reflected her upbringing, as well as the practices she observed among her neighbours and friends in the villages she lived in as a garden writer. As I have argued in previous chapters, Cran valued vernacular home and garden skills, knowledge, traditions, and recipes, shared between gardeners, homemakers, neighbours, and family members. Cran passed on what she learned from her own experiences, as well as from other gardeners, to her readers. This allowed (and continues to allow) future gardeners and homemakers to appreciate the benefits of having a domestic garden in the city, suburb, or countryside.

### **Natural habitats for plants and wildlife in the garden**

The British had (and continue to have) a longstanding fascination with the natural history and botany of the countryside,<sup>2</sup> and Cran's knowledge and appreciation of native flora and fauna can be attributed to what she learned both at home and through formal schooling.<sup>3</sup> In her adult life as a garden writer, Cran paid particular attention to wildflowers and animal life that resided in and around her garden; this was particularly evident in her sensitivity towards birds she observed in her garden in Kent (see 1924; 1929a; 1929b). Cran described how she fed birds and tended to their needs throughout the seasons by providing a sunbath and a "bird table," filled with seeds, bacon rinds, overripe fruit, and bread crumbs (1925, 125-127; 1929a, 82-83; 1929b, 118). As she wrote, she encouraged her readers to feed birds in their own gardens, indicating that "each

one of us can, if we will, make a small refuge and resting place, a tiny sanctuary, for the birds, around our home..." (1929a, 79). While she described watching and observing other wildlife as well, she indicated that birds, in particular, found ideal nesting areas in her garden, and along the banks of the larger pond on her property. Cran attempted to inspire readers to create what present-day garden writers and bird-watchers refer to as a "bird friendly" garden (Roth 2000, 26). In the following passage, Cran reflected on the birds who visited her garden:

I will admit that the bird table and the bird-bath are to me as full of interest and adventure as any part of the garden; the pond where the fish are and the moorhens and the Kingfisher come is delightful, but not so absorbing as the 'refectory' near the house windows, where the jays and magpies, robins, thrushes, wagtails, blackbirds, tits, finches and starlings shout themselves hoarse, push, scramble and squabble, snatch and twitter, all of a bustle to bag the best bits (1929a, 79, 80).

In response to the many kinds of living creatures she observed, Cran stressed that readers should use natural gardening methods to avoid harming birds, mammals, and beneficial insects that might reside in their own gardens. She implored her readers to apply compost and manure to improve their garden soil, rather than chemical fertilizers and to avoid pesticides as much as possible. Although Cran explained that she was well aware that birds could inflict damage on fruit trees and flowering plants, she emphasized the valuable role they played (and continue to play) in ridding the garden of mosquitoes, grubs, wireworms, houseflies, and other garden pests.

Voicing similar thoughts, nearly eighty years later, American garden writer Katherine Whiteside comments in her appropriately titled book, *The Way We Garden Now*, that "birds are nature's own bug zappers and are part and parcel of a well-balanced,



organic environment" (2007, 64). While Whiteside provides suggestions on growing "bird food plants," Cran advised gardeners in her fifth gardening book, *Wind-Harps*, to forego showy plants for varieties that would provide food and shelter for birds in small or large gardens:

Pursuing the idea of a bird sanctuary in the garden, another kindness is to plant by preference those shrubs and trees which bear berries for them, foregoing perhaps the newer, expensive fashionable plants for the homely beauty of hawthorn, elder, yew, berberis...(1929a, 82).<sup>4</sup>

As Cran observed, however, birds will nest just about anywhere if they "have come to look upon a certain garden as home" which likely helped to assure her readers that birds could be happy in nearly any kind of garden (1929a, 82). Cran wholeheartedly welcomed nesting songbirds not only because they ate insects and grubs but because they provided music and movement in her garden. Importantly, Cran was also appreciative of birds of prey who visited, hunting for small mammals like voles and rabbits which, she admitted, devoured plants she valued in her garden. While not every gardener would have had the opportunity to see owls close-up, even in England in the late 1920s, Cran's descriptions of their sounds and movements would have educated her readers on how to observe and respect these birds in the garden or in the countryside:

Long-eared owls are making their cat sounds; that shows they are coming out to forage now--they always mew before they start their hunting.... From the distant woods, where he is after rabbits and moles comes the beautiful, mysterious quivering note of the big tawny owl; and, as he suddenly swoops down from the barn, sounds the unearthly shriek of the white owl chasing voles and rats.... All this owl-activity is good for the garden. Mice eat up crocus corms...moles destroy the lawns and toss up asparagus roots; the little bank-voles eat the roots of the pond-side plants and drive me sometimes almost wishing I had never tried to make a garden; rabbits eat pretty well everything.... They are, beyond words, a

garden pest. But now, on a still white night like this, amid the sounds of the owls a-hunting, I am driven to a comfortable contemplation of the many useful 'helps' which work with strong jaws and beaks, to keep these and other plagues in bounds, and our gardens swept and garnished (1929b, 153-155).

Her recognition of the role that all birds played in the garden and the wild reflected her awareness of the delicate ecological balance that existed even in small gardens.

As her writing often revealed, Cran preferred the antics of birds over other creatures but she did highlight how certain insects were especially helpful. For example, lady beetles and the larvae of lacewings devoured aphids, the worst pests of flowering plants in the garden. Cran was also keen to enlighten readers on more unusual insects that destroyed pests, such as the glow-worm, whose larvae particularly enjoyed a feast of snails and slugs (1929b, 157). Cran wrote of the crucial role that bees, and other pollen bearers played in the productivity of fruiting plants and trees in the garden and orchard. In the 1920s, Cran would not have been fully aware of the devastation that pesticides would eventually have on pollen bearers and on the environment as a whole. Despite this, her appreciation for the intricate relationship that existed between birds, insects, plants, and mankind is evident in the following passage:

Sprays applied for the destruction of pests of fruit-trees at times when these other essential insects visit the trees will naturally slaughter friends and foes alike; to kill the visiting pollen-bearers is to invite, therefore, a severe loss in our crops of fruit (1924, 170-171).

As Cran reiterated throughout her books, the key to having healthy plants was healthy soil, stating that "If I wanted to have a happy garden, I must ally myself with my soil; study and help it to the utmost, untiringly....Always, the soil must come first" (1940,

90). Cran advocated that gardeners create the best possible soil for their plants by adding sufficient amounts of well-rotted manure, humus, and compost. In her efforts to create excellent soil for her garden, Cran described how she requested certain ingredients as gifts from her family in lieu of more conventional presents, recalling how one Christmas she asked for “a half dozen loads of manure” (1913, 10).

Once Cran had done everything in her power to give plants what they needed, she was determined not to spend time caring for “sickly, ailing plants” that refused to prosper (1929b, 216). This was especially true for roses, one of Cran’s favourite garden plants. Although she adored dozens of rose species and varieties, Cran revealed to her readers that she would not coddle any of them if they did not thrive in her garden:

I like to give my plants a good chance in life...the best soil, the aspect they prefer, pure air and the necessary moisture. After that I expect them to go ahead and thrive content, and not expect me to sit up with hot water bottles and gruel; washing their limbs at unseemly intervals with nauseous chemicals (1929b, 216).

Cran confessed that she struggled to rid her roses of black spot, mildew, and aphids until she began applying a natural insecticide called Keatings’ powder, which was a Pyrethrum-based product sold in packets and tins in Britain beginning in the 1860s.<sup>5</sup> Importantly, the Pyrethrum daisy (*Tanacetum cinerariae folium*) contains oil bearing glands on the surface of the flower heads; these are dried, ground, and applied as a spray on plants as a natural insecticide against aphids, leafhoppers, spider mites, ticks, and cabbage worms, among others.<sup>6</sup> Although Pyrethrum-based sprays and powders are used primarily by organic farmers and gardeners today, in Cran’s time, Keatings’ Powder was advertised to kill “beetles, fleas, and moths,” meaning that this product was effective not

only in the garden but in the home.<sup>7</sup> While Cran found that Keatings' Powder worked effectively (1929b, 221), she was not averse to using the traditional, yet time-consuming, method of picking and squishing hundreds of aphids, frog-hoppers, and caterpillars off her roses by hand (1929b, 222-223).

Cran created concoctions of fresh and dried herbs or spices to rid her garden and her home of pests and diseases. She conveyed the following information to her readers in *The Garden of Experience*:

Tansy is a very acrid herb, which flies abhor with violent distaste, so that a bunch of it hung in the larder or kitchen is of great use in keeping them away in the hot summer days (1921, 199).

As I have already described in Chapter Five, Cran often shared her fascination in the origins, customs, and practices surrounding herbs with her readers. Attempting to inspire women readers who might lack herbal knowledge, Cran directed her interest in herbs to all "good housewives" by explaining how specific herbs grown in the garden had beneficial properties for use in the home. As mentioned above, Cran advocated an herb mixture that she used to repel moths from stored clothing. Although she provided the recipe to her readers for free in her book, she did eventually produce packets of *The Marion Cran Moth Mixture* which she sold to individuals who requested it by mail.<sup>8</sup> She claimed:

It may not be amiss to repeat again the recipe for herb mixture, which keeps moth away from clothes and furs. It is much more pleasant than the usual smelly naphthaline [sic] balls that I feel a pleasure in making it better known, especially as it is quite as effective. Take half a pound each of dried rosemary and mint, four ounces each of tansy and thyme, and two tablespoonfuls of fresh ground cloves. Mix these all well together, store in a well-closed box, and scatter the powder

lavishly among the things to be stored, in the proper season. No moth will go near them (1920, 198).<sup>9</sup>

What Cran was sharing with her readers was the suggestion that they could become more self-sufficient by using herbs and spices grown in the garden or on hand in the pantry. Twenty-first century garden writers echoed Cran's approach, encouraging the use of herbs and basic household amenities, such as soap and vegetable oil, to eliminate destructive insects. In *The Way We Garden Now*, Whiteside recommends using soapy water with vegetable oil to spray on aphid and caterpillar infestations, as well as suggesting cinnamon to deter ants from coming into the home and the garden (2007, 54-56). While some of Cran's ideas and methods mirror that of a twenty-first century garden writer, there is no evidence to indicate that Cran had any direct influence on later garden writers. What we do know, however, is that many present-day gardeners and homeowners appreciate the kind of gardening and housekeeping methods that Cran promoted. They have turned to earlier methods, such as the use of simple, household items like soap, baking soda, spices, and dried herbs, to naturally eradicate home and garden pests and diseases.

Besides her moth mixture, we have little documentation to indicate how widely Cran's ideas, recipes, or methods were implemented by readers, but I have discovered small pieces of evidence to suggest that Cran did have an impact on some readers during the period in which she was a successful writer. Copies of Cran's books often contain marginalia inscribed by former owners that indicate how her writing influenced them. In the margins of her books, former owners have scribbled notes and thoughts, often leaving

comments such as “nice variety” or “placed in front border” to refer to specific plants Cran suggested, that they used in their own gardens.<sup>10</sup> On some occasions, long forgotten slips of paper in between or notes written on the pages of Cran’s books suggest a profound influence. In a battered first edition of Cran’s *The Squabbling Garden* (1934), the original owner of the book wrote lists of birds and animals on the end pages of the book (figure 6.1). This particular copy of *The Squabbling Garden* was inscribed to a Mr. and Mrs. Hogg, in December of 1941. Although a supposition on my part, I suggest that following a New Year’s resolution to record her own garden sightings, Mrs. Hogg began to create a list of “birds seen in our garden” which included magpies, swallows, house martins, song thrushes, pied wagtails, robins, wrens, chaffinches, linnets, and a brown owl, among others (1941, as found in my copy of Cran 1934, end pages). In addition, Mrs. Hogg penned another list titled, “animals seen in our garden.” She recorded foxes, rabbits, shrews, moles, hedgehogs, frogs, newts, and weasels, as indicated by her more specific comment about the “stoat in adjacent field” (1941, as found in my copy of Cran 1934, end pages). Sightings of stoats (*Mustela erminea*) would have been more remarkable as these small, carnivorous mammals hunt in a zigzag pattern that mesmerizes unsuspecting prey, such as rabbits.<sup>11</sup>

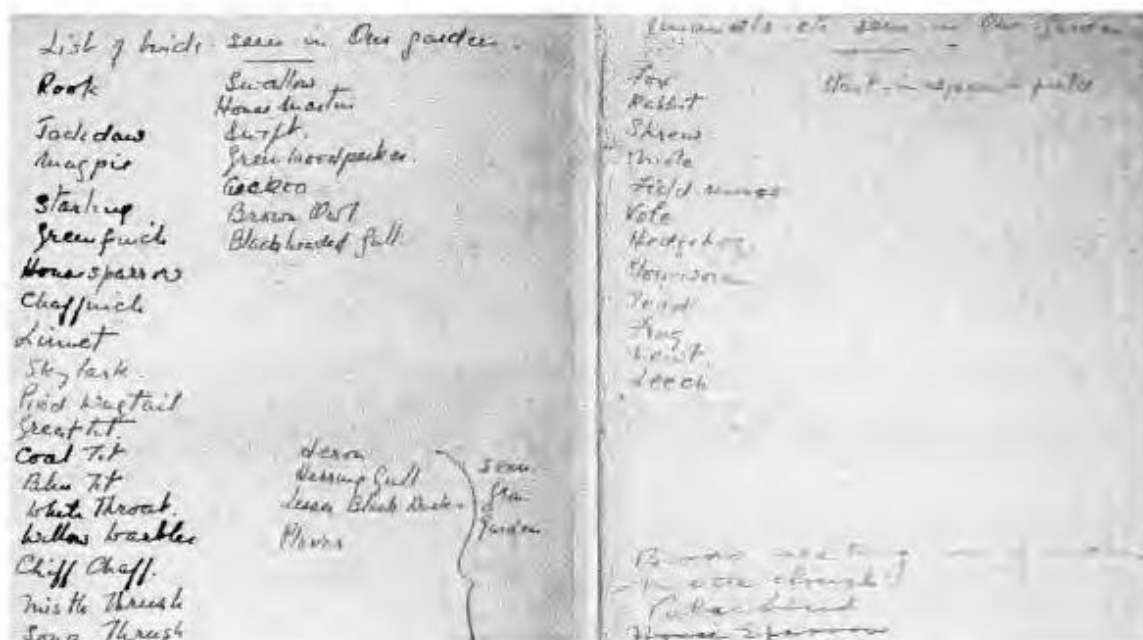


Figure 6.1 - Marginalia on the end pages of *The Squabbling Garden* (1934) written by a Mrs. Hogg, with a few notes by her husband in 1941. This book is now owned by Cynthia Boyd. Photograph by Cynthia Boyd.

At the very bottom of one end page, she or her husband wrote, in a much less legible hand, “birds nesting in garden” which included the mistle thrush, blackbird, house sparrow, dunnoek, wren, linnet, chaffinch, and blue tit (Mr. and Mrs. Hogg 1941, as found in my copy of Cran 1934, end pages). In her books, Cran mentioned sightings of most of these birds, insects, and mammals in her garden which might suggest that Mrs. Hogg read several of Cran’s books and was inspired to record what she observed in her own garden.

### Cran’s legacy and the meanings of plants and gardens

For Marion Cran, plants held historical and emotional significance because of

their connection to people and events of both the past and present. She promoted plants that she had experience growing as well as those she remembered, and thus, she inspired her readers (and wireless listeners) to consider how plants could elicit meanings in their own lives. Cran believed that garden spaces were made not only to create beauty or provide food, but they were (and are still) intended to capture and record memories, experiences, traditions, and beliefs indicative of people's everyday lives. Cran motivated her readers by weaving together recollections and anecdotes surrounding the plants she grew and the gardening techniques she practiced. As explored in the last chapter, Cran drew on her past and present experiences to communicate what home and garden spaces meant to her as well as what she anticipated they meant in the lives of her female readers.

In "Objects of Memory: Material Culture as Life Review," Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett illustrated how individuals organize and arrange objects in everyday life (1989, 329). In her analysis, she recognized that specific kinds of objects can be defined through the following categories: material companions, souvenirs and mementos, memory objects, collectables, ensembles, or miniatures (1989, 330-334). Although Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's study focuses on people's memories through such objects as paintings, boat models, doll houses, and quilts, I believe her categorization can be adequately applied to living objects, like plants and garden spaces, whose creation, arrangement, and rearrangement also "encode memories and stimulate life review" (1989, 329). Considering the variety of plants that Cran experimented with in her garden, one could argue that she encouraged readers to acquire plants as a set of collectables. However, because Cran



described plants and gardens associated with memories and experiences, I have applied Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's terms, "souvenirs and mementos" and "ensembles" to define these living objects of memory (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989, 331, 333). In her study, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett recognized how a souvenir or memento can serve as a "reminder of an ephemeral experience or [an] absent person" (1989, 333). In her books, Cran remarked on the fragrances of flowers and herbs that especially evoked memories of childhood gardens and early life experiences. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explains that souvenirs and mementos "signify particular events, people, and experiences..." [which] are rooted in the history of a life and have "sentimental value" (1989, 333) and as I have indicated previously, Cran cultivated plants that represented a connection to her family, especially to her father who was an avid gardener. Even if her readers had never grown the plants she spoke of, or lived in or near gardens she described, they could probably identify with her memories and associations surrounding the plants she or members of her family had grown and enjoyed.

In one of her later gardening books, *The Garden Beyond* (1937b), Cran wrote of visiting her daughter, Lesley, in Kenya in the late 1930s. Cran wrote of recognizing a fragrance coming from the carnations her daughter had growing in the garden. Although Cran herself grew similar varieties in Kent, she associated the carnations with the ones she remembered from her childhood. In the following passage, Cran reminisced about the carnations by describing how her father propagated them with the assistance of his wife and children:

...part of my youth is stored for me in clove-scented carnations...memories of the old Rectory at Little Billing....Well do I remember the July business of 'layering'.... I would see the dear old Parson pottering about surveying his loam, and leaf-mould...and most treasured of all, his pile of very, very ancient cow manure.... From these condiments he would mix up the carnation compost just in the way mother mixed materials to make a cake.... The earth under the chosen carnation plants was gently loosened and about an inch deep of the special compost...spread round. This was the rooting medium into which his layers were to strike. About this juncture there was a demand for hairpins...They were the implements with which the women of his household...kept up huge hot masses of hair piled on their heads.... Then came the actual layering. Father would take hold of a healthy shoot which had *not* flowered and carefully cut away all the leaves on it up to a joint about midway between its tip and the parent stem. That joint was then cut part way through itself, the shoot bent so that it pointed upwards, and the half-cut joint pegged with a hairpin or two firmly into the nice compost soil placed below to receive it...we would water all the good work with a very fine syringe...(1937b, 95-97).

These plants signified memories of Cran's father and his gardening skills. Although her childhood garden no longer existed and her father had long since died, the carnations and their fragrance acted as tangible reminders of the past; they were "mementos" in Cran's own garden, and that of her daughter. By sharing a recollection of her father's gardening methods for "layering" carnations, readers of the period would have benefited from this practical information while simultaneously identifying the connection Cran made between plants, and home and garden memories of everyday life.

Based on her day-to-day experiences, Cran wrote of the fruit trees, vegetables, and herbs that typically flourished in her garden providing food and comfort to herself and her family throughout the seasons. Cran revealed an intense appreciation for plants and trees that had lived for decades at Coggers, but she was also moved to despair when they died or were destroyed because of stormy weather. In her book, *Wind Harps*, Cran recalled

how a favourite apple tree blew down in a gale just before Christmas. In the recollection that follows, Cran shows how this tree evoked several layers of meaning through its long time service to her and her family (figure 6.2):



Figure 6.2 - Cran and her daughter, Lesley examining an apple tree at Coggers in the late 1930s. Marion Cran Album Collection. Courtesy of R.H.S. Lindley Library, London.

We were very grieved to see it lying there, for it was a gallant old tree, and we had grown used to living with it; we liked watching the birds which built in the holes in its trunk. We kept all the wood of it carefully for the Yule-tide fires, and now here it was passing from our keeping in a blaze of splendour, in beautiful apple wood fires.... I looked sorrowfully at the grey lichened bark and the fruitful buds. They would burst no more in a cloud of rose against the blue April sky; swing us no more beneath the boughs through lazy midsummer moons.... I do not know the name of the apple our tree had borne; it was a very old kind; the fruit had a golden colour...it ripened early, with a sharp flavour infinitely refreshing on a hot day in early autumn, and it cooked well. It had been a good giving tree...and its ashes have gone back to the garden to enrich it with the potash that young growing things adore (1929a, 47-49).

Like many English gardeners, Cran recognized the importance of growing apples for cooking and for eating; the apples growing on Cran's tree were what one garden historian defined as "dual-purpose cooker-eaters" (Quest-Ritson 2001, 194).<sup>12</sup> This reminiscence of a beloved apple tree indicates how plant and garden memories played an important role within Cran's *own* home and garden experiences rather than just from recollections associated with her past. As this passage demonstrates, plants as "mementos" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989, 331) evoked layers of meaning in gardeners' present lives because of the memories, stories, and traditions shared among family, friends, and fellow gardeners. The following passage provides yet another example of how Cran often indicated that plants figured prominently in her life and that of her readers:

Much of the wonder that wells like a constant spring of happiness in gardening streams from the human touch that brought each plant to our care; and to each one of us there will hang some thread that links it in a web of associations of memory (1934, 71).

Throughout her lifetime, Cran grew plants and created garden spaces that represented recollections, anecdotes, and gardening traditions that had been part of her experiences as a homemaker and gardener. These cultivated garden spaces could be considered similar to an individual's repertoire of fairy tales, handmade chairs or hooked rugs, for as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett noted, "repertoires, whether of songs, tales or other expressive forms, are examples of accumulations made over a lifetime. Their powers of evocation derive from the associations that accumulate with them" (1989, 329).

Over the forty year period that Cran gardened and wrote about gardening, it was

the fruit orchards and herb gardens, perennial borders and lily ponds she maintained, along with the memories and experiences she associated with these plants and garden spaces, that formed her repertoire as a gardener. I suggest that in re-arranging and re-making her property, Cran created garden spaces that represented small environments or what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett described as "ensembles" (1989, 333). These ensembles of edible and ornamental garden spaces encapsulated her needs and interests as well as those of her family. And while Cran was influenced by childhood gardens and later, the cottage garden style re-discovered by Jekyll and Robinson, she encouraged her readers to maintain garden spaces that reflected individuality based on their own experiences and gardening traditions. Once, in recognition of the subtle differences she observed in the small gardens she viewed from a train en route to Waterloo Station, she remarked "I believe one's garden is one's self" (1925, 67-68. This kind of thinking very likely inspired her readers to believe that each and every garden reflected the personality of the gardener who created it.

In her study titled "The Expression of Tradition in Perennial Gardening in St. John's, Newfoundland," folklorist Penny Houlden recognized how the women gardeners she interviewed valued certain flowering perennials because these plants evoked memories of their mothers, who often tended the gardens these women remembered from their childhood (1985, 227-229). Houlden indicated that the women gardeners "brought particular plants from their mothers' garden" which "heightened the private, emotional force of the garden form by including [these] specific tokens of their past" (1985, 231).

Although Houlden recognized that these women were influenced by traditional gardens reflective of their families in Newfoundland and in Great Britain, she also concluded that they achieved a sense of identity through the process of creating their *own* gardens, and thus, their own gardening traditions (1985, 226).

By assembling a garden to accommodate plants that may or may not survive, a gardener's ensembles are truly ephemeral, but the memories and recollections they evoke, last a lifetime. As I indicated in the previous chapter, with regard to culinary and medicinal herbs like parsley and chamomile, Cran was often inspired to write about a plant's history and folklore, as well as its personal connection to her life. For Cran, "each single plant and tree has its story" (1925, 126). Additionally, she remarked, "I can walk along a path and read a dozen delightful stories as I go--stories of friends and of strangers who are unknown friends where all the world beside would only see...quite ordinary flowers leading to the front door" (1929b, 168).

One Christmas when Cran was still living and gardening in Surrey, she received a small plant as a present from a friend who gardened in New Brunswick. Although at first not particularly keen to receive such a gift, Cran recalled her memory of that plant and how it brought her continual pleasure long after she had moved and began gardening in Kent:

The parcel was hung upon the tree with all the other gifts as usual, it had been prodded and eyed and guessed about...and when its turn came to be untied, amid a hush of curiosity...some dark-green leaves and damp mould had a rather dowdy, almost depressing effect among the gaudily coloured cards, bottles of perfume...stockings, books...which made up the rest of my pile. There was a card with it bearing the name of a friend...and the words 'Pansies for thoughts they say

--keep mine' .... I put it away, thinking I must heel the plants in; I felt most remote from gardening in a flimsy gay cracker cap and all! The short winter day was closing in, but just before the light went, I managed to plant the pansies in a clean border...under the study window. Christmas passed and a New Year hurried after it, the months raced on, the books were all read, the perfumes used, the stockings worn to ladders.... All the pretty presents came to an end and were forgotten - except the pansies; they grew and spread and broke into sheets of clear blue colour; they caught the eye of all who passed the study window.... The 'thoughts' of our friend! In time they multiplied and absorbed into the garden scheme.... Through every change of circumstance that living greeting has made a sweetness round my home (1929a, 51-53).

As her descriptions and anecdotes demonstrate, Cran found layers of meaning through plants that linked her to other gardeners and homemakers. When she received plants from friends and fellow gardeners, Cran sometimes placed these plants in "muddle beds" and other, temporary, garden spaces, paying little attention to their arrangement until they had become better established. While she realized this process of garden making lacked organization and formality, for her it did "make the garden a book of delightful and amusing memories..." (1929b, 206).

While viewing the garden ensembles of others, she was sympathetic to the challenges they faced whether they gardened as far away as Cape Town or as near as Salisbury. In Chapter Five, I described how Cran shared a particular periwinkle with thousands of listeners from her radio broadcasts. There is also evidence that Cran exchanged plants on a more intimate level with fellow gardeners. In *Gardens of Character* (1940), Cran included passages from several letters written by a Mr. Blaxley, who had had the opportunity to visit Cran and her husband, Fergus, at Coggers. From this correspondence, readers can appreciate how Cran inspired other gardeners to

recognize layers of meaning in the cultivation of plants and the creation of garden spaces.

In June of 1933, Mr. Blaxley remarked upon his own gardening experiences while remembering the visit he and his wife had made to Benenden:

...but Coggers still remains to me, of all gardens the most enchanting. I am in no danger of forgetting, for reminders are around me. We have had this spring a vase of your namesake iris delighting us with its succession of bloom; and outside on the little allotment garden, drifts of your forget-me-nots looked very charming (1940, 168).

Mr. Blaxley's recollection of Cran's generosity suggests that plants from Coggers acted as mementos in his own North Hampton garden. Significantly, Mr. Blaxley also noted how he was encouraged by Cran and her gardening practices to share his plants with her and with gardeners in his own community:

October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1935. I am sending you some plants of a dwarf red sweet William which I thought you might like. I had several slips given me this summer and was told it was quite hardy. Perhaps you have it, but anyway it will do to swap with. I also enclose some pink *Lavatera* seed of which I've harvested a lot this year...you will be interested to learn that the tulips you gave me gave 185 blooms this year. They were all given away so I passed the sunshine on. Our friends particularly like the striped and broken varieties you favour (1940, 168-169).

As these letters reveal, Cran enabled fellow gardeners to appreciate how plants functioned in their home and garden lives. Prompting recollections of friends and family or of past events and experiences, plants and garden spaces have been and continue to be expressive forms that represent memories and traditions that in turn create a community of gardeners. In his correspondence Mr. Blaxley commented on one of Cran's books and thanked her "for the further instalment of happenings at Coggers...I dearly love these intimate studies of home life, everyday life" (1940, 168-169). For Mr. Blaxley and many



other gardeners who read her writing, Cran was not only a source of advice on gardening matters; she encouraged others to see layers of meaning associated with plants in their own garden spaces.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes that ensembles are loosely organized collections or they can encompass an “entire environment” (1989, 333). As ensembles, gardens are not only meaningful because of the plants that elicit memories of loved ones or special celebrations, but because sometimes the spaces themselves encourage collaboration among gardeners and other members of a community. Through her study *Yard Art and Handmade Places*, Jill Nokes defined how yard art projects in Texas assembled by individuals became so popular that members of the community wanted to take part in the continual arrangement and re-arrangement of these human-made environments (2010, 13). While not every yard needed to be re-organized, the ones that did were continually being adjusted and re-assembled which attracted the attention and interest of the community. Nokes indicated that:

Organizing the space around the house often became an interactive enterprise in which neighbours contributed objects or efforts to perpetuate the display.... This un-programmed collaboration suggests that these special places express something for the community, even if that something is not verbally articulated or the same for everyone (2010, 14).

Plants that gardeners pass along to each other are similar to the objects given to yard artists for their creations. In Chapter Four, I mention how cottage garden plants continued to exist in the late nineteenth century because people grew them and passed them on despite the Victorian passion for exotic annuals that saturated the market (Scott-

James 1977, 83, 94). As plants are passed from one gardener to another, older and unusual varieties of plants are kept alive not only because of their cultivation but through the memories and recollections that these plants represent.<sup>13</sup> Cran received plants from readers and admirers throughout her career because they wanted to share plants with a fellow gardener but perhaps also because they wanted to have one of their own plants growing in the garden of a popular garden writer. In her writings, Cran invited audience interaction by inquiring if her readers knew of a particular plant variety or a specific technique to avoid certain garden pests or diseases (1925, 114-115; 142-143). Based on her home and garden experiences, Cran encouraged reciprocity between gardeners, which included exchanges in plants but also a sharing of information on how to be better, more informed gardeners and homemakers. Cran's audience felt the need to collaborate in the on-going creation and re-creation of her garden. While the current residents of Cran's former home and garden have been the only ones to re-arrange and/or re-create features on the property, these residents have allowed contemporary readers and gardeners to share their enthusiasm and fascination in Cran, her writing, and her home. In the third and final section of this chapter, I discuss how present-day readers, admirers, and gardeners have continued Cran's legacy into the twenty-first century.

### **The Journey to Coggers**

Known collectively as "Coggers," Cran's former home and garden represents a tangible reminder of Cran and her gardening life for contemporary readers and admirers,

gardeners and homemakers. Since the late 1960s, Coggers has been the residence of Arianwen and Christopher Neve. Because of their keen interest in Cran, her life, and her writing, this couple has enabled visitors to see for themselves where this writer lived, gardened and created a sense of home. As many people have visited Coggers over the past forty years, the Neves have kept a record documenting the names and addresses of guests and visitors, with a few thoughts surrounding the nature of their visits. Without the Neves' recollections of some of the more memorable visitors to Coggers, I would not have been able to fully appreciate how Cran and her writing evoke meaning for contemporary readers.

Although Coggers' architectural features have already been discussed in an earlier chapter, I would like to elaborate further on the history of this house and the property surrounding it. Once known as "Little Walkhurst" until the turn of the century, Coggers is located on Walkhurst Lane in Benenden (Pearson et al. 1994, 12) (figure 6.2). While Cran's friends sometimes referred to Coggers as "Staggers" because they never knew who they might meet when they visited (1940, 28), the name was actually linked to a family who lived there, managing the land when the property was a tenanted, mixed farm of what was and is still, the Hemsted Estate.<sup>14</sup> Coggers was derelict from approximately 1900 until Cran purchased the property in 1920. Although a Grade II listed building today, Coggers was initially restored by Cran and local craftsmen long before the National Trust and other historic preservation organizations existed. Fortunately, Cran was particularly cognizant of vernacular architecture and regional history, otherwise,

Coggers might not have been so accurately preserved for future generations. Without Cran's everyday autobiographies about her home and garden experiences, however, researchers like me would have had very little information to appreciate this woman's dedication to Coggers and the land surrounding it. While Cran brought initial attention to Coggers through her writings, photographs, and broadcasts, there were other writers, journalists, and photographers who enhanced its historical significance by popularizing Coggers as an idyllic cottage retreat (figure 6.3).

In 1930, *Gardening Illustrated* published a feature article depicting the adventures of a writer touring gardens and cottages notable for their "old world charm" (Cran, personal scrapbook, 1913-1934). As the following passage demonstrates, this author's interest in Cran and Coggers was especially poignant:

The picture I had formed in my mind had not deceived me. An old cobblestone path led up to the house, the bell from Andersen's Fairy Tales hung outside the door, and from within came the owner--the traveller, the writer, the home-and-garden lover--who, although busy with the pen, could with pleasure spare time in the interest of gardening.... Very attractive was the cobblestone walk with *Acaena*, *Thymus*, *Arenaria*, and *Helichrysum*...and to make my visit to 'Coggers' perfect, a thunderstorm set in and we had to shelter under the old oak beams in Mrs. Cran's study...(November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1930).<sup>15</sup>



Figure 6.3 – Coggers in 2007. The Neves have changed very little of Cran’s former home and garden. Photograph by Cynthia Boyd.

Six years later in *Strolling Through Cottage England*, writer and illustrator, W. S. Percy, reflected on English cottages such as Coggers: “Another cottage beloved by readers all over the world is that restored cottage in Kent of Mrs. Marion Cran, described so fully in her book *The Story of My Ruin*” (Percy 1936, 90). In the larger village of Cranbrook, near Benenden, the Cranbrook Museum and Archives has several historic postcards, dating from the late 1940s and early 1950s which depict Coggers as one of Benenden’s notable picturesque sites.<sup>16</sup>

While these comments and illustrations highlighted the nostalgic image of Coggers as an old fashioned house surrounded by a cottage garden, Cran remarked in her books that she added several modern amenities to the interior and exterior of the house to make it a more pleasant place to live. Having read Cran’s books, the current owners, Mr.

and Mrs. Neve have attempted to keep Coggers as it was when Cran lived and gardened there in the 1920s and 1930s. Although Christopher Neve has developed a small rose garden and his wife, Arianwen, has chosen to engage even more informal gardening methods than Cran did when she resided at Coggers, the Neves have made few changes with the result that contemporary readers and admirers who visit are usually enchanted by Coggers because it appears as if Cran has never left.

Christopher and Arianwen Neve began living at Coggers in the late 1960s, but Christopher's relationship with Coggers began when he was a small boy. In an interview I conducted on October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2007, Arianwen mentioned that Christopher's mother and stepfather purchased Coggers in 1947, becoming its first permanent residents since Cran lived there. As Arianwen reflected, Christopher had always felt a strong attachment to his childhood home; he established early in their marriage that he wanted very few changes made to Coggers (A. Neve 2007). Despite a few adjustments to the interior of the home made to accommodate their second child, the house is largely unchanged. Several items have remained in the house since Christopher's mother lived there, including a large Elizabethan dining table, and Arianwen recalled how this table had always been meant for Coggers, even in Cran's time. She commented:

When Christopher's mother and stepfather went shopping to furnish the house, they went to some antique shop in Sussex and [they] saw this magnificent table and said that it would be just right for the dining room.... The man [in the shop] said, 'well, I'm sorry it's been reserved...before the war and that lady has not come back but I ought to try and get in touch with her, she lives in Benenden in Kent.' And it was Marion Cran who had reserved the table...and then she had died. He [had] kept it all that time... People in those days did that sort of thing (A Neve 2007; figure 6.4).



Figure 6.4 - Eighteenth century table that Christopher Neve's parents purchased from a shopkeeper who had held the table for Cran during the war. 2007. Photograph by Cynthia Boyd.

Whenever possible, the Neves have tried to furnish their home with items similar to what Cran would have had when she lived at Coggers. The couple has read a number of her books to determine where she placed specific pieces of furniture. A high-backed chair is located directly in front of the immense fireplace and hearth just as Cran described and illustrated the living and dining area in her day (figure 6.5). In the "study" where Cran once wrote, Christopher has placed his desk directly facing the windows, looking out on a flower bed and the lily pond beyond, just as Cran had done (1924, 304). Upstairs, the

crown-post (Cran referred to it as a “King-post”) and transverse tie beam can be seen in the Neves’ master bedroom (Pearson et al. 1994, 12) (figure 6.6); this space was once used as a music room by Cran and Lesley to entertain friends and family (Graeme 2007a).



Figure 6.5 – Interior of Coggers 2007. Within the living and dining room area of Coggers, the Neves continue to use the hearth and fireplace much as Cran did in the 1920s and 1930s. Photograph by Cynthia Boyd.





Figure 6.6 – The crown-post and transverse tie beam in the master bedroom at Coggers. 2007. Photograph by Cynthia Boyd.

Based on Cran's descriptions of an "Easiwork" cabinet (1924, 66-67) she acquired for Coggers, Arianwen has tried for years to find the same kind of cabinet to include in her own kitchen (A. Neve 2007). On one occasion while Arianwen and I ate lunch at Coggers, she vocalized her eternal thanks to Cran for adding a serving-hatch between the dining room and a large pantry area (A. Neve 2007) (figure 6.7). By instructing me to simply place the lunch dishes into the serving-hatch and slide the serving-hatch door in front of them, Arianwen illustrated how Cran made her home more efficient and worry free for herself and future residents and guests (A. Neve 2007). No dishes in sight meant that conversation could continue unabated without a thought to washing up after lunch.

From Cran's perspective, the serving-hatch simply and effectively eliminated "the passage between two doorways" (1924, 66).



Figure 6.7 - Hatchway door and shelving located between the pantry area (shown) and dining room (seen through the shelf openings). 2007. Photograph by Cynthia Boyd.

As Arianwen Neve indicated above, her husband's commitment to Cran's restoration of Coggers was because the house had had an enormous impact on him when he was younger. In light of this, he later stated:

I am always very aware of the fact [that] it was she, who rescued this house when it was completely derelict. And because I loved it so much when I was growing up.... I always wanted to keep it more or less as Marion Cran made it (C. Neve 2008).

The Neves' faithful rendering of Coggers means that for the "Crannies," as Arianwen refers to Cran's admirers and contemporary readers, and researchers, entering the writer's former home and garden is like stepping back in time (A. Neve 2007).

While Cran appealed to an audience consisting predominantly of middle class women, contemporary readers and admirers come from a much broader range of backgrounds: women *and* men, housewives, doctors, gardeners, non gardeners, young, middle aged and retired people. Because the Neves have an intense interest in Coggers and Cran's books, they have tried to be sensitive to others' fascination with this writer and her former home. When I spoke to him in late September, 2008, Christopher provided his own perspective on why Cran's writing and gardening life has appealed to several generations of readers:

Marion Cran's books have had successive audiences really...she does give to quite different generations different sides of her character.... It was particularly noticeable in the 1960s when people became quite keen on her, as a person...as a strong woman and someone who had a sort of romantic life which appealed to them...(C. Neve 2008).

In subsequent years, Christopher indicated that many of the visitors who came to see Coggers "were the children of people who had gone to live in Australia or New Zealand and other places far away...whose mothers' had been very keen on Marion Cran" (C. Neve 2008). Arianwen described one of the early visitors to Coggers in the late 1970s, a young woman from South Africa, whose mother had been an avid reader of Cran's books:

...I remember when my children were small and it was in February...a filthy day, pouring with rain.... I am talking about thirty years ago and we were sitting in

here [the kitchen] doing homework or something. And there was this knock on the door and there was this young woman with a very small child dressed in summer clothes in February...with high heels on, the woman. [She] was soaking wet and she had walked from Tenterden, six, seven miles...she came from South Africa. We got her in, dried her off, fed her, [and] she stayed the night with her baby. She had come all the way from South Africa in order to find Coggers because her mother had known the books and had "Joy of the Ground," in her garden...she stayed a night or two, then we took her to the station. Extraordinary...then, months later, I didn't hear from her, [but] months later, a parcel came through the post which had two glass jars, heavy glass jars full of homemade gooseberry jam all the way from South Africa with a thank you letter. Can you imagine? It was good jam! (A. Neve 2007).

As this passage indicates, Cran obviously made an impression on this woman's mother because of the periwinkle that she had shared with readers and listeners of one of her last broadcasts (1929b, 17-23). In this particular case, however, it appears that the plant served as a memento forging a connection between these two women and the writer, and I believe that the young woman wanted to visit Coggers because her mother might not have had the opportunity to do so.<sup>17</sup> Considering the steps this woman took to visit Coggers, I would suggest that her journey may have allowed her to find a connection to her mother and her childhood garden through a plant "memento" and a home and garden "ensemble" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989, 333). This example demonstrates how the Neves have enabled past and present generations to experience aspects of Cran's home and gardening life. In light of recent scholarship, however, these visits might also demonstrate how Coggers could represent a "place of pilgrimage" (Margry 2008, 18-19) for some individuals connected to Cran through their memories of loved ones and childhood experiences.<sup>18</sup>

With more and more visitors arriving at Coggers in the 1980s and 1990s,

Christopher Neve became concerned that contemporary readers would have built up the property so much that they would be disappointed when they saw the real thing. While both the Neves had changed little in the house, the garden had become, as Christopher indicated, a “very different garden...[for] it retained Marion Cran’s original design with the box hedge and the yew...but Arianwen’s interests were much less [a] formal kind of gardening...” (C. Neve 2008). Christopher recalled that during his mother’s time, she perpetuated “a great deal of bedding out...it was actually very beautiful, my childhood garden, but probably not very like Marion Cran’s garden” (C. Neve 2008). Christopher discontinued the “bedding out” scheme and while he has maintained a rose garden like Cran, he has added more disease resistant varieties that require less maintenance (figure 6.8). In what was once Cran’s fruit orchard, he has had to replace many of the original trees because of disease and weather-related destruction. Arianwen has continued to grow herbs as Cran did, especially lavender (figure 6.9), but she has also improved the ecology of the garden by re-introducing wildflowers and cultivated flower varieties that attract beneficial insects, butterflies, and songbirds (figure 6.10) (C. Neve 2008 and A. Neve 2007). Bearing in mind that Cran appreciated the presence of birds and wildflowers in her garden, Arianwen’s gardening efforts fit seamlessly with Cran’s interests.



Figure 6.8 - *Rosa* 'Tuscany Superb', a rose grown by Christopher Neve in his rose garden at Coggers. 2005. Photograph by Cynthia Boyd.



Figure 6.9 - Just as Cran grew aromatic herbs at Coggers, Arianwen and Christopher Neve enjoy cultivating lavender, among other herbs. 2005. Photograph by Cynthia Boyd.





Figure 6.10 - Arianwen Neve grows old-fashioned favourites like sweet peas (*Lathyrus*) at Coggers, seen here in her flower and herb garden. Behind the sweet peas are the dried flower heads of *Centaurea macrocephalia* (a yellow, globe-shaped daisy) which provides a perch for visiting songbirds. 2007. Photograph by Cynthia Boyd.

As all gardeners realize, a garden is a living thing at the mercy of the elements. At best, a garden is ephemeral; change in the garden is constant and inevitable. Since the late twentieth century, contemporary readers have continued Cran's legacy because of their interest in Coggers, but also because they have heard Cran's voice, describing Coggers, the house, the garden, and the countryside surrounding it, through her everyday autobiographies. Although Cran is now dead and she left this garden decades ago, her



presence is alive, still, in the minds and imaginations of her contemporary readers and admirers.

Regardless of the subtle changes the Neves have made to Cran's various garden spaces and features, visitors have not been disappointed with it or with the house. According to Christopher, Cran's admirers have "very often [been] moved by it" (C. Neve 2008). Christopher recalled the visit of an Australian doctor and his wife who decided to make the journey to visit Coggers after reading Cran's vivid recollection of seeing Coggers again, shortly after she had officially purchased the property (1924, 11-12). The following passage reveals Christopher's recollection of the Australian couple's reaction to Coggers after they had retraced Cran's steps, walking from the village center:

They had got a bus to Benenden and got off opposite the war memorial which they'd recognized from her description...and they'd walked down the lane getting more and more excited and in time, when they came here and saw everything unchanged, they were quite overwhelmed...And I've had the most ecstatic letters from them subsequently, saying it was the best thing they'd ever done (C. Neve 2008).

Some people with a strong, emotional connection to Coggers, have often returned for a second visit. In special circumstances, the return visit represented a journey back after nearly a lifetime away. In September of 1939, a pregnant woman named Barbara, and her three children, were evacuated out of London to live with Cran at Coggers (Cran 1941, 56-57). Barbara's mother had been a school friend of Cran's when they had attended St. Mary's Hall in Brighton, as described in Chapter One (Cran 1941, 56-57). The three young children, Tootie, Patsy and Mary were between the ages of six and nine when they arrived at Coggers' gate. In June of 2006, Tootie, now Mrs. Anne Price, called

the Neves in order to arrange a visit to Coggers after sixty years (C. Neve 2008). What makes this visitor particularly fascinating was the recollections she shared of adventures she and her sisters had at Coggers, as well as her impressions of Marion Cran. In this passage, Christopher described Tootie's memories of Cran along with those of the home and garden spaces:

She was rather tweedy and [she] wore a green cardigan...[she] was full of kindness; her eyes were full of laughter and [she] was extremely enthusiastic. For [us] children, it was a happy time of mad excitement with many theatrical visitors who [we] treated as aunts and uncles. And [we] were thrilled by finding snakes in the ponds (C. Neve 2008).

Tootie recalled Cran's match-boarded cupboards, the delicious smell of stored apples, and the birds in the garden (C. Neve 2008). The children's visit to Coggers also left quite an impression on Cran, for she included a chapter about their stay in her last book, *Hagar's Garden* (1941). Cran remarked that "Mary, Tootie, Patsy and I had little spots of fun together, [and] they 'helped' with the housework..." (1941, 60). In addition, Cran recalled making a game out of cooking special treats for their mother, who was feeling poorly; each girl, in turn, was allowed to cook or bake something with Cran's help. Cran wrote of Tootie's stew, "best-end-of-neck with carrots and onions and pearl barley," which was nearly finished when she discovered that the little girl had begun to cut up the carrots with a sharp knife covered in rat poison that she had found in the garden (1941, 62-63). Despite this near disaster, Cran's kindness to Tootie while at Coggers remained with her all of her life. Reflecting back on her first visit to Coggers, Tootie reminisced that it was the "most magical, happiest time in my life" (C. Neve 2008).

For Mrs. Anne Price (Tootie), Coggers represents a whole collection of memories linking home and garden spaces, and special events that she experienced while living at Coggers during the Second World War. Mrs. Price's recollections of Coggers reveal how she remembered this home and garden as a place of comfort and simplicity as well as a place of gaiety and exuberance. As an "ensemble" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989, 333), Coggers connects Mrs. Price with memories of loved ones, adventures, and celebrations.

Cran recognized how Coggers had been the setting for so many of her own life adventures and celebratory events with friends and family. As she recalled in her books, many strangers who visited Coggers often became friends and on a few occasions, guests became so well acquainted that they eventually married and had families because they had first met at Coggers (1929b, 300-302, 1933, 311-312). Shortly before her death, Cran faced a number of financial difficulties that led to her leasing Coggers to a cookery writer and her husband (see 1941).<sup>19</sup> During this period, she resided unhappily in a friend's house in Sussex where she was asked by her publisher to write another gardening book, "a Coggers book, with loam dripping from your hands" (1941, 11). Although she struggled to write *Hagar's Garden*, she indicated throughout this book that memories of Coggers connected her to her home and garden even when she was no longer living there. In effect, Coggers was, for Cran, an ensemble of memories, experiences, and events that, gathered together, could "stimulate life review" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989, 329, 333). Cran recalled:

By rights, I believe this book should be called 'Coggers,' for on reading it through I find it is, more than anything else, the story of love flowing ever faithfully round

a dear old house.... Little did I know in 1913, gaily writing *The Garden of Ignorance*, that I had started the first instalment of an unusual serial story, one that must take all of life to write..." (1941, 11).

For Christopher Neve, especially, Coggers represents an ensemble of memories and experiences that connect him to Cran and her writing, but this home and garden also evoke fond recollections of his mother and stepfather and of his childhood garden. Additionally, they now elicit memories of the Neves' experiences raising their children and special pets, as well as entertaining local brownie troops and leading guided tours of Coggers for charity organizations (A. Neve 2007). For the Neves, the people of the Benenden community, and Cran's admirers everywhere, Coggers links people through several generations, past, present and future. In his analysis of a Northern Irish community, folklorist Ray Cashman emphasizes how individuals maintain displays of material artifacts such as older tools, furnishings, and small outbuildings that represent "reminders of a world in which they were raised but one to which they can never return" (2006, 144). On a similar level, Christopher Neve knows and appreciates that the Coggers he remembers from his childhood is gone forever, but he can re-create and preserve elements of the Coggers that Cran once maintained, if not for himself, for others who are only just discovering Cran and her writings about home and garden experiences. Cashman, through his observations of the assemblages that the Northern Irishmen created, reflected that the "nostalgic practices that these men engaged in, allowed them a sense of control over their immediate environment, despite the inevitability of social and economic change to the region (2006, 146). By preserving Coggers, first Cran and now

the Neves have exercised control over their environment, enabling future generations of homemakers and gardeners a “backward glance” (Cashman 2006, 144) to a simpler time when more of life was lived in and around the home and garden.

Significantly, the Neves have responded to requests from people to visit Coggers often because they or members of their family have read Cran’s books. The Neves’ dedication to the upkeep of Coggers and their compassion for devoted admirers and readers of an early twentieth century garden writer, have inspired the formation of an informal community who perpetuate Cran’s legacy.

There perhaps is a parallel to the collaborative arrangement of a “Fence of Shoes” that folklorist Jeannie Banks Thomas analyzed in Central Colorado for her book, *Naked Barbies, Warrior Joes, & Other Forms of Visible Gender* (2003, 101). Begun by a man named Paco, this Fence of Shoes included cast-off and worn out shoes, boots, sneakers, old dolls and other toys. Over time, friends, neighbours, and complete strangers collaborated in this creation by providing Paco with more shoes or adding their own footwear to the fence themselves. Although initially assembled by Paco to make something unusual by using everyday things, the Fence of Shoes expanded, inspiring members of a community to participate in its continual arrangement and re-arrangement (2003, 102-104). Returning to Nokes’ study of yard art projects in Texas, she recognized that the artists she spoke with--gardeners, housewives, professionals, and blue-collar workers--designed unusual yards and living spaces that expressed their “very personal vision” of what it meant for them to live and belong to that space (2010, 4). These home

and garden spaces “became an interactive enterprise in which neighbours contributed objects or efforts to perpetuate the display” (Nokes 2010, 14). In effect, these yard art spaces enabled the artists as well as members of the community to work together to re-create these spaces.

Unlike the Fence of Shoes in Colorado and the yard art in Texas which were both experienced by visitors in exterior spaces, Coggers has always been a private family residence with an extensive garden. There are no signs directing visitors to Coggers, the Neves do not advertise its existence, and they never receive reimbursement from visitors except an occasional jar of jam or a thank you note. With very few exceptions, the home and garden are only made available to visitors who ask if they can see the property. Christopher also allows especially interested readers of Cran’s work to view the study where she wrote her books. While historic trusts and literary societies allow visitors paid access to famous English women writers’ homes such as those owned by the Bronte sisters, Jane Austen, or Beatrix Potter, there is no one actually living in these homes.<sup>20</sup> The Neves live and garden at Coggers; it is their home. As Christopher remarked, “we’re capable of accommodating the number of visitors we have had, but any more than this...” might become too difficult for he and his wife to manage (C. Neve 2005).

The creator of the Fence of Shoes, Paco commented to Thomas that the fence meant so much to him because of the “sense of community that something like that can create with people that don’t even know each other” (2003, 104) and when visitors come to Coggers, they leave little behind except their impressions which Christopher

documents whenever possible. Like the creator of the Fence of Shoes in Thomas's study, the Neves have inspired a sense of community among present-day readers and admirers which bridges a connection to earlier generations of readers, family, and friends through memories and past experiences. Arianwen Neve indicated that visitors' interest in and enthusiasm for Cran and Coggers has provided both Christopher and herself with an enormous amount of pleasure: "It gives us great satisfaction and of course, we're proud to show them an ancient house...and people are so enthusiastic and so, sort of pleased...and if they can stay for a meal, that's great" (A. Neve 2007). In enabling contemporary readers and admirers the chance to experience Cran's cottage, her orchard, the ponds, and other garden features, the Neves have re-created in Coggers, a tangible connection that forms a bond between Cran and her writing life with readers and admirers who live and garden in the present day.

At the beginning of this chapter, I demonstrated how Cran, in the early twentieth century, wrote everyday autobiographies of plants and gardens in a manner that reflected the concerns of environmentally conscious gardeners in the current century. Although not cognisant of concepts such as sustainability and biodiversity in the 1920s and 1930s, Cran communicated in her writing that she was aware of how her gardening practices and methods would impact her land and the surrounding English countryside. Because Cran valued the presence of wildlife and wildflowers in her garden, her writing encouraged readers to accommodate birds, wild plants, and beneficial insects in their own gardens. By inspiring gardeners and homemakers of an earlier century to use natural methods and

apply local knowledge, Cran formed an ongoing connection with gardeners in the interwar period but also with contemporary gardeners, who aspire to live simpler, more creative lives in the twenty-first century. Like present-day gardeners and homeowners, Cran believed that the garden was multi-functional. She saw it as a space in which to express one's creativity in growing plants and designing gardens, but it was also a space in which to retreat and reflect. Subsequently, Cran expressed how plants as well as home and garden spaces evoked meaning for people, conjuring memories and recollections of older plants, childhood gardens, foodways, friends, family, and special celebrations. Applying Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's categories for "Objects of Memory," I suggest that for Cran and for many of her readers and wireless listeners, plants and garden spaces represented "mementos" and/or "ensembles," that allowed for a connection between past and present memories and experiences (1989, 331, 333).

Currently, Coggers still consists of a carefully preserved fifteenth century cottage, several intertwined garden areas with roses, herbs, and mature flowering shrubs, a small orchard, and two water features within approximately five acres. Coggers is, in every sense of the word, an "ensemble" of home and garden spaces, that is representative of Cran and her gardening life, even in the present century. The Neves, who have occupied and owned Coggers since the late 1960s, have offered contemporary readers and admirers access to Cran's former residence because they themselves are nostalgic for and fascinated by Cran, her home, and her writing. While Cran and her writings have often been overlooked by the majority of garden historians and literary scholars, I believe that



her everyday autobiographical writings of home and garden experiences, memories, and practical advice have encouraged gardeners, would-be gardeners, and homemakers for nearly a century. Eloquently and simply, Cran recognized the thoughts and emotions of every new or experienced gardener when she said: "All I know has been learned from the earth upwards, and the bit of earth to which I constantly return to gauge the efforts of others is my own imperfect garden" (1933, 10). And as a close friend once suggested to Cran, "the garden that needs you now, dear, is everyone's...the world is your garden" (Cran 1937, 310).

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<sup>1</sup> From Peter Scott's helpful book, *Edible Plants of Newfoundland and Labrador*, I have found a number of the same types of edible berries that were/are well known among English gardeners: raspberries (*Rubus idaeus*), bristly blackberries (*Rubus hispidus*), strawberries (*Fragaria species*), and crab-apples (*Viburnum opulus*) (2010, 19, 27, 166). In Coombes, he refers to the loganberry as that named for Harvey Logan (1841-1928), an American judge who raised this particular variety: *Rubus loganobaccus* (1994, 162). Still grown in England, bullaces are varieties of damson plums, that could be purple, blue, gold or green in colour. Dating from as early as the fifteenth century, black bullaces (with blue or purple skins) have been cultivated by gardeners who enjoyed these plums because they ripened later than other fruits and were especially useful for cooking and preserving rather than for simply eating off the tree. Botanically, bullaces are among many species and subspecies of plums referred to as *Prunus x domestica* (Coombes 1994, 152). Cran grew black bullaces in her garden, but I would suspect she also gathered other varieties that grew wild in the countryside (in Surrey and in Kent).

<sup>2</sup> There are innumerable books on British natural history, botany, and the flora and fauna of the countryside, which reflects the continued care and attention the English have always shown for their natural surroundings. Richard Mabey is possibly one of the most well known naturalists and prolific non-fiction writers in Britain for he has educated and encouraged others to appreciate what remains of the English countryside. Mabey's *Food for Free: A Fantastic Feast of Plants and Folklore* has been revised and updated recently as a result of the current interest in carefully harvesting wild plants for culinary and medicinal uses in the home (1972 (repr. 2012)). In addition, his massive study *Flora Britannica* won many prestigious awards and has since been republished to attract an even wider audience (see *Flora Britannica: The Concise Edition*, London: Chatto &

Windus, 1998). Several well known British publication series such as *The Shell Guides* and Batsford's countryside handbooks have inspired amateur naturalists, gardeners, and travellers for decades. I would also suggest that popular naturalists such as Sir David Attenborough have interested viewers and readers in natural history, botany, and animal life in the twenty-first century, especially through his award-winning television production, *Planet Earth: The Complete Series* (2007) and several publications including *The Private Life of Plants* (1995).

<sup>3</sup> As I indicated in Chapter Two, Cran went to school in the late 1880s at St. Mary's Hall, Brighton which was a school originally founded to educate the daughters of poor clergymen.

<sup>4</sup> Common hawthorn, (*Crataegus laevigata*), elder, (*Sambucus racemosa*), common yew, (*Taxus baccata*), and berberis, (*Berberis vulgaris*) all produce berries that would attract birds to the home garden (Coombes 1994, 23, 50, 165, 180).

<sup>5</sup> Information pertaining to Pyrethrum-based products was found through the website [www.sensationpress.com/victorianpestcontrol.htm](http://www.sensationpress.com/victorianpestcontrol.htm) which I accessed on September 16, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> For further details on Pyrethrum daisy and its uses in the garden, please refer to [www.seedholic.com](http://www.seedholic.com) which I accessed on September 16, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Please refer to [www.sensationpress.com/victorianpestcontrol.htm](http://www.sensationpress.com/victorianpestcontrol.htm) for further details on Pyrethrum which I accessed on September 16, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> As was mentioned in Chapter Five, Cran produced mail order packets of this herbal moth mixture in approximately 1929 based on an advertisement that was printed in a newspaper. I found the advertisement in her scrapbook. If she began making small batches for mail order (and advertised it), this mixture had possibly become very popular with her readers and wireless listeners.

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter Five, especially endnote 15.

<sup>10</sup> In this chapter, the marginalia that I mention comes from my own personal copies of Cran's books. I have, on occasion, seen copies of her books in antiquarian bookstores that also contain marginalia within their pages.

<sup>11</sup> Despite their skills as predators, stoats live very short lives because they are often caught and eaten by owls and hawks. For more information, please see [www.bbc.co.uk/nature/life/stoat](http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/life/stoat). I accessed this website on May 17th, 2013.

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<sup>12</sup> Quest-Ritson in *The English Garden: A Social History* (2001), describes how, in the nineteenth century, apples were bred in Britain on a wide scale, more than any other fruit. In 1883, the National Apple Congress decided to hold an exhibition because there would be a bumper crop. The event was successful as apples were transported easily by railway, and the public was informed of the event through the penny post and through a proliferation of gardening magazines. Upwards of 10,000 exhibits of apples--harvested from all over the country--indicates just how many kinds of apples were grown in Britain at that time (2001, 184-185). Again, according to Quest-Ritson, it is a peculiarly "English phenomenon" that apples were cultivated to be excellent cooking apples or good eating apples, and some had both qualities, hence the "dual purpose cooker-eater," like *Malus x domestica* "Blenheim Orange" (2001, 193-194).

<sup>13</sup> Felder Rushing and Steve Bender, in *Passalong Plants* (1993), provide gardening information as well as the history and folklore surrounding older plant varieties that continue to be shared and exchanged through many generations of Southern US gardeners. Just as cottage garden plants were kept alive because labourers and other members of small English villages cultivated these hardy plants in their gardens (see Scott-James 1979, 83), so too have gardeners kept alive older varieties of plants in other areas of the world.

<sup>14</sup> For more information about Benenden, please see the Benenden Amenity and Countryside Society's millenium study on Benenden's history (2000, 26), and a similar document titled *The Landscape of Benenden* by Ernest Pollard and Hazel Strouts (2006) available as a printable document from [www.benendenvillage.org.uk](http://www.benendenvillage.org.uk).

<sup>15</sup> I am not convinced that this journalist knew what he or she was speaking about when providing that list of plants: the only recognizable plants are *Thymus*, the culinary herb, which can be planted as an ornamental and *Helichrysum*, which is a pink daisy that dries well. The others listed here are all perennial plants native to New Zealand. While Cran spent some time there, I cannot imagine that she was able to bring back all these plants and grow them successfully at Coggers, and frankly, she did not write about these plants as being in her garden, except *Thymus* and *Helichrysum*. As this article featured several other houses and gardens, perhaps the writer mixed up what grew in which garden. Regardless, he was fascinated with Coggers from a very sentimental and nostalgic perspective!

<sup>16</sup> In September, 2008, I visited Cranbrook Museum and Archives in Cranbrook, Kent, about a twenty minute taxi ride from Benenden. Here, I spoke with archivist Betty Carmen who allowed me access to the Museum's collection; I was able to view a selection of postcards depicting heritage properties in Benenden, of which Coggers had

been featured. Although I was not able to photograph the postcards I accessed at the Cranbrook Museum and Archives, the Neves had a very faded copy of a postcard featuring Coggers from the 1950s.

<sup>17</sup> In her book, *The Joy of the Ground*, Cran mentioned meeting a South African landscape gardener, Miss Beghin, who visited with Cran at Coggers in the late 1920s (1929b, 23-25). It is possible that this is the mother of the young woman who arrived at Coggers' doorstep in the 1970s. It is perhaps only coincidental that this Miss Beghin left Coggers with a cutting of "joy of the ground" periwinkle according to Cran (1929b, 24-25).

<sup>18</sup> See Peter Jan Margry, *Shrines and Pilgrimages in the Modern World: New Itineraries into the Sacred*, especially Chapter 1, "Secular Pilgrimage: A Contradiction in Terms?" (2008, 18-20). Unfortunately, most of the visitors to Coggers that the Neves' described are no longer living and they have lost touch with them over many intervening years. The Neves indicated that only a few visitors have returned to Coggers for additional visits (C. Neve, personal communication, September 23, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> The cookery writer was Elizabeth Craig, known for her practical books on household management and gardening in the 1940s through the 1960s (A. Neve, personal communication, October 12, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> The National Trust allows access to Beatrix Potter's home and garden called Hill Top in the Lake District village of Sawrey. This quaint little cottage and medium sized cottage garden is the most visited property owned and operated by the National Trust (and maintained by dozens of volunteers). I visited Hill Top in 2008 along with a happy, chattering group of Japanese tourists who, in so many words, indicated that they felt as strong an attachment to Beatrix Potter and Hill Top as they did towards Lucy Maud Montgomery's fictional character Anne Shirley and the heritage property, "Green Gables," in Cavendish, Prince Edward Island. With regard to the Bronte family home in Haworth and Jane Austen's celebrated homes in Bath and Chawton, these properties are not operated by the National Trust, but rather by privately funded literary societies. They are extremely popular among tourists, literary scholars, "Austenites," and Bronte followers, and without the revenue from thousands of visitors, these homes and heritage properties, would not continue to exist. For more information on these women writers and their homes, please see the following: Judy Taylor, *Beatrix Potter at Hill Top* (2005); Irene Gammel, *Looking for Anne of Green Gables: The Story of L.M. Montgomery and Her Literary Classic* (2008); Maggie Lane, *A Charming Place: Bath in the Life and Novels of Jane Austen* (2003); Penelope Hughes-Hallett ed., *The Illustrated Letters of Jane Austen* (1990); and Ann Dinsdale, *The Brontes at Haworth* (2006).

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

In this thesis, I have explored the work of English garden writer Marion Cran as a form of everyday autobiography. Cran spent most of her adult life living, gardening, and writing about her home and garden experiences in Surrey and Kent in the early twentieth century. Within the fabric of her writings, she wove a narrative of women's lives through plants and gardens, cookery and herbal lore that evoked layers of meaning and "encoded memories" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989, 329) which were reflective of her own life and that of other women readers, gardeners and homemakers.

Here I have examined and interpreted Cran and her writings by building on the scholarship of folklore and literature, women's folklore and everyday autobiography, and garden history. From the perspective of folklore and literature, I have demonstrated how Cran embraced her own cultural background--her family folklore, customs, and beliefs--by incorporating it into her writings. It was a practice consistently followed by other fiction and non-fiction writers (Georges and Jones 1995, 3-5; Dorson 1957; Lewis 1976). In determining that Cran appealed to women readers, I have focused on how certain themes were evident in Cran's books, specifically: community and fellowship in gardening practices; implicit coding within women's lives; and female performativity and women's sense of empowerment and resourcefulness through the creation of a home and garden.

At every opportunity, Cran offered encouragement and inspiration to gardeners and non gardeners alike within the pages of her books. Her descriptions of plants and her instructions on how to grow them were eminently useful, and yet, they were devoid of technical and scientific jargon that might have deterred potential gardeners. Cran wrote from the practical standpoint that gardeners should work within their own gardens, dirtying their own hands and knees in order to become better gardeners. With common sense and boundless enthusiasm, Cran conveyed to her readers that creating a garden was an ongoing process combining both skill and patience. From a folklorist's perspective, I recognize how garden making, as part of material culture, incorporates not only an end product, but the people and the process necessary to create and sustain the product (Walls 1990, 107-108). Through the process of gardening, people maintain and continually alter garden spaces to meet their needs as well as the needs and interests of members of their families and communities. While I will never know to what extent Cran's gardening advice and suggestions were utilized by her readers, I understand through my own gardening experiences that whatever information we gather about gardening through reading or observing and learning from others, we alter and rearrange this information to meet our own specific home and garden requirements.

As part of everyday life, gardening practices, skills, and knowledge have usually been passed on through oral transmission from one person to another. Unlike some forms of folklore, however, gardening traditions and plant lore have not always been passed among members of the same family or even among members of the same community

because all gardeners, the world over, share tips and techniques and exchange plants with other gardeners. In her books, Cran conveyed an appreciation for how gardening created fellowship. She specified how gardening advice, bee keeping skills, and herbal knowledge were passed on to her by neighbours and villagers. From her books and personal correspondence, I have discovered how Cran recognized a connection among gardeners for she often described how her own readers (and listeners) were part of a “community of gardeners” (1913, 24-25; 1924, 79-81; 1929b, 19-23, 236-245). Within the written context in which she shared what she had learned from other gardeners with her readers, Cran indicated how a community or a fellowship of gardeners continued because people passed on information and knowledge to others. In a collection of writings based on her “Garden Talks” radio program aired on the BBC, Cran included a short chapter of readers’ and listeners’ correspondence which she introduced by stating: “Some of the letters I get are so interesting that it seems selfish to enjoy them by myself, and so I am going to quote a few of them...” (1925, 141).

These letters, along with a few others from her scrapbook, revealed how many of her correspondents were women who created homes and tended gardens as far away as New Zealand or as near as Yorkshire. Regardless of where they cultivated sweet peas or how much land they devoted to growing roses, female readers, and often their husbands and other members of their families were inspired by Cran and her experiences. While Cran encouraged homemakers and gardeners of all levels of skill living in towns and villages, she also stimulated the minds of home and garden lovers in obscure places and

under unusual circumstances. For instance, Cran learned that a copy of *The Garden of Ignorance* was found “in a ‘pill-box’ on the Hindenburg Line in 1916” by an English serviceman from Surrey who knew Cran and later, told her of his discovery (1921, 123). Whether it was an Englishman or a German who delved into Cran’s home and garden world in the midst of fighting horrific battles, I would not be surprised to hear that her thoughts of star-filled skies or picking berries for jam in the English countryside resonated in the heart of a war-weary soldier. Undoubtedly, Cran and her home and garden experiences evoked memories of earlier, peaceful times and yet, she stressed the importance of tending home and garden spaces to restore calm and promote happiness in people’s lives during the interwar period.

Although there is very little personal correspondence on which to determine the writer’s impact on readers, there is much to learn from the pages of her books. The more I read her writing, the more I realized how women would have identified with this writer, for she was a woman who raised a child, cooked and kept a house, all while gardening and writing about gardening. Without hesitation, Cran confessed her flaws and frustrations, her joys and elations and women readers, especially, would have responded to this woman and her everyday life experiences. Importantly, Cran was not the only woman garden writer who wrote and published during the interwar period. In the early twentieth century, there were, perhaps, hundreds of now, largely forgotten women writers, journalists, and editors who produced articles and books which provided insight into women’s day to day interests as these writers wrote about gardens and natural



remedies, baking or preserving, sewing, and decorating. Consider that each and every English county, city and village had a woman's page or a "Dear Abby" whose voice of wisdom or weekly suggestions and ideas revealed much about the lives of the women who read them. Through this exploration of Cran and her books, I have attempted to re-discover how women's daily tasks and everyday pleasures revealed their thoughts, impressions, and opinions.

Before Cran became a well known author and gardening expert, she wrote for a number of London-based periodicals, but even after she became a successful popular writer, she still wrote gardening articles for *Girls Own Annual* and its secondary publication, *Women's Magazine* in the late 1930s. As contributors to *Girls Own Annual* or *Women's Magazine* were never paid for their articles (Marshall 1939, 2), Cran likely considered it her responsibility to share her passion for home and garden pursuits with as many potential gardeners as possible. Like all gardeners, however, Cran was exceedingly generous with her time and her expertise, and she believed that women, especially, could express themselves creatively through home and garden practices, allowing them to become more resourceful mothers and daughters.

As I indicated earlier in this thesis, women throughout England's history have been expected to balance responsibilities and duties inside and outside the home, by managing families and livestock, and tending kitchen gardens and preserving wild fruit. By the seventeenth century, English gentlewomen had all but forgotten the knowledge and skills that their female ancestors had known and practiced out of necessity. While

herbal knowledge and kitchen gardening skills went by the wayside, women of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did develop a working knowledge of botany and natural history as one of the requirements that signified their becoming accomplished young ladies. By the late eighteenth century, Pricilla Wakefield (1751-1832), became one of the first women to write books on botany and natural history for young readers while Jane Loudon (1807-1858) wrote the first gardening books intended specifically for women gardeners in the mid-nineteenth century (Bennett 2001; Bennett 1991; Shteir 1996). Nearly eighty years later, Cran argued that women of her generation should reclaim the knowledge of their female ancestors by (re)acquiring skills in growing and/or harvesting herbs and wild plants (see 1924; 1925; 1933). Based on her own experiences gathering and using herbs for household, culinary, and medicinal purposes, Cran directed her words to all “good housewives” conveying through implicit feminist coding that if women did not know how herbs could assist them in their day to day lives, then they should learn all they could about these incredibly useful plants.

In her books, Cran reflected on observations she made of other women, whose knowledge and skills as homemakers and gardeners allowed them to forge successful careers as professional gardeners, fruit farmers, and nursery owners. Cran recognized that women had intrinsic skills simply because they were women, regardless of their prior gardening experience. Women’s delicacy of touch, their patience and attention to detail, resulted, for Cran, in an enhanced ability to garden.

Earlier in this thesis, I described how Cran applied the term “old country wife” or

“old peasant woman” to refer to local village women who shared vernacular gardening techniques with her. As I indicated previously, Theresa A. Vaughan defined the term, “old wives’ tales” to refer to the “accumulated knowledge” of generations of women that included skills in food and medicine (2009, 452). In speaking of women’s knowledge and skills as gardeners and good housewives, Cran appreciated how women could become empowered and thus, more resourceful through their involvement in home and garden tasks and leisure activities. Although Cran was progressive in her suggestion that readers could further their horticultural skills and find employment outside the home, she was aware that women could also seek personal fulfillment through everyday tasks in and around their own home and garden spaces, just as she did (figure 7.1). Thus, Cran demonstrated how women performed femininity through everyday tasks that defined their roles as wives and mothers while still performing other forms of femininity, such as tending a garden. This might provide them the means in which to express their creativity as well as a private space to escape from daily responsibilities. Within the pages of her books, Cran expanded the idea of a community of gardeners to include a community of women gardeners, providing contemporary readers and researchers, like myself, a window through which to view the world of women’s everyday lives in the early twentieth century.



Figure 7.1 - Marion Cran, trowel at the ready. 1914-1915. Marion Cran Album Collection. Courtesy of R.H.S. Lindley Library, London.

My analysis of Cran and her work has enabled me to understand how this writer created a legacy through her writings on home and garden experiences. Cran exists through her books and articles, yes, but for contemporary readers and admirers, Cran's life as a writer and a gardener can still be experienced through the existence of Coggers, the home and garden she restored in Kent. In the early 1920s and 1930s, Cran designed and maintained several garden spaces in and around her home that featured characteristics of the English cottage garden style indicative of the period. In her books about Coggers, Cran indicated how much she enjoyed having a meadow nearby filled with wildflowers and grasses that

encouraged birds, wildlife, and beneficial insects to visit and reside in her garden. In my earlier references to the ethnographic interviews I conducted, I mentioned how the Neves, as the present day owners of Coggers, have kept Cran's home as Cran had left it, with only a few moderate changes to the house and garden. Mr. and Mrs. Neve have encouraged the return of even more wildflowers, songbirds, butterflies, and ladybugs to the garden by exerting less control over the existing landscape. In the tradition of grade-listed heritage properties in England, Coggers still reflects the "Wealden-type" hall house of the late medieval period to which Cran restored the property in the 1920s (Pollard and Strouts 2006, 18). By reading Cran's books, Christopher Neve has maintained the interior spaces of Coggers in much the same way as the writer described them.

Beginning in the late 1970s, readers re-discovered Cran and her books and some of them travelled to Benenden, making their way to Coggers just as if they were on some form of "pilgrimage" (see Margry 2008). Even today, the Neves allow readers of Cran's books to visit Coggers, a home and garden that enables visitors to feel as if they have been transported to an earlier time and a place where nostalgia and memory co-exist within the realm of the English countryside of the twenty-first century. While the Neves receive no remuneration for their generosity, they are content to let others experience Cran's gardening and writing life in Kent. Through their interest and respect for Cran, the couple has helped foster a small, but growing community of readers, gardeners and admirers whose fascination with Cran and her writings will continue her legacy for future generations.

Although folklorists have not considered women's garden writings from the perspective that I have chosen to explore in this thesis, I would argue that future research on other women writers and their prescriptive writings would be beneficial. There are still so many women whose publications on gardening and preserving, cookery and crafting, encouraged mothers, daughters, and families in the early twentieth century, but their efforts remain largely unrecognized. Within this century, there is already a growing interest in vernacular gardening knowledge, housekeeping methods, and crafting traditions made evident in the re-emergence of individual and community groups dedicated to relearning skills and practices from earlier historical periods.

My examination of Marion Cran and her garden writing as everyday autobiography has revealed the rich resource that gardening and gardening literature offers folklorists. Undoubtedly, there are many other women authors of diverse cultural backgrounds who have written and published articles and books in many languages while creating and maintaining homes and gardens throughout the world whose work merits folkloristic attention.

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