

audience in mind. I wonder if, having collected such an impressive array of sources, McMahon might consider publishing a companion volume of emigrant letters that would allow readers to get to know these emigrants even better. These reservations aside, I have little doubt that academic audiences will be stimulated by this deeply humane study to rethink their own assumptions about famine migration (and perhaps migration generally) and to follow some of McMahon's leads into ever more fascinating territory.

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JUDITH W. PAGE and ELISE L. SMITH. *Women, Literature, and the Arts of the Countryside in Early Twentieth-Century England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. 274. \$99.99 (cloth).

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Women, Literature, and the Arts of the Countryside in Early Twentieth-Century England is a curious title for a book that is as concerned with Victorian as early twentieth-century English literature and art, and is more interested in English gardens and women gardeners than histories or concepts of the countryside. From their respective fields of English literature and art history, Judith Page and Elise Smith tell scholarly stories of women's lives and work during an age of radical social transitions, showing readers how Victorian women discovered through their relationships with plants and nature a path toward artistic and often spiritual development and professional success. Around the year 1880, Page and Smith argue, gardens became more complicated, more modern places of transformation and regeneration, both for the women who walked and worked on them and for the members of surrounding communities who bought the women's art, were employed by the women's businesses, or benefited from the women's preservation of historically significant landscapes and properties.

Page and Smith have collaborated previously, producing *Women, Literature, and the Domesticated Landscape: England's Disciples of Flora* (2011), and they have perfected the art of co-writing a monograph that draws on diverse methodologies and areas of expertise while conveying a coherent argument in a shared voice. Organizing their study around the theme of women artists and their gardens, they sort their eight female subjects into four areas for investigation: gardening and farming as a profession for women, with a chapter each on garden educator Frances Garnet Wolseley and National Trust benefactor Beatrix Potter; gardens as sources of women's literary invention, with chapters on famed children's writer Edith Nesbit and working-class writer Flora Thompson; the garden as an inspiration for craft, with chapters on the painter, sculptor, and potter Mary Seton Watts and painter and decorative artist Dora Carrington; and the garden as redemptive site of loss and waste, with chapters on popular wartime memoirist Marion Cran and aristocratic poet and novelist Vita Sackville-West. The ninth woman whose name links these chapters together is legendary gardener-writer Gertrude Jekyll, whose influence on these women extended from books like her *Wood and Garden* (1899) and *Home and Garden* (1900) to her garden design consultations with Watts and Cran and her long friendship with Wolseley.

Jekyll's residence in Surrey draws attention to the Home County bias of the modern England constructed out of these women's gardens. Only Potter brings us into northern England, expanding Page and Smith's metaphorical and real gardens into her four thousand

acres of working farms in Cumbria, populated with the endangered native Herdwick sheep that she raised and bred. Page and Smith wisely insist on the interdependence of country and city, tracking Potter's and the other women's ties by rail or road to London, the source of livelihood for all by virtue of either family money, arts education, publishers, or customers, thus avoiding the kind of mystification of rural roots and affections that can turn even a book on twentieth-century gardening into pastoral myth. The same cannot be said for their female subjects, many of whom tendered nostalgic, conservative, or regressive ideas about rural or natural Britain that contradicted their otherwise progressive, modern lives. For example, Nesbit, a fascinating character whose garden sustained her bestselling fiction and Fabian politics through the deaths of two children, two marriages, her husband's affairs, and unconventional child rearing, was against women's suffrage.

Page and Smith are at their best when reading neglected or unknown figures or texts in terms of more famous or dominant ones. For example, anyone who knows anything about English gardens or twentieth-century literature has heard of Vita Sackville-West and Sissinghurst Castle. Yet how many know about the cross-genre popular writing of Marion Cran, companion to Sackville-West in the last section of *Women, Literature, and the Arts of the Countryside in Early Twentieth-Century England*? Far from benefiting from the cultural elevations signaled by Sackville-West's publication with Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press (let alone the benefits of sharing Woolf's conversation and love), Cran won a devoted popular following through mass distribution of her nine memoirs of gardening, mothering, and personal struggle spanning two world wars, her *Gardening Chats* radio shows, and her strategic use of her own Jekyll-like photographs as illustrations in her garden memoirs. Similarly, many readers will recognize Flora Thompson as the author of the trilogy *Lark Rise to Candleford*, popularized through BBC television serialization in the early 2000s, but very few will have heard of Thompson's *Peverel Papers*, to which Page and Smith give significant and overdue attention.

About Thompson's *Peverel Papers*, Page and Smith conclude that “[i]n almost 500 printed pages of the column over the period from 1921 to 1927, Thompson herself fulfilled th[e] goal of paying attention to and recording the objects that surrounded her, creating her own natural history of a particular place” (90). True enough, but this claim does not suggest particularly high stakes for critical investigations of wandering, gardening women. In asking us to think from famous to obscure artist, from garden to literary text and art object, from pigs to pots to poems to paintings, across categories of canon, class, artistic medium, and genre, Page and Smith invite us to do challenging theoretical work. Proposing renewal, restoration, and redemption as the most likely endings for their women artists' encounters with struggle and conflict in and around their gardens, Page and Smith do not tell us, finally, what difference (aesthetic, cultural, or political) makes or remains a difference. Even in their excellent chapter on Carrington, the only chapter to begin with a critical challenge (to David Garnett, Carrington's friend and editor of *Carrington: Letters and Extracts from Her Diaries* [1970]), Page and Smith bring in contemporary critics as affirming voices, there to prove Carrington's value, rather than reason to engage either critics or Carrington in critical debate. Page and Smith say that they and their subjects raise “provocative questions” (10), but it would be more accurate to say that they prepare pleasing English grounds for other, more impertinent scholars to do so.

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