

# Reading women's home and garden lives: a folkloristic examination of English gardening books of Marion Cran

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## Reading women's home and garden lives: a folkloristic examination of English gardening books of Marion Cran

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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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visual cultures of early modern gardening. Mark Laird is a historic landscape consultant and garden conservator and teaches landscape history at the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University. Previous books include *The Flowering of the Landscape Garden: English Pleasure Grounds, 1720-1800* and *Mrs. Delany and Her Circle* (Yale). eBooks - Category: Gardening - Download free eBooks or read books online for free. Discover new authors and their books in our eBook community. Here you can find free books in the category: Gardening. Read online or download Gardening eBooks for free. Browse through our eBooks while discovering great authors and exciting books. Free eBooks (BookRix only). eBooks for Sale.